

WHITE LIES REDUX

by Fred Hobbs

With the possible exception of the Saints and the Almighty him or herself, anyone who proclaims, "I never lie" is, well, a liar.

The truth is, different degrees of lying exist. Serious lying such as in a court of law can get a witness convicted of perjury. That sometimes means an unwanted trip up the river. Most convicts, be they axe murderers or con artists, claim they are innocent. A few may be telling the truth, but most are liars of the highest, or should that be, lowest order.

Honors can be stripped from a resumé if the perpetrator denies falsely he has broken rules or laws. Just ask Lance Armstrong, one of the most prominent among a host of recent liars in the public spotlight. Politicians lie regularly enough that it seems almost a part of their qualifications for what is supposed to be public service.

The least serious offenses on the list of possible fabrications are commonly called "white lies." Some are even less egregious. They are little white lies. A popular song of the 1940s even bears that title. "The devil was in your heart, but heaven was in your eyes the night that you told me those little white lies." And a harder edged work of 21st century musical vintage: "If this room was burnin', I would never notice, 'cause you've been takin' up my mind with your little white lies."

White lies are considered acceptable if they occur in categories such as trivial, diplomatic, minor, unimportant or well intentioned. Each individual has to determine if a given white lie is considered as one of the conditions on that list.

Of course, one person's "minor" lie may be actually major, serious, even hurtful to the subject of the falsehood.

Now, as a reader you are probably asking: "When will the writer stop being so pseudo academic and tell us if he ever lies and if so, are they mostly white, or some shades of gray, or will he 'fess up to others that are dark, ugly untruths? The answers are in order yes, yes and "no way."

Actually, the writer will get personal to wrap up this little essay. Though sorely tempted, I seldom commit "whoppers." Too easy to get caught and I like to think I have a pretty well tuned conscience, too. A couple of examples from pre-adolescence strangely remain in my memory, however. Once, I was hired to deliver 100 flyers about the opening of a new delicatessen in the neighborhood. One hundred houses were a lot to cover. It was hot. I was tired. I dumped about one third of the circulars down the storm sewer. I lied and told the deli owner I had delivered all of them and wanted my money. He had friends in the neighborhood. Rightly, he refused to pay me.

Just before the end of 5th grade, I checked out several books from the school library. They were due back in two weeks. I procrastinated for the whole summer. When I returned them, I lied and told the librarian I was bringing the books back for my brother. She smiled and said, "Tell your brother you paid his fine of two dollars and 35 cents and not to be afraid to admit it when

he does something wrong.” Lessons learned. Seventy years later, sometimes I still feel pangs of guilt about those little white lies.