



PERSONAL GROWTH

“Beauty”

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PEOPLE SAY THAT INNER BEAUTY MATTERS more than outer beauty. But when I looked into the mirror and saw my face covered with unsightly blemishes, it was hard to tell myself that and believe it. By the time I entered high school, my acne had gotten worse, and my self-esteem was at an all-time low. So in the summer of ninth grade, I embarked on an unexpectedly difficult and emotionally trying quest for clear skin, an experience that culminated in one of my proudest achievements.

My typical daily diet consisted of sugary cereal for breakfast; salty turkey sandwiches, soda, and chips for lunch; a candy bar for snack; and rice and fried noodles for dinner. I never thought that my diet would be a cause of my acne, but the possibility first came to me when I was reading a skincare article. Desperate for a cure, I searched “clear skin diet” on the Internet. The websites that turned up all echoed the same message: a balanced and healthy diet is crucial for beautiful skin. The recommended foods listed included large portions of fruits, veg-



etables, grains, nuts, and fish; 8 glasses of water daily and only small amounts of high-sodium, high-fat, and high-sugar foods. I researched further and found out that the expensive chemical cleansers that I had been using were not the answer—gentle face washes and a coat of sunblock were inexpensive products that could reduce breakouts. I knew that changing my entire diet and skincare routine would require a tremendous amount of commitment and willpower. But determined to improve my skin and my self-confidence, I began to transform my lifestyle. I started by incorporating fruits and vegetables into my meals and replacing sugary cereal with whole grains, chips with carrots, and fried noodles with salmon. For a long, painful week, I stuck to this diet and restrained myself from any junk food. My skin condition changed gradually but substantially. By the end of the week, my skin was noticeably smoother, clearer, and brighter. Yet I found myself relapsing, unable to continue for long without indulging myself, unable to swallow the horribly plain salads and chewy carrots. Every time I stopped, the acne came back. It came to the point where I despised the acne and coveted the clear skin enough to force myself back on track. It became an excruciating pattern of cravings and self-restraint. I struggled with these two impulses until I became used to healthy eating, even enjoying it. Now, two years later, my skin is better than ever and I have never gone back to eating the way I had before.

I have no awards or medals to show for my particular achievement. But no academic distinction in the world can match what I gained from my experience with changing my diet: healthier skin, self-confidence, and newfound mental strength. Above all, I realized that by improving my outer appearance, I had enriched my inner appearance.

ANALYSIS

“Beauty” provides an intimate portrayal of the author’s struggle against acne. Most admissions essays tend to focus on resume-worthy activities. As the author admits, “I have no awards or medals to show for my particular achievement.” But this essay shows that accomplishments in one’s personal life can also be just as successful as essays focused on more prominent or recognizable activities. Other essays in this book also use personal topics not obviously related to academics or typical extracurriculars to give us a stronger sense of the author’s personality, such as Alex’s “Box of Chocolates” (Chapter 9).