

“Wow...a beauty book by the gorgeous Nancy Stafford! I could hardly wait! What secrets would she share that could change my life? ‘True beauty,’ writes Nancy, ‘is seeing ourselves as God sees us.’ Nancy reminds us that it’s the Beholder of our soul that defines our real beauty. Buy this book, apply it...become it. It’s got the best-kept beauty secret I know.”

JENNI BORSSELLINO, TELEVISION COHOST, *AT HOME LIVE WITH CHUCK AND JENNI*

“I was tremendously blessed by Nancy’s willingness to honestly share her own painful struggles for self-identity and the freedom and growth she has found in relationship with God through His love.”

MARILYN MCCOO, SINGER

“Nancy Stafford offers a perspective I wish I’d had growing up, and one I hope to pass on to my daughter... Nancy, my glasses were purple.”

CONNIE SELLECCA, ACTRESS

“With honesty, vulnerability, and passion, Nancy Stafford opens up her own beautiful life to encourage us that we are all truly beautiful and deeply loved by God. Now that I’ve finished the last page and wiped away my tears, I’m starting a list of all the women in my life to whom I must give this inspiring book. Thank you, Nancy!”

KAREN COVELL, TELEVISION PRODUCER AND COAUTHOR OF
THE DAY I MET GOD AND HOW TO TALK ABOUT JESUS WITHOUT FREAKING OUT

“Nancy’s personal experiences reveal her secrets of true and lasting beauty. I commend her for a beautiful book. A must-read for all women who seek spiritual truth and enlightened love.”

RHONDA FLEMING, AUTHOR AND HUMANITARIAN

“Getting to know Nancy Stafford personally has been one of the great blessings of my life. I invite all of you to experience the joy of her compassionate heart. It seems impossible that such an exquisitely beautiful woman has suffered deep wounds in her self-image, but here Nancy allows God to use her scars to take us all on a healing journey toward wholeness and freedom. Nancy’s writing reaches down into the hidden crevices of the heart and allows God to heal the deep wounds of childhood long buried there. Through the pages of Nancy’s inspiring book, God reached into my own heart and healed some old wounds I didn’t even know I had! He will do it for you, too.”

SUSAN WALES, AUTHOR OF *STANDING ON THE PROMISES*

“The search for acceptance can be a long and painful one. And for many women, the gap between outward appearances and the cry of their heart can be huge. Nancy’s story builds a bridge connecting our inside and our outside. The result is the revelation of a beauty that will heal.”

HENRY CLOUD, PH.D., AUTHOR OF
CHANGES THAT HEAL AND COAUTHOR OF THE BESTSELLING *BOUNDARIES*

“As a young girl, I used to love fairy tales. *Beauty by the Book* has all the elements of a contemporary fairy tale, but the beauty of this story is that it’s reality, not fantasy! It is full of deep spiritual truths that mothers and daughters everywhere should experience together.”

DEBBY BOONE, VOCALIST AND AUTHOR OF *BEDTIME HUGS FOR LITTLE ONES*

“Nancy Stafford is a beautiful woman—inside and out. She strikes a perfect balance between unmasking the lies that the world tells us about beauty and reaffirming the value of taking care of ourselves and being the best we can be. Nancy tackles this often-misunderstood subject with great heart, humor, and personal humility. Every woman will find herself somewhere in these pages. *Beauty by the Book* is a must-read for women of all ages.”

MELODY GREEN, AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SONGWRITER

“If only all women would embrace the amazing truths in *Beauty by the Book*! Nancy Stafford gives us food for thought, as well as clarifies the fact that our issues with beauty run deep. By unearthing God’s concept of beauty, we see ourselves from another point of view...as fearfully and wonderfully crafted vessels to behold!”

