

Robert McKinlay was a true pal to the students of Hearst High School. With a devilish gleam in his eye, he enjoyed mischief, as long as no one got hurt and the damage was minimal.

I entered High school in 1958 with some trepidation as I felt my role in Public School was to entertain the class. I was a good student but got bored often and would find some way to liven things up. I was the seventh in a line of model students in my family and I guess my goal was to be different. Mr. Bradford, my grade six teacher, once hung me out the second story window



(pictured on right) and threatened to drop me if I didn't behave. I guess he didn't appreciate that I had coached the entire class to respond to his "Good morning class" greeting with "Good morning Mr. Bran Flakes."



This earned me another visit to the Principal's cloak room to face the beet red face of Mr. Brown (Pictured on left). Through clenched teeth he brought the strap down on my hands saying "I can't believe you're a Bies." This only served to strengthen my resolve to pull off bigger and better stunts. Many people have never experienced 'the strap', but it was a badge of



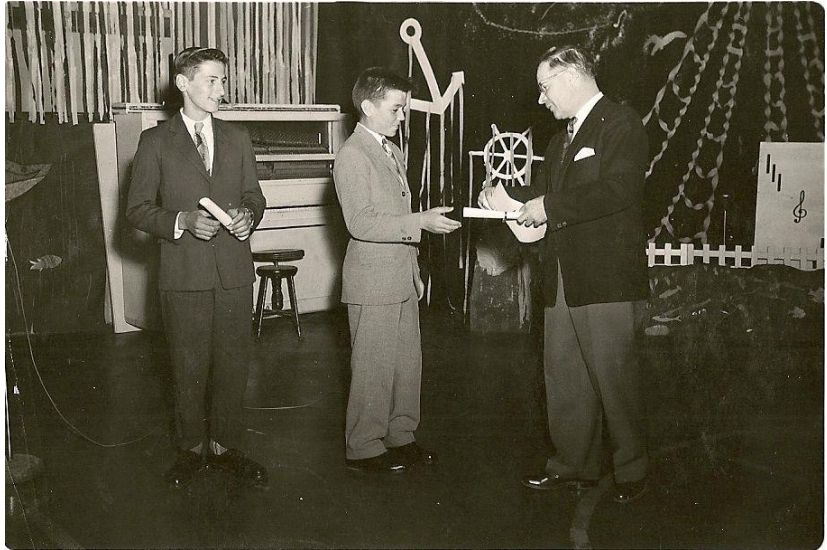
honour for the bad boys. Corporal punishment in public schools was common. Misdemeanors, such as talking in class, chewing gum or running in the hall, got you a lash or two from your teacher. More serious crimes, such as disobeying rules, archaic as they may have seemed, fighting, talking back to teachers or throwing snowballs could warrant a trip to Principal Clayton Brown's cloakroom and more serious punishment. A slap of the strap on a wooden desk by a teacher would get everyone's attention



very quickly. My first taste of the strap came in grade one, where, fresh off the farm, I was faced with indoor toilets for the first time. I could not reach the urinal so, of necessity, I used the bushes, until I was caught and disciplined. Perhaps that incident set me on the path of resistance to rules.

Hearst High School of the 50s had been ruled by Mr. C., a strict disciplinarian who employed bullying, both mental and physical, to keep the students in line. It was common for him to reduce a girl to tears or to slap the glasses off the face of a boy, actions that today would get him canned pretty quickly. Some students actually quit school when they turned 16 out of fear. I was genuinely concerned about the transition to High School.

Thankfully, Mr. C. was replaced by the kindly Robert McKinlay, a jovial little Scotsman with a sense of humour and an appreciation for diversity. He is seen here presenting me with my grade 10 diploma in 1960, as George Bosnick looks on.



I don't know where Robert McKinlay came from but he brought a refreshing change. As soon as I got settled into the High School routine, I set my sights on my new set of teacher-victims. Over the next few years I behaved well for new teachers like Mr. Gagne and Miss Bowers and older Gentlemen like Mr. Willan, but Messieurs Lafontaine, Labrosse, Stiller and especially the hapless Mr. Guy were fair game. I won't share all the stories here as I should save some in case I decide to write my memoirs which could be titled, "*True Confessions of a Sh*t Disturber.*"



I was different in a lot of ways. My growth spurt did not occur until after High School so I was the smallest guy in the whole school, standing about 5' 4". Being a December baby, I was always the youngest guy in the class but I offset my physical limitations with a quick mind which most people referred to as "smart ass". Sixty years before Boris Johnson, I never combed my hair and topped it off by wearing a Scottish Tam o' Shanter. All part of the "class clown" get up, I guess. The hat and my mischievous bent must have appealed to the Scotsman Robert McKinlay and he always gave me lots of leeway and interceded on my behalf on more than one occasion. Maybe he thought there was hope for me, once I grew up. One day Mr. McKinlay sent me to the washroom to comb my hair so I slicked it down and parted it in the middle which broke up the class. At the school Christmas dance, I was called up and presented with a multi-pack of combs. I came back after Christmas with a brush-cut.



Many of my conflicts were with Mr. Guy, pictured on right. On one occasion I acted up in class and he told me to go to the blackboard and write out "I will not do -----" one hundred times. I refused and said this was grade 10 and not kindergarten (even though I may have been acting like a kid). He kicked me out of his class and I said fine and boycotted but still kept up with the class work on my own. Mr. McKinlay got involved and, although he agreed with me, he said he'd talk to Mr. Guy. Then he came back to me and said I had to apologize to Mr. Guy and at least start to write on the board. I did that and after one line he said that's enough and I was back in.



