

No one Will Ever Know

by: Bill Greer, Chicken Soup for the Veteran's Soul

Karen, Judy and I were the last ones back in the school room after lunch. We put our metal lunch boxes on the shelf above the coat hooks, which were mostly empty. All of the other sixth graders were already outside, playing marbles or hop scotch or jumping rope, since it was a pleasant spring day.

"Look what I found this morning in the storage cupboard when I was getting out some art supplies for Mrs. Eiffler." With a conspiratorial grin on her face, Karen held up a wooden box filled with short pieces of chalk in every color of the rainbow.

"Wow! What fun it would be to write on the chalkboard while everyone is outside." Judy's eyes twinkled with anticipation.

"But Mrs. Eiffler doesn't want us writing on the chalkboard," I responded, already feeling guilty, although we had not yet done a thing.

"Don't be such a 'fraidy cat', Janet. No one will ever know," said Karen, reaching into the box and drawing out a piece of chalk.

"Right. Everyone is outside, so we're safe. No one will tell on us." Judy was already drawing a house with sure strokes.

I reluctantly joined my friends in the artwork, wanting to be part of what was going on, but afraid of being caught. I knew well that we were breaking not one, but two class rules. The second rule was that no one was allowed to stay inside at noon without a written excuse from home if the weather was nice.

Trying various colors, we drew houses, trees and three-dimensional boxes. It was fun! All the time we were watching the clock, knowing that our fun would be over if anyone walked into the room.

Then Judy had an idea. "We're all right-handed. Let's see who can write their name best using their left hand."

Judy and Karen picked up their chalk and started writing. I chose a white piece from the box and wrote my name. The handwriting was a bit shaky, but no one would doubt that it said "Janet."

"I think Judy is the winner," said Karen. "Hers is the best."

"We'd better get this board cleaned off before Mrs. Eiffler comes back," said Judy, eyeing the clock. She picked up an eraser and began erasing our handiwork from the board.

Everything came off . . . but my name!

In disbelief, I looked at the chalk I held in my sweaty hand. On closer examination, it wasn't chalk at all. I had picked up a small piece of white color crayon which was mixed in with the pieces of chalk.

My stomach churned and my knees felt weak. What would Mrs. Eiffler do to me?

My mother had a saying: "Fools names and fools faces always appear in public places." I never understood fully what it meant before. Now I did! I was a fool, and there was my name in crayon to prove it. And the teacher would be returning soon.

"Quick, let's get some wet paper towels," said Judy, springing into action.

After vigorous rubbing, my name still remained.

"I think I saw a can of cleanser by the sink in the coat room," I said as I raced to find it. Precious minutes were ticking away.

We rubbed and my name came off all right, but in the process of removing it, we left an abrasion on the chalkboard.

Listening for footsteps coming down the hall, we dried the scrubbed area as much as we could with more paper towels and fanned it with a book to remove every tell-tale trace of wetness.

We were just slipping into our desks as the bell rang and the other students began entering the room. The teacher walked in soon afterward.

Mrs. Eiffler never asked about abrasion and maybe never noticed it. But I did. Every time I walked past the marred surface of the chalkboard, I remembered. Oh, how I remembered.

The lesson I learned that day is one I never forgot, even though over forty years have passed since the event. "No one will ever know" is never true. Even if no one else found out, Jesus knew and I knew. Sometimes living with a guilty conscience is punishment enough.