

Contraband

(names have been changed for privacy)

If necessity is the mother of invention, then the teenage rebellion is invention's drunk aunt or something. I found proof of this within the senior lounge at Bishop's Advanced Preparatory School. At Bishop's, every social event and encounter operated through the seniority system: The higher your grade level, the more you could get away with, and the more respect you demanded. And as a symbol of this, each year the senior class would be awarded access to the senior lounge.

The senior lounge had started its life as some sort of storage room or office; the details are unclear. I like to theorize that it used to be secret strip club back when the school was run entirely by priests, but no one else seems on board with my theory. At some point, the administration decided that their self-entitled seniors probably needed to be quarantined so as to not infect the rest of the school with their utter sense of apathy, dubbed "senioritis" by the faculty. And so, the senior lounge was created with only one idea in mind: seniors only. No underclassmen, no parents, not even some of the teachers were allowed to enter. For a group of sixty over-entitled teenagers, this was manna from on high.

The room itself was nothing special. It was about 30 ft. by 20ft. with a weird tile floor, ugly yellow walls, and two tiny windows. One wall was lined with cubbies, just enough so that everyone got to share a cubby with one other person, and God help you if you had to share a cubby with a slob. The half-assed decor (a single Black Keys poster provided by my friend Joel) complimented the cheap Ikea furniture that looked to be a thousand years old.

The reason we all loved the lounge was because it ridded us of the brutal necessity of having to keep our things in the lockers, which were located in the basement. Instead, we could just stash everything in our cubbies. At least, that's how it was supposed to work.

I remember the day this changed. I was sitting on a particularly dusty beige futon while the Dean of Students gave us the "don't do anything stupid" talk. "As seniors, you have been given the privilege of occupying the senior lounge, and with that comes certain responsibilities," the Dean droned. I picked at a dust bunny on my futon. "We want to emphasize that you're not to have any sort of illegal substance or alcohol in the lounge at any time."

I made eye contact with my friend Cameron. He rolled his eyes. No one was actually stupid enough to bring booze to school, and the closest thing our school had ever had to a drug scare was when some freshman misplaced her legally prescribed adderall. And I think she found it within the hour.

"You've done well these past few years," the Dean was finishing up. "Access to this lounge is a privilege. Take advantage of it, but do not abuse it." We all started jittering with excitement. FINALLY. Three years of suffering had paid off. We were adults now. We had OUR SPACE where we could do WHATEVER WE WANTED.

"Oh, I almost forgot," the Dean added. "Due to last semester's incident with the disappearing binders, we're taking extra precautions with students' property. Until further notice, no one will be allowed to store their personal belongings such as phones or laptops in the senior lounge."

You know that sound a balloon makes when it's deflating? That accurately describes the mood in the lounge after that statement. *How could the administration do this?* we thought. The greatest perk of the senior lounge was not having to trudge to the mildew-y locker dungeon between classes. No one was going to sacrifice their devices because of a stuffy old Dean.

The first week, phones were left out all over the lounge. That quickly changed after Friday, when the Dean and some other teachers performed their first "random lounge check" while we were all in Calculus. They confiscated twenty phones that day. The only reason I wasn't busted was because I had forgotten my phone in my mom's car that morning.

After the first phone bust, people were pissed. And when teens get pissed, they get creative. Thus began the year-long game of phone hide-and-seek, with new and inventive methods of phone disguise invented each day. Cameron built a small hutch for his phone out of candy boxes. Joel, who was particularly tall, hid his phone on top of the cubby wall, above the Dean's line of sight. My friend Katie found that Panera takeout bags make excellent hiding spots. One kid, Warren, just kept his cubby so messy that no one even wanted to go near it, let alone check to see if there was a phone in there.

The best method by far, however, was discovered by my friend Nick. One day, he was poking the ceiling with a giant yardstick (it doesn't matter why) and discovered that one of the ceiling tiles was loose. Shifting the tile back, he discovered a huge space between the ceiling of the first level and the floor of the second, about a foot deep. Upon discovering this space, we did what any group of rational-minded people would do: we started hiding ALL of our stuff there. Phones, laptops, snacks, banned Harry Potter books; anything was fair game. We even got a traffic cone up there once. And now, with the perfect hiding spot, the Dean could never bust us for anything.

Eventually, after December, the Dean stopped doing his regular checks. We began to breathe easy, and by February we had stopped hiding our things in the ceiling. It was too much work anyways. I began to leave my laptop out in the open. I had had this phobia that someone was going to steal my laptop, causing me to lose all my homework and fail out of school, letting down my parents and also President Obama somehow. By March I had persuaded myself that the lounge was safe; there was no way I could possibly lose my laptop.

Then I lost my laptop. It was they day my Art History class left the school building to go across the street to the local cathedral and examine the Gothic architecture. I left my laptop on the rickety Ikea table so I wouldn't have to carry it through the cathedral with my weak noodle arms.

When I got back to the lounge after class, my laptop was gone. Joel was already sprawled out on one of the sofas, playing some Dungeons & Dragons type game on his phone.

"Ha ha, very funny Joel, where'd you hide my laptop?" I asked.

"Wha?" He looked up from his game in a daze. "What did you say?" Ok, so he was a bit too engrossed in nerd-land to be playing some sort of trick.

"My laptop. Have you seen it?"

He shook his head. "The only thing I've seen here are these bad boys." He flexed his biceps, which were surprisingly buff for a kid who didn't play sports. I made a mental note of that for... future reference.

"I left my laptop out on the table. Did someone move it?"

Joel gave a worried expression. “No one’s been on here. My only thought is someone might have stolen it while you were at the Cathedral.”

Shit. Obama was going to be pissed. I went into panic mode. I dumped everything out of my cubby. No laptop. Check the ceiling. Nothing. Garbage can? That search was gross and turned up zilch.

Time for double panic mode. The bell had rung and seniors were streaming into the lounge. I interrogated each one. “Have you seen my laptop? Know where my laptop is? Hey, Anna, seen my laptop anywhere?” Finally, Ella saved the day... more or less.

“Hey, Sarah, do you know where my laptop is?”

“Oh, yeah!” Sarah replied. “I think I saw it in the Dean’s office!”

My gut twisted. It would have been better if it had been in the trash can. “Oh. Thanks, Ella.”

I trudged the walk of shame up to the Dean’s office. His door was open. There on his desk sat my laptop. Behind the desk sat the Dean. Like a shark. Like an old, crotchety shark with a stick up its butt.

“Uh, hi, Dean Trent?” I squeaked.

“Ah, Kate, welcome!” His smile was warm, but it bared way too many teeth.

“Uh, I think that’s my laptop on your desk.” I reached out to grab it, hoping to get out of his office as soon as humanly possible.

“Oh, now, hold on!” the Dean gently pulled the laptop away from me. “I have to reprimand you for this.” He smiled again. That man loved his job too much.

The Dean went on to give a long and winding speech about responsibility and taking care of your property which somehow developed into him asking me about my parents and how I was doing in drama club. Finally he handed over the laptop, and I was home free.

In a movie, the Dean would have winked at me as he handed it over, and said something like, “Now remember to take advantage of those ceiling tiles,” and we would have shared some sort of unspoken understanding and mutual respect for each other. What he actually said was:

“Keep it in your locker. Next offense will get you a detention.”

I kept all my stuff in my locker for the rest of the year.