

The List

by Jack Swenson

The Principal called me into his office one day after my last class. Oh, no, I thought. Two months on the job, and already I'm in trouble. I was a new hire. But what was I in hot water for? For assigning books to my junior English classes that were "vulgar and pornographic." Mr. Peterson, a small, balding man with a smug look that had earned him the nickname The Toad, handed me a two-page typewritten list. There were one hundred titles on the list. One hundred books that could neither be assigned nor put on a recommended reading list. "Toni Morrison, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, Judy Blume?" I asked. Mr. Peterson nodded. "The Board has gotten complaints," he said

The next day I told my classes. "No way!" Wayne said. "Oh, no, I was halfway through Daddy's Roommate," Dora said. (Cute little thing, Dora.) "Look," I said. "It's the rule. No more sex, no more bad language." "We like bad language!" Danny said. "We do?" said Marvin. "Fuck yes!" yelled Danny. Everybody laughed. "Okay," I said, "What about sex?" "We want sex, we want sex!" they chanted in unison. I grinned. "All right, so be it." I picked up the list of banned books and tore it up. Loud cheering resounded throughout the building.

When things calmed down a bit I told them that I could lose my job because of this. The students groaned.

After class, one of my students, Arthur Johnson, known as "Tater" to his friends, came up to the desk and told me not to worry. He said his father owned an advertising agency. "If they fire you, he'll give you a job," he said. "They'll never fire me," I said. "I'm a union man."

And that's how I got into the advertising business.

