

Once, while in high school, I was wearing a white shirt and I spilled mustard down the front. This is a fairly common occurrence in a person's life, but for this particular teenage girl, it was an "I need to go home and change" moment. Not only did I feel like my mustard stain was shouting at everyone I passed, drawing attention to itself and worse, me, but my chubby self was thinking, "Great, here's proof on my shirt that all I do is eat! And I'm messy like a pig!" Do your voices ever talk to you like that?

My voices have talked to me that way for far too long, and I'm tired of it. I'm ready to fight back. I believe we women especially, have been body shaming ourselves since the first person saw their first reflection. When you look at renaissance paintings, all the women appeared to be chubby, and were considered beautiful. While I was growing up, and really for the last century, a thinner woman is considered more attractive. My question is, who gets to make these decisions?

I'm tired of feeling substandard because I don't fit the mold that 'society' says is the best way to be. How many times have I dodged behind others when in a group photo, so my body would be hidden? Why can't I focus on the moment and the reason for which the photo is being taken instead? It's just a photograph for Pete's sake. It's not who I am.

The photos of myself as a young girl that I used to despise, have become dear to me. Now, when I look at her face, knowing how desperately sad she was, I can finally tell her how beautiful she really was. I can see her as she was, and not who she thought herself to be. It is my hope to see myself through God's eyes always, even in photographs, for I know I am 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

How many times did we not jump in the water with our friends during a hot summer day, either because we were self-conscious in front of the cute boy we liked, or because once we were wet, others could see every pudgy roll on our body? I say, ditch the boy and get wet and cool off! Why didn't we go to the homecoming dance, just because we weren't asked? Why didn't we make a night of it and go with other friends who were dateless? Spend a day shopping and buy matching gowns, then have a photo taken together to mark that special moment!

If you get down to it, it all comes from our worrying about what other people think, doesn't it? At fifty-nine years old, I'm finally getting it. Who cares about what others think? It doesn't matter. The only opinion I care about is that of my heavenly Father. He has a personal stake in what I do, because he is my creator. His opinion of me is the only one that does matter.

People will come and go all throughout your life, but most of them will forget about you in a heartbeat. Those kids that teased you in school? They moved on a long time ago, yet even at my age, I remember every name of those bullies that scarred me so deeply. How I wish I knew how insignificant their words really were at the time. I know, 'sticks and stones' was a lie. Words definitely do hurt. But maybe not quite as much if we realized how small and petty-minded were those who spoke them. But guess what? Jesus died for them, too. More than likely their meanness came from a place of pain as well, so we need to rise above it. Love our enemies, yes?

My dear friend, do not compare yourself to one more person. Like the prints on your fingers, you are the one and only, original, uniquely designed, 'You'. Do not let one more person steal your joy or make you feel badly about yourself because you don't fit their mold. You weren't meant to fit their mold. How boring and dull this world would be without the varieties of colors, animals, sea life, hills and mountains, oceans, flowers and trees. You get the idea. You're the only one who can be the 'you' God created you to be.