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A Talent, Not a Trait

“The world is a fine place and worth fighting for.” These infamous words in Ernest Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls* have been inspiring people for decades. Our world is only a fine place if we keep it as such; constantly fighting the easy route of sin by maintaining integrity. The reputation of a society is based on the integrity of the individuals inhabiting it. Integrity is about the honesty and morals of an individual. It drives that person to make the right choice. We are all simply human and mistakes will be made, but integrity is found in those who strive to do right. Making bona fide decisions in life leads to integrity, which in turn leads to a morally right society.

We all see it happen: those who succumb to temptation, while others stand by to watch. But who will stand up for what is right when no one has the strength to stand? Being a high school student myself, I am not always familiarized with the integrity of the world. However, for five days a week I am immersed in my own world. A world of cruel hierarchy: high school. Students who live by the philosophy that the ends justify the means constantly surround me, threatening to submerge me at any moment. Many are only looking to get the best grade, often with the least amount of effort. Its commonly known nickname is cheating.

I have been acquainted with the temptation to take short cuts and to cheat. Whether it is copying homework or making a cheat sheet for a test, the constant nagging always seems to ring in the ears of high school students. When I was younger, I never understood the concept of integrity. I eagerly sought the shiny, rewarding sticker that often sat over top of my one-hundred percent. In third grade I cheated on a spelling test. I vividly remember the instance. I did not get caught, but getting caught was not the point. Though I am not proud of my actions, I have learned that I do not want to classify myself as a person who gets a grade that I do not earn. I don’t want to be a person who is not true to herself. I felt disappointed in resorting to the easy, yet erroneous way. Many people do not consider it to be cheating if they elude getting caught. However, having integrity means doing what is right no matter who may or may not find out.

The demeanor of politics is offensive to the integrity of today’s society. With elections around the corner, I see copious political advertisements slovenly stapled along buildings and walls. Alongside the roads are signs that fill me with delight: because they show change. These seemingly meaningless ads exemplify the candidate’s integrity. However, when I turn on the television to find harsh words being said about a candidate from an opposing group, the behavior becomes outrageous. In fact, it causes me to lose respect for that candidate. I am appalled that our society has resorted to discouraging someone else for his or her own benefit. It makes me think about ordinary events and how it is not uncommon to find similar situations in everyday life. We stand back and watch someone take the blame when everyone knows the truth. We choose to put the fault on others to save ourselves. We are okay with blaming the innocent as long as we are not held responsible. We are guilty of this sin but we choose to live in denial. There are those who come forth and admit when they know they have done wrong. There are

those who strive to do better out of their own will. These are people with integrity: the few and the proud.

We as a society are so fervent to point the finger elsewhere, anywhere but towards ourselves. But does that finger depict the truth or should it face back at the true culprit: ourselves? We have fallen short and become victims of corruption. But those who choose to rectify their actions are those who have integrity. If we each edify ourselves, we have the power to change the community. Integrity is a rare gift that has the strength to transform our society into a better place. On paper it may just be a nine-letter word, but in reality it defines the difference between strong and weak, right and wrong, good and evil.