

Diane Gonzalez

## Truths and Lies

In 1789 a myth began that a little boy chopped down a cherry tree and lied to his father that it was not he. In 1974 a political figure announced to the world, "I am not a crook," yet still resigned from office. Twenty-four years later, yet another world leader lied to the American public regarding a sexual scandal. From the beginning of time, good and evil has challenged humanity. Knowing what is right but choosing what is comfortable has plagued the human race. It has been proved that making the right decisions and choosing what is true edifies the soul; however, choosing to be dishonest can negatively impact the shaping of an individual. Personally, twenty-four years ago, I learned from experience how devastating lying can be to a child's psyche.

My dad wasn't just a Jehovah Witness preacher in the Deep South; he was an excited, passionate and charismatic one. I watched him every Sunday morning walk up and stand behind that large brown pulpit. It was always decorated with plants and innocent white flowers. To pay attention during his services, our dad would bribe us with money. Every time he said the word "Jehovah," we had to keep track

of it on our paper, and he would give us a nickel for each mark.

His passion for righteousness was also felt in the home. There were four kids in our family altogether: me, my brother and my two sisters. We were good kids, so we didn't get into trouble much; however, it was clear that if we lied, there would be repercussions. We knew that lying was a sin of omission and was frowned upon by God. Therefore, we tried to abstain from lying to ease our guilt.

Being the only Jehovah witness in my third grade class wasn't always easy. I was a shy girl already, and it didn't help that every morning I was told by my teacher, Mrs. Simms, to step outside the classroom while they recited the Pledge of Allegiance. I hated that. I could not rejoin the class until they had finished. I felt so isolated. I was to be excluded from all the holiday parties and activities due to our family's religion. It did not allow for celebrations of any kind. Mrs. Simms always felt sorry for me; she knew that it was tough on me having to be segregated from the class at those times.

Finally the day came that changed me forever. It was the returning to school after Christmas break. It was cold and rainy outside, so Mrs. Simms kept us inside for recess.

She sat us in a circle, and we were going to participate in "sharing time." My heart began to race when she uttered the words, "Let's share what gifts y'all got for Christmas." That was easy for me: a big nothing! I wanted to just sink in a hole and die.

I knew that eventually the turn to speak would be mine. As each kid rattled off their list of toys they received, the harder my heart would pound. I had time to think about what to do. Should I just say nothing or do I make up a lie. I was conflicted on choosing right from wrong. On one hand, I was tired of being the odd one and I wanted for once to just fit in. On the other hand, I knew that lying was wrong. As the girl right before me finished talking, I started to speak. Softly, I uttered "I got an ET doll, a hula hoop, and roller skates." I couldn't believe that I said that. Slowly, I glanced at Mrs. Simms and the disappointment I saw in her eyes devastated me.

I had lied!

I didn't make anymore eye contact with Mrs. Simms that day. I felt awful. Guilt and shame overcame my little body and I did not like it. Mrs. Simms had always shown compassion toward me. She liked me, but I knew that she hated what I had done. She thought highly of me, and now I

believed myself to be a liar in her eyes. Not only had I let her down, but I had also let myself down as well.

When I chose to lie in my third grade classroom as an innocent eight year-old child, I created an event in my life that shaped me into the person I have become. Some may say that this could have had a negative impact on my life, but I would argue that this incident has positively shaped me. The way lying made me feel about myself transformed my character. It placed a value on what had been taught to me about honesty. Today, I am a person who makes every effort not to lie. And those around me can attest that I am an honest individual who values truthfulness at all cost. In the famous words of Booker T. Washington, an African-American educator, "Character is power."