

# Patella (Alias the Kneecap)

By Joe Hasley

I've never been an exceptional student, but there is one scientific term you can bet I'll never forget.

It was a cool day in the middle of May. The kind near the end of the school year that just drags on and on. Perhaps the most tedious thing about the last weeks of sixth grade was that I was so looking forward to junior high. I hated being treated like a kid all the time and being told where to sit at lunch and that I should keep my desk clean because, "It will lead to good habits in the future." Yes, the last days of sixth grade were tedious.

Except, of course, for the time that could easily be classified as The Greatest Day of my Career as a Student.

The time for science had arrived. Mr. Winnekamp asked, "Would anyone like to try the bone chart today?"

There was an "Oh, yeah, right" and a couple of "Dream on's," but all the snickering in the room turned to a dead hush when I said, "Yeah, Mr. Winnekamp. I'd like to take the challenge."

Now granted, in order to understand the magnitude of the moment, you may need some background. It had been announced the previous day that anyone who could name all twenty-six bones on the chart at the back of the room would receive twenty extra credit points and get their name on the "I Know My Bones" chart at the back of the room and would receive an official membership certificate to the "I Know My Bones" Club. But, as is always the case when such fame and glory are at stake, there was a catch: you only had one chance to take the membership test. One mistake, one wrong word, and your chance to be the best of the best went down the tubes in one fell swoop.

So now that you know the reason for the class's amazement, I can continue where I left off.

Mr. Winnekamp and I walked to the back of the room with the class still reeling in shock. The only sound was that of my corduroy overalls as my legs swished together. It seemed like the longest walk of my life from my desk to the back of that room. When we finally arrived, the chart seemed like a giant peering down to seal my doom. The intensity was nerve-racking.

After an eternity, the solemn silence was broken by the sound of Mr. Winnekamp's voice. "What is the name of this bone?" he asked, pointing to the head of the skeleton on the life-sized poster.

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*Mr. Hasley lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and attends the tenth grade at Linn-Mar Senior High School in Marion, Iowa. He enjoys biking, camping, hiking, and drama (he's played the lead role in six of the last eight school plays). His advice to other writers: "Your life, though it may seem average to you, is a new and exotic world to other people. Don't be afraid to write about your personal experiences." Mr. Hasley wrote and submitted this story while in the ninth grade.*

