

Losing Their Religion



BOOKS

immigrant Korean women or improve the transparency of the political campaign system. So they dutifully went to law school or enrolled in graduate programs in political science. Now, as they near graduation, some of them talk of the intellectual satisfactions of protecting major-label record companies against Internet interlopers or of maximizing the efficiency of New York's workfare program. What happened?

Is it that the graduates, older and wiser, have found a weakness in their adolescent dreams of social justice and democratic improvement? Or is it that the system of graduate education itself eviscerated their aspirations?

D.C. resident Jeff Schmidt would say that these newly minted professionals are still making a difference in society—just not the kind they'd once hoped to make. Indeed, he argues in *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives* (Rowman & Littlefield) that students' professional choices—and the lifetime of decisions they can look forward to making as professionals—have a more powerful impact on democracy than their votes do. The reason, he says, that 80 percent of the entering students at Harvard Law School say they want to pursue a career in public service but 90 percent take jobs at corporate law firms after graduation is that the professional world demands their “ideological discipline,” or adherence to an assigned point of view. Professional education transforms not just what you know, but who you think you are as well.

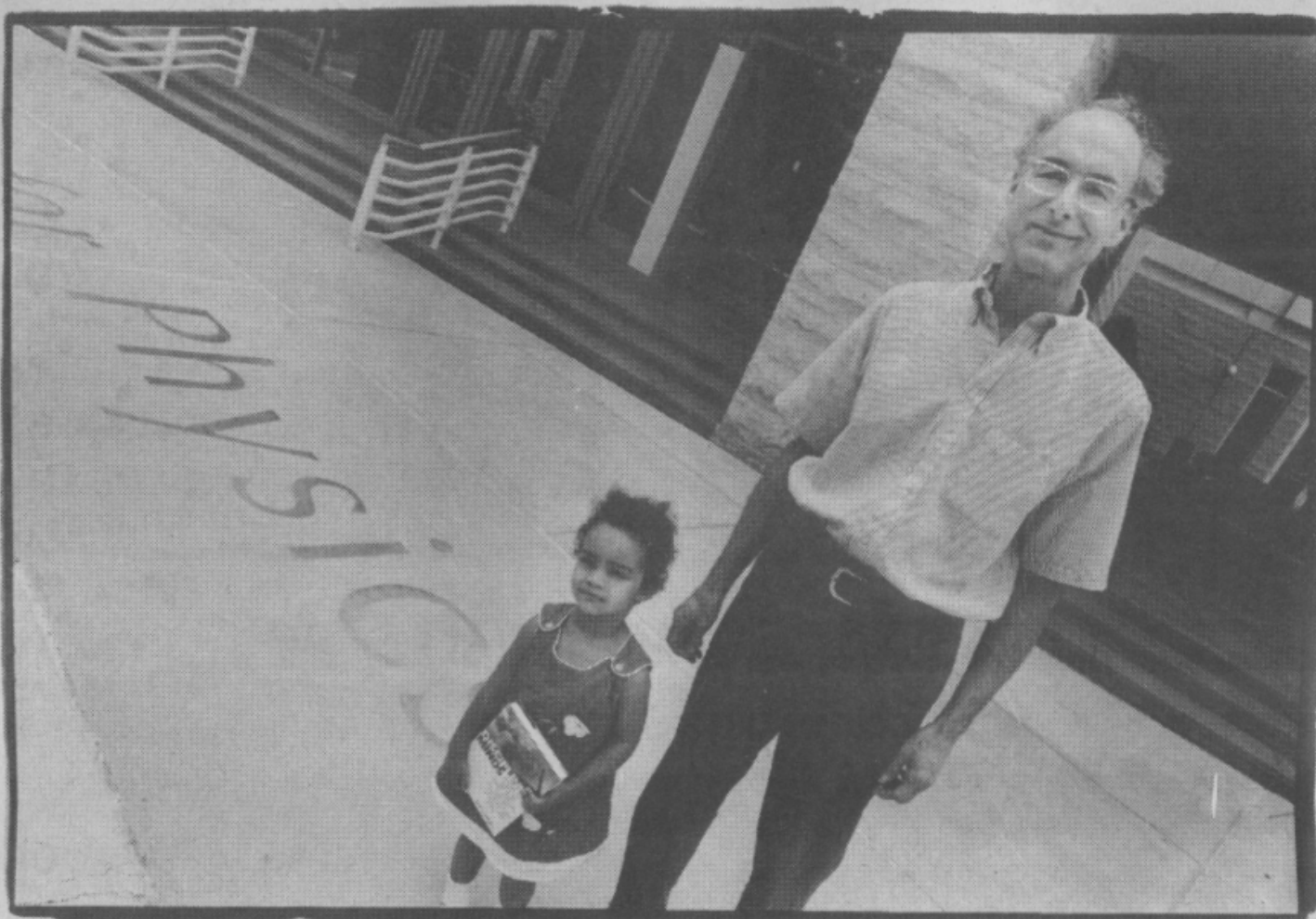
Schmidt, a former editor of the College Park, Md.-based science monthly *Physics Today*, has collected two decades of reflection on the problem of graduate training and professional life into his 280-page book. Schmidt holds a Ph.D. in physics from the University of California, Irvine, but you don't have to be a laser jock or lab rat to see that graduate programs combine sleep deprivation, too much work, rigorous competition, social isolation, and pressure to pursue particular pathways—and force students to accept the regimen or be booted from the program. This is a strategy designed to reshape a young person's social and political preferences, says Schmidt. “[Students] enter professional training with deeply held feelings about the personal and societal promise of professional work, and during professional training struggle against what often amounts to a brutal attempt to change their very identities,” he writes. The struggle of their lives, as any disgruntled associate at a law firm will tell you, is to square their beliefs with the bullying of their profession.

