

## **What's the Point?**

By Mal Butcher

I think I was eleven when I noticed something was different. Other kids could jump around without a care in the world. They could let go of things without overthinking them and face overwhelming, incomprehensible fears on their own. I couldn't hold a conversation for five minutes.

"Why are you making this into such a big deal?"

I don't know why. Thoughts swirled through my mind. Bending. Breaking. I wasn't breathing. Shaking. Stirring. I think I was shouting. Crying. Cutting. I know I need to calm down. Why is it so hard to calm down?

"I think you're blowing this out of proportion."

I know that. Stop talking to me like I don't know that. I should be fine. Everyone struggles to get out of bed. Everyone hates being alone with their thoughts. Everyone is unloveable. This is fine.

"You're wasting time."

I can't be anything beyond a background character in someone else's story. My name will be lost to time, and nothing I've done will ever matter. Someone easily overwritten, overlooked, forgotten. It's been 17 years, and I'm always running. I never make it anywhere.

"Why do you try so hard?"

It's the one thing I can do, and it's the one thing I will do. Because there is a "try." It's a work-in-progress or a failed attempt. It takes effort and honesty. It's personal and real. It's not and never will be perfect. But it's the only thing I can do right, so I do.

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## **Easier than Uncomfortable**

By Avery Miller

Sometimes, when I'm uncomfortable, lying seems like the easiest way out, but I learned early on that the easiest way is not always the best. The best example I can think of is when I was younger, and my brother Jace had done something wrong. Whenever something had been found broken or the parents had evidence of wrongdoing because of one of the kids, we would all be called to the living room.

"Five, four, three...."

My stepdad, Nini, rarely ever got past three before every kid was standing in a straight line in front of him. Ben. Jace. Avery. Then, Nini would bring to our attention the latest wrongdoing from around the house. It was the same dance each time, the same steps taken, but everyone knew who the culprit was. So, while Nini ran through the latest thing a kid must have done, I already knew it wasn't me, and between my brothers, it wouldn't have been Ben either unless Jace convinced him to do so. I love my brother dearly, but he was a troublemaker, and he had no remorse for most of what he did. He would stand for hours spouting lies about how he had no hand in whatever was wrong, and he would sound sincere while doing so. This could take

a while, and during that entire time, Ben and I would be expected to stay and listen to the lecture as a group since no one had officially taken the blame.

Another reason we always did the steps in the same dance, even if everyone knew who had done it, is that lying is a huge thing in my family. Nobody lies. This dance was giving the culprit a chance to take responsibility for what they've done and make their punishment easier. One would think by now that Jace would take advantage of such a deal, but he had a different thought. In his mind, going easier on the punishment wouldn't make a difference if he wasn't punished at all. So, he would keep up his lies and refuse to give a confession, even if everyone already knew who did it, but we couldn't prove it.

When I was younger, I eventually came to the conclusion that I would rather take the easier punishment. It seemed easier than standing in the living room for what seemed like forever and withstanding a lecture for something I had no part in.

I would hear the counts, "Five, four, three...."

All the children would line up. Ben. Jace. Avery. Then, I would listen to the beginnings of the latest lecture. As soon as the room got quiet, everyone was still, like normal, and everyone seemed to be waiting for someone to speak up. That someone was not me, but that's what they got. I would take a step forward and say I did it. If I take responsibility as soon as it's mentioned, then the punishment would be easier on me. Then, I would go to my room, waiting for a lecture from one of the parents.

That became the new normal for a while. It was never too bad, and I was never grounded. It was always just a lecture. I found out later that they went easy on me because everyone knew who the culprit was, and everyone knew that it wasn't me. I don't know why I thought that I was so believable, but all I knew was that I didn't want to stand in the living room and listen to another lecture waiting for what seemed like forever for a confession that wouldn't come. I was uncomfortable, and taking the blame was the easiest way out. It was also not the right way out.

My false confession enabled Jace's behavior since he had no consequences to learn from, and I was left facing the consequences of my own choices, mainly his punishments. I lost sight of why I started lying to begin with. To get out of standing in the living room until someone took responsibility for their actions because, in my house, we don't lie. My lying did not undo his. Lying is wrong. Covering something up doesn't fix it. All actions have consequences, and if you aren't facing them, someone else is. Though I was never the one misbehaving, I think I learned more than others to take responsibility for my actions, if only so someone else didn't have to.

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## **The Truck Truth**

By Aiden Grishaber

When I was in kindergarten, I loved playing with toy trucks. I had race car tracks all around my house, and it was my favorite thing to play with. I had a little red pickup truck that was my absolute favorite toy. On my first day of school, my teacher showed us a huge car track and a big bucket of toy cars, and I was so excited to play with them during recess.

My teacher had one rule. If I broke one of the cars, I would have to replace it. It seemed much more serious as a five-year-old than it actually was. My teacher took this rule very seriously, and at the end of every recess, she would look through all the cars to make sure that none of them were broken. One day, I was playing with some cars by myself at recess when I dropped a truck on its back. A piece had broken off the back, and my stomach dropped. As a five-year-old, this rule was one of the most serious things in my life, and I was so scared when I saw the broken car. I quickly put it in the bucket and pretended nothing happened.

At the end of recess, my teacher dumped out all of the cars, and she immediately saw the truck I was playing with in two pieces. I started freaking out and struggled to remain composed. In a very stern voice, she asked who had broken her car. I kept my mouth shut. When I got home, I immediately started crying to my mom. The feeling of guilt was overwhelming my little brain, and I couldn't keep the lie up any longer. My mom told me I had to give my favorite little red truck to my teacher and tell her the truth. When I got to school the next day, I waited in line to talk to the teacher at the beginning of class. When I got to the front of the line, I was too embarrassed for anyone else to hear me, so I moved to the end of the line until there was nobody left behind me. When it was finally time to talk to her, I immediately started crying. She was very empathetic about causing me to feel guilty. She even let me keep my truck because I did the right thing and told her the truth. This seemingly little insignificant white lie had taught me from a very young age the real importance of telling the truth.

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## **Failure Without An Audience**

By Luke Heineking

“When you’re falling in a forest, and there’s nobody around, do you ever really crash or even make a sound?”

If you’re falling in a forest, and there’s nobody around, you don’t really crash or even make a sound.

If you fell in a forest, and there’s nobody around, get up from your crash, and turn back around.

If we fail at something and no one is around to witness it, we have the opportunity to get back up and try again, free from embarrassment or shame. Without the fear of judgment, we can take risks and push ourselves outside of our comfort zones. Failure is a natural part of the learning process, and it is important to remember that even the most successful people have experienced failure at some point in their lives.

When we fail without an audience, we have the freedom to process our emotions, reflect on our mistakes, and move forward with a clearer and more resilient mindset.

When I fail without an audience, I can take the time to reflect on what went wrong and how I can improve myself for the next attempt. I remind myself that I am the only one responsible for my own growth and development and that the journey will not always be easy or without mistakes. By embracing failure as an opportunity for growth, I can approach challenges with a more positive and empowered mindset.