THE OPRAH MAGAZINE

What would it take for you to Feel Beautiful?

Give us 30 minutes and you'll be a whole lot happier with your looks

In Praise of Manly Men

Who are they, where are they, and why do we still want them?

Oprah talks to Meg Ryan

about using fame well, her mission to India, her new baby...

Pull up a couch

The Oprah Show's kind new shrink will see you now

Beauty and the Bitch

Silencing your inner critic before she does some real damage

Kenzi Snider did not murder her friend

So why did she confess?

Eat, drink & be shocked

A bacon-loving reporter chows down with the Queen of Healthy Food.

Who will live and who will diet?

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here we go!

I believe there's beauty in you. It seems to me that everybody has at least one feature worth feeling good about. It might be the way your hair shines, the color of your eyes, the sway of your hips, or the curve of your shoulders. Chances are it's something you don't even realize, but I stand by my statement—I think there's beauty in you. Of course, it doesn't matter what I think; the question this month is: Do *you* like the way you look? We asked writers to talk about what's most intriguing, mysterious, maddening about beauty—and we got a wildly mixed bag of responses. Angela Nissel stopped seeing beauty as a hair-raising problem the day she chose to just let herself be (page 265). Elena Scotti shrugged off her good looks until a vicious scar threatened to destroy them (page 262). Elizabeth Bern fled the Midwest for Greenwich Village, where beauty has a more inclusive definition (page 261). Mary Gaitskill makes a compelling argument that looking like a goddess is not always pretty (page 268). And Anne Lamott says a mouthful when she says, "Joy is the best makeup. But a little lipstick is a close runner-up." Her take is both personal and pragmatic (page 259). Along those lines, *O*'s beautiful beauty director, Valerie Monroe, not only explores the many advantages to seeing ourselves through kinder eyes but also tells us five things to avoid when attempting to feel beautiful (page 254). Finally, *O* columnist Martha Beck has a few thoughts on how to stop confusing pretty with lovable (page 266).

We follow the very lovable Meg Ryan to India, where desperately poor women are trying—against all odds—to educate, immunize, and strengthen their families (page 191). It's a trip well worth taking. We eavesdrop on Patricia Volk's lunch with New York University professor and nutrition expert Marion Nestle, a woman who *really* knows how to eat (page 159). And we get up close and personal with psychologist Robin Smith—whose empathy and directness knock me out whenever she appears on the show (page 175).

Put on a little blush, smile (because it's the fastest, cheapest way I know to boost your beauty quotient), and read on.

Oprah

Life is good.
Life is bad.
Life is messy—and
you can't fix
it if you won't
admit it's broken.
Take it from
psychologist Robin
Smith, PhD,
The Oprah Winfrey Show's therapist-
in-residence,
who's wowing
viewers with her
own brand
of levelheaded
empathy.
AIMEE LEE BALL
sits down with a
straight-shooting star.

The Doctor Is On

IT WAS A STRIKING IMAGE: a stalwart wide receiver for the NFL—the epitome of masculine strength—admitting to Oprah Winfrey and a television audience of millions that he had been sexually abused at gunpoint by his stepfather almost every night from the age of 10, and that he was still haunted by this predator and by fear of what others would think when they knew his secret. Then Robin Smith, PhD, stepped in. "I have met a man today who is a miracle," she said to Laveranues Coles. "I feel like you are re-languaging for men who don't know what it really looks like to be a man. The new information I want you to have is that he can't touch you ever again, not just physically but also your spirit, because you've broken the silence. The silence is as deadly as the abuse."

With a laser-sharp but thoroughly compassionate approach, Smith has joined *The Oprah Winfrey Show* as a regular psychological consultant. This is a ›

"The reason I do what I do well is that I've stumbled and barely gotten up many days," says Smith, at home in Philadelphia.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA FAZZARI

