



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Beauty's in the mind, not the mirror

There's a difference between looking pretty and being pretty. I learned this the year I started college at a major university.

From day one on campus, I was blown away by all the beautiful girls. Everywhere I looked there were knockouts, girls to suit any taste or preference: tall, short, curvy, lean, blonde, brunette, glamorous, natural...the list goes on.

It was an intimidating situation, especially when I considered that the ratio of boys to girls on campus was 1-to-4. As I thought about the dates I hoped to have and how the odds were against me, I couldn't help but wonder how I was supposed to compete.

Over the next four years, I learned lessons in beauty that changed my outlook. Above all, I learned that while a girl's appearance can attract attention, it can't sustain it because beauty without virtue is a wash. I saw girls fall from a 10 to a 6 on the beauty scale by being mean, vindictive or vain. Likewise, I saw girls shoot up in rank because of character and inner light. Eventually, I realized that pretty girls are a dime a dozen, easy to replace. Unless a girl has something besides looks going for her, she won't be able to compete because there's nothing unique to set her apart.

There are two kinds of beauty in this world: beauty in the eye and beauty in the mind. While the eye's opinion matters upfront, when the first impression is made, it's the mind's opinion that stands the test of time. In the mind is where true beauty registers, for it takes into account factors like behavior, attitude, heart and soul.

Pretty is as pretty does, after all.

For someone young, this may be hard to understand, but as we age, we get it. We realize that the better we know someone, the less their appearance matters. We stop noticing even their most arresting features. Inner beauty brings a person alive, illuminating them like lights on a Christmas tree. Where inner beauty doesn't exist, there are no lights, just a tree with ornaments.

We waste a lot of time in this world being insecure over appearance. I'm as guilty as anyone, and I admit that when I approve of my reflection in the mirror, I want to take the world by the horns. I want to live big. But the danger

of chasing the eye's approval is it holds no long-term value. It's superficial and shallow, and when it becomes our singular focus, we become superficial and shallow, too. There's no way around this because what consumes us is who we are.

If we really want to be beautiful – to ourselves and others – we should evaluate ourselves as a package. We should see beauty as a running tally, a tally that may gain or lose points with each choice we make. Above all, we should consider how people feel after being in our presence. Do they feel uplifted? Inspired? Warm and refreshed? Or do they feel indifferent? Down? Inadequate and ashamed because they don't fit our mold?

To me, the epitome of a beautiful person is someone whose company I crave because she touches my soul. It's someone who is high in authenticity, but not high on herself. A beautiful person represents the truth, and as I see it in her, I search for it in my life.

As a man named Frédéric Fekkai says, "Beauty's in the mind, not the mirror." Let's take care of ourselves and make the most of what we have but keep the pursuit in moderation. Looking good can be a full-time job, but even if we achieve perfection, we'd still be lacking because this outer obsession would dim our inner light. Inner light can't be bought in a bottle or created in surgery. Inner light comes from the joy we add to the world. It radiates from within.

Pretty is as pretty does. Appearance is a starting point, an invitation to look closer. Pretty girls are a dime a dozen, but true beauty is priceless. May women of all ages remember this and embrace the freedom that comes when we realize that beauty is not about conforming to a mold but rather breaking it.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four with a background in PR, writing and photography. For more inspiration, join her Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer" or find her on Twitter. Visit her website at karikampakis.com, or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.