

# Learning To Love Me

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Dear Readers,

This week has been very emotional for me. The Today Show is doing a series on "**Love Your Selfie.**" They encouraged women to go without make up and take pictures of themselves and to embrace what the pictures showed. This was incredibly hard for someone like me.



When we are young, being different in anyway is a curse. As a child; I was different from my peers in so many ways. Growing up in the 70's not having a father, having a working mother was enough to create a huge gap between myself and my classmates. When you add being obese at age 8, being the only child in class to have a mouth full of metal braces at age 11 and having a mentally ill, overprotective Grandmother who was not shy about causing scenes in front of those I hoped would be my friends; you can see childhood was not a walk in the park for me.

Several issues addressed on the Today Show gave me real insight into how I became what I was and then evolved into what I have become.

## Mothers and Body Image:

The first time little girls learn about body image is the way their mother's see their own bodies. My mother hated her body and struggled with her weight my entire childhood. At the same time she told me I was not fat even though I was obese at age 8. She allowed me to eat very unhealthy foods telling me I would outgrow my "baby fat."

I don't remember a time during my childhood when my mother was NOT on the "*diet du jour*." Weight Watchers, Nutri System, Fen Fen. She tried them all and would lose 50 lbs and then gain 60lbs back as she had no discipline and my grandmother was really good at sabotaging any diet because she felt being fat was genetic and the sign of a good, healthy Greek woman. Diets were an insult to Granny's high fat way of cooking she took joy in preparing and watching us eat.

The summer before ninth grade, I lost 35 pounds. All of a sudden, I was not a bastard, the braces were still there but no longer an issue. I was "*normal and accepted*" by all my peers. Kids who would not speak to me or would bully me the year before wanted to be my friend. WOW! Did that send a message!

That was also the year I became Bulimic. Harming myself in order to fit in and be accepted by classmates I did not realize would have very little influence over my future. Would in fact have very little part in anything I did after high school.

Their acceptance, looking like them, being like them was so important, I was willing to risk my life to fit in. Bulimia would become a way of life learned at age 14 I would battle for 20 years. A way to make those who wanted me to overeat happy while

maintaining the "normal" I needed to be in order to be accepted and loved. It would take much counseling and the true love of a wonderful man, my husband, to fully recover from the disease and scars of my childhood.

### **The First Time You Feel Truly Beautiful:**

Many women say the first man who told them they were beautiful was their fathers. I was raised by two women; my mother and her mother, my grandmother. I had no male role models in my life and very little interaction with adult men. My grandmother made it her goal in life that I did not spend any time at all with adult men, even my own father and the one man my mother dated during my childhood.

This message, "*men were dangerous*" did the job and for most of my younger years I had a fear of adult men which of course was the intention of my grandmother. It also accomplished something else which Granny did not intend. The first adult man who told me I was beautiful, at age 19, was 25 years older than I was and I fell for him hard.

This three year relationship changed my life in so many ways, all of them positive. This wonderful man was so much more than my first love. He encouraged me to take a college accounting course, took me on trips and even helped me study. Most importantly, he told me every time I was with him that I was beautiful! I will forever be grateful for his love and support as he changed my entire life and how I saw myself.

No longer was I the ugly fat bastard child with a crazy grandmother. In his eyes I saw for the first time an intelligent, beautiful, and yes, sexual woman. Part of who I am today, is because of him.

### **Different Is A Good Thing:**

I gained a lot of weight after my mom died in 2004. I was not happy with myself once again and in 6 months lost 50 lbs. At 5'2", I weighed 97 lbs and looked skeletal. I was so excited to show off my new body that summer.

The reaction this time was so different from that 9th grade return to school when everyone wanted to be my friend. This time, people worried for my health, told me I was too thin. Some pulled away from me.

The truth is having this great body turned me into a diva, someone I did not recognize. I felt that outside beauty gave me the right to stop listening to my heart. To stop caring about anyone or anything other than what I allowed myself to eat, my exercise regimen and the outfit I was planning to show off that evening.

This is the adult lesson I had to learn. As adults, we all see beauty differently than the size jeans one wears, looking good in a bikini at the pool. What I learned that summer was people cared more that I was healthy rather than what I looked like. What an eye opener!

The selfie on this page is the person my husband sees everyday and continues to love and consider beautiful. I have more "*true*" friends now than ever before. Friends that share common thoughts, common interests and don't think so much about the clothes I

wear or the make up I apply.

Isn't it strange that all we cared about in high school was clothes, hair, shoes, how we looked on the outside, yet we never really talked to one another about anything important? About anything that would matter 30 years in the future?

As an adult, I no longer see "different" as a curse. I don't want to be like everybody else because how boring would life be if I saw myself every time I was with another person? If I saw *THEM* when I look in *MY* mirror?

**It took me 49 years to realize that real beauty is not something you see. It is something you feel.**

***I can look at my picture and embrace my flaws. I accept that living half a lifetime leaves scars and those scars are memories. Some good, some bad. Some chosen, some not.***

***Those memories are MINE and every time you see me, REALLY see me; you see all those memories, those scars.***

***I see this as a gift I share with all of you. LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT EACH OTHER! See true beauty for the first time through "different eyes."***