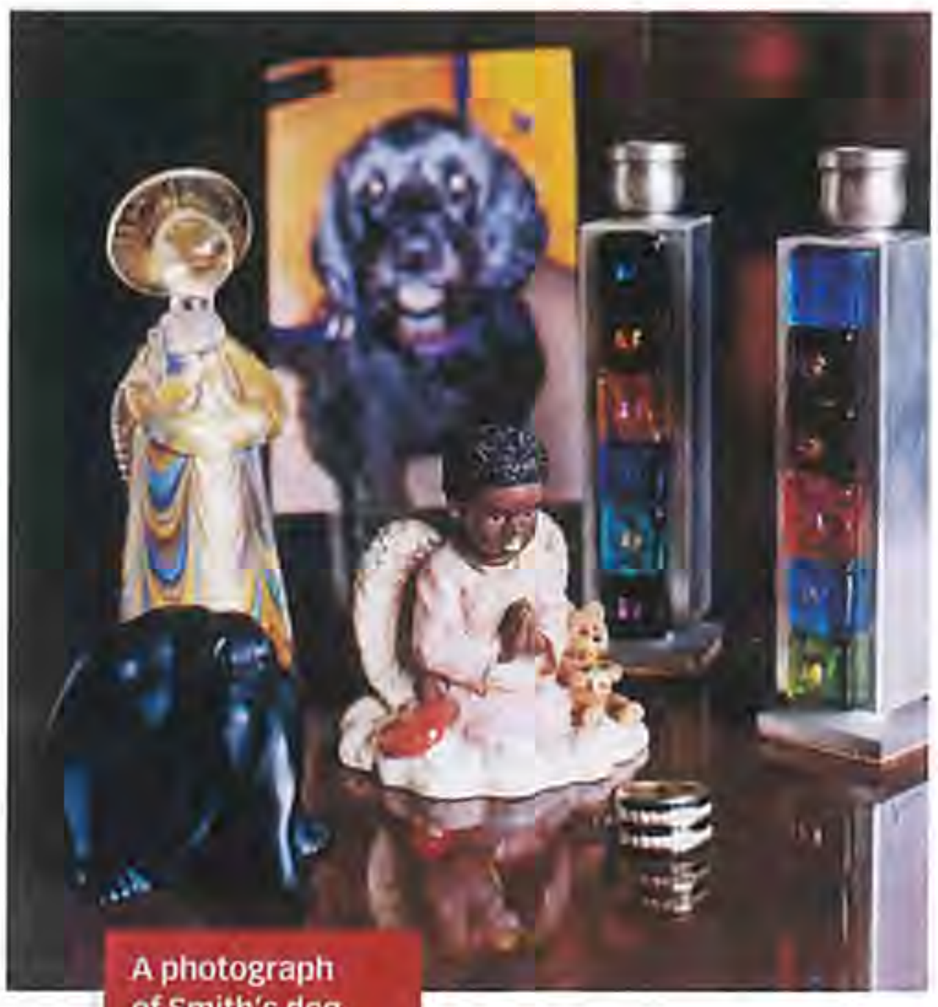
considerable departure from seeing patients in her hometown of Philadelphia. Whether she's in private practice or on a television soundstage, the fundamental tenet of her work is that we each are a crazy quilt of often tacit lessons learned as children and that we're not done growing up until we acknowledge and understand the messages of our upbringing. "What people create in their work lives and families is about unfinished woundedness," she says. "Look at your adult relationships and you will see what's still unfinished in your childhood."

HER OWN READILY ACknowledged wounds have to do with coming from a proud family where the message was all about presenting a front of perfection and accomplishment but not about what she calls self-care. She was the youngest child in a family for which high achievement was mandatory: Her father, Warren E. Smith, MD, was a psychiatrist who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and spoke Swahili, Japanese, German, and Greek. Her mother, Rosa Lee Smith (now 84), was one of the first African-American women to graduate from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. Her grandmother, Addie Belle Spencer (now 102), is the child of a freed slave and became a nurse in her 60s.

Smith, who's 43, grew up attending a Quaker school and black churches but also the synagogues of Jewish neighbors. "Part of what shaped me was being exposed to so much diversity," she says. "All the gentleness of the world was in our home—my parents never yelled. There was a mandate to love everybody. But my parents went directly to compassion, skipping accountability and personal responsibility. They'd loan money that would never be paid back and then reward you by continuing to be your friend because you said you were sorry. You don't have to do the work in my family. You can misbehave, perpetuate the jerkiness, and feel like you can get away with it."

Going along with the family dynamic of uncritical support and rescue, Smith didn't recognize the toll it was taking on her own emotional health. "It's important to know who to be friends with and who not to," she says. "I'm grateful for the bigheartedness of my parents that lives in me, but I don't want to be a doormat. I'd make excuses for outrageous behavior from other people, and I did it flawlessly." She was able to change, she says, through therapy and the support of better-chosen friends. "I don't believe in the quick fix of the illuminated moment and then you're free," she says. "My resilience has come from surrounding myself with people who could let me fall to pieces and tolerate the messiness, unlike my family."

Such public airing of personal laundry has not exactly thrilled her relatives, though they remain close to her. "The reason I do what I do well is that I've stumbled and barely gotten up many days," says Smith. "That's the part my mother doesn't want you to know. She wants you to see the evolved Robin." When Smith was divorced at 28, after five years of marriage, she was unable to manage much personal deportment beyond a clean sweat suit. Her mother urged her to put on lipstick before going out. "There's no furniture in my living room and everything is falling down around me, and she's asking me about lipstick," says Smith. "She'd say, 'If you tell your friends how you're doing, what are they going to think?' and I'd say, 'They're going to think I'm in trouble.' It's taken me until now to separate from that very poisonous message of lying about how you're doing. What's underneath is fear that if people know your vulnerabilities, they'll reject you." Facing the fear is a recurrent theme in her practice. "You don't even know how scared you are until you're not," she says. "I try to get people to the point where fear is not the guiding light, not what runs their lives."



