

# Self love

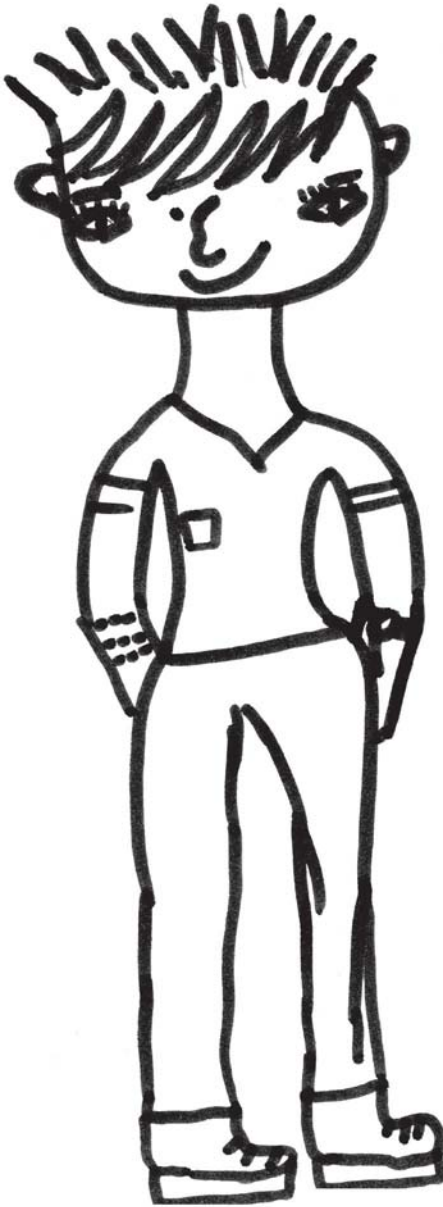
## Phoenix

Growing up I was that quiet girl no one took notice of. The girl who was always walking alone. Who did not have friends. People found me weird. They could not understand me. And I could not understand them. In high school my classmates would call me a tomboy, sometimes a lesbian, because of the clothes I wore, how I behaved around them, how I walked, and how I talked. Even in my neighbourhood they wondered. Probably even my mom wondered, but I never knew how she saw me as I was growing up.

There were times when a guy would say hello to me, and I would respond very well and by the time the guy got to know me he would be surprised to find that the things they said about me were not true. There were times I felt like explaining myself to each and every person I encountered in my life.

The first time a guy told me that he thought I was a lesbian I was shattered. How could he say such a thing? I don't see lesbians as bad people, but I knew who I was. Which is a girl who is attracted to boys.

We were busy chatting in the street. Just chilling at home, doing nothing but talking. When I told him about my boyfriend he was so surprised that it made me feel stupid. He said to me 'do you have a boyfriend?' I said 'yes' but not a convincing yes, because his question pierced through my heart so deep that it hurt. He then told me he thought I was a lesbian because he had never seen me with a guy and I always wore trousers and my hair was short. I told him 'I am not like other girls who go partying every weekend, who



wear short skirts and even have a kid. I am not like those girls but that does not mean I am not interested in boys’

I changed the subject because this was hurting my feelings. When that guy left I went to the bathroom and I cried like nobody’s business. It hurt me so bad I did not want to leave my house. I felt so alone and I started to believe I was weird and not normal. My mom would ask if everything is good and I would say yes. Which was a lie. I was hurting inside.

I am not confused about my sexuality. I know who I am. People tend to expect how you should behave, talk, walk or wear your clothes. Once you start doing your own thing people start to worry. There is a saying ‘you said I have changed. No I didn’t, I just stopped living according to your expectations.’

When you start living your life according to yourself and how you view yourself, others around you know who you are and where you are going. People may look at you otherwise but hey, don’t mind them. People are always going to be there talking whether it is good or bad they will still talk.

Being defined by other people is not a nice thing for anyone. Being put in a certain box or category is not my thing. People tend to give you their own identities based on what you look like to them. People forget one thing and that is that you are your own person. You got your identity and you can define yourself very well without their help. No babysitters needed.

