

A Girl's Guide to Bragging and Lying

By Susan Jane Gilman

SUSIE: (Pg 24) The day I started kindergarten I made a jarring discovery: all the other girls wanted to be just as fabulous as I did.

TEACHER: (brightly) Now, we're all going to say our names and what each of us wants to be when we grow up.

INTRODUCTION

"This child has a great imagination, but where do I draw the line between imagination and lying?"

It's a dilemma of parents and elementary teachers everywhere. A wild story here, a crazy answer there, a child fueled by imagination can spout unbelievable tales! Little Susie Gilman learned the difference between the truth and a lie when she was in kindergarten.

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SUSIE: (Pg 25) (Raising her hand) Mrs. Mutnick, my name is Susie Gilman, and when I grow up, I want to be a ballerina, and a model, and a movie star, and a director, and a stewardess.

Then I leaned back with a sort of "tah-dah!" look on my face that would eventually endear me to my fellow classmates.

TEACHER: (Pg 26) Carmen, what about you? What do you want to be?

CARMEN: (putting a finger on her chin) Hmmmm. I want to be . . . let's see . . . a singer . . . and a fashion designer . . . and a trapeze artist . . . and a bride.

SUSIE: I wanted to hit Carmen. Not only was she clearly copying me, but her answers were generally better than mine.

TEACHER: Sara, what about you?

SARA: I want to be a ballerina, too, and a bride, too, but also a princess, a nurse, a gymnast, and a drum majorette.

SUSIE: Oh, me too! I also want to be a princess and a nurse. I forgot to say!

What strikes me now, of course, was how stereotypical our choices were. Not a single girl longed to be a mathematician or a pulmonary cardiologist. **(Pg 27)** What it really boiled down to [for me], was the "-ess" in the word "stewardess." It was the culmination of all things feminine and highly desirable. Princess, goddess, actress . . . stewardess. "-Ess" made any profession sound

4NG Fanatics

glamorous. If someone had only been enterprising enough to call female MDs “Doctresses” and female scientists “nuclear biolgesses,” I would have been equally enthusiastic about becoming those too.

No matter. After my classmates and I recited our career litanies about a zillion times each, they began to lose their luster. So, we began transforming ourselves.

(Pg 28-29) We soon began staking out starring roles for ourselves in an even more fantastic world: Television.

“I call, I’m Ginger!” we’d yell, lunging at the television, trying to be the first one to press her palm over the seductive smile of Tina Louise before the picture flashed to the infinitely duller Professor and Mary Anne. The rule was: Whoever touched a character first got to “be” her for the duration of the show. “I call, I’m Marcia!” we’d shriek, leaving the losers to fight over Cindy and Jan. Cartoons were equally fair game. We “called” Daphne, Veronica, Wonder Woman, and Judy on the Jetsons.

For me one character was the apotheosis of all I admired and hoped to be. By day, Barbara Gordon was the brainy daughter of Gotham’s police commissioner; yet, with one flick of the switch, her vanity table rotated around and she was transformed into Batgirl! -- a crime fighter with

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stiletto heels, a peak-a-boo black mask and sparkling body suit that made it look like she had been dipped in liquid rubber.

For BatGirl’s big “fight move,” Batman and Robin would lift her off the ground like two chorus boys and **Wham! Bap!** Batgirl would swing her pointed boots right into the jaw of an oncoming henchman. And once the battle was over and the Riddler and his sidekicks were left d4owning in their own vat of pancake batter, BatGirl whirled around and vanished. Leaving Batman and Robin awestruck in her wake.

ROBIN: Batman, who do you think she really is?

BATMAN: We’ll ever know Robin. I believe we’ll never know.

SUSIE: They’d never see her, but we – the audience – would riding her electric purple Batcycle into the sunset with the wind in her hair while a groovy chorus sang: **Batgirrrrrl, Batgirl! Yeah, whose baby are you? *** Pretending to be her made me almost dizzy with yearning. There was only [one] small problem . . . She was fictional.

(Pg 33) One day [in show and tell] I planned to show a pair of maracas my grandparents had bought on their honeymoon. Yet when my turn came, I discovered I’d left

4NG Fanatics

them at home. Determined not to give up my slot, I informed Mrs. Mutnick that I had something to “tell” instead. (*standing in front of class*) Tomorrow, my parents are changing my name to Rhinestone. – Rhinestone Gilman! (*to audience*) But hearing it said aloud with my last name attached, it suddenly sounded a lot stupider than I’d imagined. (*to class*) (Pg 34) No, wait, I mean Sapphire. They’re changing my name to Sapphire. Sapphire Gilman! (*to audience*) Yes, that was much better. Plus, I got to keep my initials.

