

Please Don't Stare at Me

By Deborah Breslow with narration by Kenny Breslow

Deborah Breslow is a freelance writer and mother of three boys. Kenny was born with an arteriovenous malformation (AVM) of the nose, cheek and lip. Much of this story is adapted from Ms. Breslow's recently published book FUNNY FACE.

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Kenny's mom and dad were happy to have another baby boy. When a nurse in the hospital whispered, "Too bad about the bruise on his nose," they told her they loved him just the way he was.

When I grow up, I'm going to be a fireman. I'll slide down the pole and ride in the fire truck and wear my fireman's hat. I'll save people's lives. Then they won't stare and make fun of me.

Kenny, now five, is a great kid. But some people can't see past his nose which is big and red. At first, doctors said it was a birthmark – a port wine stain that laser therapy could fix.

But after a treatment, I looked like someone burned my face with a cigarette. People stared at me and at my mom as though she did it! Then they whispered mean things.

Mom says to ignore what people say if it isn't nice.

She says I can answer questions saying: "It's a birthmark. Some people have birthmarks on their backs or their arms. I have a birthmark on my nose."

Many people judge a person's "insides" based on their "outsides." They don't take time to know a person.

Kids are different in a lot of ways. No two ever look exactly the same.

What's the big deal? I didn't ask for a big, red nose! I don't not like kids who wear glasses because they need help to

see. In the hospital, some kids don't have any hair! I would never walk away so I wouldn't have to look them in the eye.

Kenny's nose is red because of all the blood that flows to it. Every few months, doctors operate to slow the blood flow.

I try real hard not to let people bug me. My big brother almost yelled at someone making fun of my nose.

At a birthday party, one girl covered her eyes. "I can't look at that boy. His nose is so ugly!"

Kenny has his own responses. Once he told kids the red berries he ate from a tree made his nose red. He said the black scab from an operation was "a bee sting on my birthmark." This helps him cope.

Kids stare when they see my nose for the first time. Their impression of my nose is their impression of me. What's so bad about looking different?

"Being different makes each of us special in our own way," Kenny's mom says.

"You mean it's okay to look different?" I thought it wasn't.

When I grow up, I still want to be a fireman and help people. Not so they won't stare or make fun of the way I look. Just because that's what I really want to do.

There's more to me than just my nose.

