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Private Service Training Firm Rejects Harper's Portrait

By Jack O'Dwyer



Mary Louise Starkey, founder of the [Starkey International Institute](#), Denver, has rejected many of the claims and statements in the 16-page description of the Institute that is the cover story in the [January Harper's](#) authored by John P. Davidson. Davidson was hired for the task by the magazine, said Harper's editor Ellen Rosenbush in a posting on the magazine's website, paying the \$20,095 in fees for the eight-week course.

Starkey, in a phone conversation with this website, said there were 11 students in the eight-week course rather than 16 as stated by Davidson and that all obtained positions in private service with the exception of Davidson.

She said she never told him to "mow lawns" in Dallas as he claimed but told him to return to his duties as a property manager of rental houses in Austin—a job that Davidson admits was fictitious. Davidson's references were checked and the respondents supported his claims of employment, she said.



Starkey's e-mail is as follows:

"Davidson's article is surprisingly correct when speaking of the actual course curriculum and materials, but very jaded and not truthful of what I personally did or did not feel or say. I would never speak of a client's actual name unless given permission to do so, nor would I or my staff ever even think of doing or saying many of the things as described by him.

"Particularly inaccurate were claims that I feel graduates are positioned socially or otherwise well below my clients. Rather, we spend a good amount of time speaking of today's Relationship of Service as indeed a well-paid and mutually respectful profession.

"We are housed in a 13,000 sq. ft. old Georgian mansion, which is set up as replica as many of our clients' homes. When working with our clients we also help them set up a management system for serving that takes 'the servitude out of service.' Furthermore, while I do genuinely care about my graduates, having a crush on a student is hardly part of my demeanor. After serving both my clients and graduates for over 33 years, one could not be quite so inappropriate and disrespectful and still be in business.

Voice Level Traced to Hearing Loss

"I do want to point out, however, that I have developed a severe hearing loss in recent years, and I do not always know the level of my voice. I let students know this as part of my introduction with apologies. Further, holding a standard of behavior is not always appreciated by those who prefer to be negative and are really after a story.

"I myself checked Davidson's references and noted that while they liked him well enough they got very quiet when I asked about his duties and accountability in owning a maintenance company. I took note but could not find a valid reason to keep him out of the Institute. However, during training, he was clearly unhappy and unfamiliar with any household management related skills. At the conclusion, I did suggest that he continue his maintenance duties with his company, wherever they might take him. I further told him, I was not sure that he had a genuine heart to serve! I guess I was correct.

"I am grateful for the part I have played in creating service as a profession. My rebuttal to untruthful criticisms is the success of my graduates in private service. Thank you for listening."

Signed,

Mary Louise Starkey

MacArthur Fired Previous Editor

John R. MacArthur, president and publisher of Harper's fired, previous editor Roger D. Hodge in 2010, according to [a story by Stephanie Clifford](#) in the Feb. 1, 2010 *New York Times*. Rosenbush is current editor.



Rosenbush

According to Clifford, MacArthur fired Hodge two days earlier, without warning, after a five-minute conversation with him as Hodge was finishing his breakfast croissant. Clifford said that the assets of the foundation that supports Harper's declined from \$34.3 million in 2001 to \$12.1M in 2008 and that MacArthur personally gave \$4M in 2008 to the foundation which was double the amount given two years before.

According to Clifford, John D. MacArthur, the great grandfather of John R., one of the richest people in the U.S. at his death in 1978, had disinherited his son who then made his own fortune. That is the source of the foundation currently supporting the magazine. As of 2010, newsstand sales were "plummeting" and the magazine had become an outlier in the fast-paced New York publishing world, said Clifford.