

The Real Me

Katherine Bowman - Springfield, Illinois
As heard on *This I Believe Podcast*, March 10, 2014



Katherine Bowman is one high school student with much more on her mind than impressing people with her well made-up face. She believes that hiding your true self can do more harm than good.

I don't choose to wear makeup. Some people may look at me with disdain, and others wonder why I opt out of such a common practice. I see girls around me with perfect faces, unable to tell that they are covered with the cloudy foundation, and with their eyes painted just right so that I find it easy to look and hard to look away. But I myself find no yearning to be "beautiful," or to look "flawless" simply so that others may be more visually attracted to me. I believe that nobody needs to hide his or her true colors from others, and I believe that hiding your true self can do more harm than good.

My mother lent me valuable advice many years ago that she still tells me even today. It was on a day just like any other, during the beginning stages of adolescence. Girls my age had begun to wear makeup. I didn't quite want the responsibility of painting my face but, like any other pre-teen, I wanted to hop onto the bandwagon: one that included popular girls, and even my closest friends.

I approached my mother that day, after noticing how the faces around me had suddenly become less cluttered and more perfect. "Mom, can I wear makeup?" were the first words out of my mouth.

My mother—not an avid wearer herself—frowned and looked over at my youthful complexion. Pimples had plagued my face, threatening to change its natural color to red. The only words with which she replied were: "Why? You don't need it."

At first I felt like she didn't understand. All the other girls were wearing makeup by now! I had to do it too if I wanted to fit in. But I soon came to realize that that wasn't true. There was nothing I was obligated to do if I wanted others to accept me. Makeup just wasn't me, and I didn't need it for the approval of others.

Hiding my true face just isn't me. I've always wanted to be included in the affairs of others and, when I was young, I thought that makeup would elevate me to that status. But throughout my short years, I've discovered that all it really does is waste my precious time. I've gotten used to the sight of people with heavily caked makeup to the point where if I see them without makeup, I easily mistake them for someone else: their true, exposed self.

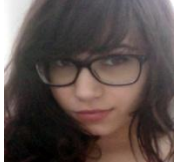
At the beginning of the day, I don't have to prepare myself to be someone I'm not; at the end of the day, I don't have to take off my mask. I want people to see the true me at every hour of the day, and to me, a bare face says all. This I Believe.

Katherine Bowman attends Springfield Southeast High School in Springfield, Illinois, and is active in school and community service through her school's chapter of National Honor Society. She is an American Red Cross volunteer, and in her spare time she enjoys drawing, reading, and playing the piano. She plans on attending college in the fall of 2014.

Independently produced by Dan Gediman for This I Believe, Inc.

The Essentials to Happiness

Alexxandra Shuman - South Burlington, Vermont
As heard on *The Bob Edwards Show*, August 16, 2013



When Alexxandra Shuman was in eighth grade, she was diagnosed with clinical depression. But it took more than medication for her to feel happy again. Ms. Shuman believes she has to look in the right places in order to find happiness.

As a child, I was generally happy, singing and dancing to my favorite songs, smiling and laughing with my friends and family. But as far back as second grade, I noticed a "darkness," about me. I didn't enjoy engaging in many things. I didn't relate to my peers in elementary school because they appeared so happy, and I didn't have that ability to achieve happiness so easily.

In middle school things in my life began to get even worse. I began withdrawing from everything I once enjoyed—swimming, tennis, family. I hated going to sleep knowing I had to wake up to another day. I was always tired. Everything was horrible. Finally, midway through eighth grade, I was told I had a chemical imbalance, diagnosed with clinical depression, and put on medication. It took months for me to feel the effects of the medication.

When I began to feel happy again is when I realized that I had to take the responsibility for getting better myself, rather than relying on medication and therapy alone. Aristotle said, "To live happily is an inward power of the soul," and I believe that this quote describes what I had to do to achieve happiness. Happiness is a journey. Everyone seems to need different things to be happy. But I believe people are blinded from what truly makes one happy.

Growing up, we're encouraged to be successful in life, but how is success defined? Success and happiness are imagined now as having a lot of money. It is so untrue. Recently I went to Costa Rica and visited the small town of El Roble. I spent the day with a nine-year-old girl named Marilyn. She took me to her house to meet her parents. It was obvious that they were not rich, living in a small house with seven children. The house was cluttered but full of life. Those who have decided that success and happiness comes from having money and a big house would be appalled at how utterly happy this family from El Roble is. People say that seeing things like that makes you appreciate what you have, but for me, it made me envy them for being so happy without all the things I have.

