

Slouch By Jim Earle



"Ever since I've been wearing this shirt, I've been getting these spooky feelings."

Bracket creep — problem for Heidi

by Art Buchwald

Heidi Schultz wasn't feeling well so she went to see her family accountant. "What seems to be the trouble, Heidi?" her CPA asked her. "I worked all week, and then to earn more money I worked overtime, and I have less to show for it than I did before." The CPA took an X-ray of Heidi's paycheck and as soon as it was developed, he held the picture up to the light. "Hmmm," he said as Heidi watched him nervously. "Just as I thought." "What is it?" Heidi asked. The CPA sat down in his leather chair and said gently, "There is no way to break this to you easily, Heidi, but you're suffering from 'bracket creep.'" "What's bracket creep?" she wanted to know. "It was a very rare IRS disease a few years ago, but I've seen a lot of it lately. What happens is that the more money you make, the higher bracket you're put into, and the more taxes they take out of your check. That's why you feel so lousy." Heidi said: "I don't understand. I thought the more money you made the better off you felt." "That was before bracket creep became so prevalent. Let me show you," the CPA said, holding up a chart. "You made this amount of money last week, which would have required you to pay this amount of taxes. The figure looks puny but at least it was healthy. Now you worked overtime for four days, so that pushed you up to another bracket. They withheld a higher percentage of taxes and Social Security, so while your gross income looks good, your net is sick." "But isn't President Reagan's tax cut supposed to take care of people like me?" "It originally was. But no one had heard about bracket creep when it was approved. A tax cut can't cure you because it doesn't attack inflation or scheduled Social Security increases. Bracket creep is insidious because the harder you

work the more your taxes hurt you." Heidi said, "How can you be so sure I have it?" "Let's talk about symptoms. When you get your paycheck do you cry a lot?" "All the time?" "And do you get angry at the people in the upper wage scales who pay less taxes than you do?" "I'm angry right now." "And do you feel that life is unfair because the longer you work the less you have to show for it?" "Uh, huh." "Then I'm afraid, dear Heidi, you have it." "What can I do about it?" "I'd like to put you into a tax shelter for a few weeks, but people like you don't get any relief from it. Your X-rays show you're not deductible so I can't prescribe a three-martini lunch. You have no tax losses to fight the creep, and without dependents I'm afraid a tax cut won't relieve the pain." Tears rolled down Heidi's cheeks. "Does that mean as far as my income goes, I'm terminal?" Heidi asked. "No, I didn't say that. Bracket creep doesn't kill. It just causes a lot of pain." "What can I do?" The CPA took out his prescription pad. "I'm going to put you on a strict work diet. First, you have to change your habits, so no matter how tempting it sounds, you won't do any overtime. If anyone offers you a bonus, refuse it. If you're tempted to earn extra money at another job, call a friend so she can talk you out of it. And every time you get your paycheck take two aspirin." The CPA escorted Heidi to the door. "Thank you," Heidi said. "If it hadn't been for you I don't think I would have slept tonight." The CPA patted her on the shoulder. "You can pay my secretary on the way out."

Defending sound education

"Will you take off for grammar or spelling or stuff like that?" That question was asked, not in a high school class, but in a junior-level course here last week. Several people in the class were unwilling, or unable, to write a grammatically correct paper for it. Perhaps that's not surprising. Universities today are not the centers of learning that they once were.

A few decades ago, university students were all exposed to the classics — which meant learning Latin and, often, Greek; they were made to study English and American literature; they had to learn a foreign language; they studied philosophy and mathematics. They did all this in addition to mastering their field.

Things have changed. We're told that subjects like engineering have become too complex to allow students much time for the liberal arts or, indeed, for anything other than engineering. You need only check the degree plans listed in the Texas A&M University catalog to see that, in many majors, only three or six hours are set aside for electives: social studies and humanities included.

Three or six hours do not give a student much time to explore Western culture; most of it unavoidably will be ignored.

And so, for many students, the classics are completely foreign. Many of us take one sophomore-level literature course

daniel puckett



and few students are required to take any foreign language course at all.

The result is predictable, though I doubt many people gave it much thought in the heyday of requirement-dropping. We have engineers who can't write a sentence in English — much less French or Spanish; scientists who know nothing of the world outside our borders; chemists who can synthesize polyester but can't understand why this Shakespeare guy is so well-regarded.

