

## Long Nose, Big Feet

I lied the other day. Please don't tell my mother; she wouldn't understand. I know it was wrong and I'm not proud of it, but I also know I will do it again.

These moments come where I have to choose between confusion, shame, and torture and telling a little white lie. Maybe I could stand my ground if they didn't come so often. I mean wouldn't it be masochistic of me to submit to emotional torment over and over again when one little fib could hold the status quo without hurting anybody?

I know what you're thinking. You're laughing to yourself, imagining the petty emotional drama of a twelve-year-old girl. What could I have to lie about? Plenty.

It's not that I'm ashamed of who I am and the things that I do. But when it comes down to it, I am not good at making quick decisions. When the pressure's on and people are watching me with clear expectations, I see the situation more as a problem to be solved than as a test of brutal honesty. What words will bring the most peace to this situation and keep attention away from me? That sounds incredibly weak minded until you stop and remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. Peacemaking and diplomacy had brought me alive through three countries, five schools, political upheaval, and famine. I'm a TCK—that's Third Culture Kid. Did I forget to mention that part?

Now you're thinking, "the poor dear had to lie with a gun to her head," but that's not true. And

I'm not lying to myself in order to cope with reality like that "Life of Pi" kid. I guess when you strip everything else away it was plain old pride—a lie to save face.

My friend Megan came over for a few hours. I want to make it clear to you how long it took to find a friend I feel comfortable around. There was that one kid who tried to form a friendship with me based on the fact that we shared a name, but she kept trying to hold my hand, and after my cousin's terrifying run down of American middle school culture, I didn't want to be mistaken for a lesbian. Then there was the kid who picked his nose and talked about Transformers, which I understood to be mechanical demons.

Megan was a trip to Toys R Us with a rich relative. She was pretty, confident, popular with her classmates, and kind. She was the bridge between the litter lined streets of rain soaked Southeast Asia and the clean bathrooms of America. I was confident she would lead me through the tunnel and into the Promised Land, and everything would suddenly make sense. I would stop calling the fire department when my sister burned dinner and set off the smoke alarm. And the names of all the popular celebrities would fall on me like gentle raindrops. It was all within reach. And today was the opening day of negotiations.

Things were going well. She seemed honored to be invited over to the exotic missionary's house. My mom gave us cookies and milk, which apparently Americans enjoy as much

as anyone else. Our common ground was growing. She responded enthusiastically to my mother's suggestion of basketball. Another good sign. I couldn't stand those girls too sophisticated to play sports. There was one small obstacle: she wore flip flops for the afternoon.

Share and share alike. Outgrown your shirt? Hand it down. My clothes are your clothes (or at least used to be in the case of my sisters). This was my philosophy. So I immediately promised a loan. She accepted. Off we went to my bedroom.

We had gone shoe shopping just last week, and I smiled proudly at the prospect of lending my friend a beautiful new pair of genuine American sneakers. I would gladly wear the old ones with the holes. In the old days I was accustomed to playing basketball barefoot on asphalt, which is no joke until your calluses build up.

We were fitting on the shoes when my Cuban missile crisis was launched.

She looked over at my oblivious face with an expression of wonder that wanted to turn into ridicule, "Why are your shoes so big?"

Panic. Terror. Def-Con 5. Any moment that non-committal expression might turn into disgust, pity, or scorn. I wasn't to the Promised Land yet, and I could see the tunnel ahead of me filling with rubble.

How could I tell her that I had never bought shoes on my own before? How could I tell her that I got a new pair every three years, and they started out three sizes too big to compensate for growth? How could I explain that now when

my dad asked me if my shoes fit, I didn't know how shoes were supposed to fit so I just said yes. When you've spent most of your life barefoot there *are* no shoes that fit.

It was one of those moments that needed a solution. And I found one.

"Oh, wow! You know what? Those must be my brother's shoes. Yeah! We both got similar pairs!" Her face expressed doubt. But I was committed. "I wonder how they got in here? Maybe my mom picked them up and thought they were mine. Let me look for my shoes." The lie had to be substantiated and so I searched my room thoroughly and then moved on to my brother's. His absence today became convenient.

"Wow. I don't know where my shoes could have gone! You can borrow my brother's if you want. He wouldn't mind. Or you can wear my old ones." I guess Megan did not feel as comfortable with my brother's feet as I thought she would. She opted for my old tattered ones. And I—too full of shame to wear my new ones in front of my guest, even under the pretext that they were my brothers'—went barefoot.

I guess that's what it comes down to in the end. For those of us lucky unfortunates who grew up ex-pat children and then returned to the foreign country called "home," there is no easy adjustment. There are simply choices. I could have told the truth and faced rejection, shame, and misunderstanding. Or I could have told the lie and taken the consequences, in this case blisters. I guess you all know which one I chose. In my opinion the blisters aren't so bad.