"The essentials to happiness are something to love, something to do, and something to hope for," a quote from William Blake sums up what I believe people need to realize to be truly happy in life. People need love; I feel they need their family and their friends more than anything in the world. People need work to do, something to make them feel they are making a difference in the world. People need to know that more good is to come in the future, so they continue to live for "now" instead of constantly worrying about the bad that could come. And most importantly, people need to know that happiness is not something that happens overnight. Love and hope are happiness.

Alexxandra Shuman wrote this piece when she was 16. She is now a 24-year-old graduate of Smith College with a degree in Art History. After studying at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris, she discovered her passion and is now completing her second year at the New England Culinary Institute. She has curated exhibits at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art and recently completed an internship at the renowned WildFlour Pastry in Charleston, South Carolina. She is very happy.

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I Am Still The Greatest

Muhammad Ali - Louisville, Kentucky

As heard on NPR's *All Things Considered*, April 6, 2009. Essay read by Lonnie Ali.



To be "The Greatest of All Time," boxing legend Muhammad Ali says you have to believe in yourself. It's something Ali's parents taught him as a child, and it's helped him through the biggest challenge of his life: fighting Parkinson's disease.

I have always believed in myself, even as a young child growing up in Louisville, Kentucky. My parents instilled a sense of pride and confidence in me, and taught me and my brother that we could be the best at anything. I must have believed them because I remember being the neighborhood marble champion and challenging my neighborhood buddies to see who could jump the tallest hedges or run a foot race the length of the block. Of course I knew when I made the challenge that I would win. I never even thought of losing.

In high school I boasted weekly—if not daily—that one day I was going to be the heavyweight champion of the world. As part of my boxing training, I would run down Fourth Street in downtown Louisville, darting in and out of local shops, taking just enough time to tell them I was training for the Olympics and I was going to win a gold medal. And when I came back home I was going to turn pro and become the world heavyweight champion in boxing. I never thought of the possibility of failing—only of the fame and glory I was going to get when I won. I could see it. I could almost feel it. When I proclaimed that I was the "Greatest of All Time," I believed in myself. And still do.

Throughout my entire boxing career, my belief in my abilities triumphed over the skill of an opponent. My will was stronger than their skills. What I didn't know was that my will would be tested even more when I retired.

In 1984, I was conclusively diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Since that diagnosis, my symptoms have increased and my ability to speak in audible tones has diminished. If there was anything that would strike at the core of my confidence in myself, it would be this insidious disease. But my confidence and will to continue to live life as I choose won't be compromised.

Early in 1996, I was asked to light the cauldron at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. Of course my immediate answer was yes. I never even thought of having Parkinson's or what physical challenges that would present for me.

When the moment came for me to walk out on the 140-foot high scaffolding and take the torch from Janet Evans, I realized I had the eyes of the world on me. I also realized that as I held the Olympic torch high above my head, my tremors had taken over. Just at that moment, I heard a rumble in the stadium that became a pounding roar and then turned into a deafening applause. I was reminded of my 1960 Olympic experience in Rome, when I won the gold medal. Those 36 years between Rome and Atlanta flashed before me and I realized that I had come full circle.

Nothing in life has defeated me. I am still "The Greatest." This I believe.

Muhammad Ali won the world heavyweight boxing championship three times. He retired in 1981 and became active in humanitarian causes, including goodwill missions to Afghanistan, North Korea, and Cuba. Ali married childhood friend Lonnie Williams in 1986.

Independently produced for NPR by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman with John Gregory and Viki Merrick.

Ali photo by John Lair. Photo of Muhammad and Lonnie Ali courtesy [Celebrity Fight Night](#). Special thanks to the [Muhammad Ali Center](#), an international education center and cultural attraction in Louisville, Ky., that preserves and promotes Ali's Legacy.

Unleashing the Power of Creativity and Intelligence

Bill Gates - Redmond, Washington



Bill Gates founded Microsoft on the dream of putting a computer in every home and office. He says he built his company on the belief that technology, creativity and intelligence can change the world.

I've always been an optimist and I suppose that is rooted in my belief that the power of creativity and intelligence can make the world a better place.

For as long as I can remember, I've loved learning new things and solving problems. So when I sat down at a computer for the first time in seventh grade, I was hooked. It was a clunky old Teletype machine and it could barely do anything compared to the computers we have today. But it changed my life.

When my friend Paul Allen and I started Microsoft 30 years ago, we had a vision of "a computer on every desk and in every home," which probably sounded a little too optimistic at a time when most computers were the size of refrigerators. But we believed that personal computers would change the world. And they have. And after 30 years, I'm still as inspired by computers as I was back in seventh grade.

