

# Being a *satanist* in the third grade

By Julia Morgan

Walking into the messy art room, I smelled the pungent stench of ripe paint as the crinkles of papers and laughing classmates filled my pink ears. I proudly wore my sticker that the dentist gave me earlier that morning for not crying like I usually did whenever I saw him. My dad even let me have Chick-Fil-A after the cleaning, erasing any dental excellence my mother paid for just an hour beforehand. Palms still a tad greasy from the nuggets I consumed, I raced into the art room to brag about how awesome the Chick-Fil-A was compared to the school's lunches. My friends were jealous — mission accomplished.

The rather rotund teacher came my way and informed me what assignment the class started. I couldn't see much behind her protruding double chin that seemed to hang steep, probably low enough for my small arms to pinch.

Apparently the assignment given, focused on painting something larger than life, something grandiose, per say, the biggest thing

I could think of.

"That's easy," I said, "Skyscrapers are tall."

"Someone's already taken that, Julia."

"What about elephants? They're big?"

"That's taken too."

"What about God. He's supposed to be huge, right?"

"Someone's already painting God," she said, pointing to my classmate David, who I knew came from a very devout Christian household. They didn't even celebrate Halloween.

"You'll just have to be a bit more creative than everyone else, I'm afraid," she said patting my back and handing me a large paper canvas to draw upon.

Well alright, I thought, I guess my good luck today has ran out. You can't have Chick-Fil-A and chose your first idea to paint. What is something big — something bigger than everything I can imagine?

I looked at David, who painted pale blue skies, the same color you see on balloons congratulating mothers for having a son. But, staring at David's pious painting, an idea finally came to me.

I ran over to the paints, grabbing tons of reds, oranges, and blacks, and rushed back to my chair, scooting in tight so I can focus on my painting.

About ten minutes in, my friend Kent came over to me.

Gazing at my painting for a good five seconds, he commented, "Woah...that is big...and scary."

"I'm just tryna do it justice," I said. I heard my dad drop that

phrase occasionally. I wasn't exactly sure what it meant, but I felt pretty mature saying it— like the week I used “keen” over twenty times in one day and got tons of compliments for being so smart.

That Friday, it was time to present our paintings. I barely finished it that period. However, the art could stand on its own without lots of detail, in my opinion.

When I presented it, the reaction was not the one I expected. My classmates looked disturbed and scared. I looked at my teacher for reassurance, but her puffy face mimicked the children.

“Julia, you painted Satan?”

“Well yeah...” I started, “He’s big, right? And, everyone took my other ideas so.”

I shrugged my shoulders and looked at my painting: I drew the devil, surrounded by roaring flames and coal brimstone, since that’s what Hell’s supposed to look like after all, bright red, like Clifford the Big Red Dog, and I gave him a sharp, black goatee, along with some muttonchops on the sides. His teeth I drew as triangles and I painted his tongue black, like my dog’s. His head was marginally bigger than the rest of his body, which I drew a bit scrawny by no intention, and his stick-like hands raised above his head with small, fingers spread wide like snowflakes. I’ll admit it: it was not my best piece of work, but nothing to look so disturbed by.

I took my painting down, and turned it into the teacher, who looked extremely uncomfortable.

After class, she pulled me aside to talk.

“Julia?”

“Yes ma’am?”

“Do you parents talk to you a lot about the thing you drew?”

“No...not really. Sometimes, I’ll hear him in the Bible study my Grandma makes me go to when I go up to Tennessee. My parents don’t go to church,” I added in.

Her eyes widened.

When I scurried back into my classroom, the air shifted. My friends turned away from me. David looked like his eyes were going to burst from his head.

No one really talked to me for the rest of the day. I didn’t understand why.

When my dad picked me up, his face was crimson. I entered the car with extreme caution. My dad was never mad — I didn’t want to witness it for the first time.

“So, I got a call from the principal today, Julia,” he said, his voice strained.

“What’d she say?”

“She told me about what you painted today in art.”

“I don’t get it! Why is everyone so upset about it?”

“Julia, did you paint the devil?” He said, his face clenched and eyes watering.

I nodded, guilt dripping down my face.

He bursted out laughing. He laughed the entire ride home. He went on and on about the over-concerned and hovering teachers. He told me they questioned him on what he taught me while we were at home. They even asked him if he himself was a praiser of the devil — a Satanist, he called it.

“This is almost as funny as a few years ago,” he stuttered

through his intense laughter.

"Huh?"

"When they called and told me you spit on a classmate." His laughter intensified with that memory.

"I was trying to hold the water in my mouth as long as I could," I said.

"I know, sweetheart, I know. That school really misunderstands you."

I nodded my head.

The next Monday, David came up to me with a steady stance.

He coughed a bit before he said, "My parents said I can't talk to you anymore."

I frowned at this, but he walked away before I could protest.

During art class that period, we all received our paintings from the previous week.

"We're going to put them up outside the room for visitors to see at Open House this weekend," my art teacher said as she handed out our art.

"I didn't get mine," I told her after all the kids received their paintings and scurried around the hallway picking the place they want to display their work.

My art teacher bent down to my level, her hanging second chin touching her chest.

"Julia, we can't display yours. I'm sorry, sweetie."

I huffed, "But that's not fair! I worked hard on it."

"I know, I'm sorry, Julia."

Disappointment shattered across my face. My work wasn't good enough to show the prospective families visiting.

"Mr. McCollum will see these paintings, and we don't want to set a bad image for ourselves."

"He's nice!" I protested. I first met him when he stood with me in the cold at the College Park Marta Station when my bus driver forgot I was on the bus and made me wait for the next bus to transport me to the Lower School. He really was nice.

"He'd like it," I said.

"I don't think so, Julia."

She left to help put up other students paintings while I stood there, defeated.

"Can I at least have my painting back?" I asked her after I slumped over towards her and the rest of the students.

"I'm afraid not," she said, avoiding my eyes.

I told my dad later that day and he called the principal and demanded my painting be hung up alongside all the rest of them.

"Hell hath no wrath like an upset parent," he said as he hung up the telephone.

So I waited. I waited for the distance from my classmates and the awkward encounters from my art teacher.

The students acted mostly the same, especially David, who avoided me like I was the devil himself. However, my art teacher was a lot nicer to me and let me hang up my painting next to David's.

Later that week, we got a personal note from the principal saying Mr. McCollum loved the colors I used in my painting.