

## **White lies really a cop-out that just colour the truth**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

WHY do people tell white lies? I'm not talking about black lies, which are out-and-out lies to save the liar's behind.

I am talking about the lies we tell with the justification that we are trying to save someone else pain.

In the end -- most of the time -- we cause more pain than we would have caused had we told the truth.

Take this disgraceful situation I got myself into as the fibber.

I have a very dear girlfriend. We grew up together and our relationship over the years had deepened.

Then one day a sad thing happened. She acquired a partner who was -- to put it delicately -- not to my liking.

Though I tried and tried to be accepting of her relationship with him, it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to be in her presence when she was with him.

He didn't like me much either. We clashed quite elaborately on matters of politics, heart and soul. When she wasn't watching, we'd say sarcastic things to each other and exchange dark looks.

So I tended to avoid going over to their place. When I did visit, I'd sit there for a while feeling edgy. If he walked in, I'd make some excuse and leave.

I just couldn't be in his company despite my Buddhist practices of acceptance and compassion.

I couldn't tell her how I felt. I just believed it would make her unhappier than I figured she probably already was.

When she'd ring and ask my husband and I over, we'd tell fibs. I couldn't see her alone on weekends as she was busy with Bob and the family.

I'd try to be tricky about it and arrange coffee dates or lunches during the week, but we were both working mothers, and it all became too difficult. So we began drifting apart, sad as this made me feel.

One day she rang and invited me out for brunch. Finally alone, all these terrible things came out: how for years she had felt unloved by me, not valued.

How she had felt that I was selfish -- always trying to meet her at times that suited me, how hurt she was that I never had her to any of my dinner parties, as if she wasn't good enough for my other friends. She felt snubbed and unwanted when nothing could have been further from the truth.

"I don't want to be your friend any more," she finally said. "You have hurt me too much." It was a moment of reckoning.

In that moment I realised the degree to which human beings make up stories to explain the things that happen. We see the world through our own filters and then use evidence to prove our beliefs.

My lies and excuses had become the basis of a scenario that played into her own feelings of self-doubt and low self-esteem.

I presumed that she had always secretly understood the impact Bob was having on our friendship.

But she had no inkling, instead finding in my behaviour a reflection of her worst fears of rejection.

This is what white lies do. They allow for chronic and damaging misinterpretation. The time had come to tell the truth. "I love you. I miss your humour and intelligence and friendship.

"I would see you every day and all the time. It's just that I don't like Bob. I really, really don't like Bob," I said, sharing things he had said and done over the years that had caused me great offence. "I just didn't want to tell you in case you felt -- ummmm -- hurt." I heard how pathetic my rationalisation was. Thankfully, I was able to rescue that friendship from the brink.

She was relieved the problem was so basic. And the truth has made everything much easier. We now find times to be together when the coast is clear.

Men often tell white lies to women.

I watched an episode of Sex In the City recently where one guy explained that if another guy doesn't call: "He just isn't that into you." The women were actually relieved. No more bullshit, no more: "Why didn't he call?" Or "Why didn't he come back to my apartment and make love to me?" Simple: "He just ain't that into you." End of story. "You aren't my type," is a sweet, sweet phrase because it puts an end to all the game playing and hope and make-believe and guesswork that goes on around sexual politics.

In the end, white lies are questionable little devices. They are as much about protecting the fibber as the fibbee -- wanting to keep options open, not to be rejected, not feel like a bad person.

But it is not our responsibility to hide the truth from others, rather to speak it honestly and let the consequences unravel.

The truth is empowering on both sides.

To the fibbee it gives choices. We can change the outcome or walk away.

To the fibber it enables boldness, which feels so liberating.

And clean cuts are always better than ragged ones. They don't leave such brutal scars.

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First published in The Weekend Australian SAT 29 MAY 2004

