



Episode 89

The Truth Will Set You Back a Few Bucks

www.haircutpuente.com -- a web site to contend with.

Haircut Puente has more than a few theories about the Internet. He sees it not as a toy or fad but as the future. The entire world, connected. Every person instantly connected to every other person. A new level of communication, the next evolutionary step up from the written word. A combination of words and sound and images much more like the workings of the human brain than any one of these alone in a book or recording or photograph. A collection of neurons enveloping the entire world in a single electronic brain.

Haircut is *really* into this stuff.

Seth B. Obomash is sitting at the computer in his home office, reacquainting himself with Haircut and Haircut's philosophy of life by poring over Haircut's web site. The home page is an image of an interconnected world not unlike the old concepts of the atom with electrons spinning around a nucleus. There are lots of lights and stars and whooshing noises, yet the page is designed to load in such a way that no matter what equipment you're using, it comes up fast.

Nothing worse than waiting for a page to load; nothing worse than waiting for images to

load; nothing worse than waiting for midi files to load; nothing worse, in an electronic universe, than waiting. -- HP

There are a number of choices for the visitor to Haircut's home page. There is Philosophy, where Haircut bloviates on issues internetian with phrases like the one quoted above. There is the Weekly Analyst, where Haircut analyzes a commercial site he has chosen and explains what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong and, if the site is worthy, gives them a Haircut Award -- the Golden Follicle -- while if they are an embarrassing squandering of electricity that could be put to better use elsewhere, he gives them the booby prize of the HP Baldy. If one is so inclined, subscriptions are available to have the Weekly Analyst delivered to one's mailbox automatically, and Haircut has over twenty thousand subscribers, few of whom realize that he is seventeen years old. And finally, perhaps the most important attraction on www.haircutpuente.com is the library, or, as Haircut puts it, the Mother Loadin' Zone. Haircut's chief goal in Internet life is to crack the tricks that the best 'net programmers are using and make them available to everyone. Haircut has become skilled in HTML and its various versions and updates, in Java and SGML -- you name it. If your web site does something Haircut finds interesting, something for which you, as a Fortune 500 company, have probably paid serious consultant megabucks, Haircut will crack it and explain it to everyone else. Or, as it happens occasionally that Haircut can't deconstruct what you've done, he reengineers it, using the tools he does understand. And since Haircut goes to great pains to publicize and share what he has done, often the recipients of serious consulting megabucks are doing little more than cannibalizing Haircut from the get-go. Which Haircut doesn't mind in the least. His goal is, after all, total electronic egalitarianism. Because:

Only when the mind is free can it begin to think. Open sharing of resources is the first step to opening the legendary doors of perception. -- HP

Seth B. Obomash, browsing Haircut's writings and library of downloads, including code of every sort for every trick, is astounded at his former student's depth of involvement in the Internet. He knew Haircut had gotten into the Web, as the students had referred to it; he didn't know that Haircut had become a combination Johnny Appleseed, Christopher Columbus, Siskel & Ebert and Karl Marx. Seth is, to put it mildly, impressed.

Contact The Webmaster. Seth had planned to telephone Haircut and talk to him live, but it is clear that this particular young man is of the e-mail persuasion.

Seth begins typing. "Shavena: I'd really like to discuss something with you when you have a chance. Seth B.O."

He clicks on the send button.

The response is immediate, a chat dialogue box that opens front and center on Seth's monitor.

Haircut: Hello, Seth.

Seth: Hello, Haircut. How are you?

Haircut: Good. Busy.

Seth: Great web site.

H: Thanks. It's sort of taken over my life, but it's worth it.

S: I'm sure it is.

H: I sent the whole thing in as my essay for early admission to MIT. They accepted me yesterday.

S: Congratulations.

H: Thanks. I mean, it's like bragging, I guess, the first words out of my mouth. We haven't talked in a long time.

S: Not since you quit the team.

H: A long time ago.

S: A long time ago. A whole year.

H: I'm sorry about your leaving Veil. It didn't seem right.

S: Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. I'm all right with it.

H: Are you teaching somewhere else?

S: Not yet. But I am trying to keep busy. As a matter of fact, I'm going to be doing a little private coaching.

H: Excellent.

S: That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Coaching.

H: I'm out of the debate world, Seth. I don't know how much I can help you.