BUNNY WILSON, AUTHOR OF *SEVEN SECRETS WOMEN WANT TO KNOW*

“Honest, transparent, and liberating, *Beauty by the Book* speaks gently to a woman’s deepest heart’s cry. Nancy Stafford sets the record straight: We are not the sum total of what we see in the mirror. She points us to the One who created beauty and challenges us to discover the true source of our identity. If you’ve ever struggled with your own external qualities, this book will force you to take another look at yourself—and to celebrate the fact that you were wonderfully created by divine design...inside and out.”

MICHELLE MCKINNEY HAMMOND, AUTHOR OF
IF MEN ARE LIKE BUSES, THEN HOW DO I CATCH ONE?

“Nancy’s ability to focus on true inner beauty in the midst of a culture that bombards us with beauty that’s only ‘skin deep’ is completely refreshing. Her vulnerability in sharing her pains (even the ones that seem insignificant) and her healing is a beautiful reminder to us that Jesus not only heals us, but also bears our pain...and that through Him we can walk in the wholeness He has provided.”

KIM HILL, CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN RECORDING ARTIST

“Nancy Stafford’s *Beauty by the Book* is one of the most touching books I’ve read. It is a must-read for any woman—young or old, large or thin, tall or short—who has ever felt ugly, insecure, fat, invisible, unloved, or unwanted—and isn’t that really all of us? If you wonder how you can ever be, or more importantly, feel beautiful, you have to read Nancy’s book. It rips your heart out and draws tears from your eyes...and then leaves you feeling loved, accepted, and beautiful!”

VICTORYA MICHAELS ROGERS, FORMER HOLLYWOOD AGENT AND COAUTHOR OF
THE DAY I MET GOD AND HOW TO TALK ABOUT JESUS WITHOUT FREAKING OUT

BEAUTY

b y t h e

BOOK

NANCY STAFFORD

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Dedication

To my family—Mom, Dad, and Tracy—
who taught me what true beauty looks like.

To my husband, Larry, who is beautiful in every way.

To women everywhere, may you come to know
how beautiful you really are.

To my Lord, “who had nothing in His appearance
that we should desire Him”—
the most beautiful of all.

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WITH GRATITUDE

Heartfelt thanks to my many friends for your prayers, encouragement, guidance, and, in the case of Henry Cloud, friendly coercion and policing my progress.

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Thank you to my wonderful editor—and new friend—Judith St. Pierre, for your vision, for your heart...and for your beauty.



A TRUE MIRROR

THEY SAY TO WRITE what we know. This I know: Real beauty isn't what we see in magazines or on movie screens, and it doesn't depend on the opinions of others or the changing tastes of culture. True beauty is seeing ourselves as God sees us, reflected in the mirror of His Word.

Inner beauty—knowing who we really are—is the message closest to my heart because it's been a lifelong search and a long, hard journey to reach the point where I really *believe* and *feel* that I am worth something, that I have value, that I am beautiful.

Believe me, no one would have used the word *pretty* to describe me when I was growing up. Tallest in my class by a head and shoulders, I was a gangly, gawky, unattractive kid. I had Casper-white skin with freckles galore, buckteeth, and glasses as thick as Coke bottles. My scraggly, wispy pigtails started off in the right spot when I left for school but somehow always wound up front-to-back, cyclops-style, by the end of the day. You get the general idea.

I grew up in a wonderful, loving Christian home. I felt secure in my parents' love, and I fell in love with Christ when I was eight years

old. Even as a little girl, I would feel God's intimate, tender love for me, and my tears would flow. God gave me a sensitive heart. I've always felt things very deeply. But I didn't understand then the flip side of feeling deeply. Yes, I was receptive to His Spirit and His presence, and that was wonderful. But I was also very sensitive—too sensitive—to the attitudes and comments of the people around me.

My family tried to reassure me. "Nancy, honey, you're so beautiful on the inside. That's what counts," Mom would say.

Yeah, right.

When I was in first grade, I was painfully shy and terribly insecure, so Mom enrolled me in a ballet class. I loved it! This was where I could shine! I would rush into class every Saturday and dance with abandon—twirling, spinning, and leaping on my spindly legs, feeling absolutely beautiful and totally confident in my little pink tutu.

