

*Six years ago, in a place not too far from home...*

I am ten years old. I am trembling with fear, yet excitement. I look calm and collected, but feel overwhelmed and distressed. I have just won the Ventura County Spanish Spelling Bee, and have earned a spot in San Antonio to compete at the national level. This is the biggest, craziest thing that has ever happened to my lollipop-loving, flute-tooting little self. I can't tell if I'm happy or terrified, but nobody notices as I smile for picture after picture with my trophy, next to the girl who won second place. The girl next to me appears very hard-working and deserving, and I suddenly feel like she should be the one smiling with her trophy, not me. In fact, what have I done to earn this incredible opportunity?? I didn't study much, and I don't feel all that special. Hmm, I thought that winning would feel better than this.

The event is over now, and my family is busy congratulating me over and over again. Everyone seems stoked about Texas, except for me. I smile and nod along, yet they can clearly tell that something is up.

“What's with the face?,” my dad asks, “You *do* want to go to Texas, don't you?”

“I... I don't know yet,” I admit.

As soon as I get home, and the last of the congratulations have been given, I go into my room and shut my door to think. And think. And think some more. I do not know where to even begin in the decision-making process, but then I think about questions my parents ask me along with the things running through my own mind:

“Did I really win the Ventura County Spanish Spelling Bee?” Well, yes, I guess it's true!

“Did I win fairly?” I guess I *did* get the last challenge word right, but only because I remembered the accent on the “o”.

“What kinds of people will I meet at the big Spelling Bee?” Going to Texas *would* give me a chance to meet people from all over the country - people like me who are learning Spanish and others, too, who have spoken Spanish their whole lives! Maybe I would make some brand new friends!

“Lastly, what would be the benefits of going?” Now that I think about it, it would be so, so fun to travel to Texas - a new and exciting place - to learn more about my country and represent my school, two-way-immersion program, and county. Also, my family could come and enjoy themselves, too! Win-win.

After what seems like hours of pondering and contemplation, I step outside of my room to go get a snack.

“What’s with the smile, sweetie?,” my mom asks.

“Nothing much, Mom. Just thinking about how totally *awesome* San Antonio will be this summer!” I exclaim, overjoyed.

Incorporating the four essential questions - of truth, of fairness, of goodwill, and of helpfulness - allowed me to make the grandest decision of my lifetime (up until that point) and feel truly satisfied and fulfilled with my choice. From this point onward, consciously or not, I have enacted these principle questions into each challenging decision I make in order to lead a happier, more gratifying life.