I believe that computers are the most incredible tool we can use to feed our curiosity and inventiveness — to help us solve problems that even the smartest people couldn't solve on their own.

Computers have transformed how we learn, giving kids everywhere a window into all of the world's knowledge. They're helping us build communities around the things we care about and to stay close to the people who are important to us, no matter where they are.

Like my friend Warren Buffett, I feel particularly lucky to do something every day that I love to do. He calls it "tap-dancing to work." My job at Microsoft is as challenging as ever, but what makes me "tap-dance to work" is when we show people something new, like a computer that can recognize your handwriting or your speech, or one that can store a lifetime's worth of photos, and they say, "I didn't know you could do that with a PC!"

But for all the cool things that a person can do with a PC, there are lots of other ways we can put our creativity and intelligence to work to improve our world. There are still far too many people in the world whose most basic needs go unmet. Every year, for example, millions of people die from diseases that are easy to prevent or treat in the developed world.

I believe that my own good fortune brings with it a responsibility to give back to the world. My wife, Melinda, and I have committed to improving health and education in a way that can help as many people as possible. As a father, I believe that the death of a child in Africa is no less poignant or tragic than the death of a child anywhere else. And that it doesn't take much to make an immense difference in these children's lives.

I'm still very much an optimist, and I believe that progress on even the world's toughest problems is possible — and it's happening every day. We're seeing new drugs for deadly diseases, new diagnostic tools, and new attention paid to the health problems in the developing world.

I'm excited by the possibilities I see for medicine, for education and, of course, for technology. And I believe that through our natural inventiveness, creativity and willingness to solve tough problems, we're going to make some amazing achievements in all these areas in my lifetime.

Bill Gates is chairman and chief software architect of Microsoft. Under Gates' leadership, Microsoft's mission has been to improve software and to make it easier for people to use computers. He and his wife founded The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which funds global health, education and public library projects.

The Necessity of Compassion

Kevin Myers - Portland, Oregon

As heard on *The Bob Edwards Show*, July 19, 2013



As a young boy, Kevin Myers felt outraged at being treated unfairly because of his life circumstances. However, his mother taught him an important lesson in forgiving others that he still carries with him today.

I believe in the power of determination and the necessity of compassion. My parents were good Irish Catholics from the north of Boston. They believed in boiling their food flavorless, and that the only joy in God is when he gets to smite someone. They divorced when I was six. We were the first family in our congregation to choose eternal damnation over an insufferable marriage, which caused considerable social discomfort to my family and particularly to my mother.

Being a coach of both Little League baseball and church league basketball, a member of the Knights of Columbus, a local business owner, and a drinking buddy of our priest, my father weathered the brimstone and hellfire storm better than the rest of us. In fact, he seemed to revel in his role as victim of my mother's sinful plot to raise fatherless children and defy Papal Doctrine.

Nobody seemed to notice that we children were far less clumsy after our father left: we stopped falling down stairs, we stopped bumping our heads on doors, and we could sit without wincing. Nobody questioned why we went without food, why I had to wear my sister's old winter clothes, or why we lacked fuel to heat our house. Nobody noticed, nobody asked, and nobody told, even when we were reproached on the steps of our church. We just turned the other cheek and let the rest of our bodies follow, never to return.

My mother couldn't find work and we went on assistance, as she called it. One day she and I stood on the sidewalk waiting for the welfare office to open; two men drove by in a work truck and yelled, "Get a job!" I was maybe seven years old, but I was so filled with rage that I knew I could have killed those men with my bare hands. I started after them, and my mother jerked me back. She knelt down and looked into my eyes. I'm sure she felt my rage, which reached far past two strangers in a beat-up old truck. She told me that I should have compassion for those men because they didn't understand the pain they caused a small boy. She told me that if I couldn't forgive them that I risked becoming like them.

It was a long time before I understood her advice.

When I look back at that time, I marvel at how my mother got us through an energy crisis, a recession, and resisted the pressure to stay in a harmful marriage. Her determination was manifest in her working long hours, weekends, and holidays, but the benefit of her compassion is far more subtle. Her determination gave us a better quality of life, but learning compassion raised her spirit above the cruelty and pettiness of those who made her life so much harder than it needed to be.

And oh, to the men in the truck: I forgive you.

Kevin Myers lives in Portland, Oregon, with his wife and two wonderful children. He is the director of communications for Reed College. Mr. Myers wrote and directed the feature film Emerson Park, and his agent and he are currently seeking a publisher for his first novel, Ambition.edu.