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Mrs. Barker

English IV-?

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Looking Up

I can still remember the way my shabby tennis shoes looked as I stared down at them, dreading what was about to take place. It was time for the weekly fifth-grade volleyball game, an inevitable scene of mental anguish for me. It wasn’t that I ever expected to be chosen first. I knew I was clumsy and would never be the best player on any team. But every week, I stared at my shoes and simply wished that I wouldn’t be picked last. And yet I was last almost every time. No team wanted the girl who dropped the ball, tripped over her own feet, and missed the easy serves.

Years later I realized how much those moments of rejection had affected me. It hadn’t been easy being the last one picked, the one the other team members “had” to take. I began to expect the worst in every situation, repeatedly telling myself that I just wasn’t good enough. I basically grew up staring at my shoes.

All of that began to change during the summer after my freshman year in high school. My mom’s oldest sister, Aunt Karen, needed some help at her real estate office and offered me a part-time job. I had always looked up to Aunt Karen because she was successful and seemed to lead such a fun, exciting life. Her engaging manner and warm, confident smile couldn’t have been more different from the nervous, timid way I approached the world. But that summer she taught me to look at things differently.

Aunt Karen said that the secret to success comes from the inside, not the outside. She described her own adolescence, and I was shocked to learn that her experience had been similar to mine. Notably, she hadn’t been good at sports, either! Aunt Karan said she finally realized that what other people thought of her didn’t matter nearly as much as what she thought of herself. She told me that when she started speaking positively to herself and noticing her own good qualities, she stopped being so self-critical.

So that summer I took her advice to heart. I listened to what I was saying to myself and decided to focus more on the good. For example, when I misfiled an important realty document, I reminded myself of all the other documents I filed correctly. And when Aunt Karan showed me the messy supply closet, I assured myself that I would be great at organizing it. Before long I had learned a valuable lesson. Positive thinking actually works! The more encouragement I gave myself, the better I felt about myself. By the time school started that fall, I was much more confident. I approached people around me with a totally different attitude. My afterschool volleyball days were over, but when my chemistry teacher announced that we should find a lab partner, instead of looking down at my shows, I looked up and smiled. And do you know what happened? A very nice girl immediately asked me to be her partner!