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## Professor STORIES

by *Burton Blatt, EdD*

### THE PLAGIARIZER

There's an old saying that one shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. But to "stay alive," academics had better. Tom Griswold learned that lesson the only way some people learn any lesson—the hard way.

Griswold was by any noticeable measure an outstanding professor. When he was younger, people called him the "boy wonder," and even before he turned 40, they were beginning to speak about him as "distinguished." By the time the catastrophe occurred, the textbooks and journal articles would note that, for example, "so distinguished an anthropologist as Tom Griswold expressed grave doubts about. . ." or "Griswold, the eminent social scientist, came to a different conclusion about. . ." Any way one looked at it, Griswold was not only in the establishment but led it. Enter Daniel Ketcham!

Ketcham was to the graduate student body what Griswold was to the faculty. Ketcham was bright, verbal, well-educated, well-connected, and cynical. On top of all that, he had a dazzling personality. On top of everything, he knew how to please his professor.

"Don't worry about a thing, Tom; I'll take care of your class while you're away," or "Let me handle this for you," or that, or the other thing, or everything.

Like all famous professors, Tom Griswold had too many commitments, too little time, and too much ego to say no to yet another honor or standing ovation. So, of course, every now and then everything caught up with Tom Griswold. The chapter was late to the editor, the book was late to the publisher, the lecture had to be canceled, the world had fallen in. Almost as if planned by whoever implements the grand design, in almost predictable cycles Tom Griswold would be cornered, trapped with too many responsibilities and too many deadlines, with the specter of failure hovering over the Golden Man. Reenter Daniel Ketcham.

"Tom, I'll take a whack at drafting the last three chapters. Then when you return from Australia, you'll be able to get them in the shape you want. I have the time, and I think I know what you're driving at in the book, and I'd love to

help." So the pact was made. Tom had cut corners before, but he had never permitted a student or anyone else to draft three chapters for *his* book. A little help in fine-tuning a manuscript is one thing, but Tom had to work at convincing himself that this help wasn't "over the line." Convince himself he did, or at least he told Dan to go ahead with the idea, and he thanked him profusely.

Griswold returned from Australia. The chapters were waiting for him. They were perfect—astonishingly perfect. The professor was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. The student basked in the praise. The book was published.

The three chapters were lifted from a little known monograph published years before. But "everyone" read Tom Griswold's books, even the author of monographs that no one read. Then came the disgrace.

This is the end of the story, and that was the end of the professor.

### CHEATING

Thirty-five years ago there was a woman who caused an enormous stir in my field, which is mental retardation. Her doctoral research led her to conclude that retardation is curable. Probably no one would have found out that she cheated with her data had she not written dozens of persuasive articles for the popular magazines elaborating on her "discovery." To gild the lily, one of the monograph series in psychology and education reprinted her entire dissertation. Eventually, however, her name not only became a household word but also a dirty academic word when a nosy professor from her same state, interested in her area of investigation, took it upon himself to examine her data with a meticulousness that was absent among her own doctoral committee members. And he also took it upon himself to visit the supposed location of her research where she "proved" that feeble-minded children could be cured. There he interviewed school officials and teachers and others who were reputed to have collaborated on that study. To reduce the cause celebre of the 1940s to the short shrift needed here, it's enough to say that this once famous woman was exposed as a cheat and, insofar as the academy is concerned, was never heard from again. By the way, not even her committee members, who each signed off on her dissertation, would defend her when it

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came to the final reckoning. Everyone deserted the crooked ship, and once off, everyone went back to business as usual as if that misguided woman had never existed.

There was once a man who was hired by us to coordinate some research we had contracted to do for the State Department of Education. He seemed to be bright enough, and, certainly, he was vigorous and full of good cheer and energy. He was also full of something else. To make this summary even shorter than the last—because, after all, who wants to belabor our too frequent failures to detect cheats—we learned through this young man's secretary that the major paper he had "written" about this work was lifted word for word, paragraph by paragraph, and page by page from a book authored by one of the leading professors in that area. We put a stop to the distribution of the publication and told the plagiarizer that he had to pack up and leave immediately. After tearful pleas from both him and his wife, we reluctantly permitted him to remain on the project until the end of that academic year. But sure enough, before he left us he did exactly the same thing, this time fudging data on his final report for the state department. That did it! We threw him out, tears or no tears, without compassion—indeed, only with barely restrained hate.

I know another professor who has a chair at one of the most prestigious universities in the world. He is respected by colleagues, by students, by people in his own specialization, as well as by academics in general. He is world-famous and, from the standpoint of the academy, deservedly so. Yet this friend cheats too. But his cheating is confined to illicit lovemaking. And for all we know, and for all we care, he may even cheat on his income taxes. But insofar as the academy is concerned, this man is to be trusted and, more than that, is to be followed and honored.

Cheating is defined much differently in the university than outside of it. What seems to be trifling matters outside are of enormous importance inside. What seems to be despicable, even criminal, on the outside can be tolerated on the inside. That's why outsiders are sometimes befuddled when they learn that the nicest people, the gentlest people, the most "honored" people are not necessarily honored in the academy. And conversely, the complete bastards to outsiders are oftentimes revered on the inside. Not only is university justice harsh, but it's different from the civil and criminal codes of the larger society. What is child's play on the outside—reading, writing, studying—is life and death drama on the inside. What is a crime on the inside—plagiarism, data fudging—is trivial if noticed at all on the outside. A crime is *not* a crime, is *not* a crime, especially in academe. Or is it! ●



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