



S E L F - E S T E E M

T H E M O S T B E A U T I F U L G R E E N E Y E S

M I C H E L L E C O X

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.

—PROVERBS 25:11

Every time I looked into the mirror, the image that looked back at me was ugly. At my advanced age of eleven, I was convinced of that. I wasn't just unsightly on the outside, I saw myself as unattractive on the inside, too.

Numerous life events, including a dysfunctional home situation, had contributed to my low self-esteem. Well, maybe not *low* self-esteem. *Nonexistent* would be a more apt description.

My home life fell apart when my parents divorced soon after my sister's death. Overwhelming grief flavored their days, and laughter and fun disappeared from our home. Friction and angry scream fests ensued.

Several months later, all our belongings were packed and my

dad moved to one city, and my mother and I moved to another city far away.

My mom developed severe emotional problems, and I spent many nights cowering in fear as she lashed out at me and broke things while screaming, “You’re worthless. You’ll never amount to anything.” And in my childish heart, I believed the hurtful things she said. Words that smashed my self-esteem.

That’s why I looked in the mirror and saw only shame and ugliness—repulsive on the outside, and worthless on the inside, too.

Then something happened that changed my outlook on life forever.

Our teacher had scheduled a field trip for the class. The sun shone bright on that perfect spring day. Several moms had agreed to drive, and I was part of the group assigned to Mrs. Fincannon’s car. I ended up sitting in the middle of the front seat next to her.

Getting everyone settled in the car took a few minutes. While we waited for the others to take their places, Mrs. Fincannon looked at me and smiled. Then she said, “You have the most beautiful green eyes I’ve ever seen.”

I’m sure the moment was just another trivial instant long forgotten by Mrs. Fincannon, but those ten simple little words she said to me that day changed my life. I’m sure she never realized her words would have that kind of impact, but I was a child who needed to hear those words, and almost forty years

later, they are still as clear in my heart and my memory as if they were spoken yesterday.

You see, for the first time, this child whose heart had been battered and bruised, saw something of beauty in herself. Maybe—just maybe—I wasn't so ugly after all. Maybe I wasn't worthless.

That was a turning point in my life. Mrs. Fincannon's words left such an impression that I've spent the last thirty years working with young people, bolstering hearts that have been battered and bruised by life and home situations.

I always make it a point to say something positive to them, to give them a sincere compliment. I've had the pleasure of watching them blossom as many of them—for the first time—see something of beauty in themselves.

I always smile as I remember the lesson learned from Mrs. Fincannon so many years ago—that our simple little words can touch hearts and change lives.



Words—so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them.

—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE



Dear Lord,

Please help me never to speak words that will wound the lives of others. Help me to be an encouragement to those I encounter, a shining reflection of your love and mercy. Remind me that my words can make a difference in the lives of those I meet along life's way.

Amen.