

I Got Caught Cheating

I thought the worst thing about science class was checking on the growth of mold samples we made from old beans, bread, bananas, and other “hairy” food. Whew, what a smell! That was, until my science midterm at the end of the semester. My father knew how important it was that I do well on my science test. So he helped me study, and the day of the test he even fixed me breakfast. Then, he gave me one of his “you can do it!” speeches.

Even with his help, I wasn’t all that confident that I’d ace the exam. Since my dad had helped me, I didn’t want to let him down by getting a low grade. Then, I made a real bad decision. To tell the truth, at the time it felt less like a decision and more like an impulse.

Anyway, I got caught cheating.

The school called my dad and told him what happened, and they scheduled a parent-teacher conference (with the vice principal!) Needless to say, my dad and I talked. He explained that failing isn’t bad; it’s just an outcome, and not a final one. I was really glad he understood-- although he said it would be the last of his “good-guy understanding.” He said that he’d tolerate a failed exam now and then, but not cheating. “While failing can mean a lack of preparedness,” my dad went on, “cheating can never mean anything other than a lack of integrity.” I got the message. And I learned something else: When you cheat, you usually doubt yourself and your ability to master what you’ve studied. The whole incident, including my father’s disappointment in me, taught me something I never would’ve guessed--I’d rather fail a test honestly, than pass one at the price of cheating. It just isn’t worth the way it makes you feel.

A Gift in Disguise

I really wanted a certain part in the spring play our high school drama club was putting on. I knew I'd be great in the part because I'd been in plays for the last three years and really like acting. Plus, it's such an honor to get selected for a good role and all. I've even thought about being an actor.

Well, I didn't get the part. The teacher asked each of us to help with the lighting and sound, as well as with other behind-the-scenes roles. Two of my buddies were so upset at not being chosen for the lead role that they said no to the behind-the-scenes work. I have to admit, it was my first thought, too, because I was disappointed I wasn't chosen for the part. At first I figured, well, I'll just wait and try out for the next play -- which was only three months away. But then I decided, why not learn all you can about the theater? It might come in handy to know this stuff.

Boy, did I find out how true that was! Not only did I learn that I was really good at production and behind-the-scenes work, I also found out I enjoyed it. What I didn't know was that I would enjoy it even more than acting! Now I'm certain that I want to be a film producer. Move over, Steven Spielberg

As it turned out, it was really good that I didn't get chosen for the part. I'm happy that I agreed to work backstage. It was a gift in disguise -- because I've discovered my acre of diamonds!

The Most Beautiful Girl...

We don't always see others the way they are, but rather, as we want them to be. I thought Christina Thomas was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. It took me a long time to get up the courage to ask her out. Finally, I did. When she accepted, I thought I was the luckiest guy in the world. The feeling was short-lived.

The first couple of times I went out with Christina, I was so nervous (and happy to be with her) that I pretty much just agreed with whatever she said. But as I began to relax around her, I saw a person who was very different from what I had imagined.

I was surprised to discover Christina wasn't very respectful of other people. She was always saying mean things about them, always putting them down. And she was rude to people for no reason.

I only went out with Christina for five weeks.

Now I see the real Christina. I know what Christina Thomas is really like, and I don't think she is nearly as pretty as I thought at first.

I think it's possible to wear two coats of paint, one on the outside and one on the inside. The coat of paint Christina has on the outside is awesome, the one on the inside isn't as impressive. Seeing her beauty, I thought she must "be" beautiful, but I've learned that people aren't always what they appear to be. But I doubt that Christina Thomas was ever any different with me than she was with others.

I think that maybe it wasn't Christina who has the paintbrush. I was the one who had painted Christina in a "color" she was not.

The Pickle Fork

When I was eight, I asked my father for money to buy a gift for Mother. He gave me a whole dollar. Off I trudged to find something wonderful.

The elegant shop owner suggested I could find something “maybe at Woolworth’s” for my dollar.

Suddenly, a miracle. There it was! It was beautiful in its box, on a bed of cotton like a precious jewel. “How much is this?” I asked the lady.

“It’s your lucky day, “ she said. “That’s on sale, marked down to a dollar. Hardly anyone needs a glass pickle fork nowadays.”

I did! The next day before lunch I presented it to her. My father leaned over to see. “Isn’t it beautiful?” Mother said. “Why it’s hand-blown glass...”

“It’s a pickle fork,” I said proudly.

“I shall treasure it,” said my mother and kissed me. After that, we had lots more pickles at meals.

Later she hung it on a ribbon in our sunroom window. “Now it’s a suncatcher,” she said. “Too bad to hide it all the time when we aren’t having pickles.”

At Christmas, it hung on the tree, with the lights making it sparkle even more.

Years later, when she died, I went to the safe deposit box to take out precious things. There was the glass pickle fork in its old box, with a special note. “You were always so thoughtful so loving. You always made us so happy. I love you Mother.”

Priscilla Dunn

A Gift for Two

You never know what happiness a simple act of kindness will bring out.

--Bree Abel

It was a beautiful day for sightseeing around downtown Portland. We were a bunch of counselors on our day off, away from campers, just out for some fun. The weather was perfect for a picnic, so when lunchtime came, we set our sights on a small park in town. Since we all had different cravings, we decided to split up, get what each of us wanted, and meet back on the grass in a few minutes.

When my friend Robby headed for a hot dog stand, I decided to keep her company. We watched the vendor put together the perfect hot dog, just the way Robby wanted it. But when she took out her money to pay him, the man surprised us.

“It looks a little on the cold side,” he said, “so never mind paying me. This will be my freebie of the day.”

We said our thanks, joined our friends in the park, and dug into our food. But as we talked and ate, I was distracted by a man sitting alone nearby, looking at us. I could tell that he hadn't showered for days. Another homeless person, I thought, like all the others you see in cities. I didn't pay much more attention than that.

We finished eating and decided to head off for more sightseeing. But when Robby and I went to the garbage can to throw away my lunch bag, I heard a strong voice ask, “There isn't any food in that bag, is there?”

It was the man who had been watching us. I didn't know what to say. "No, I ate it already."

"Oh," was his only answer, with no shame in his voice at all. He was obviously hungry, couldn't bear to see anything thrown away, and was used to asking this question.

I felt bad for the man, but I didn't know what I could do. That's when Robby said, "I'll be right back. Please wait for me a minute," and ran off. I watched curiously as she went across to the hot dog stand. Then I realized what she was doing. She bought a hot dog, crossed back to the trash can, and gave the hungry man the food.

When she came back to us, Robby said simply, "I was just passing on the kindness that someone gave to me."

That day I learned how generosity can go farther than the person you give to. By giving, you teach others how to give also.

Andrea Hensley

