

Learn to accept flaws, beauty of your body

By Bill Shaw

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First of all an apology. When I listed the finishers in the Sept. 6 Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon in my last column, I overlooked Karen Wells, a former student, who finished in 1:58:21.

I began this column in my head about 4 a.m. Saturday morning as I had a cup of coffee on my back porch. (I was up that early because I volunteered to help with the Family Fitness 5K, which had a 7 a.m. start.)

Strip down to your underwear and stand in front of a full-length mirror. Look carefully at your body from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. What part of your body do you like most? What part of your body do you like least? What part of your body do you hate?

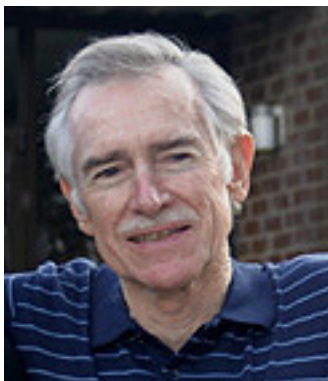
Even the most beautiful of women and the most handsome of men dislike something about themselves. The rich and famous can afford plastic surgery. For most of us, plastic surgery is not an option.

Then there are ravages of time and age. The sagging body of a 70-year-old in a full-length mirror is not a thing of beauty. The sagging starts all too soon for

many of us, no matter how fit or athletic.

Except for those with good genes. Some people are lucky and naturally svelte, shapely or sculpted. We can only envy them and wish for warts on their noses.

No one's body is perfect. All of us, the svelte, shapely or sculpted, the saggy, the struggling, over-achieving athlete, have only one option, outside of a



complete remodeling; that option is acceptance.

One of my favorite stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne illustrates a failed quest for human perfection. In “The Birthmark”

(1846) Alymer, a “man of science” marries a beautiful woman named Georgiana. She is perfect except for a tiny birthmark in the shape of a hand on her left cheek. Some “affirmed that the Bloody Hand ... quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana’s beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous.” Alymer seeks to remove the birthmark so “that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness, without the semblance of a flaw.”

A series of scientific treatments and experiments finally removes the birthmark, “the bond by which an angelic spirit kept itself in union with a mortal frame.” Georgiana’s beauty is perfect. When the “sole token of human imperfection” fades from her cheek, “the parting breath of

the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere.” She dies.

As struggling athletes, we strive for a perfection that is ever evasive and unachievable. We will try almost anything — the latest fad diets, the new exercise machines that promise chiseled bodies and six-pack abs in 30 minutes a day — to rid our bodies that God and our genes gave of things we do not like or hate when we stand bare before a full-length mirror.

The alternatives are to give up any type of physical fitness or improvement because we cannot change the parts of our bodies we hate or to accept what we have to work with and do our best with our physical limitations and imperfect anatomy. I choose the latter and struggle with the envy I have for the more genetically gifted.

Walt Whitman says in Song of Myself in Leaves of Grass, “I exist as I am, that is enough” (413) and declares “the scent” of his armpits emit an “aroma finer than prayer” (525). Like Whitman, as I frolic and run in the cooler fall weather and accept my imperfection, “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (1342) to celebrate life and who, uniquely, I am.

You can, too, but you might keep your nose out of your armpits.

Bill Shaw’s running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.

