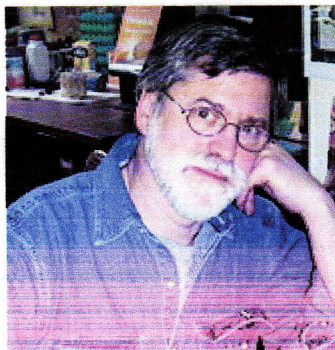




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## **What's Really in a Twinkie? Find out in *Twinkie, Deconstructed*** **This article originally appeared in SLJ's Extra Helping. [Sign up now!](#)**

**Laura B. Weiss -- School Library Journal, 5/16/2007**



Have you ever wondered what's in a Twinkie, that highly processed yellow sponge cake filled with velvety cream that so many kids love? Prompted by a question from his daughter, author Steve Ettlinger went on a mission to find out.

Surprisingly, many of the things found in a Twinkie are more closely linked to rocks and petroleum than any of the four food groups—and it's not uncommon to find these ingredients in other junk foods. *SLJ* caught up with Ettlinger at his New York apartment, where the author talked about *Twinkie, Deconstructed* (Hudson Street Press, 2007) and the lessons he discovered about food and kids along the way.

**Everyone seems to be down these days on processed food, but your book seems pretty straight down the middle.**

It would be kind of silly to attack Twinkie for having stuff in it that's bad for you. Twinkies aren't holding themselves out as health food. The ingredients in Twinkies are used in most of our processed foods. You can't be surprised that there are strange sounding things in Twinkies like petroleum. What is surprising is that they're in everything we eat.

**There's a tendency to link products like Twinkies with childhood obesity.**

I wouldn't link Twinkies with an obesity problem. The fact that we like our processed foods and our convenience foods is a cultural thing that leads to obesity. Eating quickly leads to obesity, eating sweet foods leads to obesity. Twinkies have plenty of company. It's a cake. It's supposed to be half sugar.

**In the chapters on eggs and milk, even those natural products seem processed.**

Even the water is processed. The first ingredients in the book are recognizable foods: flour, sugar, corn sweeteners, soy bean products, and eggs. Even the first one, flour, it isn't just flour; it's not just wheat that's been ground up. It's been bleached with a poisonous gas, chlorine gas. If a chlorine gas tanker ever derails, they evacuate the land for 40 miles around. It's that dangerous.

**I never would have thought that petroleum was in a food.**

Five of the raw ingredients [in Twinkies] are rocks: salt, calcium sulfate which is just gypsum, and three are rocks used to make baking soda—phosphate or trona, which is sodium carbonate, and regular old limestone.

**It seems like you're describing the triumph of science over nature.**

A flavorist (someone who creates flavors for a foodservice company) told me she'd much rather have something that's made in a clean laboratory and that's guaranteed pure than something like natural vanilla that's all dirty from growing in the ground and buried in the ground at one point to ferment. Yuck! For a moment I thought she was joking but she was dead serious.

**I lost my appetite reading your book, but people love their Twinkies.**

I would eat a Twinkie like I might drink a lot one night, or stay up late one night, or engage in a dangerous sport like bicycling or skiing. It's a risk, there's a downside, you can get hurt, it can cost money, but you do it, because you can do a little of that. You have to strike a balance.

**What should schools, and teachers and librarians do to help kids eat fresh foods?**

I went on a field trip with my sixth-grade son to an environmental camp up in the Catskills. I went to eat in the cafeteria. The teachers all brought out bags of cucumbers and red peppers, and carrots and things like that.

**Teach by example?**

A lot of us know to eat an apple instead of a piece of cake but to do it in front of your students would be a really neat thing.

**Isn't it a little unfair what you've done to poor old Twinkie?**

If you look at the cover, you'd think I'm slamming them. When you read it, it's clear these ingredients are used in a lot of other foods.

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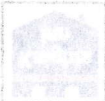
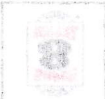
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