Carol Osborn: Good afternoon. I am Carol Osborn, Deputy Director of DANTES. We are attending the Department of Defense 2006 Worldwide Education Symposium in Orlando, Florida. This afternoon I have the great privilege of chatting with Dr. John Bear. John probably has one of the most interesting biographies I have ever read, but to highlight one aspect, he has written over 30 books. John, about 10 years ago DANTES purchased ‘Bears Guide to Earning Degrees by Distance Learning.’ It’s now in its 16th edition, why so popular?

John Bear: When I started doing this in 1974, it was a brand new field. There were so few schools doing it and people just knew almost nothing about it. It was very controversial, do a degree or even get credit, at a distance. People associated with those… you know, they called it the matchbook courses; those dreadful schools that advertise on the back of matchbooks.

Carol Osborn: I remember those.

John Bear: So, “Draw me and win a scholarship!” Yes. So, I was the first one through the door and saying, “Hey, there are good schools doing this,” and people really craved information, and as it turned out, there were also bad schools doing it, and they needed information on that as well. So, 32 years later, I’m still here.

Carol Osborn: Here we are. Well, I think is wonderful that you have a book that is not only informative, but entertaining, and those of us in the education field, we aren’t always that blessed with reference publications, so we certainly have spread the word. You are certainly an expert on scam schools. Do you think the Internet will make the problem worse?

John Bear: Well, it already has. Diploma mills have been with us for seven centuries. There were fake schools in England in 1300s. So, it’s a problem that’s never going to go away. People want the product or think they do, but the biggest three problems… if you wanted to started a diploma mill 20 years ago, your big three problems were: advertising - it costs a lot of money to buy those ads, postage - you had to mail out your catalogues, all your stuff, and privacy - you did not want my coauthor, Allen Ezell, or others knocking at your door. So, if the fake school operators had wishes or prayers they would say, “Give us a way to stop spending on postage, to stop spending on advertising, and to be anonymous.”
and their wishes were all granted. This is what the Internet does; they can send out a million spam emails for 50 bucks, nothing on postage, and they can do it through anonymizer services in Portugal, or Finland, or Liberia or whatever, and they are much harder to find. So the Internet has made it much, much worse.

Carol Osborn: To put it on a personal level, I have had more than one call from a military family member, literally in tears because the spouse has spent thousands of dollars on a bogus degree or a worthless education. How do we prevent this?

John Bear: Well. First we need to acknowledge that this is a really big problem. It is not a few people printing diplomas on their kitchen table with their home printer. It's a multi, multi million dollar, in fact, we think, a billion dollar industry. So, how do we prevent it? We are never going to stop the schools; that's my sad conclusion. So, we need to inform the public so they know, so the degree buyers know what they are doing. I call this putting a time bomb in your resume. They know that they are taking a chance. The degree gatekeepers, the HR people, the ones who hire, they need to know, they need to be more vigilant... and of course, we would love it if law enforcement enforced the law. They are not that good, unfortunately. They used to be. The FTC was great in the 1960s, the FBI was great in the 1980s. Now it's just not seen as that big of a problem. The FBI, the postal service, the FTC, the Department of Commerce, which regulates that .edu suffix, but they don't really regulate it, so the bad schools use it too. We need to get the enforcers much more concerned than they are. And that way we can at least make a major dent in the problem. If people stop buying them because they know - they are going to be in trouble. It's like buying the $10 Rolex watch on the street corner. Yeah, you might get away with it, you might fool a few people, but at some point somebody is going to say, “Hey! You got a fake.”

Carol Osborn: It's bogus.

John Bear: Yeah.

Carol Osborn: Here is another one. We have an increase in PDAs and iPods, streaming video, all kinds of handheld devices, as an author do you feel threatened that maybe books are on the way out?

John Bear: Oh! I feel pleased that we have all these other opportunities. I mean, books are, one could argue, a passing phenomenon. We used to have -- Homer didn't write books, he sang and recited poetry -- and then we had minstrels doing it, and then Gutenberg came along and we put ink on pages and now we have got other ways of doing it. So, for things to get from my head through my fingers into somebody else's head or hands, I don't really care how it happens, as long as I get my royalties.

Carol Osborn: Okay. I love it. What are your future plans for your next book?

John Bear: Well, I write books on all kinds of stuff. I've written seven or eight cookbooks.

Carol Osborn: I saw that.

John Bear: And books on “For Beginning Computer People,” books on “Complaining” and “Consumerism.” The next one out is going to be Cookbook Number 8, morning food, unusual and interesting breakfast recipes. My real dream in the field we are talking about though -- people buy ‘Bear's Guide’
because they only need one page and there is a 300-400-page book, but they only need one page, they don't know which page so they buy the whole book, but as soon as they find that MBA, that Bachelor’s, whatever. I’d like to do a much smaller book and combine it with another one that my daughter and I did called ‘Finding Money for College,’ ... the unusual ways to finance the college education, not the usual federal aids or scholarship things, but all the interesting innovative ways. Our daughter -- she was told her graduate school would cost $42,000 and we said fine, go for it ... but, not us. Well, she found 11 different ways to do it: there is a book fund, there is a travel fund, there are special things for women, there is just all manner of stuff. So, I’d love to combine these -- simplify it, how to get the degree with the simplified how to find the money to do it.

**Carol Osborn:** Well, I can guarantee you, as the mother two college grads, that would be a bestseller very quickly.

**John Bear:** I think it could be. So standby, in about two years you might see it coming along.

**Carol Osborn:** We are going to look for that. As I said we are at the Department of Defense Worldwide Education Symposium. We’ve broken all the records, we have almost 2000 people here, we serve military people around the world, what might be your message for our audience tomorrow?

**John Bear:** Be careful!

**Carol Osborn:** And capitalize on it.

**John Bear:** Probably, but not certainly. That's the charm of this field. There are wonderful degrees that you can do, even doctorates now, through home study. So, some people say, it can't be real and the bad guys love that because they say, “Oh! We are doing it just like good school A, B, or C,” except they aren’t.

**Carol Osborn:** Well, thank you so much for being with us this afternoon. We really look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

**John Bear:** Thanks for inviting me.

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