

Library Debt by Curtis Chang

Skit done at FLEP '97 before talk on Luke 7:36-50

Karl is sitting in his dorm room working on his computer, writing a research paper with mounds of books around him. By him there is a bed (a table with sheets over it?) and under the bed is a bunch of junk. Bob walks in dressed in sweats.

Bob: Hey, Karl. Listen, some guys wanted to throw a football around outside. It's really warm outside. Do you want to join us?

Karl: Oh, that sounds like fun. But, aggh, I've got to finish this stupid research paper.

Bob: Come on, you're a senior, Karl, you're not supposed to be working!

Karl: No, I really should just get this done. It was already due two days ago. I can't wait until I graduate. Give me my diploma and I am thru with "compare and contrast so and so with so and so in ten pages or less!"

Karl and Bob high five each other.

Bob: Yeah, that'll be great... so, could we borrow your football?

Karl: So, that's why you came by, huh? Yeah, of course. But I'm not sure where I put it. I think it might be under the bed somewhere. You might have to dig around.

Bob begins digging around and pulling out one strange item after another: clothes, pizza boxes, back issues of Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues, etc.. Bob makes various comments about each item and Karl tries to justify why he still has them, all the while still trying to work on his paper.

Bob: Man, when was the last time you went through all this?

Karl (distractedly): I don't know, there's a lot of stuff in boxes that I've just moved from place to place. I think I vaguely remember putting the football in one of them. You'll just have to look through the boxes.

Bob pulls out the boxes and begins to pull out book after book. He cannot find the football. Finally, he begins leafing through the books.

Bob: Karl, you sure have a lot of books here.

Karl: Uh, huh.

Bob: Karl, you sure have a lot of library books here.

Karl (still half distracted): Yeah, yeah. They were all for papers I've had to write.

Bob: Karl, you sure have a lot of overdue library books here.

Karl (finally beginning to pay attention): There's just a few, isn't there.

Bob pulls out more boxes and flips through them.

Bob: Karl, you sure have a lot of boxes of overdue library books here.

Karl: Well, how overdue are they? It's not that bad, is it?

Bob: What day is today?

Karl: March 16th.

Bob: Oh. Well, a lot of these were due in February.

Karl: That's not too overdue. What is the fine, a dime or so a day?

Bob (holds open book and shows Karl): February 1994, Karl.

Karl: What? Are you serious? I thought I returned those books from freshman year!

Bob: And here's one due October 1995. June 1996. April '94. Wow, Nov. '93!

Karl: Why didn't somebody tell me? That's not fair that I have to keep track of all this!

Bob: Didn't you get reminders from the librarian, you know they come in those yellow envelopes?

Karl: Was that what those were? I threw them out as soon as I got them. I just thought it was junk mail.

Bob: Karl, why would the library send you junk mail?

Karl: I don't know! I don't know! Look, so, what does this mean?

Bob: Well, it means unless you do something, you're not going to graduate.

Karl: What do you mean, I'm not going to graduate.

Bob: Yeah, well in May the Dean of the College gets a printout of any unpaid fines of all seniors. If you haven't paid it all off, they withhold the diploma. It's true, it happened to one of the guys in my fraternity last year.

Karl: How... how much do you think I owe on the books? I only have a couple of hundred left in my account. And after my dad paid off my credit card debt last year, he made it clear he wasn't going to bail me out anymore.

Bob: Well, I can find out the exact amount if you want. Your computer is hooked up into the university, isn't it? I'll just log on to the library's system.

Karl turns the desk over to Bob and sits slumped on his bed. He keeps muttering, "It's not fair, it's not fair. I'm so close to graduating. I'm not going to be able to find a job without a diploma."

Karl: Hey, maybe there's a way out of this. What if I say I'm sorry and I promise I'll work off the fine over the summer. They give me my diploma and I could work checkout for a few weeks after graduation before I go home and look for a job. What do you think, Bob, would they go for that? Sounds like a reasonable offer, doesn't it? Bob? Bob, did you hear what I said?

Bob: Uh, sorry. I was busy trying to scroll thru to the end of your overdue account. Yeah, well, I think it might work if you were willing to work a little more than a few weeks. Like maybe a few years. Karl, you owe them \$49,304.43. And it's rising each day.

Karl: Bob, I'm screwed! What do I do? There's gotta be a way around this! Come on, Bob, you once said so, "There's no system that can't be beat!"

Bob: Well, it shouldn't be too hard to hack into the library's system. Let's see what we can do here... oh, yes, OK, I can get around that password layer with this. Oh, please, you call that a firewall? Here we go, here we go. Yes, we're in. OK, OK, Karl, I just want you to know that you are in the presence of genius.

Karl: Yes, Bob, I know that. Can you edit my account to say it's all paid up now?

Bob: Well, let's see.... hmmm. Very interesting.... how about that... no. OK, how about this..... no. But will you stop me from using this function? Ah, hah. This presents an interesting choice.

Karl: What? What? What?

Bob: The system won't let me edit your account in any way. It's got a pretty good protection system to prevent that. But -- by the way, did I remind you that you are in the presence of genius -- I think I can get around that protection by just deleting you entirely from their system.

Karl: What do you mean, deleting me entirely?

Bob: I mean, we erase your entire account, your entire record. As far as the library is concerned, you never existed. And so neither did your fines ever exist.

Karl: Oh, awesome. But, does that mean I can't take any more books out. Like I might still need some more books for my last couple of papers.

Bob: Well, you'll have to get them somewhere else if you want me to do this. Not only will your past status be erased, but your present status as well. The library's system won't recognize your name or ID.

Karl: Hmm, well, but I'll be able to graduate, right? You're sure about that? What if the library has backup records on a different system. Maybe they keep a written copy somewhere. Maybe they've already sent a copy to the Dean. What if they suddenly discover it before graduation and all my family has already come. Do you know my grandmother is making the trip all the way from Italy to come for my graduation? What will she think?

Bob: Look, I don't know. I think it will work, but I don't work for the library, I don't know their procedures. And you can't exactly ask them to assure you that this will work. You are taking somewhat of a chance here. But would you prefer to pay \$49,000? You've got no other choice!

Karl: OK, OK, so what do I do with the books then. Do I just sneak down there one night and dump them in the overnight return box?

Bob: I wouldn't if I were you. If they got a big load of books due in '93, they're bound to start asking some questions and nosing thru their records. You'd be risking being found out somehow, I imagine. What I'd do is just keep the books but hide them where no one can ever find them. I mean, imagine if say, a chick you're trying to impress or your boss is over at your place and they find a box of books stamped, "Property of University of XXXX." (holds up book) With me it's cool, but not everyone is as understanding as me. You probably should just box them up and put them in your attic or something like that.

Karl: Hmm, well I guess this is the only way. I don't know why I feel so reluctant, though. It just feels strange to have your entire record and identity deleted with a keystroke. And it feels risky to have to wonder whether the university will find out the truth somehow. And it feels like a pain to have to lug all these books with me in secret.

Bob: Well, buddy, what do you want me to do? The way I see it, there is no other option.

Karl: Yeah, I guess you're right, there is no other option.