

From her desk in the corner of the prefab building serving as the Deans' Office in the summer of 1971, Claire Hess brought over to me a stack of files. The manila folders contained the letters of application and the credentials of people wishing to be hired for the first-year teaching faculty of Evergreen. She said, "You might want to take a look at the top one first." It was an unusually thick file and turned out to contain the materials sent by a man whom I shall call Mr./Dr. J.

At that time the outlook for teaching positions in colleges and universities around the country wasn't too bad. But a good number of aspirants wanted to work at Evergreen. By the time in 1972 when we stopped counting, we had received well over ten thousand unsolicited applications for the ninety-some positions we had to fill by our second year of instruction. Claire Hess had the full-time job of scanning these applications, determining who might be likely candidates, sorting their files to be passed on to the appropriate academic dean (Merv Cadwallader for social scientists, Don Humphrey for natural scientists and mathematicians, me for humanists and artists), sending out "thanks-but-no-thanks" notes to those who didn't make the first cut, and handling further communications with those who did.

Claire would rule on those obviously unsuited, and there were a lot of them. Many applicants stated forthrightly that they had been raised in the Pacific Northwest or had spent some time here and would love to get back to the region. Endearing, but not sufficient grounds for hiring them. Others had seen our name among newly founded institutions but had obviously not bothered to find out anything more. "I am applying for a position in your School of Mining Engineering." "I would like to join the faculty of your School of Nursing." Claire would deal – courteously – with these applicants by herself and not bother the deans with them. But a lot of the applicants had done at least a bit of homework and were either enthusiastic about what we were planning to do or at least eager to get in on the ground floor of a promising new enterprise. If the experience they could bring to us at all fitted the priorities which the deans had listed for Claire, she would put their applications on our desks.

Mr./Dr. J. had done some homework and presented himself as a highly educated interdisciplinary scholar in the humanities and social sciences. He was currently employed – as "Dr." – at one of our sister institutions in Washington; but he thought he could really do the job for us and would be just what we should be looking for. Among copious listings of experiences, awards, and publications, two items stood out. He had been awarded the Ph.D. degree by a small private university in London, named for a distinguished British humanist of the earlier twentieth century. He also had received a diploma or certificate for long-term involvement with a research institute connected with Harvard. I had never heard of the university or of the institute at Harvard, but such ignorance was not unusual. My late friend Ronald Hurst, a Benedictine monk, once remarked that there are three things God does not know: what the Jesuits are thinking, where the priests get their whiskey, and how many orders of nuns there are. If these are unknowable, then the names and numbers of small private educational or cultural institutions in London and of research institutes in and around Harvard must at least rank high among facts barely knowable. I did not recognize the names but was impressed.

Some of our early planners had connections around the state, and I asked whether any of them had heard of Mr./Dr. J. No one had, but he had not been in the state very long. Something about the weight and persuasive power of his file got to me. Things which seem too good to be true usually aren't true. So I told Claire to send the polite turn-down, with the note that we would keep his application for a while and be in touch at a later time if his qualifications fitted our needs. I put the matter behind me and turned to the next files.

About nine months later, my memory of the file came back. I was sponsoring a part-time individual learning contract for Mike Sayan. We-the-planning-faculty had assumed that the College could offer few individual contracts in the first year of instruction. The demand, however, was so heavy and consisted of so many worthy requests that Jack Webb and Peter Robinson, the only faculty members assigned as contract sponsors, were swamped. As the dean overseeing the policies and practices of individual learning contracts, I tried to help out. [I add here that I have always insisted upon the term "individual" rather than "independent contracts." The arrangements may have involved largely independent study, as opposed to classroom participation with a group, but by the very nature of the mutual obligations meant by the word, a "contract" cannot be "independent."]

Mike Sayan was employed by the Washington Education Association and had the opportunity to study labor law with Herbert Fuller as sub-contractor. Though I was not involved with the substance of Mike's learning, we would still meet every other week to talk about how things were going. At the close of one such meeting in the spring of 1972, Mike sighed and said that he was going to have to do something on the next day that he didn't want to do. He had to make a trip to one of our sister institutions. One of the faculty members was charged with having falsified his credentials, and Mike – though he felt that the situation was indefensible – had to be present at the hearing to make sure that appropriate procedures were being followed.

It seemed that things had been going smoothly for the faculty member in question until the possibility of an early award of tenure had come up. For such an important step, the administrators of the institution had gone back through his credentials and started checking up. As Mike went on, things came into focus. It was Mr./Dr. J. The small private university in London, no matter how prestigious the person for whom it was named, turned out to be a house owned by Mr./Dr. J.'s father. The institution did have some sort of homemade charter and a table of organization, in which all administrative positions were divided between the father and the son. Mr./Dr. J. was the lone graduate whom anyone could identify. And the sonorously named Harvard institute did not exist.

When I next spoke with Mike, he said that the hearing had gone pretty much as expected. Neither of us talked further about the matter, and I never found out what happened to the man whose credentials had indeed been too good to be true.. But I did hear something of him again.

In the spring of 1975, as I was walking across Red Square, Rindetta Jones, our Affirmative Action/ Equal Opportunity officer stopped me. Rindy informed me that a grievance had been lodged against Evergreen for racial prejudice in hiring and that, from her research, I seemed to have been the academic dean who had

been concerned with the application. Yes, it was Mr./Dr. J. again. I told Rindy what I remembered about the application and that, had my suspicions not been aroused, my colleagues and I would have been much interested in providing more diversity for the faculty in ethnic and national background. I pointed out that he belonged to an ethnic group which was neither supported by Affirmative Action nor identified as a class to be protected under Equal Opportunity. Moreover, he had in fact falsified his credentials.

Rindy told me that he had admitted falsifying his credentials. But since Evergreen had not known that the credentials were false, and since these credentials were so impressive, the only reason he was not offered a position must have been that we were racially prejudiced against him. He had lied, but we didn't know he had lied. Therefore, we should have hired him.

That was all I ever heard of him. I must admit, however, to feeling a tinge of admiration for the way in which he had promoted himself and then manipulated logic. Though I cannot condone and do not recommend his practice, there is something, after all, to be said for consistency and perseverance.