

Recently the chairman of the North Fibre School District No. 88 board of trustees, Dale Fitzwilliam, had had himself elected spokesperson for the board and the district. One day Aldon called him at his office, a government agency, for comment on a school district budget item.

"Look!" Fitzwilliam said impatiently. "This is my day job and I can't be wasting time taking media calls all the time."

Aldon wondered in his own mind why Fitzwilliam had campaigned among fellow trustees to be named spokesperson for the board if he wasn't available to make a comment during business hours.

"Send me an e-mail with your question, and I'll get to answering it when I can," he instructed Aldon.

Aldon did as he was told and sent an e-mail with three questions about the district budget. A sketchy, uninformative answer of exactly a sentence and a half arrived by e-mail at 4:30. Absolute deadline was 5:00. Fitzwilliam could not be reached for answers to follow-up questions that the editors wanted answered or even for a more detailed explanation of the information in the e-mail.

About a week later the district superintendent, Rick Haeuser, invited Aldon to cover a meeting at the district central office auditorium between the assistant deputy minister of education, Arthur Henderson-Smith, who had flown up from Winnipeg, and members of the District Parent Advisory Council led by Horace Votuboff, a senior officer of North Fibre Pulp Ltd. He assured Aldon it would be OK to sit in on the meeting and interview Henderson-Smith afterwards.

Aldon had chosen a seat towards the back of the small auditorium. He opened his notebook and set his take-out coffee on the desk-like arm of the chair.

"Aldon!" Votuboff said sharply. "I promised the ADM a private meeting with parents! I'll have to ask you to leave."

Aldon tried to explain that the district superintendent had approved his attending the session well in advance.

"Leave NOW!" Votuboff ordered.

Aldon was shocked. When he started to recover from this surprise, he said at normal voice level, "Nonsense."

Out in the foyer the district financial secretary, Ryan Ready, was talking with a local principal and some of Henderson-Smith's staff. Aldon, beginning to boil over, said more loudly, "This is absolute nonsense! Waste my time calling me out to a meeting and then closing it! Nonsense!"

"Well, Aldon, we all have frustrations in life we have to deal with, don't we?" Ready said.

Aldon kept walking toward the door outside like a diplomat leaving the United Nations general assembly in protest of a speaker's comments. He reached his car quickly and drove back to the office of The News.

About two weeks later Aldon found himself moved back onto the provincial court beat, normally considered a rookie beat at small- and medium-sized dailies.

