

# Attention!!

## Sacrificing Mickey Mouse for integrity

Integrity, the firm adherence to a code of moral values, synonymous with incorruptibility and honesty, is one of those \$.35 words that parents use to describe what children should grow up with.

In my house, integrity was on Dad's lecture list right next to responsibility, virginity and respectability. It was one of those words that I pretended to know the meaning of, figuring that one day I would attain it because everyone has to.

My junior year in high school I learned not only what integrity meant, but that everyone does not have it.

The fall semester of my junior year the choir members 02503502 sold candy bars by the cases and worked concession stands at the Aggie games to earn money for the spring tour. Dreams of Disneyworld, Florida's beaches and a week of independence from my parents inspired me to sell, sell, sell.

By spring, the selling was completed and the tour schedule was set.

However, the work was not complete. One month before the tour was to begin, the choral department performed "Guys and Dolls", a musical performance that required over 150 hours of work during one month's time. After the closing night's show, several parents hosted a cast party to celebrate the group's success.

Skip, my high school sweetheart, treated me to a glass of champagne on the way to party. This one innocent drink would teach me a lesson that I would never forget.

As high school parties sometimes go, there were about a dozen drunks stumbling around.

Not being my scene, I left early.

Monday morning the choral director stood grim-faced in front of the class as he began his speech about his disappointment concerning selected people's behavior at the cast party. He explained that this was technically a school sponsored function despite the fact that it was held in a private home.

I remember the speech well; it went something like this.

"I am astounded at the lack of maturity and responsibility that was demonstrated Saturday night. School functions do not allow the use of alcohol or drugs. As a matter of fact, considering that you are all minors, neither does the law. I feel that

those of you who offended the rules must be punished. However, I refuse to point any fingers. You know who you are and I know who you are, so if you come forward I will not have you suspended from school (as regulations required). But, because of the severity of the situation I cannot condone taking you to Disneyworld. If those of you that I am referring to choose to not step forward, then I will have no choice but to cancel the trip for everyone."

I could feel the sweat forming on my forehead, every muscle in my body seemed to be on fire. That sudden panicked urge to urinate surged through my body (you know, that feeling that only happens in the worst of situations when you know you're history). I was guilty, I knew it and I knew that Hornbeck knew too. What should I do?

After class and throughout the afternoon my mind was filled with "what ifs."

"If I came forward I wouldn't be able to go to Florida. I only had one glass of champagne, it wasn't like I was drunk. Maybe he wasn't referring to me, but if he was, then he knows, so if I don't come forward the situation could get worse."

By 3:30 p.m. I knew that, despite recommendations from numerous party delinquents, I had to be honest so that I could live with myself.

I shakily walked into the director's office and slid into a chair (the only one of three that happened to be unoccupied by musical scores). The director, my choir instructor for five years, my older sister's instructor for two years and a good friend of my parents, cheerily asked me why I was there.

"Well, to what do I owe this pleasure?" he asked.

"I-I-I h-h-have something I need to tell you concerning Saturday," I replied.

The anxiety and guilt were written in red all over my face, I could just feel it.

I continued, "I realize that it was irresponsible of me because when I think of the party as a school function, I understand my mistake. I would never drink before a performance (drill team performance at a football game). I just didn't realize the severity of my actions, I'm sorry."

A puzzled look appeared on his face and he asked me what I was referring to.

As I explained my specific actions (trying to justify that it

was only one glass — I wasn't drunk — I left when I realized what was going on), his face fell. The disappointment in his eyes pierced my insides.

When I was finished he told me what I had expected to hear.

"I'm going to have to make an example of you. I'm afraid that since I made the statement about not going to Florida, you will have to abide by it."

Then came the unexpected oration which made the situation worthwhile.

He rose from his chair, hands in his pocket as he began pacing the cluttered office.

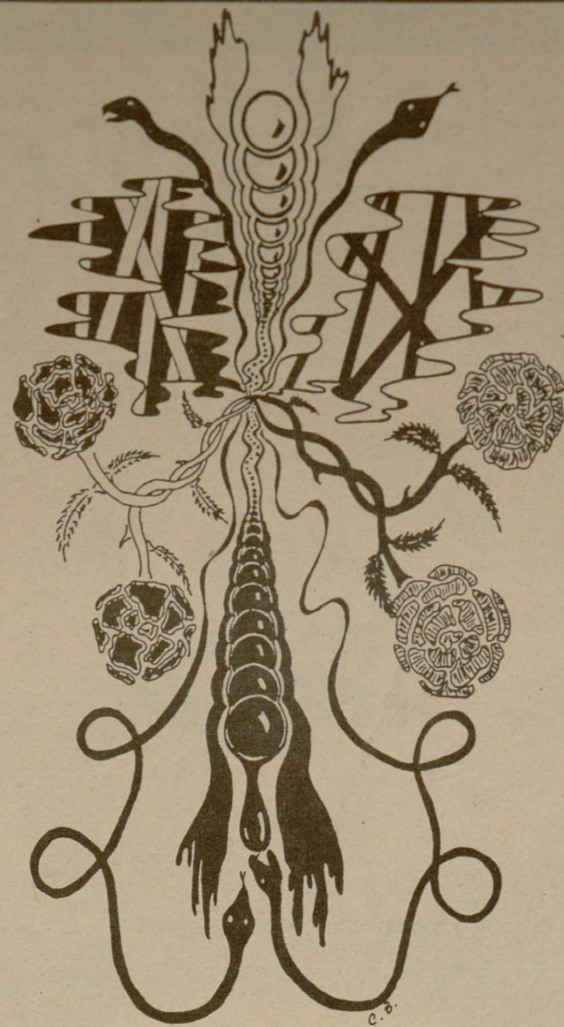
"You see, my problem is that it is very hard for me to enforce a punishment when right now I have more respect for you than I have ever had for anyone. It took a lot for you to come forward because you put so much into the preparations for the tour.

"I'm doubly impressed because I had no idea that you had had anything to drink; as a matter of fact, you weren't even on my list of possibilities. I think so much more of you now because you have shown strength and integrity, characteristics which deserve tremendous respect at any age."

As the conversation continued I realized that I would indeed be a better person for having been honest, having found my integrity.

Unfortunately, integrity and fairness do not go hand-in-hand.

I was the only person who came forward and therefore, I was the only person who spent my spring break in Bryan-College Station. The remaining offenders had a wonderful time with Mickey Mouse and Goofy and came back with healthy-looking tans.



Today's Attention!! artwork was drawn by Clay Bryant, freshman wildlife and fisheries science major.

For the next few years I had to remind myself that I was a better person for having had the strength to be honest, despite the price. It was not until four years later that I ran into another situation where my integrity came into play — full force. This time there were no "what ifs", I knew that I had integrity and I knew how to use it.

This \$.35 word that once seemed like rhetoric, has be-

come an integral part of my life. It allows me to look squarely in the mirror because I don't have any skeletons in the closet or shadows lurking from my past. Although the punishments along the way weren't enjoyable, integrity has given me a kind of freedom that I think few people ever really find.

**This week's Attention!! column was written Lyneen Johnson, a senior journalism major.**

Editor's Note: This *Attention!!* page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in *At Ease*.

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