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### Seeing Myself Clearly: Growing up with Glasses

When I began wearing glasses, I not only got better vision, but I got a target for bullying on my face. I first started elementary school already wearing glasses. I wore them every day because without them I couldn't read a word two feet away. There were a lot of kids in my class who enjoyed making little jokes or comments about my glasses. I often heard 'four eyes,' while just sitting doing my schoolwork. Most of the time it was just annoying kids in my class who thought they were funny, but occasionally my friends would join in. They would always say it like a joke and then just tell me they were kidding. However, after multiple occasions, these comments started to affect how I felt about myself. It wasn't my choice to get glasses. I know no different kind of life. I've had glasses ever since I failed the eye test in preschool. I need them to see. Every morning when I wake up it is instinct to reach over and grab them off my nightstand. It's common to find cloths spread around my room because I'm always cleaning my glasses in a different place. When showering, I can't read the labels on my shampoo or conditioner because I don't have my glasses on. If I don't have my glasses on for a long period I begin to get a headache, so ibuprofen was a common occurrence. These things have become natural to me, and I no longer second-guess them when it happens. Living with glasses for so long has made me become used to what others might find uncomfortable or strange. It's not something I can change, so why did it take me so long to accept that? The truth is my opinion of myself was completely influenced by those around me. Singling someone out because of a physical quality is

bullying and can be extremely harmful. Having glasses makes someone stand out, no doubt, but that should not mean they stand out in a negative or 'weird' way. Glasses don't make us any different.

No one in my immediate family had glasses, so I wasn't super excited to get them. My mom would make jokes about how I was the 'odd one out,' but she was always there to try and help when I was struggling with them. I was told I had to wear them all the time, and as a kid running around and getting into trouble, it was hard to not be annoyed by them. I was a very active kid; I participated in a variety of sports. In a sport like softball, it is extremely challenging to participate with glasses on. The ball hitting my face and breaking my glasses, tripping and falling while running and landing on my glasses, or even the dust getting kicked up and fogging my vision. Unlike all the other kids I was playing with, I had to take off my glasses while playing. When they would see me coming or leaving practice my teammates would all make comments like 'you look so different,' or 'I didn't know you had those things,' because they would only really see me without glasses. Although they meant no harm by these comments, hearing something so often about my appearance frequently caused me to think about it. It's similar to someone mentioning your hair, for instance, if you wear it a different way than usual, they aren't necessarily insulting it, but they aren't complimenting it either. It makes you question what's so weird or different about the way you're doing your hair, but most of all it makes you want to stop doing it.

In the coming-of-age movies it was always the stereotypical 'ugly girl' that would have glasses in the beginning, but by the end of the movie they would take their glasses off and were suddenly considered 'pretty.' One of the biggest things I noticed from these movies, was how it was strictly girls. The boys never received comments like the girls did; they were never considered 'ugly' or in need of a makeover. Throughout elementary school, I began to start

dressing more like a boy. I cut my hair super short; I wore longer shorts in the summer and always had the neon Nike shirts on. One of my biggest fears was falling into the ‘nerdy,’ ‘ugly,’ or ‘outcast’ crowd. I used to be embarrassed to wear my glasses. In other shows like Scooby-Doo, Velma would become basically blind when she didn’t have her glasses on. However, that’s a little unrealistic. Peers would ask me all the time ‘can you see without your glasses?’ Yes, I can. Although my prescription is strong, my eyes still work. Yes, faces can be blurry from a far, but that doesn’t mean I don’t know an object is there. When boys have glasses the stereotype is that they are a nerd, but with me lots of people were almost treating me like I didn’t even understand myself. Although I never realized it at the time, these comments began to get to me. In second grade, I had to wear an eye patch to make my left eye stronger. However, I would never wear it in fear that I looked even more stupid than people already thought. It made me look like a pirate, it made me uncomfortable, and it made me so completely different than all my peers. My mom would have to force it on my face and bribe me with TV for me to wear it. Having glasses was one thing, but I had never seen anyone wear an eye patch before. The thought of having to wear it in front of people scared me because I didn’t want everyone to look and make fun of me for it.

When I started doing sports more consistently, where I couldn’t wear glasses while participating, my mom bought me contacts. I wanted to wear them desperately, so I didn’t have to worry about being the odd one out anymore. I wanted to be like all the other kids, but the contacts would irritate my eyes. I would never be able to wear them for more than an hour, much less long enough to last the school day. Every time I would have to take out my contacts early, I would get upset and down on myself. I finally had this opportunity to look like my peers, but my eyes just couldn’t handle it, and it was hard for me to accept. Not only did I not want to wear my glasses, but when I would do an activity with them off, I would struggle so much because my

vision would be blurry. It was a lose-lose no matter the situation. At school, I always heard kids in my classes tell me how they had glasses they were supposed to wear, but they never did. It made me so envious that they got the option when I didn't. They would tell me that I would 'grow out of it' or that 'everyone has a glasses phase,' trying to reassure me. However, I knew my glasses were not a phase. I will need them for the rest of my life, and without being able to keep contacts in I had no other option.

After multiple tries, I found the type of contacts that worked for me. I not only wore them for sports but began to wear them to school a lot more. I would find myself getting more compliments about my face, specifically my eyes. I often heard someone telling me, 'Your eyes look really pretty today.' Now, in school it's popular or 'hotter' to wear blue-light glasses. Wearing glasses has almost become more normalized, even though they have been around for ages. In school someone will bring a pair of glasses and only wear them in certain classes; I hear everyone compliment how they look as soon as they put them on. Now, as I randomly wear glasses to school my fellow students will talk about how much they like them, and how I should wear them more often. After wearing contacts more and my glasses less, the compliments for both variations of myself began to even out. I realized that I shouldn't be deciding how I look should be based on someone else's opinion. I began to find outfits wear I was more confident in my glasses, as well as outfits wear, I liked my contacts better. Although I began my acceptance of my appearance a couple years ago, the sudden switch up still affects me. I think people have slowly started to realize that needing glasses isn't something to be ashamed of. However, I still grew up in the toxic environment that surrounded how numerous people viewed glasses. The reality of it all just makes me wish I was able to accept myself a lot sooner.

I never found glasses to be embarrassing until people, or the movies told me it was embarrassing. A large majority of social opinions influence your own opinions. Now that the

world thinks of glasses as stylish, I don't feel ashamed to wear them. In recent years I've seen women like Oprah Winfrey and Meryl Streep embrace their glasses. They have a variety of different frames for all different outfits, and each one shows a different personality. Having women like this to look up to encourages me to embrace my glasses myself. I am who I am today because of all my journey's but looking back and seeing how embarrassed of my glasses I was makes me sad. They have become such a big part of who I am, and I cannot imagine a world where I grew up without them. The glasses I wear on my face are not to be made fun of. After years of having to decipher how to find my confidence within myself, I was finally able to do so. Rather than be ashamed, I wear my glasses with pride because they are part of me.