# True Beauty

## by Kate Schweitzer

***More than skin deep.***

**T**welve or thirteen second-graders had already · clamored around Kyle's desk. I knew what they were doing, but I stayed across the room, finishing my art project. I chiseled at the large piece of construction paper until the tip of my crayon wore down to the nub.

*Whatever you do, Kate, don't look up.*

They began to snicker. Kyle's squeaky laugh pierced the air. I could feel their eyes drilling into me, begging me to lift my head.

*You'll be sorry, Kate.*

I stood up from my chair and nervously stumbled over to them. I brushed my way past the others and saw Kyle. He was fiercely sketching on a piece of stark white paper. I forced my eyes, red with fear, to look over his shoulder.

It was a picture of me. I could tell only because it had my name at the top with an arrow pointing to a crudely drawn figure. The face was ugly. Kyle had made my nose take up the entire piece of paper. He drew it in the shape of a mountain, with snowcaps on the tip.

*Don't cry. Don't let them see you cry.*

Salty tears burned my eyes and rushed down to my lips where I could taste their bitterness through muffled gasps and forced inhales. In a blur, I grabbed the paper and ran from the classroom. I could hear laughter follow me.

That was not the first time I had been teased and tormented. That was not the first time I had run out of a laughing classroom, cried in my mother's arms or prayed that I would open my eyes and be someone different, nor was it the last.

But after that day in second grade, I no longer looked in the mirror and saw a girl with silky black hair, big charcoal eyes, a crooked smile and a nose that, according to my mother, "added character." I no longer saw the beautiful little girl my mother saw.

All I saw was ugly.

For the next four years, I spent hours each night pushing my palm against my nose, trying to flatten it. I would sometimes push too hard and get headaches. In junior high, I dreamt of plastic surgery and researched how nose jobs worked, what they cost, and figured out how much money I had. During freshman and sophomore years, I covered my nose every time I looked in the mirror. Subconsciously, I covered it whenever I talked to friends, teachers, boys. I would rub my eyebrows, scratch my forehead or twirl my bangs—whatever I could do to take the focus off my nose.

Without realizing it, I spent most of my life trying to hide. I was so afraid of what others thought that I refused to let them see my flaws. I believed that if they saw me as vulnerable and unaltered, they would see me the way Kyle saw me—ugly.

It was not until the end of my junior year that I finally stopped hiding. I was exhausted from focusing on what others thought. For the first time, when I looked for all the things that I thought were beautiful—a kind heart, a warm smile, a gentle hand to hold—I found them within me. They had always been there, but I had spent my life searching for them in the wrong places.

I was finally inspired to look for the beautiful in everyone. If it was hard to find, I searched deeper. Some, however, were like me and unaware of what was inside.

Now I try to give people the inspiration to see the beauty that lies within themselves, and this gives me the inspiration to do the same. Every morning, I wake up and look for what makes me beautiful. Sometimes I use the mirror, but often I do not need to. I can see beauty in my thoughts, my beliefs, my dreams, my choices. I can see it in my friendships. I can see it in my laughter, my tears, my silence. I can even see beauty in my imperfections—and in my nose.

I kept the picture that Kyle drew in second grade. I look at it every day. It is a constant reminder that through all the ugliness in the world, we have to find what is beautiful.