

## The Plagiarist

Roger Gayland loved research, but he didn't like writing. That's where the whole problem began. He was researching how plate tectonics affected Antarctica when he stumbled across a reference to an obscure dissertation. "How Plate Tectonics Affects Ocean Currents in Arctic Regions." It was written more than 50 years earlier by Dr. Björn Baalsrud, a Norwegian geologist. Unfortunately, it was written in Norwegian. Roger thought it *might* have some bearing on his research, so he ordered a copy and paid what seemed like a fortune out of his student's budget to have it translated. It turned out the paper had very little to do with his research, but it did have some very clear explanations of plate tectonics in general. Roger incorporated those explanations into the introduction of his dissertation. He cited the paper in his bibliography and acknowledged the pioneering work of Dr. Baalsrud in his acknowledgments, but he didn't cite any specific quotes. After all, he wasn't quoting the original paper, he was quoting a translation which he had paid for. Also, since he didn't speak Norwegian, he didn't know which pages of the original text corresponded to the explanations he was quoting.

When Roger defended his dissertation, Professor Max Henriksen objected. Very strongly. Roger had asked Professor Henriksen to sit on his advisory committee because Professor Henriksen was a world-renowned authority on plate tectonics, and Roger's major professor had said it would add to Roger's academic credentials to have him on the committee. Roger had hesitated because he'd taken two classes from Professor Henriksen and considered him a pompous ass, but he finally relented. Now he regretted that decision. It was just Roger's luck that Professor Henriksen was second generation Norwegian and spoke the language fluently. He also was quite familiar with Dr. Baalsrud's work. He declared Roger's dissertation to be a gross plagiarism of Baalsrud's dissertation and, since he was a world-renowned authority, his word carried the day. Roger's dissertation was rejected and he was expelled from the university for violating the ethics code.

That was over five years ago. Roger's academic reputation was such that he couldn't even get a job teaching Geology at the local community college, so he was selling insurance. He still researched geology as a hobby because he enjoyed research and he was genuinely interested in geology, but instead of spending hours immersed in the university library he now spent an hour or two on the Internet at home. That's how he discovered Professor Henriksen had recently published an article on "The Effects of Plate Tectonics on Antarctic Substrata."

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"It's my work!" Roger said to his major professor as the professor frowned at the paper in front of him. "He even copied some of the tables and graphs from my unpublished dissertation."

"It's hard to believe it," the professor said, shaking his head. "A man of his reputation. I need to take this up with the Dean. I'll let you know how it turns out."

A week later Roger got a call from the professor. "The Dean elevated it to the Office of Ethics and Compliance, and they took it to the Board of Regents. They relieved Professor Henriksen of his position. There won't be any public announcement, of course. I'm sure you can understand why this case is being

handled with discretion. The reputation of the University is at stake, not just the reputation of one professor. I can assure you, though, that Professor Henriksen will never teach another class at this university, or at any other university for that matter.”

Roger was glad the Board had taken action, but it still left a bad taste in his mouth. That man had ruined Roger’s reputation and brought his academic career to a screeching halt. And now he was being quietly fired, with no blemish on his reputation because it might reflect badly on the University? Still, Roger was enough of a realist to know why the university was being discreet. There had recently been a national scandal over plagiarism by someone who testified before Congress. Any hint of scandal could lead to an investigation and possible loss of Federal funding for research grants and student loans.

Universities are terrible at keeping secrets. Boring stuff can be kept secret. Boring stuff like trade secrets, classified information, patentable research breakthroughs, and similar mundane occurrences. But interesting gossip about faculty members? Not a chance! Roger still had a few friends on campus, and it wasn’t long before he learned the truth. Professor Henriksen had indeed been relieved of his teaching position, but only so he could accept a new position as “Professor Emeritus.” It was also true that he’d never teach a class at any other university. He wouldn’t have to. His new position carried a salary of \$300,000 per year. Roger decided it was time to do a little research into Professor Henriksen’s other publications.

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The Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion referred Roger to the Director of Ethics and Compliance. Roger sat quietly while that Director read through the summary of Roger’s findings.

“Just what do you expect me to do with this?” the Director asked after he’d read it.

“I rather thought you might want to take action,” Roger replied.

“We’ve already relieved him of his position for plagiarism,” the Director answered. “This is just more of the same. If I took action on this, it would be like kicking a man when he’s down. I’m not going to do that.”

“You relieved him of one position,” Roger countered. “But only so you could promote him into a higher paying position.”

The Director was taken aback. Roger wasn’t supposed to know about that. “That had no connection to his being relieved of his teaching position,” he said. His voice sounded like he was trying to convince himself that it was true. “That was in recognition of his many years of devoted service to this university.”

“Service like the research I noted on the pages you just read?” Roger asked. “The copy machine down the hall gives service like that. I was particularly impressed by items three, seven, and nine.

Professor Henriksen applied for government grants to do that research, and in return he supplied the government with results copied from other projects.”

“They got the results they paid for,” the Director insisted.

“I wonder if the GAO would come to that conclusion.” Roger replied.

The Director just looked at him icily.

Roger continued. “And of course, there’s the PhD degree awarded to Professor Henriksen by this university. It appears the good professor was familiar with the dissertation he accused me of plagiarizing because he copied material from the same source to use in his dissertation. The difference is, I used a reworded description of a few general terms. Professor Henriksen copied data and results. Without attribution, I might add.”

“What is it you want?” the Director asked coldly.

“I would like equity,” Roger replied. “This University does support equity, doesn’t it?”

“Of course we do!” the Director insisted. “That’s one of our core principles.” He suspected Roger was trying to trick him into saying something negative about equity, an act that would get him fired faster than if he peed on the Provost’s pop tart.

“He copies a dissertation and gets a \$300,000 per year honorary position,” Roger said. “I paraphrase a few terms from that same dissertation and get thrown out on my ass. That doesn’t sound like equity to me.”

The Director stared at Roger for a long time. Then his face seemed to soften a bit. “I can see how that might appear unfair. I’ll talk to the Academic committee. Maybe we can reinstate you as a student and reconsider your dissertation, provided you revise it to give proper attribution to your sources.”

Roger shook his head no. “You’re offering me the same opportunity Professor Henriksen had when he was a student. That’s equal opportunity. Equity means more than that. Equity means equality of outcome. I checked with your Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion before I came to you, and she told me equity means evaluating each individual’s situation and doing everything within your power to guarantee an equal outcome.”

“Don’t be absurd!” the Director shouted. “I can’t appoint you a Professor Emeritus. That’s a recognition for years of devoted service.”

“Well, maybe I need to spend a few years as a Professor, first.” Roger suggested.

“Assistant professor.”

“Associate professor has a better ring to it.”

“You’ll have to revise your dissertation. And teach. And publish,” the Director said.

“The dissertation goes without saying,” Roger agreed. “And I think I’d like teaching. I’m not too keen on publishing, but that goes with the territory. Fortunately, Professor Henriksen has already published my first paper for me. You just need to convince him to add my name as a co-author. And, of course, you need to do everything within your power to ensure equity. I make full professor and Professor Emeritus in the same period of time it took Professor Henriksen.”

The director stared at Roger for a long time. “Give me two weeks to work out the details,” he finally said with resignation. “Then we’ll get you on the payroll and give you your teaching assignments. Classes begin in six weeks.”

They shook hands and Roger hurried home to revise his dissertation. He wasn’t proud of how he got on the faculty, but he was determined to be the best Professor of Geology they ever had.