

I wore a short sleeve shirt to the on-campus MIT interview just to show them the absence of tattoos. Nevertheless, those Ivy League prigs on the admissions committee must have breathed a sigh of relief two years later at the matriculation into outer space of one Harley D. Davidson. My crime: making a point with an AI professor who offended my dog.

Okay, he ridiculed my dog, a constant companion, in front of the whole class, and I retaliated with creative prejudice:

“Mister *Harley Davidson*,” Professor DeBunce drew out my last name in his affected British accent. “You and that mangy sidekick of yours think your AI project can make sure that I never complete another cell phone conversation in my life? That’s just barking mad!”

Mangy? He called my only friend in life mangy! Okay, I overreacted. Chalk it up to the hubris of adolescent youth. I know, I need to work on that. Which you’ll see later. In spades.

“Yo prof, I suggest that you apologize to my dog immediately.” I’d become quite sensitive to people insulting Chenoa. She happened to be the closest thing to family I’d had since grade school. Chenoa. A pure-bred Bichon Frise father and equally pure-bred Shih Tzu mother had created an F-1 darling with grey ears and white fleece with a brown spot on her right side. For ten years now, I refused to go anywhere without her. Including to class or on dates. Which meant irritating a few cynophobe professors and 100% of the high-maintenance young women who correctly ascertained that I cared a good deal more for the dog than I would ever care for them.

“Apologize to that fleabag some eighteen-year-old boy genius made part of his admission contract to this institution?” He laughed quite a long, forced chortle. “I’ll tell you what, *Mister Harley Davidson*. You block even one cell phone call with your dissertation project, and I’ll give you an honors A in any class you ever take from me. Need the rest of the semester? Take it.”

“No Professor DeBunce, I don’t need the rest of the semester. I don’t even need all afternoon. Send me a text at this number.” I gave him my cell phone number. “Formalize your challenge, giving me proof of our contract, just in case authorities get involved, and that’ll be the last time you successfully use that or any other phone in your entire life.”

Heaven help me, but I shouldn’t have let my adolescent testosterone take the bait. Not only did my draft dissertation articulate the twenty-two attributes of a perfect computer virus, but I’d actually created the darn thing and had been itching for a chance to deploy it. “Sweet Baby Jesus,” as Ricky Bobby in the movie *Talladega Nights* would exclaim, I so wish I’d thought twice about accepting this urination contest! Then again, my accepting the challenge may well have saved the planet from annihilation, at least in the short term. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Professor DeBunce sent me the text.

Upon notification by an especially modified Android phone, which also served as my virus command and control center, I hit the voice-recognition icon and said, “Sheila, level 5 block on this number and any future number you can associate with Boyd F. DeBunce. Use a Chenoa-barking cue to prove your presence before terminating any call he tries to make.”

“Acknowledged, Harley,” answered the British-accented AI’s voice. The whole room heard it, since I’d turned on the phone’s speaker.

BTW (that’s a social media abbreviation for “by the way”), my AI answered to the name Sheila. Professor DeBunce responded by turning on his own phone’s speaker and punching up my number for a voice call. The phone sounded a clear-as-a-bell dialing tone and buzz of a call attempt. Then barked and a hung up. Chenoa responded to the remote sound of her own barking by perking up her ears and rapidly wagging her bushy white tail. The class ended in something akin to pandemonium.

The bad news piled up quite rapidly after that.

MIT’s disciplinary committee demanded I stand down my AI, even after my showing them Professor DeBunce’s explicit permission to accept his challenge.

I declined using some trumped-up rhetoric. Which left Professor DeBunce doubly hosed, since my AI even got his voice print. He couldn’t use his mother’s cell phone or a drug store burner, either. Net-net: He couldn’t outrun the barking dog he’d so cavalierly insulted. Hell, he couldn’t even make a land-line call!

Soon thereafter, the NSA got into the act, demanding source code to Sheila and my immediate ceasing and desisting such shenanigans, given every cellular network and domain name server in the world had been...heh heh...DeBunced. Very quickly, the word “DeBunce” became synonymous with “Kevorkian” in the press.

Had my physical presence not been on a profoundly liberal campus, a *sanctuary campus*, no doubt my carcass would have been renditioned somewhere for perfection of my advanced degree in waterboard interrogation.

The laws of unintended consequences rescued me, at least from any planet-side law enforcement.