

Unveiling Vitiligo, Unleashing Beauty

By KimberMarie Faircloth



Model Jennifer Field

Photo by John Di Giovanni

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and so are blemishes. Many people are born with unique features that may not be standard in terms of what everyone else is born with — markings like freckles, birthmarks and, in some cases, a particular skin disorder, called vitiligo. Vitiligo is a disorder in which a common function in skin cells stops working, causing loss of melanin and leading to patches of discoloration on the skin. But vitiligo's label as a disorder is purely medical nomenclature not because it results in unique markings.

Jennifer Field is 39, a mother of three, an entrepreneur specialized in marketing and an event specialist for the automobile industry. She has loved working out since she was 17, when she signed up for weight-training classes at her high school, igniting her passion for getting to the gym. Field also has vitiligo, but it would be inaccurate to say she suffers from it due to her exceptional positivity. This quality has helped her overcome obstacles induced by the skin discolorations she has.

Field, who developed vitiligo when she was only 6, has always had to give special care and attention to affected areas on her body. Patches of her skin are unable to tan and are extremely sensitive; having them in the sun is the equivalent to “sticking a newborn baby into the sun without sunscreen,” Field stated. If an abrasion occurs, it could scar over with white tissue instead of transitioning back to her regular complexion. When Field and her family first discovered the discoloration, they were perplexed and immediately took her to the doctor; diagnosis helped give the markings

a name but did not explain how they occurred. It is incurable and unpredictable, and even its cause is a mystery.

As a child, Field remembers watching the vitiligo get bigger, an anxiety she still has today; she will always worry if the discoloration will spread to other parts of her body or get larger. She recalls her childhood nickname, Pinto, given to her after “beautiful, painted horses,” Field reminisced, a moniker that still makes her smile warmly today. Field's family always told her that “beauty is within,” helping her to always “maintain a positive attitude,” she explained. These two states of mind are ones she now embodies fully.

For Field, transitioning into adulthood meant taking on new goals and overcoming social anxieties, such as wearing a two-piece to the beach. Her condition of vitiligo seemed to plague others more so than it did her. Becoming a model and figure competitor came with its own challenges: the task of having to mix the perfect hue of three different derma-blend pigments for photo-shoots and being asked if photo-shopping color into affected areas was acceptable were occurrences Field will never forget. “It kind of hurt, you know?” she said. She always wondered why small things, such as discolored patches of skin, could cause unpleasant reactions in people whom they did not affect, especially since she wears them proudly.

Maintaining a healthy and fit lifestyle has helped Field preserve positivity as well as treat her vitiligo to an extent. Doctors have recommended she eat a diet full of fruits, vegetables and Omega-3 fatty acids to nourish her complexion; exercising

helped to keep her stress low and energy high. But fitness is more than just skin deep; it is just as much about mental health — Field always says, “When you look good, you feel good, you do good”. One of her ultimate goals was to compete in a figure contest, which she fulfilled in the 2014 Excalibur competition. The experience taught her will-power, dedication and, most of all, that if “you have support and love you can do just about anything,” a statement Field made with her children and family in mind.

These difficult challenges have only made Field stronger; everything from having strangers asking to touch her affected areas or people's commentary on how they would never wear a two-piece to the beach if they had vitiligo have taught her patience. She has found that what most people would call a blemish is beautiful to her, and that is what truly matters. Field realized, “It's just beautiful ... it separates you from everybody else and adds character.” In the end, Field advises that “no matter what you have, whatever disability or flaw ... we are still human beings, we all are different and we each have a story and we all have a journey ... my journey is beautiful.”

When her workout partner and editor of Oblique Magazine, John Di Giovanni, showed Field the photos he took of her, he expressed interest in using one of them in Oblique. She asked if he was going to Photoshopped out her vitiligo. “No way,” he said, “It looks great and captures the composition.” That's when the angle for this article was created and put into words by KimberMarie Faircloth.