The mothers would gather in the back of the class to pick up their ballerinas, and one Saturday I glanced back and saw that they were all looking at me. *They must like my dancing!* I thought. Then I overheard the teacher say, "Oh yes, the girls are all doing so beautifully...except for that little Stafford girl. She's the clumsiest, most awkward child I've ever seen." They all laughed uproariously.

I was stunned. Mortified. Tears burned in my eyes, and I hid my face in my tutu and ran across the room to bury myself in my mom's big, soft, pillowy chest. I think that was the day I realized that what I had suspected about myself was true: I wasn't worth much. I wasn't valuable. And I was ugly.

No matter what my dear family said or did to try to convince me otherwise, I didn't believe them. They were my family; they had to say that. That big world out there told me something else, and I believed it instead. That day a lie lodged in my six-year-old heart: *You're ugly. You're clumsy. We don't want you.* And that day I put up my first wall of protection. Through the years other walls followed,

all to help ward off the pain, loneliness, and rejection of being different from others, not accepted, and not really understood.

“Nancy, honey, you’re so beautiful on the inside. That’s what counts,” Mom would say.

Somehow I knew that it should have been true—that inner beauty *was* more important—but as I looked around, even at age six or seven or eight, I noticed that it didn’t really count that much, at least not as far as how people treated you. The physically beautiful, the socially acceptable, and the currently fashionable were what people—even in the church—really accepted and esteemed. And that wasn’t me. Goodness and kindness and consideration, the traits my family possessed and taught me were important, didn’t seem to matter nearly as much as popularity, a sassy comeback, the right clothes, and a pretty face.

For many years I struggled to reconcile what God wanted me to be with what the world told me I should be—a struggle that continued even after I began modeling and acting.

For twenty years now I’ve enjoyed a wonderful career in television as an actress and as the host of an international fashion and beauty TV series. I’ve modeled in New York and been in the Miss America pageant. I know the tricks of the trade. But what I know most about beauty has nothing to do with my profession.

Quite the opposite.

What I know most about beauty has come from God healing my heart and showing me who I really am. He has turned the ashes of my life into beauty, the mourning into joy. He will do the same for you. He wants to love you into being!

That’s what this book is about.

It isn’t a “how-to” beauty book.

It isn’t *Five Easy Steps to a New You*.

It’s a book about freedom from the bondage of our culture’s

unattainable standards, freedom from lies of the past that have told us who we are, and, yes, even freedom from the lie that outward appearance means nothing. It's a book about the beauty our spirits are drawn to because we have been made in the very image of Beauty Himself.

Everyone has beauty, but not everyone sees it. I want you to see it.

Each piece in this book begins with a promise about who you are in Christ. Through these promises, I want you to get a picture of who you really are—of who God says you are. I want you to look into the mirror of God's Word and see yourself as He sees you. I want you to know how much He loves you and how much you have because of His Son.

When you know who you really are, you glow with an inner radiance and confidence that affects every other part of your life. And as you absorb the truth of how much God loves you and grab hold of the promises He has made you, you'll be surprised and delighted as you see yourself being transformed into the vibrant, healthy, complete, beautiful woman you were always meant to be.

Maybe this isn't the kind of beauty book you expected. Perhaps it's more of a makeover book, one that offers rebirth and rejuvenation in those areas that need a little cleansing, some refreshing, and new life. That's the kind of beauty I care about—the real beauty that comes as we become everything God created us to be.

I'm writing this book because I want you to grasp the depth of God's love for you, to discover and embrace the beauty within you, and then to delight in the unique beauty He has reserved for you alone.

I'm writing this book because I want you to see the beauty of others, so that, free of envy and comparisons, you can encourage their beauty and help them flourish.

I'm writing this book because beauty has been a big part of my life. I've experienced both its pain and its promise. As a homely young girl, it eluded me. As a model in New York, it seduced me. As an actress in Hollywood, its importance distresses me. And as a woman who loves God, the power of true beauty staggers me.

