

Judith cofer triumphs over prejudice essay example

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



The kind of childhood we had inevitably influences the kind of adults we become. Those who consider themselves failures or successes in life attribute most of this to their upbringing. Their experiences in school and the society around them shape their attitudes towards life and even influence their career choice. Such is the story of Judith Ortiz Cofer, the author of “ The Story of My Body,” which appears in her 1993 essay and short stories collection, *The Latin Deli*. She tells the story of her life with nostalgia, reflection, and humor, intended to keep her target audience captivated with the flawless prose. She engages 20-60 years audience in a discussion of social perceptions and their effects on the young mind of a child aged between 4 and 18. This is done through her thesis that skin, color, size and looks determine social perception, which inevitably, fix kids into certain positions in the society.

Cofer begins her essay with an explanation of two differing perceptions about her appearance from two distinct societies; the Puerto Rican and the American. Her experiences of the cold and cruel realities of being judged by appearance shook her from the comfort of her mother and fellow Puerto Ricans’ kind words about her beauty and height. The first instance is when at 10, she was told by a “ cruel school nurse” that she would always have blemishes on her face as a result of severe small pox attack. She describes how she started being “ invisible” as a result of this skin condition.

The color of her skin was the other aspect of her appearance that would have a profound effect on her social life. She says that in Puerto Rico, she was “ white” but in Paterson New Jersey where her family moved in 1956, she was “ brown.” She describes her first color prejudice experience when a

butcher in the local supermarket told her that “ PR kids. always look dirty” and that “ maybe dirty brown [was her] natural color.” Cofer explains how these comments confused her wondering who among her and the butcher looked dirty. The color of her skin was now an aspect that she had to be conscious about and one that would determine her popularity in school. As Cofer covers how size affected her in school especially during PE classes, she describes how she felt the “ torment of waiting to be called” last during “ volleyball or softball games.” At this section, she described her distaste of the co-curriculum activities and that she “ would rather be reading a book than sweating, grunting, and running the risk of pain and injury.” In school she had already gained “ a reputation as a shrimp.” Cofer’s ability to perform in other activities in school forced her to concentrate on what she knew best, reading. She was saved from this life when she transferred to another school where “ Gladys” was the smallest student.

Another aspect in which the two societies differed in perceptions towards Cofer is in the way she looked. The people in the barrio would talk of her stunning beauty but in the US, she was a brown girl. The “ hierarchy of popularity” in the school started with “ pretty white girl, pretty Jewish girl” and then “ pretty Puerto Rican girl, pretty black girl.” This hierarchical order meant that she could not participate in events that required beautiful girls and good looking boys; confining her further to her studies where she excelled. In her own admission, Cofer states that she regarded herself as an “ intellectual.”

In spite of the challenges, Cofer managed to pass in high school, get into college for her degree in English and later masters in English. It can be

deduced that the society's perception of appearance led her to education and study where she has triumphed tremendously becoming a professor of English in a University. She has also written numerous essays, biographies, and poems.