To lessen the conflicts, says Schmidt, the professions require that future workers be transformed while they're still trainees. These transformed employees then can “work within an assigned ideology rather than from a specific list of tasks, because the professional works with unpredictable events,” says the 54-year-old author. And

so the creative work goes to those who can be trusted not to stray from the path, while more creative types often find themselves working as waiters. (Schmidt does not except journalists from his critique of the professions.)

Schmidt's effort to help grad students resist their indoctrination through such chapters as “How to Survive Professional Training with Your Values Intact” was met with some resistance at *Physics Today*. In late May, Schmidt was fired after 19 years on the job, he says, for allegedly writing the book on company time. He successfully contested that charge with the State of Maryland Department of Labor and is now collecting unemployment benefits.

community,” says Allison Sheedy, one of the organizers of “Scene Beat” music conference at the 14th Street with Black Cat czar Dante Ferraro. The Black Cat Club to offer a unique social service in broken guitar strings to navigate packages and demo tapes. Scene Beat is a condensed version of the first school: \$5 buys panel discussions “Keeping a Band Together” and “You Can Do With It.” The safe chat sessions will provide a much-needed corner to D.C. music's harsh reality answered by a collection of wiser heads. Done that, and have the hearing loss. Sheedy also hopes that the forum



We're All Dissonant Beings: Jeff Schmidt with future worker (and daughter) Joshua Rose Schmidt

“The people who were most concerned about others seemed to be the least likely to survive,” says Schmidt of his time in grad school. Not much seems to have changed for him, even in the work-world.

—Garance Franke-Ruta

Scene and Not Heard



MUSIC

shrinking supply of affordable practice spaces, what's an honest bunch of starving musicians with big ambitions to do?

First things first: Circle the wagons and talk things through.

“We wanted to bring together diverse factions of the music

It's a well-worn complaint among would-be songsters doing time in one of the many anonymous bands fighting for recognition in Washington: D.C.'s fractured music scene is deeply frustrating. Faced with indifferent audiences, disinterested club owners, and a

offers instruction on how to string advice on setting up turntables or face a few catcalls.

As if that weren't enough for Scene Beat event may also come under fire for the presence of WHFS DJ Dave Shack manager Richard Burgess. The warm, fuzzy, do-it-yourself-friend shade of corporate gray. Aren't they margin-minded machine endangering first place?

Sheedy is unabashed when defending charges of sleeping with the enemy. “It represents a corporate element,” she says. D.C. are interested in getting played.

Should the back-and-forth be able to chill out with post-forum Dare, Mary Prankster, and Phase

Scene Beat workshops run from noon at the Black Cat, 1831 14th Street

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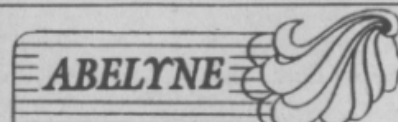
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