

The following is an excerpt from:

**YOUR RIGHT
TO BE BEAUTIFUL:
The Miracle of Raw Foods**

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CHAPTER 1



I Will Be Beautiful, or I Will Be Dead

“Few women, I fear, have had such reason as I have to think the long sad years of youth were worth living for the sake of middle age.” — George Eliot (1819 – 1880), English novelist

Helena and I stood in front of a mirror in the junior high lavatory. Her eyes surveyed me briefly then began to flirt with her own reflection. With me as a foil in the background, she was even more beautiful. My friend Helena bore an amazing resemblance to Scarlett O’Hara both in her breathtaking beauty and her cold vanity. With obvious savor, she rated her physical assets against mine. Under her penetrating gaze, I saw my image reduced to a set of unsightly features. And, as if that weren’t enough to demean me, she said, “If I looked like you, I would not even want to live.”

How should I have responded to such a judgment? I felt like killing *her* instead. But no, we did not make the newspaper’s headlines. Beautiful and popular Helena was not found stabbed by her desperate and less fortunate schoolmate. Nor did I commit suicide. But I got the message: “To live I must be beautiful.” With conviction, as if the army of all the ugly ducklings in the world depended on me, I clenched my fists, and swore: “As God is my witness, I will be beautiful.”

I realized I was imitating a scene in my favorite movie only when Helena burst out laughing. “Don’t be ridiculous; just look at yourself.” The contrast in the mirror began to

hurt as if a million pieces of shattered glass were slicing through my skin. Awareness that I had been denied something essential for existence knifed through me. I had been robbed of the right to be beautiful.

Justice had to be served, and I meant every word I had said. I just didn't know how I was going to achieve it. The mirror sneered back at me. Helena had so much, and I had so little. But I didn't really want *her* beauty for myself, nor did I want Helena to lose her beauty in order to make us equal. I just wanted to become beautiful as only I could be. This realization made the undertaking seem more feasible.

It was my father who planted the idea in my head that nothing is really impossible if you put your mind to it. I remember when I was five, he gathered me into his strong arms and buried his bristled cheek in my hair. "Life is not fair," he said. "But you must be brave and fight for your fate. Just dare and life will be fair!" His voice was strong, but I could hear tears in his words.

I knew he was talking about my legs. I was born in the former Soviet Union, a healthy baby, but with one unfortunate flaw. Both hip joints were dislocated, a not-so-rare birth occurrence. Usually, such cases are diagnosed early and are easily corrected within a few months. But my condition went undetected for years and created serious damage to both hip joints. As a result of total joint deterioration, my right leg became much shorter. Surgeries consumed my childhood. I spent endless months in casts, but ultimately nothing could be done. Medical science in Russia was not advanced enough to help me. My parents were told I would never walk.

My father tried to instill in me the will to prove the doctors wrong. "You must be like a rubber ball," he said time and again. "The harder life hits you, the higher you must bounce." In Communist Russia, this message was the only gospel I knew.

In time, I did learn to walk without crutches, albeit with a limp. This was a big victory for me but no longer was it enough. Helena was right: crippled leg, shoulders stooped from using crutches, and a washed-out look from many surgeries made my image in the mirror a teenage girl's nightmare.

I craved physical wholeness. In my dreams, I gave myself attractiveness that would overrule my physical limitations. In real life, my disability often made me the target of cruel comments. I lived under a doubly plagued image: plain and crippled.

As a result, I redoubled my efforts to improve myself. I devoted my energy to looking better, dressing nicer, and trying harder. I practiced walking before a mirror so my limp would be less obvious. I wanted to wear short skirts and high heels like the other girls. Instead, I had to hide my leg under pants and long dresses.

I thought if I could only be beautiful people might overlook my infirmity. I studied beautiful people, hoping attractiveness could be learned. I read every biography of famous beauties I could get my hands on. I watched movies portraying beautiful women again and again. If I saw a beautiful woman, I would follow her just to get another glimpse. I tried to imitate the carriage, the gestures, and the charms of the beautiful. I always paid scrupulous attention to every detail of my appearance. I learned to make clothing for myself — embroidering for many hours to fashion attractive garments I could not otherwise afford. But the feeling that something was still missing would not go away.

