

# Context Books letter yielding to Ted K's demand

to hit stop the press on mass printing of book

Beau Friedlander

Sep 24, 1999

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[\*Pages 1–3 were written before letter #82 arrived, 4–5 were written after.]

[Pages 1–3:]

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Dear Ted:

Your book is on its way and I am glad for that. Certainly was a long time in coming. I'm already thinking about a second edition, in the event that your situation changes, and I look forward to more projects, if you should want to publish another book with me.

It has been a very hard week. You already know that Dubner pulled his piece. Well, I just got off the phone with Adam Moss, the editor of the *New York Times* magazine, who tells me that he's disinclined to publish Dubner's article because it would look like he was promoting your book. I told him that I thought it was news, he told me that the Times sells things — so anything he published about the book would be perceived as support. I tried to prevail upon him to reconsider, but he only said that he'd give it some more thought over the weekend. Dubner said that Moss will not change his mind. Dubner also said that he was being loyal to *me*, and would not allow the piece to change. Who knows, maybe they all decided that it was more interesting to write an article about the immoral “Unabomber's defender” (me), maybe this “pulled article” and NYTimes crap is just a ruse to get some soundbytes [sic] out of me. (All I've said is that it seems absurd that no one is willing to run the piece, and turn the story around, set the record straight.) It *is* absurd. So, I sit here and wonder if the Gods of Culture are waiting to smite me for disloyalty, and we shall see. And yes, I do understand that this must seem very paranoid... All I can say is that my situation as your publisher *inspires* paranoia. Maybe Barnes and Noble will call tomorrow and refuse to sell the book. But maybe I'm mistaken. I'm glad Melissa's with me, the support she gives me is immense. But enough of that.

Miss Simmons should be a name that means something to you. Here's why: It seems the Library of Congress never received an application for the cataloguing number that would place your book forever in that, and many other libraries. It's a pretty serious thing not to have this number assigned to a book. I am still unclear as to how we came to have no number, since I thought Travis (my trusty sidekick) had applied for the number. At any rate, Blake was typing in your copyright page and asked me about the number. It was nowhere to be found. This was the day the pusillanimous, pussy-footing Floyd came to town. Everyone had gone home for the day: except me and Miss Simmons (I sent Blake home at noon). Miss Simmons and I talked about the weather (I'm sure no one every does that with her) I asked her if she had the number (she did not) and then asked if she might consider getting us one about a month faster than

usual (she would). It was a nice thing for her to do, and it lightened my load a little — pretty difficult to bang on and on about historical artifacts and important documents and then not even have the thing catalogued in the Library of Congress! I sent her a small bouquet of flowers. She called back very happy. And that is Miss Simmons vis-a-vis *Truth versus Lies*.

The reason for the mad dash has to do with my distributor. I am not very happy with them. They seem to think it's funny that I'm publishing your book. I gave them a fairly severe tongue-lashing at our last meeting, and I think they now understand my position. They are even more standoffish now. I'm currently looking for an alternative mode of distribution. They have the loyalty of a male rabbit. Anyway, they were pushing me to publish the book, and started to threaten me by saying that they would not have time to distribute it if it *was* delayed any longer. They were of course reacting to Talk. Then, when Talk fell through, they accused me of *lying* about Talk. Now I have also told them about the NYT magazine. Of course I will appear even less creditable after they find out that this too fell through. They simply have not given a moment's thought to the fact that the media and you are not chummy, that my project is not an easy one. What can I do? I'm not going to publish the book the way they want it published. They want something sensational, they want to put you in the same old pillory. I want it to change history, set the record straight. They think I'm mad. I think they're nuts. (I tell you, Ted, it's a match made in heaven.) As if it were a crime to attempt to recast a one-dimensional caricature into a three-dimensional man. The will to lie in our culture is a pandemic, chronic disease. No one wants to know the truth: the ship is still heading north. But I digress...

Your book *was* vetted by Miller, five times by me, then it *was* run by three proofreaders under the supervision of one copyeditor. They found very few errors — and you are their new hero. The copyeditor (Roz) thinks you should re-write the Chicago Manual. (I'm thinking of buying one for you — let me know if you would like that.) Your writing is pretty close to perfect with respect to both usage and punctuation.. I think a philosophy of grammar could be developed from the crystalline perfection there. But someone has already written a book called *The Philosophy of Grammar* (a Dane, if I remember correctly). The proofreaders and Roz found your book very compelling. I am sure everyone would, if the media would only let me publish the fact that readers will find the book compelling. We shall see. Interesting: Everyone identified strongly with the letters exchanged about salted nuts and smoked oysters — it is indeed a universal problem.

Family problems. Do you remember (I should know better than to ask) when I said I had to run from classroom to classroom during junior high school? You said that you found it difficult to believe. Here's a thumbnail of that time in my life: My mother took an inordinate amount of narcissistic pleasure in my accomplishments. She *was* very abusive (verbally) toward my older sister Liza. The dynamic *was* dangerous. Liza abused me very badly, and I had no self-esteem. I was encouraged to be eccentric by my mother (she wanted me to draw well and play the classical guitar). This made me the

odd-man-out among my peers. That my sister regularly scrubbed the asphalt with my body in their presence did not make matters better with me. Liza took her aggression out on me, since I was the most identifiable source of her problem. Her problem was quite simply that her mother didn't love her — or at least not in any manner that might be deemed healthy. To this day, I have a fear of doing well, because that was when Liza would come after me. I think this might be the cause of my strong reaction against Theresa, which should not have bothered me at all. She reminded me of my sister (with whom I now have a very loving relationship based on parity of esteem). Our mother died thirteen years ago and our stepfather died five years after that — so we have come to depend on each other for filial Jove.

