

LIAR, LIAR

Notes from a pathological liar

By Leo Cardez

I can't trace the origins, all I know is one day I woke to find a pathological liar staring at me in the mirror. I was a liar to the core. I would lie about anything and everything for no good reason or remorse. Was it the thrill? Was I ashamed of the truth? Was I hell-bent on being liked? Yes, yes, and yes.

It started as a needy child desperate for approval and scared of disappointing his parents. I told half-truths and partial stories -- white lies I consoled myself. The worst part, if not the saddest, was that I wasn't a good liar; often getting caught and paying the price behind the shed. But that would change over time. By the time I was a freshman at [REDACTED] University in [REDACTED] my lying had taken a life of its own. Like a double agent on a secret mission I had multiple identities. There was Mick, the photographer from a wealthy family; Or Ian, the Italian ex-pat and ex-special forces operator. And the craziest part? Everyone ate it up. Especially the ladies.

In those young, dumb, full of cum days my whole life was oriented towards the opposite sex. And the lying worked. I was flush in one-night stands. The catch? I could never hold a relationship as the lies always seemed to catch up to me until I learned to pre-emptively end relationships before anyone got too close to know the truth: I was a scumbag liar. "Lies make intimacy impossible," says Charles Ford, M.D. a professor and author of Lies! Lies! Lies!.

By the time I left college and entered the workforce my lying had become more creative, polished, and sophisticated. They opened doors into social and professional circles I had no business in. Through these connections (some real, some imagined) and an array of fake credentials my career skyrocketed as did my earning potential. My life was a delicate balancing act built on nothing but my own imagination. But still, I couldn't stop, even when I wanted to. Neil Garrett, PhD, cognitive neuroscientist at Oxford explains, "What begins with small acts of dishonesty can escalate...the brain generates less of an emotional response each time we lie, and that enables more dishonesty." But nothing lasts forever.

Finally, under the harsh light of my arrest and ensuing press coverage and trial all my indiscretions were dragged out of the shadows. There was nothing left for me to do, but hang my head in shame. Prison is the great equalizer, the ultimate humbling experience. At first, I presumed I would have to continue my lying ways in the Big House...for my own safety. See, prisons can be as volatile and violent as any wild jungle, but as gossipy and judgemental as any American high school. But prison also helped me find something else.

I began writing as an act of desperation, but it soon became my escape hatch from this place and ultimately my own head. Writing helped me find a new purpose, hope, and a certain sense of freedom through raw, brutal honesty. I figured, if my writing were to mean anything to me or anyone else, above else it had to be true. It wasn't easy. I was constantly reminded of the consequences of my lies in every butt crack strip search and cold steel bar. There's also a part of me I can never get back -- a trust lost with my family and friends, even with myself. Could anyone ever really trust me again? Could I?

Lying can be addictive and like any addiction can consume you and everyone around you. When you say that first lie, you can't imagine how deep the well goes, the thousands of ways events will pull you deeper and deeper into the darkness. It becomes who you are versus what you are. Lies breed more lies until they overwhelm you and the only thing that can save you is the truth, but by then the damage is done. I put my family through hell. I was not a good father, good son, good brother, good anything. It rips my guts out to think about. I have no excuse. My friends and family loved me unconditionally, unfortunately, my love was conditional.

Seven years ago, upon my initial arrest, I was forced to come clean to my loved ones. Most of them jumped ship. Who could blame them? They had backed the wrong horse? They didn't know who I was behind all the lies. In many real ways I was a stranger to them. But, as I wrote my apology letters to them, I found it easier to be honest. What else did I have to prove or lose? As these letters turned into essays and started to get published I realized they would be read by those I had hurt; I realized I owed it to them to face the pain through complete transparency. Whatever the cost. And so I have. In this small act I hope I can redeem a part of who I am and who I want to become.

I now live with the fact that most people will forever regard me as nothing more than a liar and criminal. Any of my positive, real achievements and attributes questioned for validity. Any good I have done or will do will be wiped from existence. I have spent many sleepless nights staring at my four walls being angry about that unfairness and injustice; of that stigma which will follow me the rest of my life no matter what I do. The thought of being judged solely on your worst mistakes and addictions should scare anyone.

Today, I would say I'm an honest person. I'm not perfect, impossible inside these walls capable of such dark magic. But, I am diligent with my words, precise and forthcoming. I've made some terrible mistakes, but between God, my family, and my friends, I have been given a second chance. I refuse to let them down again.

Sources: Men's Health, May 2021
