

Reach for the Skai

How to Inspire, Empower, and Clapback

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Crown Books for Young Readers

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Being True to Me

The one thing bullying has taught me is to be comfortable with my true self.

First, I've had to be honest with myself about my height. I hated being short for the longest time. I didn't like being teased. It's a pain in the butt when my clothes have to be altered because I'm so small. I also look young, so it's like . . . UGH! It's especially hard during this time in my life when I want to look more mature. But then I see taller girls who wish they were smaller and skinny girls who wish they were curvier. So it seems like people always want what they don't have. It's taken me a while, but now I like my height.

Then there's my looks. There have been points in my life when I've felt like I'm ugly, even though at times people would tell me, "You're so pretty." Some days I think, "I wish I looked like her" or "My nose is too big and I need to wear makeup to cover it." There are times when I've wished I had this or that hair or skin color or body part.

Even when I haven't felt like I'm ugly, a lot of internet trolls thought I was. They cyberbully me about my every feature and flaw, which can make me feel insecure. There are times when I go through that every day, and honestly, it is really hard.

I also know teenagers go through phases where they don't always feel great about themselves, and they don't love their looks. Plus, working in an industry that is so focused on appearances makes it more difficult—especially when beauty standards don't include brown-skinned girls. Maybe this should count as a type of bullying too.

Even when people think I'm pretty, at moments I wonder why they do. What's so special about me that some people want to look like me, yet when I look at myself I'm not satisfied? I realize that I'm in denial about my looks.

There are also those who think that I have this perfect life and who wish they could be

me. Sometimes people think that because I'm on television, I don't have the same insecurities as any sixteen-year-old girl. But I do. And when people bully me about them, it hurts. This industry tends to make you mature a lot faster than other kids do. So I am growing and learning how to be comfortable with myself. And I will get there when I get there. There's no rush.

I've spent a lot of time discussing these issues with my mom. She always reminds me to love how God made me. She also helps me understand that I'm only sixteen. My body's still developing, and my face is still developing. I am developing inside too, becoming a whole person. How I look now is not how I'm going to look in a year, five years, or ten years. And no matter how things turn out, I need to learn to love myself.

My mom has also helped me understand that lots of people are insecure, and everyone goes through difficult things in their lives. You never know what other people could be going through that may cause them to be mean or a bully.

These days I'm focusing on surrounding myself with high-quality people. I've changed some of my friends and have gained confidence from spending time with people who encourage me. I'm starting to feel like, finally, I've reached the point where I really don't care what anyone says about me. I know who I am, my mom knows who I am, my friends know who I am, my family knows who I am, and I've learned to let the negativity go over my head. That said, there are some days when I feel down, when I'm not happy with myself, and people just need to understand that. And sometimes negative comments do get to me. But it's important to remember that there are people who are going to support what I'm doing no matter what, and I have diehard fans, which I'm so thankful for.