

Teenager's Dilemma

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I remember as a kid this weird story my grandma used to tell me. I didn't think much about it back then but now as I face a really tough decision it's meaning is becoming more apparent.

One of those "and the moral of the story is" fables by Aesop, it told the story of a woodsman who loses his axe in a pond.

Mercury, the patron God of merchants and merchandising comes to him with a golden axe. Of course, this is not the Woodsman's axe, and he is now faced with a decision, should he lie?

My name is Dylan. I am fourteen. I live in Ft. Covington, a small sneeze and you might hit your neighbor town on the northern edge of New York's Winter Wonderland, the Adirondack Mountains. Growing up here it is only natural for a pair of ice skates to become your secondary feet. I have been on skates since my toddler-sized feet found a pair that fit.

A freshman at Salmon River Central High I have a lot to live up to. You see my dad was #17, the MVP of Salmon's Hockey Team. I love Hockey, and I am so good at it that I am the only "freshmen" on the team, Coach even made me second string.

Teenager's Dilemma

It's pretty cool being a "Varsity" jock. The girls smile at you, and you get lots of special attention. You also get a lot of ice time. Every day after school we hit the ice, an excellent opportunity to improve our skills, especially if like me you dream of going pro.

Unfortunately, as I am just now beginning to learn, there is, as with everything, a downside. Having practice for several hours every afternoon and sometimes into the night doesn't leave much time for homework. Then, of course, there are the scrimmages and games and lots and lots of traveling.

Needless to say, my grades are starting to suffer. At first I didn't worry about it, after all, I'm varsity, and I'm good, they won't bench me because of my grades.

Well, yes they will, as my buddy Justin just found out. So now I have quite the dilemma, and this is why I am beginning to think a lot about that old story grandma use to tell me.

You see if the woodsman says yes and takes the Golden axe he will become a wealthy man. The woodsman, however, has always prided himself on being an honest man and so he tells Mercury, "Thank you, but that isn't my axe."

Mercury returns to the depths of the water and returns with a silver axe. Now the Woodsman is really facing

Teenager's Dilemma

temptation. He had already passed on the golden axe and was feeling a little stupid. After all, the axes were in the water, lost long ago. Why shouldn't he say yes and claim the silver axe as his, no one would know? He would know, so again the woodsman says, "Thank you, but that is not my axe either."

So you see the dilemma I am facing is this, there's this really big English test coming up, and I have not even touched my book. I just don't know when or how I am going to find the time to study and if I fail, well, I don't even want to think about it. I just have to pass this test, I can't get kicked off the hockey team, or my dad will kill me.

"Hey man, tough luck about Justin," my friend Brady said, rounding the corner by my locker.

"I know," I said.

"Listen we can't afford to lose you too man, not with the big game against Potsdam next week."

With that, he slipped some papers into my hand, "No need to thank me, man. See you on the ice."

In my hand was the answer key to the English exam. It would be so easy to cheat. I mean, who'd know. Just go home, spend a few hours memorizing the answers and BAM. It

Teenager's Dilemma

would be great. I closed my locker and headed for the bus feeling like a winner.

But, by the time I arrived home, well, let's just say there was a full-fledged war going on inside my head. Echoes of the woodsman raged in my head. Who would know? I would the woodsman thought. Can I live with myself? No, he had decided. All the riches in the world weren't worth his self-respect and the knowledge that he was known for being an honest man.

I had always been honest; well maybe once when I was little and broke my sister's doll, I lied, but heck, I was a kid. Now I am a man and men tell the truth. At least that is what dad and mom tell me, and grandma and papa and my teachers. Heck everyone tells you that honesty is the best policy but is it?

I know a lot of people who lie, and they are still around. They even seem to be doing okay. Nothing has struck them dead yet. Maybe lying isn't that bad a thing. I wonder - is cheating the same as lying? God, I wish life was easier.

Dad was waiting in the kitchen when I got home. "So, what's up," he asked.

Why did I feel guilty? I cringed as my hand felt the papers in my pocket. Did he know?

Teenager's Dilemma

"Not much," I lied, heading to the fridge. Opening the door, I grabbed a can of soda and headed toward the stairs.

"Dylan," Dad said, "Sit down, I want to talk to you."

A wave of heat ran through me, Dad never wants to talk. Why now? What had he heard? Did someone see Brady hand me the answers to the test?

A voice inside my head screamed at me, "Knock it off, man. He doesn't know anything. You are letting your conscience get the best of you. Calm down man, you didn't do anything wrong."

As I turned and moved closer to the table another voice inside my head whispered, "Not yet that is, but you are thinking about it aren't you?"

