

Advantage

by Joan Kendrick

I'll never forget the day I really began to understand that there was an **advantage** to being a **white** person in Texas. It was a hot, humid May morning in 1947. I was a first-grade student in Miss Butler's class at Fanning Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas when I blamed someone else for my own mistake. The disturbance was over in a matter of moments, but the memory of it is imprinted forever in my mind. My selfish, cowardly choice on this day made me aware that the **advantage** of being **white** offered dangerous privilege.

Miss Butler was infamous for her stern discipline. Little hands and minds were kept busy, and anything that resembled foolishness was quickly curtailed with a sharp rap on the head or knuckles with the long pointed stick she carried. You can imagine the horror I felt when, while drawing in a deep breath of air, I accidentally whistled. Miss Butler spun around from the blackboard, and seeing my expression, demanded, "Joan, did you do that?" Instead of explaining what happened, I pointed to the boy next to me and said, "No. Leandro did it." In a moment the stick had descended, and Leandro was sobbing into his shirt sleeve.

Somehow, even as a young child, I had known she would believe me. Somehow I thought I had the **advantage** because I was a nicely dressed little **white** girl, I lived in a pretty house, and my mother was active in the parent association. And Leandro, who was he? A quiet little Mexican-American boy who was unlikely to deny my accusation because he was shy about speaking English. Leandro, how I wish now that I could ask your forgiveness. I knew that my skin was **whiter** than yours and that somehow that had given me an **advantage** over you. My sin went beyond the telling of a lie.