TWENTY THINGS I WISH I HAD KNOWN BEFORE MY FIRST YEAR OF TEACHING

Ethel Stanley
Department of Biology
Millikin University, Decatur, Illinois 62522

1. Genetic corn should not be stored in a cardboard box. (Discovering 24 naked cobs nestled in mouse droppings is a shock.)
2. When setting up the still to make distilled water overnight, do not use the daytime production rate to estimate the size of your container. (Water pressure increases at night when no one is using it. Your cup may runneth over... my carboy sure did.)
3. Nothing dead stays that way. (Stuffed birds, mounted butterflies, and even an old moose head must be checked for life. Periodic freezing, adding mothballs, and even light vacuuming are helpful.)
4. Electrical equipment must be plugged into a live outlet. (Hint: If the air conditioner has stopped running, check the circuit breaker.)
5. Blood Sweat and Tears is not just the name of an old group. (If you add Urine and Saliva to the title, this is exactly what you can personally expect to donate in preparing an A & P lab practical.)
6. Apple slices should not be used to feed the mealworm culture. (The resulting fruitfly invasion kept us hopping for a week.)
7. Power outages will only occur under two circumstances: (1) You've sacrificed frogs, isolated the sacral plexus and are ready to apply an electrical stimulus. (Substituting a mechanical stimulus while holding a flashlight is not a satisfying alternative.) (2) You are doing only microscope work in lab.
8. Even large redlegged tarantulas can negotiate a dime size opening. (Our secretary still speaks colorfully of the incident.)
9. Check puffball fungi for animal life before you try to sun dry them on your office window sill. (A mass of wriggling maggots is an upsetting sight.)
10. Overfeeding a Physarum culture and leaving an open container of rolled oats nearby is not ideal. (Plasmodia everywhere!)
11. A small, but hungry, lizard can jump a vertical foot. (Our secretary was impressed again.)
12. The pH of tapwater should always be tested. (Ours has a pH of 9.7 which has quite an effect on a phenolphthalein solution.)
13. The pH of distilled water should always be tested. (Ours is 6.2 - ditto the above effect.)
14. Biological graffiti is expensive. (Pens and pencils should be taken away before students count genetic corn, examine bone surface markings, or study anatomical models or charts.)
15. The phrase "It's snowing on the cacti again" is not an example of some weird greenhouse effect. (Our school's greenhouse sits on the south side of a building with a peaked roof that dumps melting snow and ice directly on the glass roof three stories below.)
16. The most important thing you can tell students about a physiograph when they are running an ECG is the difference between the transducer and the high gain coupler ports. (Delivering a stimulus during an ECG is not an acceptable experimental error.)
17. Mark the fresh eggs when working with both fresh and hard boiled eggs. (Our globular protein demonstration in the non-major course took on a real sense of adventure (panic?) when I casually tossed a fresh egg into a group of students.)
18. Consult the Away Game schedule before requesting a school van for a field trip. (Sad, but true.)
19. Having a new lab assistant increases your teaching load - at least initially. (A corollary to this is never teach a lab that only seniors take. Your "pool" of qualified assistants is non-existent.)
20. Getting out of the science building in your first year requires skill, organization, and luck. (Students still visibly react to my occasional presence in our liberal arts building.)