

The Woman in the Mirror.....

By Cheryl Veenstra

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I saw an unfamiliar face in the mirror today. She caught my eye as I rushed to start the day. I hardly recognized this woman. What had changed in her eyes? She was no longer young, naive and viewing the world through rose-tinted glasses. What had caused the worry lines and thoughtful brow? How could she look so fragile and weary, yet also determined and strong? Around some corner on the road of life.....she had been shaken to the core of her very being.

There was a time when only tears and fears were reflected in those eyes. A doctor's unexpected words, the future suddenly uncertain.....gray, shadowy images of the vague and scary concept of her child coming into the world as "disabled". An incredible journey began that caught her by surprise and would take her places she never thought she would go. The journey had been long at times and she had shed tears of pain and tears of joy. She'd had hopes and dreams dashed in the blink of an eye. She'd asked the question WHY? She'd had friends fail her and not know what to say or how to help. She'd seen her child suffer. She'd cried silent tears into her pillow at night. Tears of exhaustion and fear. Tears of helplessness and longing. Tears of thankfulness and relief. Tears that are choked back during the day, but are unleashed like floodwaters in the safety of the night to wash away any walls being built up to protect her heart. Nights of worry blurring into days of endless responsibility. But then slowly, but surely, her broken heart begins to heal and mend.

The same pity she had once felt as she watched a mother hold her 'special child' close was now looking back at her in the eyes of strangers. But a smile tugs at her lips as she suddenly realizes that now she knew the secret! The hard-fought, carefully guarded secret that was slowly revealed in the depths of her heart.....but only after the tears and anguish of the first days and weeks of this new life. The illusive truth that mothers of special children discover as they take their first faltering steps down this new path.....It was okay. She and her child could survive, even thrive! It was not as grueling and unforgiving a road as she had imagined. The fog, confusion, despair and fear were being slowly replaced by peace, acceptance, contentment, joy and gratitude. A mother's unique, unconditional love changes the equation that may look hopeless and tough from those outside, looking in. She will fight for, live for and die for her child. These special children transform those around them into different people. Stronger people. Dare I say it.....deeper people. Long gone are the days when all they had to worry about was where to vacation or what color mini-van to buy. They now struggle with life and death medical issues. They must answer their child's questions about life's unfairness and pain. What remaining strength and energy they have is spent trying to make their 'family life' as normal and happy as possible.

A twinkle returns to the eyes of the woman in the mirror as she takes a deep breath and remembers what she's been fighting for. How very worthwhile this journey has been! This child is an incredible gift and it is a privilege to be given the task of raising her. Her child is beautiful

and perfect in her eyes. She longs for her child to be seen by the world through this filter of love, acceptance and potential. Could others take the time to see past this little girl's slower steps to see the life and love reflected in her eyes? Would her child be able to see herself through the filter of contentment that the woman has journeyed so long to discover?

Hope was rekindled as the woman's eyes grew brighter. The future remained uncertain, but the incredible, protective love she felt for her child threw a warm blanket over the cold, dark storm clouds that used to threaten her very soul. As she threw open the doors of her heart, she felt the warm sun on her face and she beheld a beautiful rainbow of intense beauty and unmistakable peace. Hope still comforts this woman who cries in the middle of the night. Love gets her through each day. Faith takes her hand and leads her around each corner and through each deep, dark valley. Peace soothes her heart as she relinquishes control of their destiny to One wiser and all knowing. Joy brings laughter and smiles to those tired eyes once again. Each day is recognized for the gift it is.

I gave that woman a smile as I left her at the mirror today. I'll see her again soon and I'm curious to see how she will continue to change and grow. She's not the same young, carefree woman she used to be, but that is okay. I like who she is becoming and I feel comfortable in her life. The sun is shining, the day is brand new, my child is humming and God is so good!

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