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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Plagiarism

The most important grade I received in all my years of education was an F from my 11th grade English teacher, Miss Hook, in Sleepy Eye High School. It came in relation to a term project near the end of the year. We could choose any topic we wanted. I chose TV.

TV, as we know it, came on the scene in the late 1920s but was not commonplace until much later, at least not in the hinterlands of Minnesota. The concept of transmitting a picture through a box was mysterious when I was in high school.

I cannot remember when my family got a TV or whether we had one when I was doing my class project. Whenever we got one it was like all others then, rabbit ears, three channels, and lots of fuzz.

Those reading this probably think e-mail, the web, or Google are the biggest innovations of our time, but they would be wrong. It was the remote control (Zenith 1955). Remote controls changed everything. Before they came along you had to walk across the room to switch channels or adjust the sound. With a remote you could stay put!

Our Saturday night entertainment after we married was Perry Mason. Perry Mason, Della Street, Paul Drake, and Hamilton Berger (Berger never won a case!). Our TV was in a big as a house cabinet with an RCA TV in it.

Eventually, when our family had grown and left the nest, I came to realize it was my wife who controlled the TV. She had the remote! I watched what she watched. I was reduced to “gently” requesting “Mute the TV Dudley!” (that is what we called each other; long story) when there was a drug commercial with annoying background music and messages of what we should tell our doctor if there were problems.

Sometimes she muted. Sometimes she did not (but she did often enough so as to not to extinguish my requests).

She has since departed this earth. Now most of my TV watching is with the sound off reading crawlers at the bottom of the screen.

I hope there are no TVs in heaven.

But I digress.

We had plenty of time for the assignment, but I was not a believer in the adage of never putting off to tomorrow that which can be done today. Early on I realized some of the jobs disappeared or got done by others when put off. Further, I reasoned that if I died before tomorrow I would have done unnecessary work.

So I procrastinated until the deadline was hard on me. I burned midnight oil a day or two before the deadline “researching”. It was before word processors and Power Point so I wrote. When I finished I leaned back in my chair and thought, “not bad”. I handed in the report with pride.

About a week later the reports had been graded. I sorted through the pile to find mine. There it was with an F that filled half the front page and below it the word “Plagiarism!”.

I could not believe my eyes. My best work with an F! I asked Miss Hook why the F?

“You copied phrase without attribution. That is Plagiarism.”

She was correct. I deserved an F.

Years later, when I reflected on my F and the lesson I learned, I tried to locate Miss Hook to thank her for the F, but to no success.

Where ever you are Miss Hook, thank you for the F and the lesson you taught me!