All of the above made me seem strange to the other kids in middle school. Worse was the fact that the girls thought I was “cute,” which made me a particularly good target for the larger boys who had already hit puberty and had reason to value girls. I would not hit puberty until my fourteenth year, and then only slowly. Does this lend any credence to the statement I made during our visit?

Onward. I talked with John Zerzan. We talked about the media and the possibility that I might publish *Against Civilization*. We shall see, I think it might fit in with a series I am launching next year called “Grassroot Guides.” The titles in that series are: “Hacking: What it is and how it's done”; “The A to Z of Hate Groups and their Corporate Sponsors”; “How to Disappear: for victims of domestic abuse and fugitives from abuses of power”; “Investing with Good Karma”; “How to Grow your Own Herbal Cures”; and “Animal Farm(s): You are what you eat.” But maybe it would work better as a distinct entity. I think John and I should pursue the conversation.

All reference to your journals has been removed. I found two that you did not mention: p.250 of Notes and Documents and Chapter 3, footnote 5. I corrected these instances per your method. I was very sad to see the parsnip-reckoning-the-date-of-a-letter footnote go. I hope it can be restored in a different edition sometime down the line.

Peter Hossli wrote to me recently, after a long silence, to ask about an interview with you. I responded that you were probably not interested, but that he should write to you about it. Heike Faller is a bad idea, I met with her and must say that she would not contribute anything but a general interest article of a pretty ordinary variety. One of the head writers from Der Spiegel has expressed interest in the book, but I have not heard from him in a while. He might be someone for you, but let's see what he's like in person. I have only spoken with him on the telephone and he is due in New York presently.

[Pages 4–5:]

It is now Saturday morning. I was just about to write about Yeats's “The Second Coming.” I have enclosed a copy. But I received letter #82, and the poem can wait.

Working under these circumstances makes things so difficult. I feel confident that I understand the way you want things to be in your book. I am also very protective of our agreement. But let me respond in particular.

I had the impression that you sympathized with my situation, and I think that you do. I also understand where that sympathy ends. There are many forces that compel me to make the commitments you rightly said I should never have made. I promise you that I would not have in a perfect world. For instance, the *Talk* piece caused my distributor to say that they would not have time to distribute the book if it was not ready by the beginning of October. They were pushing me because they wanted to make sales. But they were also implying that it was now with support from them, or later with no support from them. If they do not support me, your book does not get into stores. And my project has been to get the word out. They were threatening my ability to do my job. The politics are very strong. I am not able to put them off entirely. And so I have done my best to satisfy their demands, my conscience with regard to our relationship, and most importantly *your* needs as an author.

I think you have an idea of the seriousness with which I take my prior commitment to you. I have very conscientiously remained true to that commitment. I wrongly assumed that I had your faith at this point, and that you trusted my ability to make some last-minute judgment calls. I apologize deeply. By now you and I will have spoken on the phone, and perhaps this will be moot. I cannot say that right now. I am very worried. The book is at the printer now, and pulling it (which I will do in the absence of word from you on Monday) may be impossible. This means that I may not have the funds readily available to print your book after your approval. I am sure I can find the money, but it is indeed a lot of money. I feel my error smartly. My feeling has been that the kinds of changes that you might want to make at this point (if any) would be small. I waited for Chapter 10. I entered those changes faithfully. I was hoping that we could re-number the footnotes in the second edition, which I would be willing to produce immediately. In other words, I assume that we might do altered editions of *Truth versus Lies* instead of second printings. It is not terribly expensive to do this. Everything is in shipshape legally. And in my opinion everything is in shipshape in other respects. The book was vetted several times by several persons.

You wrote your letter to me after our phone conversation. I even imagine that your irritation with me may have softened since you wrote the letter. But I can also imagine that you are very anxious to hear that I will respect your wishes. Guess what, I'll go out of business before I screw over *any* of my authors. And I like you too, which would just serve to galvanize that position. I am not sure what to do about the books, should you not approve the contents as they stand. It's an awful waster of paper. Maybe we could use them later, in the event that you were to find that edition contained no grave errors and/or capricious alteration. I hope so. You are in the right, and I hope you will be able to somehow adjust to my needs for the mutuality of regard that I feel exists between us.

I am enclosing the galleys of *Truth versus Lies* under separate cover. I know that you like me personally and there are no hard feelings — other than anxiety, which has nothing to do with you. I don't like being at odds with you either. I hope you will come to understand this in time, if you do not already know this in your heart.

I'm going to get this off to you post-haste. More later.

*Anxiously, yet still fondly,*

Beau

P.S. I spoke to [TEXT REDACTED] last night at length. She told me some things that were surprising, and I asked if she had told you. She told me that she had not given you details. I suggested that she do so. I think Joy has her head screwed on right, and she is not mistaken in her perceptions.

P.S.2: Melissa and I are getting married in the Spring. I asked her by a reservoir among pine trees at about 10.30pm Wednesday, September 22. She accepted. It was a beautiful night with a threequarters moon and lots of stars. It was chilly (about 45 degrees) and I took her there on the pretext that we should greet the coming season. She was surprised.

The Ted K Archive

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to hit stop the press on mass printing of book  
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Archive.org & University of Michigan Library, Box 66, Folder 9.

**[www.thetedkarchive.com](http://www.thetedkarchive.com)**