Beauty. It's seldom what we think it is. True beauty is inner beauty—beauty by the Book.

I invite you to come with me as I share my life, my reflections, and my struggles on my own path to beauty. Join me on a journey from insecurities and fear, through brokenness and doubt, all the way to fullness and truth—all the way to knowing, beyond a shadow of a doubt, what the psalmist proclaimed: “The king is enthralled by your beauty” (Psalm 45:11).

*Beauty of form affects the mind,
but then it must not be the
mere shell that we admire,
but the thought that this shell is only the beautiful case
adjusted to the shape and value of a still
more beautiful pearl within.—Jane Porter*





CHAPTER ONE

BEAUTY MATTERS





THE POWER OF APPEARANCES

He does not judge me by appearances...

*Stop judging by mere appearances,
and make a right judgment.—John 7:24*

THE HOTEL BALLROOM was jammed. It was the biggest fundraiser of the year for the American Red Cross. Everybody who was anybody was there. Philanthropists mixed with politicians mixed with Rotary Club. I was Miss Florida. I wore a red evening gown draped with a satin and velvet sash that said so.

Ouch! With every move of my head, one of the three-inch bobby pins keeping my crown aloft jabbed into my skull and pinched my teased scalp, bringing me to near tears. I imagined a handful of hair being yanked out at the roots. Surely I must be bleeding by now. Better check. Looking for an escape route to the ladies room to recrown myself, I saw...her. As Sherlock Holmes referred to the character of Irene Adler, she was...The Woman.

Tall, regal, elegant, graceful. Golden brown body and near platinum blond hair. Her ivory crepe evening gown stood out like a lighthouse in a sea of blinding rhinestones, bright chiffon...and pageant-sashed red. Proof of her refinement and elegance. She was compassionate too, I could tell. Probably a Red Cross volunteer *and* a philanthropist. She laughed easily but had a mysterious reserve.

Royalty, maybe? Sweden or Bulgaria, I guessed. Someplace far away. And elegant. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She was a vision. Did I say she was elegant? She was everything I wanted to be.

Then, unbelievably, I saw that she was looking at me. She gave a small, elegant smile. Wow. Warm feelings washed over me. This creature, this *vision* had noticed me! I felt as though she was inviting me into some inner circle. I glanced around. Nope, nobody else. Just me. Of all the hundreds of people in the whole room, she was looking at *me!* Then I felt the bobby pin jab. Oh yeah, I had a crown on my head. Who wouldn't notice?

It didn't matter; I had to meet her. I grasped the sleeve of my pageant chaperone, Donna Jean, and we slowly made our way across the room. To my amazement, The Woman had begun to walk toward me too, weaving her way through the crowd like an ivory ribbon.

We both began to speak at the same time. Laughing nervously, I deferred. After all, she was The Woman. She brushed a platinum wisp off her perfect face, smiled that elegant smile, and then, in an octave lower and a volume louder than I expected, said in a gravelly kind of rasp, "Ya know, I was Miss New Joisey once-st. Miss Casino, USA. Yeah! Woulda gone onta da nationals too, but dem blankity-blanks found out about me an one-a dem judges. Ah well, dat's da breaks. I just came ta dis ting wit Joey. *Hey, Joey!* Get me anudda drink!"

I was stunned. A bucket of cold water in the face would have been less startling. Hoping that my bulging eyes and slack jaw hadn't given me away, I managed, "Well...uh...I'm not the least bit surprised! You're...beau...tiful!"

*That which is striking and beautiful is not always good;
but that which is good is always beautiful.—Ninon de l'Enclos*

How deceived we are by appearances! We exalt some people and dismiss others, sometimes at first glance, based on how they look to us. That's what I did. I supposed some things about "Miss New Joisey" and attributed certain qualities to her based purely on her appearance. At a glance, I made her the embodiment of beauty and grace, only to find that she was a flawed mortal just like the rest of us.

