



TWO STROKES

for Integrity

*No one saw my botched shot.
So would it still count?*

By Emma Pister

I was five years old when I first picked up a golf club. Golf had always been a sport that our family played together, and as the youngest of four siblings who were on the high school golf team four years each, I felt the substantial pressure to live up to their reputation.

In my senior-year golf season, I had shown great improvement, and it started to become a possibility for me to go to state—the first girl in years to go to the state tournament to represent our team. Before I knew it, I found myself in the two-day playoff tournament to go to state. I was determined to try as hard as I could.

This season had also been one of spiritual growth as I began to learn to pray for things such as a calm mind or to plead with Heavenly Father that I would just be pleased with myself after tournaments.

More than any other game I could remember, it felt like I had a constant prayer in my heart. The Spirit was with me as I played the best 18-hole round and broke my personal record. At the end of the day, the scores were posted, and I was in the running for state. The top five of about 40 girls would make it, and I desperately wanted to be one of them.

The next day this mentality took over, and the stress of having to do better than my best took hold of me. Shots that I had practiced over and over were suddenly replaced by shaking hands and an unsteady swing.

I stood over a short shot that I was about to hit into the hole. Much to my embarrassment I missed the shot, and the ball landed no more than two inches from the hole. Angry and frustrated, I didn't take the time to set up, and I hit the ball prematurely. It missed the hole once again, moving only about half an inch. I looked around, waiting for someone to snicker or say, "That counts too, you know!" Every time you hit the ball it counts as a stroke. But no one had seen. I knew my already-suffering score didn't need another mess-up stroke and that no one had seen it. But in this same instance the thought

the results board. To my dismay, I saw that I had come in sixth place, and by just two strokes. I felt devastated.

On the bus ride home I reevaluated every shot, but over and over again the two shots that no one had seen seemed to play in my mind.

Just as the thought had come to me earlier, I thought, "Never would I wish to ruin my peace of mind and my reputation as an honest person for something so short-term as the state golf tournament." With this thought, my mind felt at peace. I felt good knowing that I would never trade those two strokes of integrity for a chance at state.

The stress of having to do better than my best took hold of me.

came to my mind, "One stroke of honesty holds far greater rewards than that of a dishonest mind."

I quickly told the girl my honest score, knowing that it was indeed the right thing to do.

Twenty minutes later I made an almost identical mistake, adding yet another stroke of honesty to my score card.

Eventually I pulled out of my bad performance rut and really started to play again, and my score improved greatly.

As we finished our last playoff round, all the girls hurriedly raced to

EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

"When you have integrity, you are willing to live by your standards and beliefs even when no one is watching."

For the Strength of Youth
(2011), 19.

My decision that day to give up the temporal for the eternal continues to bless my life. I know that if I can do hard things when no one is watching, the Lord will always bless me—even if it means giving up state, and even if it's only by two strokes. **NE**

The author lives in Oregon, USA.