

A Difficult Decision

By Audrey Corn

I couldn't believe my eyes! But there it was: Teacher had written "92" across the top of my history test! I grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., in the 1940s, when school was serious business. I had studied hard for the history test. But later, when I talked it over with my friends, I found that I'd put down several wrong answers.

Teacher's 92 was a big mistake.

I knew that I should tell her that she'd graded me too high. Instead, I folded my test paper into a tight little square and crammed it into my pencil box.

When I got home, I unfolded the test and stared at the 92. Then I put the test back in my pencil box. Mama had warm oatmeal cookies waiting out in the kitchen. I told her I wasn't hungry.

Several days went by. The test paper was a web of wrinkles and creases from all the folding and unfolding. My guilt grew worse every time I saw the 92.

Teacher had handed back our test papers on Tuesday. By Friday, I knew what I had to do.

The dismissal bell rang at 3 p.m. I lined up with the rest of the kids. But after everyone left the building, I trudged back inside. Teacher was straightening her desk.

"Did you forget something?" she asked.

"No, Ma'am." I handed her my creased paper. "You marked me too high," I whispered.

Teacher went over my paper with a fine-tooth comb. I had hoped she would go easy on me to reward my honesty. But no, her red pencil marked an X next to every wrong answer.

I should have ripped that history test into tiny pieces and thrown it in the garbage. A fat lot of good my honesty was doing me!

Teacher counted my correct answers and entered the new grade, 71, in her record book. Then she gave me back my paper.

"Thank you," she said.

"You're welcome," I lied. I turned to go.

Teacher's voice stopped me. "Simple and easy are not the same. Knowing what you should do was simple. Doing it wasn't easy," Teacher said.

"Yes, Ma'am," I replied.

I stood there, waiting, in case Teacher had more to say. But she just told me to hurry home before my mother looked at the clock and started to worry.

A large metal trash barrel stood right outside the schoolhouse door. I crumpled my history test into a tight ball and tossed it into the barrel. I was glad to be done with the whole nasty business.

Sometimes on Fridays, Mama had warm brownies waiting. I ran the whole way home.

Could Teacher have been a bit more lenient? Absolutely! But one thing's for sure: Our elders taught us to understand right from wrong back in the Good Old Days. ❖