That Halloween I paid a visit to Mr. Guy's trailer which was about a mile out of town across the river. He wasn't home so I redecorated the outside with some graffiti and colourful drawings. I had the worst handwriting in the world so it was pretty obvious who the culprit was.

The next morning, I was summoned into Mr. McKinlay's office to face Mr. Guy and a policeman who wanted to know my whereabouts the night before. I played dumb and said I hadn't crossed the river and had no idea where Mr. Guy's trailer was. The policeman took my word for it and told Mr. Guy it must have been someone else. As the Policeman and Mr. Guy left, Mr. McKinlay asked me to stay behind. When the others were out of sight, he reached into his desk drawer and pulled out my Tam o' Shanter and said with a wink that I had left it at the trailer last night. Needless to say, that Tam never saw the light of day again. Mr. Guy left Hearst in about 1961 to teach at Chippewa High in North Bay. In the small world department, one of my Grade 12 classmates, Penu Chalykoff, went to North Bay for Grade 13 and was in his class. Even more of a coincidence, my future wife, Sandy, also attended Chippewa and was in that same class.

In my English Composition exams, I always picked a topic and wrote an adventure story. One year, Mr. McKinlay wrote my name opposite one of the topics and said I had to write a story entitled "*Love is Blind.*" Without missing a beat, I wrote an action-packed story about Sgt. Love of the RCMP who was based in Dawson City, Yukon. Paraphrasing the story – *Sgt. Love was out on patrol with his dog team and got lost in a snow storm. The blizzard hurt his eyes and he became temporarily snow blind so he threw himself on his sled and was at the mercy of his dog team. They knew the way home and, as he came into Dawson City, a Grizzled old Gabby Hayes-type prospector ran out to help him off his sled. Realizing his condition, the prospector announced to the townspeople, "My God...Love is blind."* I scored an "A" for that effort.

Mr. McKinlay was a loveable old rogue who had an eye for the ladies and was one of the boys. Having played soccer in his youth in Scotland, he tried to introduce us to the sport in Hearst. He surprised us with his agility on the soccer field but since we had snow from November to May, and the boys would rather skate than run, he soon gave up. The school had a strict no smoking policy but that didn't stop the boys from gathering in the furnace room for a puff. One day the door opened and Principal McKinlay walked in. The boys thought that expulsions were forthcoming, but he just walked over, took a pack of smokes out of RayMo's shirt pocket and asked for a light. He stayed and enjoyed a smoke with the boys, saying he had run out. I wasn't part of the furnace room smokers as I had quit smoking when I was twelve. In reality, when the older boys tried to teach me to inhale, I would get sick so I never got past the throwing up.

The Principal's office was on the second level right beside the main entrance which had two large cement flower boxes on either side. One Sunday I decided to go exploring when I noticed the office window was open. I climbed up on the flower box and managed to "spiderman" my way up the bricks and into the open window. The school was wide open for me to snoop around all the classrooms.



Mr. Labrosse had left the upcoming Christmas Latin Authors exam on his desk. Being an A student, I didn't need it but I thought others in the class would appreciate it. I passed it around to all the class warning them not to do too well. That term the class average was the highest ever and Mr. Labrosse thought he was really getting through to the students. The Easter exam brought everyone back to reality. This should not be confused with another exam stealing escapade involving the son of the school janitor and his cousin. They made a copy of the key to the front door, which gave them access to the school at will. They found an advance copy of an exam which was provided to their friends, who shall remain nameless, statute of limitations notwithstanding.



Mr. Labrosse, pictured on the left, probably liked me less than Mr. Guy after I christened him "*Sir Bob*" on a sports field trip to Kapuskasing and he countered with "*Lippy*". We had several run ins over the years. One day I had written, "Latin is a dead language, let's keep it that way," on the blackboard. He was not amused and threatened to give the whole class a detention until the guilty party went up and cleaned the board. At the graduation in 1962 he was afraid his car might be a target so he parked in on the lawn directly under the Principal's window. A group of four boys and a lookout, who shall remain nameless, took up the challenge and let the air out of all four tires and removed the valve stems. The next day he saw me on the street and said I owed him \$400 to replace the tires that he had ruined driving to the service station. I just asked him why anyone would drive on flat tires. Looking back, he was really not that bad a guy. He served on the town council in Hearst and played for the Lumberkings fastball team. Later, he moved to Ottawa where he became Vice Principal of a High School, sharing duties with ex-football star, Russ Jackson.

But wait, this is a Christmas story, which seems to have morphed into a story about school misadventures. I will end with the Christmas connection.

The Hospital had a fundraiser selling Christmas trees from an unmanned lot behind it. It was surrounded by a short snow fence that did little to prevent an adventurous tree from seeking a new home when it followed me home one night. Mr. McKinlay lived a couple of blocks from the hospital so I rang his door-bell to see if he was in the market for a tree. He didn't ask any questions and specified the size he wanted. I was back ten minutes later with his perfect tree and he gave me ten dollars with a chuckle, wishing me a Merry Christmas.



Although Mr. McKinlay only stayed in Hearst for three years before moving on to Earleton, he is fondly remembered for his gentle manner and sense of humour.

In a future instalment I will write about pranks we pulled at Ryerson and Carleton.