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CHAPTER 22

The Cost of an Education

One Monday morning, three months after graduation, Rachel Greenberg called the Registrar's office to find out what happened to her diploma.

"Where do you live?" an assistant registrar asked.

"Fishers Ferry," she answered.

"Well, that's your problem."

"Because I live in Fishers Ferry?"

"Because you live within 50 miles of the college."

"Because I live within 50 miles of the college, I can't get a diploma?"

"You can get a diploma, but you must pick it up in person."

"But why can't you mail it out?"

"Because you live within 50 miles of the college."

"If I lived 51 miles from the college, could I get my diploma by mail?"

"If that were the case, we'd mail out your diploma, but you live in Fishers Ferry and that's—"

"—within 50 miles of the college."

The assistant registrar politely explained that it wasn't cost-effective for the college to mail diplomas to graduates who live within 50 miles of the college—there's all those costs associated with buying, stuffing, and addressing the mailers, paying for the postage and, for all anyone knew, the time involved in putting the mailers into a mailbox. Graduates living within 50 miles of the college could just stop by the office, between 9 a.m. and noon, and 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. But, Rachel Greenberg worked from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, a temporary job, but a job nevertheless, so she offered another plan. She'd send a check for \$5 to cover the cost of mailers, addressing, stuffing, and postage. That's when she learned another truth.

"I'm sorry, but we wouldn't be able to do that. We don't have any accounts established that we could put that check into."

Another plan! She'd have a friend stop by and pick up her diploma. "We'd really like to help," said the assistant registrar, "but you need to sign for it in person."

"I'll send a notarized statement authorizing him to sign for me."

"I wish that were possible," said the assistant registrar, "but we have a book with your name, major, and graduation date printed in it, and you have to sign in that book."

Rachel Greenberg, with a B.A. in fine arts but no diploma, had completed college by testing out of almost a year's worth of courses, and by mixing courses from previous colleges, correspondence courses, and courses while in attendance, all while working a dozen assorted jobs, most part-time or temporary. She was almost 40, and

had no reason to do the academic shuffle any longer. So, she talked with the registrar himself, and then talked with a dean and a vice-president. She would have talked with the president if she hadn't been out of town on some fund-raising mission. They all sympathized, but rules are rules.

So, one fine autumn morning, Rachel Greenberg took off a half day without pay—employers who hire temporaries don't throw in vacations, sick time, and benefits—went to the college where she picked up a diploma which had already cost her more than \$12,000 in tuition and fees, and then returned to her car, determined never to send the college any money ever again.

On the windshield was a college-issued parking ticket.