I remember it vividly. It was during school holidays in September. I was fifteen. My sister and I visited our granny’s home in Pretoria and all her grandchildren and great grandchildren were there. Even though my gran had passed away we still visited her house. It was a tradition for us during the school holidays.

My gran's is a 6 roomed house in a dusty, hot, boring place called Winterveldt. But we loved going there with my sister. One hot afternoon we were playing outside. I was wearing my favourite pink t-shirt and brown shorts which matched my brown All Stars takkies. All the clothes I wore that day were boy's clothes. I was very excited playing with sticks, making jokes, looking for snake holes and rabbit holes. We were not used to these things as we don't have snake or rabbit holes in our township.

We came from playing in the veld when my other sister called out to me. She was sitting under the big green tree with her friends and other family members. She asked for a glass of water and the friend sitting next to her looked at me with not nice eyes. She was very tall, dark complexioned, wearing a short skirt that showed off her long dark legs. She said to me 'are you my friend's sister?' I said 'yes'. She said 'I thought you were a boy, because you look like a boy, wearing boy's clothes. And you behave like one.' I said to her 'I love wearing boy's clothes, but I am a girl.'

My sister's other friends and family members started laughing and making jokes about how I looked. My sister joined them. They said I looked ugly, that I don't have a pretty face for a girl, and that my younger sister has the features of a girl but I don't. I stood there and laughed with them, as if I was not hurt. I went inside to get my sister's water but because I was angry at my sister and hurt too, I poured the water in a big navy blue plastic jar and I spat in it. Thinking about this now makes me laugh, makes me feel stupid. But back then I was angry and hurting and I told myself 'she deserves it. How can she laugh at me like that? She was supposed to be on my side and defend me like any other big sister would'.

So I gave her the water and she drank it. Her friend drank it also to the last sip and this made me laugh. That's killing two birds with one stone, I thought. But after that I went to one of the bedrooms and I cried. I did not leave the room until supper time.

Even at supper I did not enjoy the food. That night we ate pap with cabbage and potatoes. This was the worst meal ever because I was not familiar with that food. With my mom we did not eat that food. But because I was hurting this was even more terrible for me. After eating I went straight to bed. I did not even watch TV. Even though I loved watching TV I was not in the mood to watch.

In the morning I did not feel like waking up. I kept thinking of what had happened the day before. Because it was not my mother's house and I was just a visitor I had to wake up. It was the longest day ever. I did not play. I stayed under the tree all alone, asking myself the question 'Am I that ugly? Do I look like a boy?'

I called my mom that morning to tell her I want to come home this afternoon. She asked why. I made lame excuses and that 'this place is too hot, it's boring, the shops are too far. They make us sleep at 8.30pm and wake up at 5.00 a.m. I miss your cooking, it has been a while since I had pap and meat. All I get here is pap and veggies'. All she said was wait for the holidays to end because it was only one week and in no time I would be back home.

I came back from my trip feeling miserable about myself. I did not say anything to my mom, nor to my friends. You see I am one person who did not share my feelings with others. Not even with my mom. For me it was hard to share how I felt.

I grew up as a teenager who was quiet and who never talked a lot. For many years I had low self-esteem. I looked at myself as a teen who was not beautiful and I even convinced myself that I was ugly and that I would always stay ugly. I would not try to convince people to see me as beautiful.

As time went by, as I became a young adult, I started to love and appreciate myself. I started to look at myself as beautiful because I hung out with people who loved themselves and appreciated themselves. I started appreciating each and every inch of my body.

I loved my dress sense, how I walked, talked and behaved. I loved how I presented myself to people.

If I could go back to when I was 15 years old I would tell my 15 year old self that it is okay, there is no need to listen to other people. Listen to yourself only. People will always talk whether you have done good or bad.

It is okay to embrace your beauty and yourself. It is okay to love your uniqueness. I was created to be unique and different. I believe I was created by God because he could not find any person who looked like me. After being created God said 'it is good' so that makes me good and also I was made in God's image. God is not associated with bad or ugly things. So that means each and every one of us is beautiful in his or her own right. Right now I am so in love with myself it's not even funny.