A photograph of Smith's dog, Kalle, with angels, candlesticks, and other mementos.

Despite the limitations of the television sound bite, Smith manages to do this, conveying advice that is consistent and empathetic in a short amount of time. One recent *Oprah* episode featured Mary Jo Buttafuoco, who stayed with her philandering husband for years after his girlfriend, Amy Fisher, a high school student dubbed the Long Island Lolita, shot her in the head. The Buttafuocos' daughter, now a young woman, proudly described herself as Daddy's little girl, which made Smith bristle. She explained to the girl that it sounded as if she felt cherished by her father. "Daddy didn't protect you," Smith said, explaining that if the young woman continued to consider herself treasured by an unfaithful father, she might replicate that feeling with men who treat women the same way.

Another episode focused on parents who pushed their children into competitive sports. Listening to the exhausting schedule of one 9-year-old, Smith said, "I feel like I need a tranquilizer," and she made it clear that such an unforgiving agenda was about the parents' own dreams. When another 9-year-old's father insisted that the "young man" did his training with gusto, Smith corrected him: "A 9-year-old is not a young man—he's a boy. What part of your son's joy are you sacrificing? How do you help him become a champion as a human being?"

The opportunity to illuminate for a wide audience the ways in which people derail personal growth was so enticing to Smith that when she got the call from an *Oprah* producer who'd seen her on a TV news show, she drove her demo tape to the airport to make the last FedEx plane to Chicago. "It's hard to be good on TV," says Ellen Rakieten, the executive producer of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. "Very few people can say CONTINUED ON PAGE 178

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 176 something on TV that makes you sit up and listen, and she's got that gift. You come away with something memorable, in terms you can use in your own life. When she was on our show with parents obsessed with their kids doing sports, she said that we talk about everything we do right as parents, but do we ask: 'What could I do better?' I'm a mother, and I could relate to that. She understands that all pain is the same, whether you're abused or on drugs or your husband left you. And I love the fact that she's willing to open up about her own experiences."

Given Smith's success, it's surprising to learn that she describes her career choice as a fluke. After graduating from high school at age 16 and LaSalle University at 20, she was teaching gymnastics and trying to figure out the trajectory of her life. One day, on her way home from work, she saw a billboard for Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and literally made a U-turn to ask for an application, still in her shorts and a T-shirt. Today she is an adjunct professor at her alma mater, having earned a master's degree (as well as a PhD in counseling psychology from Temple University), and conducts leadership training for organizations such as Johnson & Johnson, Victoria's Secret, and the IRS. "All companies are macrosystems of families," she says. "Conflict management, anger, accountability—they're the same issues that come up in personal relationships. In the same way that a family has a scapegoat and a shining star, those roles show up in the corporate culture. And they're major energy drainers, dangerous to the survival and thriving of the system."

IN 2004 SMITH WROTE A SMALL GUIDE TO PERSONAL empowerment called *Inspirational Vitamins,* choosing 16 words (such as *trust, gratitude,* and *awakening*) that she calls key nutrients for creating healthy emotional lives. In her new book, *Lies at the Altar,* Smith adapts traditional wedding vows to show how couples might enter into marriage with out-of-sync notions. ("Forsaking all others," for example, could mean different things to different people. Is it a promise to be monogamous? Or an exclusion of other close friendships?)

One of Smith's vitamin words was *hope*—but with a caveat. "Hope without action is destructive because it goes to magical thinking," she says. In times of heartache, she's seen clients cling to hope to avoid grieving. But as Smith has learned, if you can't grieve, you can't move on. A year after she found a man who cherished and respected her, she witnessed him collapse in cardiac arrest at age 49 on a remote beach in the Caribbean. "The lesson was about not postponing joy," she says, "and about the ability to transition when you simply don't want to. Life has its seasons, and you must be able to transition or you'll be wearing a parka in the summer and a bikini in the winter."

If Smith's own life can serve as a blueprint of change for others, that's just fine with her. "There's a passage in Ezekiel that asks: Can these dry bones live again?" she says. "My own life has had such dry spells, such desolate times, but I know that dry bones can live again, that hopeless things can be turned around, not with magic but with hard work. I feel that's what I'm on the planet to talk about." ●

Aimee Lee Ball is a contributing editor and coauthor of Changing the Rules *(Free Press).*