That evening shook me. Yes, I've laughed about it over the years as a "funny story," but its deeper truth haunts me. How many times have I dismissed people with true elegance and inner beauty just because of their packaging? Do I still blindly deify some, yet blithely disregard others? Even in a tiny way, am I prejudiced toward the attractive, while missing the true beauty of the seemingly plain ones in front of me? Truthfully now, what do I think deep down when I look at that ratty street person, that pencil-thin and fashionable neighbor, that grossly overweight woman, or that photogenic superstar? Even when we know better, we judge. We esteem and we disparage, we elevate and we denigrate—all based on appearance.

But even though we sometimes do, God is One who does not judge by mere appearances. And how grateful I am for that fact when I'm the one He is looking at.

*We live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion.
The great task in life is to find reality.—Iris Murdoch*





OUR LONGING FOR BEAUTY

I will gaze upon the beauty of the Lord forever...

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.—Psalm 27:4

THE TRUTH IS THAT WE *need* beauty in our lives. We were made in the very image of Beauty: Christ Himself. Our first home was a place unsurpassed in its natural beauty—perfect, in fact—Eden. We are born with a deep longing for and appreciation of beauty. Our spirits are drawn to it. It calls to us, nourishes us, stimulates us.

Think about how you feel when the beauty of nature surrounds you, how nourished, refreshed, whole. A shady forest trail, a sparkling sandy beach, a majestic thundering waterfall, a tiny fragrant garden—all have the power to renew us. We drink in their beauty; we savor it.

What happens to you when you see a powerful work of art or hear a stirring piece of music? Don't you feel nurtured and nourished when you walk into the elegant lobby of a great hotel or a tastefully decorated home, enjoy a deliciously magnificent meal, or meet a vibrant, confident person?

Beauty is a baby's toothless, dimpled smile that makes you grin from ear to ear. It's a fragrant bouquet and the mellow taste of a rich red wine rolling slowly in your mouth. Beauty is art that transfixes. Literature that transports. The violin cry that breaks your heart and

moves you to tears. The driving drum that bores deep in your bones and inflames your soul.

Surrounded and awakened from slumber, my senses can hardly take it. *Stop!* I cry. Then, *No! Give me more.*

*What delights us in visible beauty is
the invisible.—Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach*

At its most magnificent, though, earthly beauty is but a paltry taste, a dim foreshadow, of what awaits. C. S. Lewis reminds us that the beauty we are drawn to—nature or art or music or books—is not the ultimate, only the conduit:

It was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing.... They are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.¹

What we yearn for is the beauty of heaven. Eternity has been set in our hearts, and it burns there in our secret longing. Lewis writes:

In this universe...the longing to...bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely...the promise of glory...becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last....

Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.²

One day our longing and ache will end. Our hunger will be satisfied. Our great heart-cry, the one thing we ask—to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord—will be answered. The door will open. And we shall be one with Him. Until then, we long for beauty and desperately need it in our lives.

*In all ranks of life the human heart yearns for the beautiful;
and the beautiful things that God makes
are his gift to all alike.—Harriet Beecher Stowe*





THE IMPORTANCE OF BEAUTY

He crowns me with love and compassion...

*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life
from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.—Psalm 103:2–4*

A WOMAN'S APPEARANCE is an important part of her need for beauty. A woman can be interested in both blush and the boardroom, mascara and ministry, fashion and physics, hair gel and homeschooling, or working out and working with the homeless. One doesn't cancel out the other, and wanting to look good doesn't make you a shallow person or a self-consumed sinner.

We all know that how we look influences how we feel. Be honest: Don't you feel better at the post office when your hair looks good, you have on a dab of makeup, and you're dressed nicely? Isn't it better than waiting in line hoping that nobody sees you in your sloppy clothes, with your dirty hair bundled up in a ponytail? (Okay, okay! I admit it: That was me you saw in the express mail line!)

