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Good evening,

**I am Rob Nelson, of the George Mason University Ph.D. class of 2000. It is a great honor to speak on this occasion.**

If Gordon Tullock was not such an insightful economist we would not be gathered here tonight. But Gordon Tullock has another respected, if not always appreciated talent. A paucity of praise has been paid to Tullock the comic. Some of you understand immediately why I mentioned that this talent is not always appreciated. If you are not now among the knowing, you soon will be.

Professor Tullock kindly agreed to serve on my dissertation committee. My defense was scheduled for Halloween of 2000. My committee of Tyler Cowen, Roger Congleton, Ron Heiner, James Sanford, and of course Gordon Tullock gathered round to determine my fate. Tyler, the chair of the committee politely offered Professor Sanford of the GMU Psychology department the opportunity to speak first. Professor Sanford opted to withhold his comments, for this was the first Economics committee of which he was a member.

Tyler then openly offered, "Would anybody else like to begin?"

"I would." Professor Tullock quietly yet securely seized the opportunity. He raised the last year of my life to shoulder level and shook it gently. "I would like to say that this is a perfect example of a boring dissertation."

Tullock's comment certainly released any tension from the room. The remainder of the defense was stress free and constructive. Most importantly I passed.

Am I a fool? Before my defense I requested a letter of recommendation from Professor Tullock. Several days after my defense we crossed paths outside of his office. He said, "I finished writing your letter."

I gratefully exclaimed, "than y--"

When before I could finish he continued, "It should effectively prevent you from finding a job."

Ahh, But now the rules of our relationship had changed a bit. He had signed off on my dissertation and plus I had five people on my committee-four economists from who I could solicit my three recommendations. As "Professor Tullock" he of course had some market power, but not so much that I was unwilling to speak frankly. So, I quipped "I should kill you now before the letters are sent off."

To which he responded, "That would be a good idea."

To dramatize the anecdotes I did not initially provide evidence that Professor Tullock respected my thoughts or at least found me amusing. On several occasions he sought me in the student section of Public Choice Center and engaged me in discussions on the evolution of altruism. Another time he asked for comments on a paper. I provided said

comments promptly. This informal contact with professor Tolluck is fondly remembered. According to what I have been told by Ph.D. students at other universities, GMU is distinguished from other Ph.D. programs by the accessibility of the top-flight professors. Allow me to thank all of the professors in the George Mason University department of Economics for attending to myself and other student. I thank **the Mercatus Center and the Institute for Humane Studies for supporting and continuing to support my academic career. And of course a final thanks to** Professor Tolluck for his time, attention, and humor. After weathering the first 15 seconds of my dissertation defense I fear no panel or critic.

Please, eat, drink, and be merry in celebration of Tullock's 80<sup>th</sup>.