


# When High School Art Class Goes Bad



by Cork Marcheschi

**B**urlingame is 18 miles south of San Francisco. It is a sweet bedroom community populated by homes from the '20s through the '50s. Going to Burlingame High School was a unique experience. The physical plant is classical, with columns and a beautiful apron of grass with mature trees. It is set into a city park with a full-size baseball diamond with structured and covered seating. With an Olympic-size swimming pool, tennis courts, football, track, lacrosse and soccer fields, it is the high school out of America's blissful past. My favorite full body memory



is all of the high school girls in tight sweaters, firm breasts covered in pastel cashmere and angora - AAAAHHHHHHH!  
A major defining element to the school was its unique demographic,

which will explain the proliferation of cashmere and angora. Half the school's students came from Hillsborough, an old money community just across El Camino Real. The parking lot looked like a sports car dealership. The other half of the kids were blue-collar families who had lived in Burlingame from the early days of the Great Diaspora. My family is Italian and had been in Burlingame since 1918. Like most of the kids from the blue collar side of the tracks, I always brought my own lunch to school. My mom had it down cold. I always got two sandwiches, a piece of fruit, a little bag of chips AND a homemade cookie or other custom fabricated sweet.

There were three teachers at BHS (Burlingame High School) that made an impression on me. Mr. Pardini taught English; Joe Brown was the shop teacher; and Mr. Pat taught art. Each of these teachers supplied me with something that I have been able to use in my life. But it is the lesson from Mr. Pat that I will tell you about.

## One day during my sophomore year

(1960) I went to my locker, got my lunch and headed out to the park to meet Bob Gibson. Bob was a great friend and we got in a lot of trouble together - I wish I could find him today. We were sitting around eating and talking about music and the quality of the pastel sweaters that paraded, by when I realized that my mom's cookie, or whatever treat, was missing. In my lifetime of educational lunches my mom had never forgotten the treat. When I got home that day, I mentioned this oversight in a nice way. My mom assured me that a brownie had been placed in my lunch.

Everyday for the next three weeks my mom's personal expression of love and devotion was missing from my lunch. This was a personal attack and I needed to do something about it. Clearly someone knew my locker combination and knew that my lunches were primo. I took it for granted that it was one of the rich kids who seemed long on money but short on family. My mom always mentioned how they would eat everything in sight when I would bring a carload of the Hillsborough kids home with me.

At this same time, Mr. Pat, the Art Teacher, was instructing us on how to make a plaster mold. I don't remember what we were doing as a project but the molding process presented itself as a

possible answer to the snack bandit.

I asked Mr. Pat if I could take some of the plaster home with me and he said sure. When I got home I took an empty milk carton and sliced it in half. This is what the plaster would be poured into.

**N**ext step was the purchase of a **Hershey's chocolate bar** (without almonds). With one hand I very carefully pushed the chocolate bar out from its brown paper wrapper. Next I took my grandfather's fish filleting knife and slipped the very thin blade under the foil being careful not to disrupt the delicate structure of the aluminum. I carefully removed the chocolate bar from the foil wrapper and set the wrapper gently aside.

I took a hair drier and warmed the interior of the milk carton; this little bit of heat made the wax coating a bit tacky which would lightly attach the flat bottom of the candy bar to the interior of the milk carton form. I painted a little vegetable oil on the top of the chocolate bar, then placed the Hershey bar flat bottom down into the milk carton and gave it just a little push to be sure there was some adhesion to the carton. The plaster was mixed a little thinner than normal; I wanted a detailed mold of my candy bar. I spooned the plaster on to be sure I was not creating any air bubbles, and waited for it to dry.

A couple of hours later I peeled the

milk carton off the block of plaster and examined the chocolate bar, happily resting in its plaster blanket. I refrigerated the whole thing for about an hour, which gave the chocolate some body. When it came out of the fridge I used a flat little spatula from my enameling kit and popped the chocolate out of its mold and WOW the mold was beautiful! It was perfect. All of the little rectangles with the word Hershey in each one looked right!

The final step in the plan to rout out the snack bandit was about to happen. I took four rectangles of the Hershey bar and dropped them into a double boiler, then added to those four pieces, six pieces of Ex-Lax chocolate laxative. **DO NOT MESS WITH MY SNACKS!**

While the chocolate melted I lightly covered the interior of the mold with vegetable oil and then slowly poured the chocolate mixture into the mold. I was getting excited to find out who was ripping off my cookies. After leaving it for an hour in the fridge, I took it out, held my breath and turned the mold upside down and tapped it a couple of times - the laxative-loaded doppelganger was perfect. You would have to be intentionally studying the molding techniques of nickel candy bars to detect that this was not the real thing.

Bob Gibson and I took the candy bar and delicately re-wrapped it.

**T**omorrow - High Noon at BHS. I knew that whoever ate the loaded candy bar would be missing by the end of the day - six Ex-Lax are guaranteed to induce the green apple quickstep or Montezuma's Revenge.

I put my lunch in my locker, shut the door and headed for first period. I was a little giddy waiting to see if my diabolical plan for just desserts to be served would be satisfied. Come lunchtime, I got my lunch from my locker and yes, the bait had been taken. Bob and I were too curious to partake in our usual pastime of pastel sweater appreciation. We had never been this focused before.

It happened in 6th period. One of the wealthy kids from the good side of the tracks had to abruptly leave history class. Bill R (I won't mention names or I am sure I will be hunted down and sued) did not come back to class and ended up leaving school that day. He was gone the next day too. When he got back to school he was a little drawn and not too pink in the cheeks.

That noon time Bob and I went to my



locker and slowly examined the contents – the biscotti were there! We took our lunches and headed for our usual spot. On the way out of the building I locked eyes with Bill R – a silent moment of knowing that the jig was up. He had been caught with his hands in the wrong cookie jar, but mostly there was the understanding that you should never piss off art students because they know how to do stuff and they know no bounds. Bob and I never missed another blissful lunch hour of appreciating the beautiful girls of Burlingame High School. Little did we know that we were approaching the power of the sixties and with that the pleated skirt and tight sweater would be relegated to the back of the closet. What a shame.

Thirty years after this event, Mr. Pat came to one of my art openings. I was surprised and pleased, he hung out for a while and after three glasses of wine, I told him this story and laid the blame at his feet for teaching dangerous ART techniques. It was a great ending to a wonderful opening, watching Mr. Pat just about pee in his pants as he laughed himself off his feet. 🍷



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