And have you noticed that when you feel better about yourself, you're more apt to smile and talk with others? Believe me, I wear makeup so much for work that I love the days I can run around in sweats or shorts and not have to do my face or hair. And I do. (You've seen me at the post office, remember?) But I also know that I feel better and more willing to engage with others

when I'm confident about my appearance.

According to some psychologists, when you're looking after your appearance, you're also looking after your *self*—your emotional life, your self-esteem. It seems to follow that taking care of yourself automatically improves the way you see yourself. You respect yourself. And by caring for your appearance, you are telling the world that you are a person worthy of respect. The bottom line is that when you feel better about you, you're more confident, so you can forget about yourself for two seconds and focus on somebody else.

Psychologists are also becoming more aware of the link between making the effort to look good and feeling happy. They note that people who are depressed or emotionally fragile just don't think it's worth the effort to groom themselves. As one therapist told me: "When people are very depressed, their self-care is low. When we start to see grooming reemerge, we know they are improving. There's no doubt that both psychological and physical health demand that people pay attention to their needs."

I've seen firsthand the psychological and emotional benefits of improved appearance. When the beautiful actress Rhonda Fleming lost her sister to cancer, she determined to create a place of beauty, care, and compassion for women going through that nightmare. She established the Rhonda Fleming Center for Women with Cancer at UCLA Medical Center and filled it with warm colors, lovely furnishings, paintings...and love. Then she asked our mutual friend, Vera Brown, for help.

For thirty years, my dear friend Vera has been the facial, body care, and makeup maven to L.A.'s most beautiful people. But her favorite clients aren't film stars, cover girls, or socialites; they are women fresh out of chemotherapy.

Every week for many years, Vera joined Rhonda at the cancer center, giving these ladies what they needed to feel feminine and

beautiful again. She brought wigs, creams, makeup...and hope. She rolled up her sleeves, dipped her hands, and soothed away the pain, fear, and loss that cancer causes. Her creams are legendary, but it was her touch that restored.

A dozen or more women would gather in a room, some just days after surgery or hours after chemo. Unhurriedly, Vera gave each woman a facial, did their makeup, and taught them how to have beautiful eyes—no lashes or brows required. And as she did, she told them: “Nothing comes out of a jar that does as much for you as your spiritual attitude. When you have that and love yourself, you’re truly beautiful.”

Vera is proud of the business she’s built—the photo-lined walls, the magazine spreads, and the national awards—but true satisfaction lights up her beautiful face when she talks about “her girls.” These women are proof of the psychological benefits of improved appearance for the self-esteem of cancer patients. Paying attention to the way they look has a huge therapeutic impact on them. Suddenly they realize that, no matter what has happened to them, their beauty is more than just the sum of their parts. They see that they are worthy of attention, and just knowing that makes it easier for them to cope. And as they adjust, they are better able to pour out on others the love and compassion that encourages their beauty and helps them flourish too.

Several years ago, Vera had to begin to practice what she preached: She woke up one morning to find a lump in her breast. And the women she had embraced, cared for, and comforted now surrounded her with love and support and affection.

*There is no beautifier of complexion, or form, or behavior,
like the wish to scatter joy and not pain around us.—Virgil*





MERE APPEARANCES

He sees my heart...

The Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height. . . . The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." —1 Samuel 16:7–8

I REMEMBER THE DAY I noticed my family was different. I think I was five.

I was with Mom and Dad and my older brother, Tracy. We were in a shopping mall. A young family nearby glanced our way, looked a little longer, and then began to snicker and stare. The father saw us first and elbowed his son. The two children pointed, giggled, and, to the amusement of their folks, began to imitate my parents. The boy dragged one leg in an exaggerated limp, like a monster in a cheap horror film. The girl formed her arms into a huge circle, puffed out her cheeks, and waddled with great effort. The father pretended to shush the children, but he silently laughed his encouragement. The mother cupped her hand over her mouth to hide her expression of half giggle, half disgust.

