

Scars (by Christy Jones, June 2016)

For my Children,

The other day after I got out of the shower, I took a good long look at myself. (Whatever, kids. Even Moms are naked underneath their clothes.) I know, you are groaning right now, probably saying, "Gross Mom!" And that isn't too far off from my own sentiments at that moment. I mean, after doing a cursory assessment, even I could see that I was a hot mess. From my thin, scraggly hair and loose wrinkly skin to my missing nipples and disproportionate body...let's just say that things were not as they once were.

But most of all, I noticed the scars. I now have scars literally crisscrossing some parts of my body. While some have mostly faded enough to blend into my stretch-marks others are still thick and strong. I still have my expanders in my body, so instead of smooth fake boobs, I have rock-hard, lumpy, bumpy pancakes stuck to my chest. Like I said, the reflection in the mirror wasn't pretty.

However, as I stood there, feeling discouraged, I remembered a part of a talk from conference by President Uchtdorf. He recounted his experience as a child in Germany as bombs rained down over his town during the end of World War II. He told how not too far from him, in the city of Dresden, bombs also destroyed a Lutheran church. Apparently, when that church was rebuilt, the builders reused some of those black, scarred bricks that survived the bombings sporadically throughout the reconstruction. During his talk, Uchtdorf had displayed a recent photograph of that church. It was amazing looking at a picture of that beautiful church with its war-torn history proudly displayed throughout its facade. Uchtdorf was using this experience as a metaphor overcoming trials, but standing in front of my mirror, I took it literally.

Right then I chose to see my scars as proof of life instead of a shameful visual of being damaged or less than I once was. It was a very conscious, very personal paradigm shift. To set my decision in stone, I decided to deconstruct each of the scars that I saw in front of me. I began with my very first scar. One that nobody sees and most people never know is even there. However, it is one that, at times, I am hyper aware of. It's my cleft palate scar that I earned after two separate surgeries as a small child. That scar came along with about twelve years of speech therapy. These days, only children are uninhibited enough to ask why my voice is so different from others. Most people don't ever mention it and those who know me best accept my voice as part of me. Like my short stature or my big eyes, my voice just makes me who I am. For the most part, even I forget about it. Only when I've told people about my cleft palate, and I know they are listening more intently to my speech, does my anxiety kick in and my speech goes kuptz. At those moments, when the attention is focused on my speech, I can only think about everything that tiny scar represents to me. Years of frustration from not being understood. Anger at myself for not being able to communicate in the same fluid way that ideas and thoughts ran through my mind. That attention would often turn into anxiety that could freeze up my jaw and thicken my tongue so that anything I said after that would just be a garbled mess. But that isn't all that scar means to me. It also represents years of hard work and the

satisfaction of being able to clearly express myself in most situations. I've succeeded in enough public speaking, that the thought of talking in front of people hardly registers on my 'greatest fears' list. I am also rather proud that I was able to converse (no matter how poorly) in a second language. French, no less. I'll hold on to that scar, if you please.

My crisscrossing scars are all about my babies. Little scars in my belly button from surgeries clearing out polyps and endometriosis. Four separate belly scars stretching hip to hip. The first one was from my ectopic pregnancy that caused my fallopian tube to burst. That emergency surgery saved my life even if it brought the grief of losing two little embryos. Next came an emergency C-section that brought out my twins nearly 2 months early, saving their lives and sending them straight on to the NICU to be given the medical care they needed to survive and thrive. And then my two scheduled C-sections, introducing our lives to two very sweet, very active little boys. These scars are my children. All my children. Even though I didn't give birth to Ethan, if I didn't lose those first twins, I would never have gone on to adopt. So that first scar belongs to him. These scars along with the stretch-marks on my soft belly, thinning hair, smile wrinkles and the worry lines are my honor badges displaying the work and sacrifice I gave to bring those beautiful souls that I get to call my children, into our family. I deserve to wear the signs of all that work. I earned my scars and I'm not going to hide them because I am so proud of the children that changed my body and my life. Every "I love you" and sloppy kiss tips the scales back to my favor.

Now the two little inch long scars on my abdomen don't look like much, and I guess you could argue that my whole pancreatitis/cholecystitis debacle, where I ended up losing my gall bladder, wasn't worth gaining a scar over, but I disagree. Those two little scars represent the experience that led me to the most incompetent doctor who managed to do one thing very right. That doctor was the one who strongly advised me to get a mammogram. Me. A forty-one year old who has absolutely zero cancer in her family. A very busy mother of five who had about a million more important things to do than to get a unnecessary exam. It seemed like a silly thing to do at the time, and of course, looking back I will always be grateful for those two little scars. The cancer we found this year would have been a nightmare to fight a couple years down the road.

That leads me right to those angry, thick scars that deleted my nipples off my body. My giant hypophens. They come accessorized with two puncture hole scars on each side and one matching future scar on my back, to arrive in October. These very intrusive scars represent the advancement of technology and medicine that just gave me years of my life that might have been lost had I not gotten them. They gave me ball games and birthday parties. They gave me family trips and watching my little loves grow up and love and experience their own lives. No. I'm not trading in these specific scars either. They just might end up being my most treasured marks. My symbols of the future.

That leaves only one scar left. A long thin line down my shin. This one doesn't really represent anything. It's a scar left after slipping on a stone I was racing towards with my girlfriends in college. Seriously. Not everything has to mean something, you know. Sometimes we just do dumb things and pay the consequence for our actions. Geez. Ya'll are way too serious for your own good.

Now, I'm sure that I'm not done with this masterpiece I like to call my body. I'm going to keep changing it (or gravity will do that for me) and I'm sure I have more scars in my future. I mean, I hope I'm not done yet. I'm only at the halfway mark. I am just sorry that it took me forty years to understand what true beauty really is. It's not the make-up or trendy hairstyles. It's not in a sip from the fountain of youth or even in Photoshop (Really...isn't that the same thing?). It's in the scars.

So, my dears, I love you all so much. In the end, though, that won't be enough. The thing that will really bring you self-worth and happiness is if you love and accept yourselves. I hope, with all my heart, that you do and that it doesn't take you forty years to do it.

Love, Mama.



Alaina, Jason, Ethan, Christy, Rob, Emmett, Austin (November 2017)