

Beyond My Reflection

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Have you ever looked in the mirror and felt like a stranger was staring back at you? If so, you are not alone. For years, I defined myself by the roles I played—a daughter, a wife, a mother, a sister, etc. These titles shaped my life and became the foundation of my identity. My days were consumed by responsibilities, caring for others, and making sure everyone around me was happy. But somewhere along the way, I lost touch with myself.

One evening, something changed. The house was silent—no phone calls, no urgent tasks, just an overwhelming stillness. For the first time in a long while, I had nothing to do. As I stood before the mirror, I expected to see the same familiar face. But the reflection looking back at me was different. Her eyes, once filled with life, now carried sadness and loneliness. Her smile, once effortless, now felt like something she had learned to wear.

At that moment, I realized that I had been so focused on being everything to everyone else that I had forgotten who I was. I had poured so much of myself into others that I no longer knew what made me happy, what inspired me, or what dreams I once had. Maybe I was trying to please everyone so that they would love and accept me.

That night, I asked myself When was the last time I asked myself what I wanted? Not as a mother, not as a wife, not as someone's daughter—but as me? What did I love? What excited me? What dreams had I set aside?

I asked myself out loud: Who am I beyond the roles I play? And in that moment, I had no answer.

I had lost touch with who I truly was. And in that emptiness, I realized something deeply unsettling, I had forgotten to love myself.

That night, instead of judging or criticizing my reflection, I did something different. I looked deeper. Beyond the surface, beyond the image I presented to the world. I peeled back the layers of expectation, responsibility, and the image I had worked so hard to maintain. And for the first time in a long while, I truly saw myself.

What I discovered was both liberating and painful. There were parts of me I had buried for too long. Dreams I had

silenced, fears I had ignored, emotions I had pushed down. For years, I had measured my worth by how well I could care for others, how much I could give, how many expectations I could meet. But in doing so, I had slowly faded away. And with that fading came a loss of self-worth, because how could I value someone I no longer recognized?

Life, like a coin, has two sides, light and darkness, struggle and triumph. As I moved through the many roles I played, navigating the highs and lows, I emerged stronger. Just like a rough rock, weathered by waves and shaped by time, transforms into a smooth, shining pebble, I, too, have been refined by life's challenges. Every hardship, every moment of self-doubt, and every sacrifice molded me, not just into someone who endures, but into someone who stands with resilience and purpose.

And yet, despite this strength, there was still an emptiness inside me. I had been so focused on how the world saw me that I never stopped to ask, how do I see me? In that silence, I realized I had never done something just for myself.

We are not defined by what we do for others. Our true self isn't defined by the roles we play, the titles we hold, or how the world perceives us. It is shaped by our emotions, our thoughts, and values. Yet, so many of us measure our worth by external validation and I did for all these years. And when we base our self-worth on things outside of our control, we create a fragile foundation. One that crumbles with criticism, rejection, or change.

That night, for the first time, I whispered words I had been too afraid to say: I deserve to exist, too.

It didn't erase years of self-doubt. But it was a beginning. So, I made a promise to rediscover myself, to nurture my own happiness, to honor my own needs, embrace my passions, remember that self-care isn't selfish.

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True self-love come from within. It is the foundation of self-esteem, confidence, and inner peace. It is understanding that our value isn't defined by what we do for others but by who we are at our core.

Self-love is often misunderstood. Many associate it with selfishness, indulgence, or vanity. But in reality, self-love is about recognizing our worth, treating ourselves with kindness, and prioritizing our well-being. Without it, we risk losing ourselves in the expectations and demands of others.

I discovered I was doing the same, constantly seeking validation from my achievements, relationships, and how well I met others' expectations. I had unknowingly placed my worth in the hands of others, hoping that their approval would make me feel whole. But external validation is fleeting. When it disappears, it leaves behind emptiness and self-doubt.

I carried the weight of bottled-up emotions, unspoken words, unresolved feelings, and experiences that shaped me in ways I did not fully understand. But now, I embrace the process of releasing them. It was not easy, revisiting old wounds was uncomfortable, even painful. However, I had come to see those moments not as burdens but as opportunities for growth. I realized that each emotion, each experience, was just another brushstroke in the masterpiece of my life. Each emotion, no matter how intense, was a stepping stone toward inner peace and self-acceptance.