S: You were a great debater once.

H: We did have a couple of good years there.

S: You and Tara were stars. Novice champs, junior varsity champs. You would have been varsity champs too.

H: You know what happened, Seth. At the beginning of junior year I got into computing. I couldn't do this and debating. This is my life.

S: So I see. It's even gotten you into MIT.

H: Yep.

S: But I've got a problem, Shavena. A problem only you can help me with.

H: I'm listening.

S: It's Tara.

There is no answer. Seth stares at his screen. Maybe the connection is down; all the other answers were instantaneous.

S: Are you there?

H: I'm here. What about Tara?

S: Well, you know that she and Invoice were a team after you left.

H: Sure.

S: Well, now Invoice is doing LD and Tara has no one to debate with.

H: What do you mean, no one to debate with? Veil has the biggest policy team in the state.

S: No one at her level, Shavena.

H: And you want me to come back and debate with her?

S: You got it.

H: I don't think you understand, Seth. When I quit debating, I also broke up with Tara. You knew we were going out, right?

S: Yes.

H: So like I said, I broke up with her. It was not pleasant.

S: I'm not asking you to date her, Shavena. I'm asking you to debate with her.

H: But I'm not a debater anymore.

S: You've been out for one year. That's not very long. I can get you back to fighting trim in a week.

H: But I'm busy. I've got my web site, I've got school.

S: You're already accepted into college. And we both know senior year is a breeze at Veil. You're not killing yourself.

H: The web site takes a lot of time.

S: You can still do the web site.

H: You don't understand, Seth. I just really don't want to debate anymore.

S: You and Tara have a chance to be national champions, Shavena.

H: Please call me Haircut.

S: Okay. Haircut.

H: I don't really care about being national champion.

S: But Tara does. Are you telling me you don't really care about Tara anymore?

H: We broke up, Seth. A long time ago.

S: I don't know if she feels that way about it. If you know what I mean.

H: Once it's over, it's over.

S: Trust the wisdom of the aged, Haircut. It's never over, even when it's over.

H: Does she know you're talking to me?

S: That's my point, Haircut. She asked me to talk to you. She wants to debate with you,

she wants you to be her partner. She still likes you.

H: I don't really want to debate, Seth.

S: Consider it. Please. For old time's sake. For Tara's sake.

There is another long pause. Seth stares at the screen expectantly.

H: I'll consider it.

S: That's all I'm asking.

H: I'll let you know in a day or two.

S: Perfect.

"Tara? Seth."

"Hi, Seth."

"I just talked to Haircut. Or I guess more accurately, I computed with him."

"I didn't really believe you'd do that."

"Why not? You and he were once a great team. He's only been out of it for a year. He was one hell of a debater."

"But now he's like totally web crazy. He's logged on twenty-four hours a day."

"Maybe. But he is interested in debating again."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I don't know. It won't be all that comfortable. He and I used to go out. I broke up with him when he quit the team."

Seth, on his end of the telephone, is opening a bag of popcorn fresh from the microwave. He takes a deep breath as the pungently moist steam rises into the air, and mentally remarks the phenomenon that no one in their own memory is ever a dumpee. Haircut says he broke up with Tara. Tara says she broke up with Haircut. The world consists entirely of dumpers. Always a dumper, never a dumpee.

"Are you telling me you don't really care about Haircut anymore?"

"We broke up, Seth. A long time ago."

"I don't know if he feels that way about it. If you know what I mean."

"Once it's over, it's over."

"Trust the wisdom of the aged, Tara. It's never over, even when it's over. He still likes you."

"That's not true."

"I just talked to him, Tara. It is true. Trust me on this."

"What's that noise? Are you eating something over there?"

"Popcorn. Delicious."

"I've got to go eat dinner myself."

"Do you see Haircut much in school?"

"We've got a couple of classes together."

"Don't push him, Tara. He sounded a little edgy."

"I have no intentions of pushing him. Especially if he doesn't seem to realize that it's over between us."

"That's what I mean. Forget about debate for a minute. You don't want to hurt his feelings, do you?"

"No. Not really."

"Good. Then just don't say anything to him. Let it be for a day or two. I'll take care of everything."

"If you say so."

"Trust me, Tara. Have I ever lied to you?"

"I'll talk to you later, Seth."