Slowly I took a seat at the table across from my dad. I tried to get comfortable, but I could feel myself fidgeting.

"Are you okay?"

"Hmm, what, me, yeah, I'm fine why?"

"You are acting weird. Is there something you want to tell me?"

Oh no, not that trick again. Every time Dad asks if there is something I want to tell him I end up telling him things he didn't have a clue about until I opened my big, fat mouth. Not this time. No way.

Teenager's Dilemma

"No, I'm fine. I just have lots on my mind, what with hockey and school. Actually, I have a big test tomorrow, and I need to study."

Man if I were Pinocchio my nose would be about six inches long by now.

Dad began to talk about some trip he was planning for the family. Whew, he really did just want to talk. It seems that this trip would happen right in the middle of hockey season, winter break from school and I would end up missing some important ice time. He wanted to know if I wanted to go or would I rather stay at Grandmas.

"I'd love to go dad, but I really don't want to miss hockey. We are killing them, and if all goes well, we will be headed to States this year."

"I thought you'd say that so I already talked to Grandma. She is looking forward to you staying with her. Says she doesn't get to see much of you anymore and would really enjoy it."

"Great, sounds good."

"Okay, then it's settled. You will stay with your Grandma."

"Is that all you wanted to talk about?"

You dummy, what did you go and ask that for. Are you looking for trouble?

Teenager's Dilemma

"Yup, that was it. You better go and study for that test. What class is it?" "English."

"Oh, well I guess I won't be much help with that one," Dad chuckled.

Chuckling back I made my way into the hall and bounded up the stairs. Inside my room, I closed the door, threw my books on the bed, my jacket over the back of my chair and plopped down on the bed. As I lay there, I felt my hand move slowly to my face and feel my nose. Nope, it was still the same size.

Lying there I again thought about the story of the woodsman. He had turned down both the golden axe and the silver axe. Now he had no way to provide for his family. Without an axe, how could he work? If he couldn't work, how would he make money to buy a new axe? What a dope?

I closed my eyes and tried to remember how the story ended. I remembered that it had something to do with honesty being the best policy, but for the life of me, I couldn't remember the ending. Picking up my phone I called my grandma.

"Hello."

"Hey Gma, it's Dylan. How are you?"

"Hey, Dylster. I'm fine, how are you?"

"Oh, I'm okay."

Teenager's Dilemma

"Have you talked to your dad yet?"

"Yeah, I told him I didn't want to go."

"Then you'll be staying with your old G-ma for a few days?"

"Yup!"

"That's great! I am so excited. We are going to have a great time."

"Hey G-ma, do you remember that story you use to tell me when I was a kid; the one about the woodsman and the axe?"

"How could I forget, it was your favorite. What made you think about that?"

"Oh nothing really, it's just that we are having this really big English test tomorrow and it made me think about stories."

I reached up and touched my nose, nope still normal.

"Oh, well, what did you want to know?"

"I can't remember how it ended. I know the woodsman said the golden axe wasn't his, and that the silver axe wasn't his, but what happened after that?"

"After that Mercury brought up his axe and the woodsman said thank you."

"That's it? Where did the honesty being the best policy come in?"

Teenager's Dilemma

"Well, after he thanked Mercury for finding his axe, Mercury rewarded him for his honesty by letting him have all three."

"Oh yeah, thanks, G-ma."

"Anytime buddy. I love you. You know, you can call more often."

"Okay, I'm sorry. It's just with hockey and everything."

"I know that's why I'm so happy you're coming to stay with me. We will be able to get caught up."

"Yup, it'll be great. Well, I better go study. Love you G-ma." "Love you, buddy."

I hung up the phone, put my hands behind my head and stared at the ceiling. Mercury gave him all three axes, just for being honest. Tilting my head, I looked at my alarm clock, five fifteen.

"Dylan, supper's ready," Dad bellowed up the stairs, "Hurry up before it gets cold."

Opening my door, I yelled down, "Okay, dad. Be right there."

Reaching into my pocket, I found the papers Brady had handed me. Slowly, I pulled them out, holding them for what seemed like forever.

"Dylan."

Teenager's Dilemma

"Coming."

Shoving the papers back into my pocket, I went down for supper. Dad, his girlfriend, and I sat laughing and talking about school and life and how lucky we were. We talked about the vacation and how sad they were that I wasn't going, but that they understood how important hockey was to me.

Hockey was important to me; it was my life. Failing that test would get me kicked off the team until I got my grades back up. If I got caught cheating - well, there would be no coming back from that. A cheater would be off the team for good.

Scrunching up the papers in my fist I tossed them into the trash and headed up the stairs to my room. It was going to be a long night.