That was the moment it dawned on me that the real purpose of Show ‘n’ Tell was not to show off Frisbees or spoon collections, but to provide me, personally, with a forum for passing off all of my wildest fantasies as bona fide truths. The next day, when Mrs. Mutnick asked who had anything for Show ‘n’ Tell, my hand went up again.

My family and I are moving to Passaic. (Pg 35) For my birthday. We’re going to have a pink bathroom and a swimming pool and a pink fake fur toilet seat cover!

The next day for Show ‘n’ Tell I informed my classmates that I would be dancing that weekend in the *Nutcracker Suite* Ballet at Lincoln Center.

4NG Fanatics

By Monday morning, I’d forgotten my whopping lies of the previous week and had even better things to share.

(Pg 36) (*raising her hand again*) This weekend, my mommy had another baby! It’s a girl. A girl like me. Her name is Sylvia Goldia. Sylvia Goldia Gilman. I got to pick out her name!

My life from then on was a dream. I danced around the playhouse with my friends, instructing them in proper ballet technique, which they now looked to me for, seeing as I had appeared at Lincoln Center. Everybody called me Sapphire and inquired thoughtfully about my new baby sister. Everything was going perfectly – I was even contemplating what to say next for Show ‘n’ Tell – Christmas in Hawaii? That I was going to appear as a guest star on Captain Kangaroo? – when, suddenly, my mother walked through the door.

TEACHER: (Pg 37) Oh, Ellen, congratulations! I’m so surprised to see you. They let you out of the hospital so early! Sapphire said you’d given birth to a baby girl over the weekend.

MOTHER: (*confused*) Sapphire? Who’s Sapphire?

SUSIE: I suddenly realized it would be a very good idea to develop an interest in the chalk tray right about then.

4NG Fanatics

TEACHER: Oh, dear. I'm guessing there's no house in Passaic? And she didn't dance in the Nutcracker Suite Ballet this weekend either?

MOTHER: (*laughing until tears come to her eyes – she wipes them on back of her hand*) Just out of curiosity, what did she say her new baby sister's name was? . . . Sylvia Goldia?

SUSIE: (**Pg 38**) For a moment I assumed I was off the hook. But the next thing I knew, the other kids had all gone home and my mother had taken me out of my winter coat and she and Mrs. Mutnick were sitting me down at the table and they were reading me a book. --- "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." You all know the story . . .

MOTHER: So, Susie, do you understand why it's bad to tell lies?

SUSIE: (*nodding seriously*) Because you don't want to get eaten by wolves.

MOTHER: (*sighing*) Good enough.

SUSIE: The next day, newly chastened, I came to school as Susie again and raised my hand for Show 'n' Tell.

TEACHER: (*proudly*) Susie has something very important to tell the class, don't you, Susie?

SUSIE: (*nodding with her hand in the air*) Last night my

4NG Fanatics

mother was hit by a truck!

This time, Mrs. Mutnick didn't wait for the end of the day. She telephoned my mother, and during Juice and Cookie Time, they sat down with me again. Out came "The Boy who Cried Wolf" again, and again we had the discussion roughly titled "Why It Is Bad to Lie."

(**Pg 39**) When we got home from school, [mother] said:

MOTHER: Why don't we try to come up with the most interesting *true* thing for you to share? That way, you can show everybody at school how smart you are.

SUSIE: The next day, I trooped into kindergarten armed with my maracas. (*in front of the class*) Today (*shakes maracas*) I'm going to tell you about something (*shakes maracas*) true. (*shakes maracas*) Today I'm going to tell you about the Cuban Revolution. What's a revolution? Sometimes, my mommy said, it's when people in a country don't like the way the country is. Sometimes lots of people are poor, and only a few people are rich. . .

(**Pg 40**) Mrs Mutnick was beaming. I had everyone's attention. Everybody was focused on me. Not because of my costumes, or who I was pretending to be, but because of what I had to say. It was my moment. Finally, I was a stewardess, I was a prima ballerina. I was BatGirl!

And I couldn't help myself . . .

SUSIE: The Cuban Revolution was led by a man named Fidel

Astro. He was named after the dog on the Jetsons!

SOURCE INFORMATION

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AWARD HISTORY

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** Batgirl's Theme Song can be found here*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFidlZdAOxg>

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