Self-love starts with acknowledging our emotions, embracing our strengths and imperfections, and reconnecting with the parts of ourselves we've neglected for far too long. The moment I recognized this, I began the journey of loving myself, not for what I could offer, but simply for being me.

Rebuilding self-love and self-esteem takes time, but it is a journey worth taking. These are the things that guided me in rediscovering myself and nurturing my self-worth.

1. **Journaling** - I started journaling my thoughts and emotions, writing down everything that came to mind. It helped me recognize patterns of self-neglect and allowed me to identify what I truly wanted in life.
2. **Practicing Self-Love** - For years, while I offered others compassion and understanding, I was my own harshest critic. I realized this needed to change. I started taking baby steps changing the way I spoke to myself. Instead of letting self-doubt take over, I replaced negative thoughts with self-affirmations. I looked in the mirror and reminded myself, "I love and accept myself deeply and completely." At first, it felt unfamiliar, even forced.

But with time, these words became a truth I could believe in.

3. **Each day, I reinforced a simple yet powerful reminder:** I am enough. The moment I adjusted my perspective and embraced self-acceptance, something incredible happened, self-criticism and doubt began to fade. By choosing to see myself through a lens of love rather than judgment, I finally gave myself the kindness I had always deserved.
4. **Prioritizing Self-Care** - I realized that self-care wasn't a luxury, it was a necessity. I started making time for things that brought me joy like reading, taking long walks and connecting with nature, enjoying a quiet cup of tea. These moments of self-care weren't just about relaxation, they were about rediscovering myself, reminding me that my happiness mattered, too.
5. **Setting Boundaries** - I've learnt to say no without feeling guilty. I used to be afraid of saying no, constantly doing things for others at the expense of my own mental and physical well-being. Eventually, I realized that taking care of myself didn't mean I cared any less about others—it meant I had more to offer when I was whole.
6. **Reconnecting with My Passions** - I rediscovered hobbies I had once loved but had set aside in the chaos of everyday life. I embraced new experiences and allowed myself to dream once more. One of the most empowering decisions I made was signing up for an art class. With every brushstroke, I felt a rush of creativity and joy that had been absent for so long.
7. **As I explore my newfound passion for music**, I find solace in every beat, every melody, and every lyric that resonates with my soul. Music has become more than just an art form, it is a therapy, a way to navigate through the layers of my emotions. Each note helps me confront what I once feared, allowing me to feel, process, and ultimately let go.
8. **Surrounding Myself with Positivity** - I started being more intentional about the people I let into my life. I made the choice to distance myself from negativity and focused on building relationships with those who uplifted and inspired me. It wasn't always easy, but it made such a difference in how I felt day-to-day.
9. **Finding Joy in Small Things** - Instead of waiting for big milestones to feel proud, I started embracing my progress in the present moment. Every piece of music I created, every sketch I made, and every meal I prepared became a source of fulfillment and added

a new layer to the beautiful masterpiece of my life. This shift in mindset allowed me to appreciate the journey itself, making each moment more meaningful.

My reflection in the mirror didn't change overnight, but the way I saw myself did. I was no longer just someone's daughter, mother, or wife, I was me. And for the first time in a long while, I realized that being me was enough. I didn't need to prove my worth by overstretching, over giving, or seeking approval.

As I stood before my reflection, I realized that my journey did not end with mere self-awareness; it extended beyond the surface, into the depths of my emotions and past experiences. Every emotion that surfaced, every trigger that stirred something within me, held a story, a memory waiting to be understood. Instead of suppressing or ignoring these emotions, I chose to acknowledge them,

to delve deeper into their roots, and to restructure those memories in a way that brought healing rather than pain.

Beyond my reflection, my journey continues.

So, I ask you now, when was the last time you truly saw yourself Not just a passing glance in the mirror, but really saw yourself, the person beyond the responsibilities, beyond the expectations, beyond the roles you play?

I invite you to take out your phone, turn on selfie mode, and look at your reflection. Not with criticism, not with judgment, but with curiosity and compassion. Ask yourself: Who am I, beyond what the world expects of me?

Because true self-discovery begins the moment you dare to see yourself beyond the reflection. And when you do, you might just find someone incredible waiting to be seen.

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