In the past I'd seen people stare or maybe look at us for longer than a polite glance, but this was different. My family didn't seem to notice or be bothered by it.

But I did. Something happened in me. I felt a sharp pain in my

heart and, as best a five-year-old could understand them, mingled feelings of righteous anger, injustice, and flat-out hurt feelings. Something like a sob erupted deep inside me. I kept the lid on it; I didn't make a sound. But I can still remember feeling my chest cave, my breath catch, my eyes burn, and my throat tighten.

What are these people doing? I asked myself. *Why are they looking at us? Why would they be imitating Mom and Dad? Why would they do that?* Perplexed and unnerved, I looked over at my family. And there for the first time I saw them—really *saw* them—as everyone else saw them.

Daddy's twisted and ungainly gait, his foot wrenched at a forty-five degree angle, his shriveled leg, which looked more like a young girl's wrist than a grown man's limb—ever-present reminders of a toddler's battle with polio.

Mom's obesity. Countless years of countless diets and five-hundred-calories-a-day monitored hospital stays, only to gain yet more weight, develop yet more arthritis in her knees, and suffer yet more debilitating pain.

Fat is the last preserve for unexamined bigotry.—Jennifer Coleman

My brother's towering height and battle with his weight. Through the years diabetes has taken its toll, as amputations have whittled away his mobility and left him with an artificial foot.

I felt conspicuous too, with my knobby knees, thick glasses, and ghostly white-and-freckled skin. But even at age five I realized that the way people reacted to me paled in comparison to the judgments they leveled at my mom, dad, and brother. So I watched this family I didn't know make fun of the family I knew and loved so well. And it hurt.

Yes, my family was different. But they are the most beautiful people I've ever seen. From them I learned what true beauty is.

My Daddy is gone now, but he was the strongest, kindest man I'd ever known. He set the standard for what I looked for—and found—in a husband. Dad never viewed himself as “handicapped”—he hated the word. His massive torso was evidence of his strength, the strength that built—from the ground up—the house I grew up in. Though he was often in great pain, I never heard a word of complaint. He lived with grace and died with dignity. He was honest and good and true.

Mom is in a wheelchair now, but she has more spirit and optimism and humor than anyone I know. Accomplished and creative, she casts a wide net of love and encouragement to everyone around her.

At six feet four inches tall, my brother, Tracy, has always stood head and shoulders above the crowd. Nobody who knew him was surprised when he became a city concilman, then mayor, and then spent ten years in Florida's House of Representatives. This gentle giant has a natural brilliance, a quiet courage, and a gentle kindness that belies his stature.

Through the years, if Mom and Dad and Tracy have noticed the pointing and the laughter and the snickers, you would never know it. No knee-jerk reactions. No angry retorts. Just quiet nobility. They have always responded in good nature to offense, extending grace to the ignorant, showing dignity in the face of cruelty, and meeting heartache with humor. Their spirit and intelligence and tenderness and humor have risen above the limits of their physical bodies. They have laughed and loved and given and sacrificed. My family is what beauty looks like.

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

It thrills me to imagine what God thinks when He looks upon the hearts of my family. I can just hear Him exclaim: "You are so beautiful to Me!"

*The criterion of true beauty is that it increases on examination;
if false, that it lessens.—Lord Grenville*



REFLECTIONS OF HIS LOVE

I just read these words by C. S. Lewis...and I never want to forget them!

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities...with awe and circumspection...that we should conduct all our dealings with one another... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.³

O Lord,

thank You that You do not judge as we judge.

You do not judge us by mere appearances.

Keep me from judging that way too, Lord.

Even when I know You, when I know the truth,

I often don't see things right.

Forgive me, Father. Give me Your eyes to see as You see.

Open the eyes of my understanding;

increase my discernment.

Show me the true beauty of those around me

when I am apt to miss it.

Let who I am on the inside always be more important to me

than how I look on the outside.

May my appearance never deceive.

Keep my heart pure before You.

When You look upon me, may my heart be pleasing to You.

Amen