"Later."

Eat Up. Shut.

Hamlet P. Buglaroni, Jr., comes careering down the stairs and into the dining room as his father is taking his first bite of eggplant parmigiana.

"We don't wait forever," Ham Senior says as he chews. "We call you, you're supposed to come."

"Homework," Buglaroni says, dropping down into his chair at the dining room table.

"He's a good-a boy," Grandma says to her stepson as she places a heaping plate of eggplant in front of her grandson. "Right, Hammy?"

"Right, Grandma."

There is a few minutes of knifing and forking and biting and chewing.

"Guess what?" Buglaroni eventually says.

His father glowers at him as he sips from his beer glass.

"I'm going to be a movie star," Buglaroni continues.

Ham Senior puts down his glass and says nothing.

"No. I mean it. When I was at the tournament yesterday, there were, like, talent scouts, in the bathrooms and stuff."

"There were talent scouts in the bathrooms?"

"Not all the bathrooms. Just, like, the one I was in."

"I don't want to know what kind of talent people are looking for in the bathroom."

"No. Really. It was Hans Castorp. He's, like, a famous movie director."

Ham Senior tilts his head. "That name rings a bell."

"Yeah, right. He's, like, real."

"So what happened here?"

"He said I was perfect for this part in this movie he's making. He wants to, like, do a screen test. The woman is going to call me up this week."

"What woman?"

"The fat woman. She works with him. She had a funny name. I don't remember it."

"And when is this all going to happen?"

"What?"

"You going to Hollywood and putting your ass in the cement at the Chinese theater."

"Don't talk-a like that at the dinner table!" Grandma says.

"It's my dinner table, I'll talk like I wanna talk."

"I also got a girlfriend," Buglaroni says, making this quite the night for revelations.

"A girlfriend?" Ham Senior's eyes narrow.

"Her name is Gloria. We're going out tomorrow night. I'll need a ride to the mall."

"On a school night?"

"What's wrong with that? I'll do my homework first."

"You don't go out on a school night."

"If he wants-a to go out, he should-a go out."

"It's a school night!"

"So? It's not-a like he's a Rudolph Valentino, capisce?"

"Going out on a school night. Jeeze." Ham Senior takes another swig of beer, finishing off the glass. Without comment, Grandma Buglaroni gets up from the table and returns with a fresh, open bottle, half of which she pours for him before reseating herself.

"You had-a fun at the debate yesterday?" Grandma asks.

"Yeah," Buglaroni says. "It was, like, real interesting. Except they're cancelling the debate team."

"They're cancelling the team?" his father echoes.

"That's what Mr. Jutmoll says. They're out of money, the school board or something."

"Jeeze. You pay your damned taxes and what do you get? Squat. God-damned squat."

"You were a good-a debater, Hammy."

"I know, Grandma. They'll, like, let us debate a couple more times, but after that..." He runs his finger across his neck. "We're a done deal."

"How much can it cost to run a damned debate team? Five thousand bucks? Ten thousand bucks?"

"More like twenty or thirty, according to Mr. Jutmoll."

"Chump change, considering the damned school taxes in this town. I'd like to give those bastards a piece of my mind." He turns to his stepmother. "You got any more eggplant?"

She rises, takes his plate and goes into the kitchen. She returns in a minute and puts a full plate in front of him.

"You want-a more, Hammy?"

Her grandson shakes his head. "I'm full. And I gotta get back and, like, finish my homework. I got a lot of stuff to do if I'm going out tomorrow night." He stands up from the table.

"No one said you could go out tomorrow night," his father says.

"Dad--"

"Going out on a school night? What kind of--"

"Shut up," Grandma Buglaroni interrupts him. "Eat." She turns to her grandson. "Do-a your homework. We'll take care of tomorrow, tomorrow."

"Thanks, Grandma."

Buglaroni disappears out of the dining room and bounces back up the stairs.

"You spoil him," Ham senior says.

"Shut up. Eat."

He shuts up and eats.

Will Haircut and Tara realize that Seth has lied to them?

Will Buglaroni go to the mall for his big date?

Will Buglaroni go to Hollywood for his big break?

Will Karl Rove go to anywhere where we never have to hear about him again?

Find out for yourself in someone else's next episode: "Ernest Borgnine: Forever Marty, or father of Seven?"