Naturally, my first area of interest became cosmetics. I diligently researched ingredients and began to make my own lotions, creams, and facial products. I even wanted to enter the field professionally but assumed it to be reserved for flawless women.

I resigned myself to study on my own, experimenting on my own body. I relied on cosmetics too much. My husband, whom I dated for three years before we married, never saw me with a naked face. I would not be caught dead without make-up.

One morning, at the age of 25, I awoke to find my first wrinkle, a tiny crease near the eye. This horrified me! Not only will I be disabled, I will be old.

I was married and had a child, but my value still hinged on the ideal of beauty I had enthroned as a young girl. In a panic, I raced to the library and snatched book after book from the shelves, determined to stop this enemy, searching for some magic answer. I found only grim reminders that, after a certain age, a woman's youth begins to fade, and no creams or lotions applied to face or body would make a dramatic improvement.

I had always sensed that the day would come when I would be able to walk without a limp. At the existing level of medical technology, I had a better chance of being sent to the Moon. I remember thinking: *what if this happy time comes when I am in my 40s, 50s, or even 60s?* I was determined to find a way to look youthful and beautiful when it happened. That is how I became interested in people who looked 10 or even 20 years younger than their chronological age. There was something magical about them. I always went out of my way to interview them.

Beauty became my lifetime ambition, a matter of justice that seemed only fair for me to pursue. Learning the secrets of beauty became a passion bordering on obsession. Back then, there was no God to comfort me; there was only a need to prove my worthiness. I cry for the girl I was. I know, however, that without this motivation, this driving force inside of

me, there would be many things I might never have accomplished in my life.

“Often, the things we pursue most passionately is but a substitute for the one thing we really want and cannot have.”

— Eric Hoffer, American social philosopher

I knew I was deficient, and, in my search for wholeness, I was looking for the scattered parts of myself in different endeavors. I resolved to improve my mind. If I could not attain physical perfection, I would prove myself intellectually. Over the years I worked on degrees in mechanical engineering and theoretical mathematics. It seemed to me that the more difficult the area of study, the more pursuing it would proclaim my value.

In spite of the other degrees that I pursued, hardly a day passed in which I would not read something on my favorite subject. Since coming to the United States in 1991, I have read more than 500 books on various topics related to beauty. Years of exploration revealed the answers I had searched for. It is amazing how much more you can discover if you are seeking, not out of duty to do the job you are paid for, not out of curiosity to indulge your hobby, but out of desperation, as if your whole life depended on the uncovered information.

Recently, I read Lillian Müller’s book *Feel Great, Be Beautiful Over 40* in which she shared her beauty secrets. At the age of 22, Lillian became a successful model and was discovered by *Playboy*. Several years ago, *Vie* magazine called her “The Most Beautiful 40-Year-Old in the World.” At the time she wrote the book she was 43, and at the time I read it, I was also 43.

During my youth, my looks could not have come close to Lillian Müller’s angelic face, but looking at her current pho-

tos, it suddenly struck me that I looked just as good as she did. That is when it first occurred to me: “Maybe I am beautiful too!”

A year later, I read *Living Principal: Looking and Feeling Your Best at Every Age* by Victoria Principal. This famous actress wrote about her “aging crisis” and how she was “slammed” at 42 by seeing her changing face in the mirror. These were the words of a woman who was named 1983’s most beautiful woman in America by Harper’s Bazaar. She was the best-selling author of several books about health and beauty. Yet, for me, at 44, the mirror had never been kinder. For the first time, I liked my reflection. That is when I knew that I had stumbled onto something extraordinary.

In the midst of my research, I never intended to share this information. I wanted it for myself. I was looking for something to give me an advantage over others to compensate for my defect, a means to cope with my painful self-consciousness. The acquired knowledge of how to look better with time, when everyone else seems helpless to ward off aging, gave me the leverage I needed to level up with so-called normal people. I guarded my secrets carefully. I feared that if others were to follow them, I, being in an unfavorable starting position, would always be left behind. But, when my appearance improved so dramatically, I became healed by beauty. Goodness saturated me so fully, and gratitude took over me so powerfully, that I could not bear not sharing this good with others. *All of this* culminated in the writing of this book.

“If there’s a book you really want to read but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” — Tony Morris, editor and novelist
