TASPs are small educational communities that rely greatly on individual members' maturity. Tell us about a time you did something that upset or hurt someone in a community you were involved in. How did you respond to this situation? Reflect on your response, and evaluate it. What would you do the same, and what might you do differently? Why?

Last year, my best friend and I almost ended our friendship over a simple misunderstanding regarding chemistry lab reports. The whole ordeal started one night when we were strolling through the gardens of the Walt Disney World Swan Resort. My best friend Emma\* and I, along with twenty other staff members from our school’s newspaper, The Chronicle, were in Orlando, Florida for the National High School Journalism Convention. We had been conversing lightheartedly, but on the inside I was growing increasingly irritated at Emma. Earlier that evening, I had received a text from another friend named Tom\*, informing me that Emma has been telling the other students at our school that my chemistry lab reports are terrible and that I should not be consulted for chemistry advice. Understandably, I was shocked and offended upon receiving the news. I knew I wasn’t the strongest chemistry student, but my lab reports usually received decent grades and were surely nowhere near “terrible”. How could Emma, my own best friend, go around spreading false tales about me? Growing more and more annoyed as the night progressed, I finally decided to confront Emma during our walk in the garden.

“I heard you’ve been telling people I write awful labs.” I was direct and went straight to the point.

She looked at me in confusion and informed me that no, she would never slander me behind my back like that. Immediately, I assumed that she must be lying to me. After all, why would Tom tell me a made-up story? I decided that there must be some truth to what he had said and said so to Emma. I could see that I’ve infuriated her, for she looked at me with rage-filled eyes and suddenly the tone of her voice changed. She began to deny my accusations and rambled on furiously about how she couldn’t believe I would ever listen to Tom’s lies like this. What had previously been a carefree chat suddenly turned into malicious accusations and spiteful looks being shot back and forth between us. The angrier she became, the more convinced I was that Tom had been right. I can’t explain why, but in the moment, the livid, rambling girl before me looked guiltier than ever. She could tell that I didn’t believe her and with a sudden halt in her angry speech, she shook her head at me and stormed off. Both of us understood that chemistry labs are hardly matters worth being this angry over, but because we’ve never fought like this before in the entire course of our friendship, neither of us knew how to react in this situation. We did not speak to each other for the rest of the night, and for some reason, we could not bring ourselves to confront each other again. So for the remaining days of the trip, we both stayed silent. Even after we returned to L.A., we continued the mutual silent treatment as it became increasingly evident that we both considered ourselves to be in the right. A few days turned into a week, and a week extended into two weeks. We were still not talking to each other, and I decided something must be done to resolve the situation.

Before I could talk to Emma, I decided to first consult our other friends. I needed to understand why Emma had instantly become so furious during our conversation. What reasons did *she* have for being angry when *I* was the one who was hurt? After discussing the conflict with some friends who had also been with us in Orlando, i felt like I had begun to understand the situation a little better. Emma was hurt mainly because I had chosen to believe Tom’s word over hers. We’re best friends. We did everything together, and we shared everything about our lives with each other. She was my closest confidant, and I was hers. Yet, I had chosen to listen to someone else’s story instead of trusting the one person who cared about me the most at our school. Suddenly, I saw myself from the night of the argument again, but this time in a whole new light. I saw that I had jumped to conclusions without hearing Emma’s side first, that I had been stubborn and hotheaded, unwavering in my unproved assumptions. I made my decisions based on evidence from only one source. I should have been more calm and collected. I should not have been so quick to dismiss Emma’s statements and to put my faith so completely in someone whose facts I never even considered to confirm before launching my accusations upon Emma. To look at the one person whom you thought was your closest and most understanding friend and see that she did not believe a single word you said must have been incredibly upsetting. A link of trust had been broken between us, and that’s what hurt Emma the most.

I knew that it would be uncomfortable and awkward to suddenly approach Emma at school after having not spoken to each other for so long. I didn’t want to further deepen the already existing tensions between us, so I sent her a message one night, letting her know that I was sorry and that I realize that I could have handled the situation in much better ways. I asked her if we could meet up after school the next day to talk it out. She agreed, and before I knew it, I was talking face-to-face with my best friend again after more than two weeks of silence and purposely averted gazes. I admitted that I recognized my lack of faith in Emma and my decision to trust someone else over her must have been extremely hurtful. She apologized for being so easily angered that night as well as for not speaking to me for the weeks following the argument. It was uncomfortable at first, but after talking to each other for a while, we began to gain much deeper insights into one another. Eventually, at the end of the day, we reconciled our differences.

One of the great ironies of this story is that it all started at a journalism convention, which we attended in hopes of learning the skills necessary to become better reporters, and a respectable reporter would never write an article after interviewing only one source the way I made up my mind after only listening to what Tom had to say. I realized that the values of journalism are reflected in everyday life. As a species, humans have been striving for centuries to improve upon preconceived truths by looking for further evidence and deeper understandings. Every day, I remind myself of this while interacting with others, hoping to improve myself by developing new and more effective approaches to dealing with conflict. From this experience, I learned to tame my quick-temper and to never jump to conclusions before knowing all the facts of a situation. I tell myself to always withhold judgement of others because one never knows if there are more sides of the story that one was previously unaware of.

\*Names have been changed.