

The Pencil Problem

By Meghan Decker

(Based on a true story)

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

I raced from math class to my locker. I couldn't wait to meet my friends for lunch. Starting middle school was pretty scary. But after a few weeks I had made some new friends. I could even make it to my classes without getting lost!

When I got to my locker, I saw my new friends standing around Alex. They were looking at something he was holding.

“What's up?” I asked.

“It's Alex's lucky day!” Josh said. “He went to the library to buy a mechanical pencil, but someone put too much money in the machine, so he got an extra pencil for free!”

Alex held out the pencils for me to see. They had green and blue stripes with yellow erasers.

“Wow,” I said. “But . . . what about the person who lost the money?”

“Come on, Maya. Whoever lost it is long gone,” Josh said. “It's their fault they put in too much money.”

“Well, yeah, but the money still belongs to someone else, doesn't it?”

Alex's smile faded a little. “I guess it does, but I don't know who put in the extra money.”



“Don't listen to her, Alex. It's yours!”

Josh turned to me. “Why are you trying to make him feel bad?”

Everyone seemed to agree with Josh. What if I ruined my new friendships because I disagreed?

I took a deep breath. “I'm not trying to make you feel bad,” I said to Alex. “But maybe you could talk to Mr. Reed in the library about it.”

“Hey, guys,” Liz interrupted, “we'd better get to the cafeteria before they run out of pizza!”

The group headed to the cafeteria, leaving Alex and me alone. Alex looked at the pencils and then at me.

“I think I want to talk to Mr. Reed,” Alex said. “Will you come with me?”

“Sure,” I said. “Let's go.”

We walked to the library, and Alex explained to Mr. Reed what had happened. Mr. Reed checked the vending machine where Alex got the pencils.

“There's nothing wrong with the machine,” Mr. Reed said. “Someone must have put in money for two pencils but only turned the knob once. I don't have a way to find out who did it, so you can keep the extra pencil. Thanks for being honest.”





As we left the library together, I worried that Alex would be mad at me for talking him into going to the library for nothing. We were halfway down the hall before Alex spoke.

"Thanks, Maya. I didn't feel totally good about keeping the pencil, but I wasn't sure what to do. I feel OK about it now."

I was so relieved. "I'm glad you're not mad at me," I said.

"Mad?" Alex looked surprised. "Why would I be mad? I made my own choice. Thanks for going with me to see Mr. Reed."

"No problem," I answered. "I still need to get my lunch from my locker. I'll meet you in the cafeteria."

I grabbed my lunch from my locker and ran to the cafeteria. I was glad I'd spoken up and that everything turned out OK. I was smiling all the way to the cafeteria. Today felt like my lucky day too! ♦

The author lives in Michigan, USA.



"I know it is sometimes hard to stand for truth and right. Yet we need to be positive examples if we are to help others find a better way."

Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

"Standing for Truth and Right," Ensign, Nov. 1997, 39.