Rather than producing men and women with a wider view of the world — an objective of the old-fashioned university education — we succeed instead in narrowing people, shutting off vast areas of their lives so that they can take one more course in their major field. And while we train our students for their careers, we give them nothing for the hours they must spend away from the office.

For while the liberal arts often have

been condemned as irrelevant, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and the rest of the liberal disciplines are precisely those fields which better equip us to live. They give us insight into ourselves and each other; they help us communicate with each other; they tell us about the *what* of humanity, but also about the *why*.

Certainly, technology has advanced far beyond its level at the turn of the century, and that obviously means greater time now must be spent learning it. Perhaps four years is too long a time for technology majors to spend on their technology. And perhaps shortening the time necessary for a laureate to five years is impractical.

But it is a shame that, instead of teaching as a university should, we find ourselves functioning as a school: a place where a specific skill, nothing else, is acquired. And it is a shame that more and more of our graduates are denied a chance to explore their own culture, since, for them, this will be the last chance they will be exposed to, and tutored in, non-technological achievements and civilization.

The answer, by the way, to the question posed in my class was: No. Spelling and grammar and "stuff like that" count in some classes at Texas A&M. And that's disturbing.



PSST... BETTER CHECK THOSE TICKETS WE HAVE FOR THE QUEEN

Salvadoran guerrilla interview

If an American journalist were to interview a Salvadoran guerrilla leader, it might go something like this:

"Senor Duartez, in America, our government has emphatically led us to believe that the revolution in El Salvador is nothing more than a Russian plot or design. Is this the case?"

Duartez: "Mr. Kegan, in my country most of us are poor and hungry peasants. And for as long as any of us can remember, our various governments have forcibly maintained this status quo. Imprisonment, torture and execution have been the rewards meted out to us for complaining."

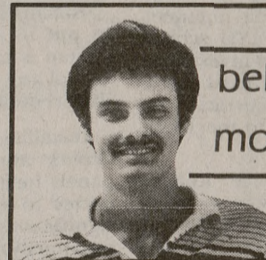
"It is true that most were satisfied with limiting their resistance to the dinner table. But, many were not and have resorted to active rebellion. So, you see, it is our plot to revolt. As for the Soviets, we gladly accept their military means with which we carry on the struggle."

"For the most part, one can term what is happening as demand-side revolution: our demand is their supply."

Kegan: "Then, in that case, why have you turned to the Soviets for assistance and not to others?"

Duartez: "Well, once we conceptually opted to revolt, we were left with the practical problem of implementation. The United States would not help us. Western Europe would not help us. And all the countries allied to these two would not help us. The Soviet Union and Cuba did. We did not have many alternatives."

behrooz moghaddam



Kegan: "But don't you see that in the process Soviet goals of thrusting U.S. interests in Central America are furthered?"

Duartez: "Of course, you are right. But why should we be concerned about your interests. Your government is supplying weapons to our enemy in San Salvador. As such, should we not welcome the prospect of frustrating Washington?"

"Nevertheless, we do not necessarily enjoy being in the middle of a superpower conflict. It only prolongs the struggle for us."

Kegan: "Switching over to theory, does all this mean you have adopted Marxist-Leninist doctrine as your political direction, and that this is after all a communist revolution. And if so, should we expect a domino effect to sweep through Central America?"

Duartez: "You know, Mr. Kegan, 200 years ago your countryman had just successfully revolted against the British monarchy. I have always wondered what an American from that period would

think of our revolution.

"Today, I'm afraid the answer has drastically changed. First, we are not communist or leftist for even thinking of a revolution. And secondly, we are not in order to save democracy. We are above all Salvadorians. And the only picture of you fear so much is nationalist, not communist."

"On the other hand, I would not give you the impression that communism has no hope in El Salvador, even secondary influence. Capitalism is part of the world is equated with the horrors of dictatorships. American national complicity in Allende's overthrow in Chile is the only picture of enterprise we have. Consequently, philosophy which appears to contradict is naturally attractive. We see that around the world."

Kegan: "As my last question, what do you think will bring an end to the civil war in El Salvador?"

Duartez: "Well, Mr. Kegan, once we face is that once a people is pushed to arms, rarely do they put down without perceived victory. A governmental gesture, whether or not, is suspected to be a trap."

"A peaceful solution as such is inconceivable. Yet I can tell you that substantive change is pursued by peasants are no longer peasants. Our compatriots will eventually die if our people close their doors to us. Otherwise, we will win."

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