

Anyone wondering what it was that triggered Minneapolis attorney Randall Tighe to become a staunch, overzealous defender of the First Amendment need look no further than the Federal University of Conglomerated Knowledge.

Long before he ever wrestled with law school, Tighe spent a troubled year as the editor of his high school paper's editorial page. The scathing editorials he contributed brought serious disfavor from teachers and administrators alike. It was not long before the almighty hand of censorship intervened.

"The advisors to the school paper said the things we were doing were 'too contemptuous,'" said Tighe. "It was apparent that they were much happier with the innocuous drivel that was in most student papers of the time."

In a final bold effort before graduating, Tighe wrote a satirical piece on the upcoming graduation ceremony. He wrote that the ceremony's guest speaker would be a representative of the Federal University of Conglomerated Knowledge. It didn't seem too funny until people began to figure out the acronym for that institution. The school administrators figured it out too. It did not strike them as funny.

Tighe was given the choice of paying the printing costs of a new paper (minus his article) or not graduating. He chose to graduate.

It was Tighe's last fling with journalism and his first experience with censorship.

Tighe has spent the better part of his legal career seeing to it that everyone has a right to freedom of expression. His reputation is as a defender of pornographers. It's an image he is comfortable with.

A good part of his fame (or notoriety — depending on who is asked) stems from his association with Ferris and Edward Alexander, Minnesota's two most prominent porn merchants. If their names make the newspapers, chances are Tighe's name shares the same paragraph.

Does that kind of distinction bother Tighe?

"No, not at all," he said. "It's pretty accurate. If it wasn't for Ferris, I'd probably be broke."

In fact, he enjoys his share of public recognition.

"People need to be upset about something," he says. "I haven't had any pickets around my house, yet, and I'm not making any suggestions." A few weeks ago, though, someone sent every Tighe in the phone book a bunch of literature about how terrible pornography is. It had a lot of shirttail relatives pretty upset.

"You want to know my favorite bit of crazy reaction?" Tighe asks. "I had a message on my answering machine not too long ago. It said, 'Mr. Tighe, this is God. I have an appointment with you after this life. You've been engaged in some pretty unsavory material with Ferris Alexander. Like I said, I have an appointment with you after this life.'

"So," he continues, "I concluded that since he used 'like' as a conjecture, either God isn't the perfect being he's cracked up to be, or this guy wasn't God."

Since then, Tighe has spent some time trying to track down the caller. "I just wanted to tell him that whatever sins I may have committed, I've never impersonated God," he says.

Some find Tighe's alleged sins far worse. Recently he has begun to keep the angry letters he receives. One of his favorites refers to him as a "degenerate" and adds "Thank God for people like Bill Wilson." Next to the signature at the bottom of the letter is a hastily drawn swastika.

"That's precisely the mentality of the folks that Wilson appeals to," said Tighe.

St. Paul City Council Member Bill Wilson is one of Tighe's best-known opponents. For years Wilson has tried to rid his district of adult-oriented entertainment. In the past Wilson organized picket lines to walk in front of those businesses, many of them owned by Ferris Alexander. Tighe calls this "the politics of bigotry."

"It's really an unfortunate way to win public office, but it works," Tighe notes. "Bill Wilson is living proof."

"You know he used to be a commissioner of human rights? He really should know better. I hear him in public meetings talking about property values going down because adult theaters are in the neighborhood. Twenty years ago they said that because a black family would move into the neighborhood. The value of the property never went down. It was white bigotry that created mass-selling that made prices go down."

"We made a decision a long time ago in this country that public policy should not be based on public bigotry," he says.

For years Tighe has listened to arguments about the dangers of pornography. He doesn't put much stock in those arguments. Some feel that pornography leads to violence toward women, but not Tighe.

"Every study I've come across shows that sex offenders are not exposed to pornography when growing up and developing. In fact the majority of them tend to have very rigid upbringings," he says.



Tighe: "The opposition to pornography seems inconsistent with the volume of business it does."

FIRST Things FIRST

By Jeff Hinkle

*Porn defender Randall Tighe
is judged by the company he keeps and
the amendment he protects*

"But even if my information is wrong, consider this: A few weeks ago there was a big robbery in St. Paul that was patterned after a scene in the movie *Uptown Saturday Night*. Last year a forger was caught who said he got his ideas from old reruns of 'The Rockford Files.' Manson said he took his inspiration from the Beatles' music and the book of Revelations in the Bible.

"My point is we cannot operate a 'pervert's veto theory' when it comes to the First Amendment. The most degenerate nut among us cannot control what we see or read. If we operate that way, then we'd better outlaw 'The Rockford Files,' *Uptown Saturday Night*, the Bible and any other thing that may prompt violent action. What we'll probably have left are Mickey Mouse cartoons."

Tighe is not convinced that the opposition to pornography is that widespread. His statistics indicate that last year over 54 million hardcore videotapes were rented or bought in this country. "When you consider that Reagan received 52 million votes in the last election and it was called a 'landslide,' the opposition to pornography seems inconsistent with the volume of business it does," he says.

"Even if I'm wrong about everything it doesn't matter. The First Amendment isn't there to protect what people like. That doesn't need protection. The First Amendment is there to protect pornographers, Moonies and Nazis.

"Every time somebody tries to censor anything — be it Ferris Alexander or the Reverend Moon — I remember the Federal University of Conglomerated Knowledge and think there go I." ■