

**Amazing new  
beauty herb**  
Ends anxiety,  
revitalizes  
skin!

# God Bless America Woman's World



THE  
WOM/  
WEEK

Kelly Ripa of  
Live with Regis  
and Kelly

## Have a stress-less Christmas!

**152** fun, fast &  
easy tricks

**Save time!**

**Save money!**

**Enjoy your  
holiday more!**

*plus*

Doctors tell how to  
**Cut stress  
by 63%!**

\$1.49



Exclusive new **MIRACLE JUICE PLAN**

**LOSE 10 lbs  
in 48 hours!**

\* Warning: So powerful, you  
should only use it for two days!

**Hair cocktails that  
Supercharge  
volume & shine!**

**Too much to do?**  
How to re-claim  
an hour every day!

**End Christmas-bill  
worries!**  
Easy secrets that  
save hundreds

**SPEEDING TICKETS FOR SANTA!**  
This town uses fines to make  
Christmas special for needy kids!



**Christmas cookies!**  
1 easy dough makes  
6 delicious kinds!

## My Story

Kathleen Kurowski,  
Saddle Brook, NJ

As soon as I got to work, I rushed to the ladies' room, and just as I did every morning before going to my desk, I peered in the mirror. Is it showing? I worried.

Every break, every lunch hour—sometimes every hour—I'd slip into the bathroom to check my face, searching to see if the deep crimson birthmark that covered my left cheek was showing through the thick makeup that I wore to conceal it.

Other women in the ladies' room must have thought I was terribly vain. They didn't realize that as I gazed at my reflection, I was thinking, I hate the way I look! And I was too ashamed to tell anyone the truth.

"What's wrong with her face?" strangers would ask my mother when I was little.

Though only four, I knew they were talking about me. Stop staring! I wanted to cry, but all I could do was hang my head in shame.

Praying no one would notice me, I walked with my head down, and I grew my hair long, letting it sweep over the left side of my face. Called a port wine stain, the birthmark was composed of an overabundance of blood vessels beneath my skin, and stretched from my nose, across my cheek and under my eye.

My looks made me shy away from people. I had a few friends,

**"People will love you for who you are," Mom would soothe**

but most kids stayed away from me. Others were cruel. "It's a monster!" they'd shriek at school, and tears would sting my eyes.

*Why was I ever born?* I'd write in notes I'd leave for Mom to find.

"Oh, Kathleen!" she'd cry, reading them. It broke her heart to see me suffering. She took me to doctors, but at the time, all that was available were painful skin grafts that would leave large scars.

"People will love you for who you are," Mom would soothe. She'd emphasize my good points, but I wanted to cry. How could anyone like me? I'm a freak! In high school, I was finally old enough to wear makeup. Slathering thick foundation over the blotch, I thought, Now I can be like other kids!

But perspiration made the

For most of her life, Kathleen Kurowski cringed when she looked in the mirror. A huge red birthmark made her feel freakish and ugly. She hid her face from the world until a miracle treatment set her free ... and gave her the happiness she'd always dreamed of



# True beauty

makeup run, so I couldn't play sports. I loved to dance, and I dreamed of being on stage, but it was impossible—the hot lights would melt my makeup.

"Why do you wear so much makeup?" classmates would ask.

"I just like it," I'd shrug, too ashamed to admit the truth.

In my 20s, I started working as a bookkeeper. I wanted to make a good impression, so I got up early every morning to apply the foundation. I balanced it with lots of eye

shadow, blush and lipstick. But I was devastated when I learned through the office grapevine that I was passed over for a promotion because I wore too much makeup!

Over the years, I sought help, but the doctors I consulted never had anything new to offer. "You'll just have to live with it," I was told.

As the years passed, I tried. I went out with friends, and I even dated. But I didn't let anyone get too close, and loneliness ate away at my heart.

"Give people a chance to know the real you," my mother would urge. Her other words would come back to me, too: People will love you for who you are.

I wanted her to be right. And when in my 30s, I started dating John, a salesman, I thought maybe she was. I just felt so comfortable with him. And one night, I told him about my birthmark.

"It must have been hard for you growing up," he sympathized.

He understands! I cried. And though he understood *why* I felt the need to cover it

up, he told me, "Even if you didn't wear makeup, I'd think you were beautiful."

But old fears welled up. He's just being nice, I told myself. He'd hate me if he saw how I really look! Fearing rejection, I pushed John away, and soon, we drifted apart.

As my 40th birthday approached, I didn't think I'd ever find real happiness. And now, standing in front of the mirror in the ladies' room at work, tears filled my eyes. I can't go on like this! I wept.

Then, that weekend, an article in the paper caught my attention. It was about Dr. David Goldberg, a dermatologist who used laser surgery to remove birthmarks. I quickly made an appointment.

Please, help me, my eyes begged. And after examining me, Dr. Goldberg had good news. "I can help," he said. So once a month, I went for a laser treatment. Using a high-powered beam of light, Dr. Goldberg removed layers of skin. The spot would be purple and swollen for

a few days, but when it faded, pale pink skin emerged.

It's a miracle! I thought as the months passed and the ugly red mark grew smaller. To my relief I needed less makeup, and three years later, after my last laser treatment, I threw away the heavy foundation. I never felt so free! And when people noticed me, I didn't shrink away. Laser surgery helped boost my confidence. I held my head high and wore my hair out of my face. I sought people out, and I signed up for tap dancing lessons. I was a brand-new me.

But something was still missing. As I watched couples walking hand-in-hand, I wished for more. Will I ever find true love? I wondered.

Then last year, as I was getting ready for my first tap dance recital, I thought of John. My heart warmed, and a voice inside me urged, Call him. John was happy to hear from me, and I was elated when he showed up at the performance.

"You looked beautiful on stage," he told me afterward. "But I always thought you were beautiful!"

Suddenly, I realized John had always seen the real me. We started dating again, and soon fell in love.

When I told him about the surgery, he said, "I admire you."

**Finally, I threw away the heavy foundation. I'd never felt so free!**

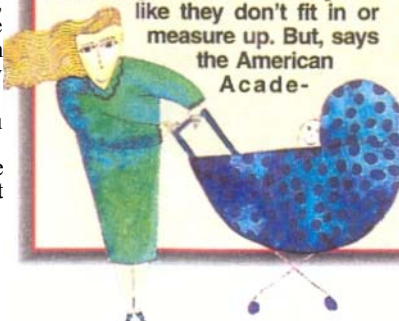
That was a year ago, and today, as John and I plan our future together, I'm happier than I dreamed possible. Still, I can never forget the shame I felt growing up, so I talk to parents of children with birthmarks about laser surgery. "It changed my life," I tell them.

I used to hate the face looking back at me in the mirror, but now I like what I see: a confident woman who radiates happiness. Now that I understand what true beauty is, I feel beautiful inside and out.

—as told to Deanna Pease

## How to help your child build self-confidence

Like Kathleen, all kids go through times when they feel like they don't fit in or measure up. But, says the American Acade-



my of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, you can help build self-confidence by:

- Offering reassurance. Let your child know that everyone goes through those times by sharing stories from your past.
- Using criticism sparingly, and only constructively.
- Encouraging interests. Sports and hobbies promote a sense of self-worth.