

Seeing, Really Seeing

By, Marie P McDougal

Chicken Soup for the Kid's Soul

His nose was all smooshed looking, like maybe his mom had dropped him when he was a baby. His ears were two – maybe even two and a half – sizes too big for his head. And his eyes! His eyes bulged like they were ready to pop right out of their sockets. His clothes were nice, I had to admit. But he was still the ugliest kid I'd ever seen.

So why was the new kid leaning on Jennifer Lawrence's locker like they were best friends or something? She was a cheerleader and one of the coolest girls in school. And why was she smiling at him instead of twisting her nose all funny like she did when she looked at me? *Strange*, I thought. *Really strange*.

By lunchtime, I had forgotten about the new kid. I sat down at my usual table – in the corner, all alone. I was a loner. I wasn't as ugly as the new kid – just a little on the heavy side and kind of nerdy. Nobody talked to me much, but I was used to it. I had adjusted.

About halfway through my peanut butter and ketchup sandwich (I put ketchup on everything), I looked up and saw that kid again. He was holding his lunch tray and standing over Jennifer, grinning like he'd just aced a math test. And she was grinning, too. Then she moved over and made room on the bench next to her. *Strange. Really strange.*

But even stranger was what the new kid did. I would have plunked into that seat so fast, my lunch bag would have been left behind, just hanging in the air. But not this new kid. He shook his head, looked around and walked straight to my table. "Mind if I join you?" he asked.

Just like that. *Mind if I join you? Like the entire eighth grade was fighting to sit at my table or something*, I thought.

"Sure," I said. "I mean no. I don't mind."

So the kid sat down. And he came back, day after day, until we were friends. Real friends.

I had never had a real friend before, but Jeff – that was his name – invited me to his house, on trips with his family and even hiking. Right – me hiking!

Funny thing was...one day I realized I wasn't so heavy anymore. *All that hiking, I guess*, I thought. And kids were talking to me, nodding at me in the hallways, and even asking me about assignments and things. And I was talking back to them. I wasn't a loner anymore.

One day, when Jeff sat down at the table, I had to ask him. "Why did you sit with me that first day? Didn't Jen ask you to sit with her?"

"Sure, she asked. But she didn't need me."

"Need you?"

"You did."

"I did?"

I hoped nobody was listening. *This was a really dumb conversation*, I thought.

"You were sitting all alone," Jeff explained. "You looked lonely and scared."

"Scared?"

"Uh huh, scared. I knew that look. I used to have one just like it."

Tim couldn't believe it.

"Maybe you didn't notice, but I'm not exactly the best-looking guy in school," Jeff went on. "At my old school I sat alone. I was afraid to look up and see if anyone was laughing at me."

"You?" I knew I sounded stupid, but I couldn't picture Jeff by himself. He was so outgoing.

"Me. It took a friend to help me see that I wasn't alone because of my nose or my ears. I was alone because I never smiled or took an interest in other people. I was so concerned about myself that I never paid attention to anyone else. That's why I sat with you. To let you know someone cared. Jennifer already knew."

"Oh, she knows, all right," I said as I watched two guys fighting to sit near her. We both laughed.

Then I looked at Jeff. Really looked. That's when I realized that I was seeing Jeff for the first time. Months earlier all I had seen was a funny-looking nose and "Dumbo" ears. Now I was seeing Jeff, *really* seeing him.