For **Ty Han**, 12, the beauty within is about expressing oneself and not letting insecurities trap themselves in their own mind. He speaks from personal experience, as he once concealed his authentic self, constantly fearing how people would react if he let his true soul shine.

"Before I came out [as homosexual, I was really insecure about my body and everything. But when I came out I became more confident, especially through fashion, which also helped grow my confidence. But more importantly I had to not care what other people thought, because I had to start putting myself first," Han said.

From a young age, Han always had a feeling that he was different. But due to the factors surrounding him and his own internal turmoil, he was not able to express his true self until later in his life.

"I knew when I was, like, 4 that I was gay. I would get the girls toys when I went to McDonalds and I would always wear my moms heels. But I kept it in for so long because of the internalized homophobia I had from growing up Christian, and my dad was really Catholic. He always has strong Korean values where he wants his son to marry a woman and take over his business, so I held back for a long time," Han said.

While Han always had a feeling that he knew who he was, keeping it a secret from the rest of the world began to take its toll on him.

"Being closeted definitely has an effect on your mental health. I feel like closeted kids are a lot more depressed or anxious. You have this big secret weighing you down that you don't want people to know and then gossip about you or start to look at you differently," Han said.

Despite the war in his mind, Han could not hide how he was really feeling for much longer, and was greeted with open arms when he finally revealed to his friends and family that he was gay.

"Coming out was actually not hard. My mom already basically knew since I was a kid and when I hinted at it one day, she asked me and I just told her yes. My close friends always kind of knew and when I told them they accepted me instantly," Han said.

As the weight of his secret began to lift off his chest, Han was able to fully enjoy the freedom of being himself, and being able to express himself in a way he never could before.

"When you come out, you are a whole different person. You see the world from a different perspective because you are not constantly in your shell. You don't constantly have a wall built up, wondering what everyone will say about you. You are able to just be yourself," Han said.

Not only did Han grow as a person through his coming out, but his relationships and friendships did too. Han's long-time friend, **Ayida Sanborn**, 12, was able to see his transformation, as well as their friendship's once he came out.

"When he came out, we grew a lot closer as friends because his personality came out, too. Before he was hiding a piece of himself, but now that he is more himself we are a lot closer," Sanborn said.

Han's confidence since coming out can be seen even by those who did not know him before. To one of Han's newer friends, **Maya Santos**, 12, his energy is rejuvenating.

"It is really nice to see people, especially when they are just starting to understand their sexuality, learn confidence, and understand that even if other people don't understand, you know that you are perfectly fine no matter what other people think," Santos said.

With his newfound confidence came a newfound form of expression: an improved fashion sense. While Han once cowered at the thought of everyone looking at him, now he dresses with the intention to catch the eye.

"Fashion is how I express myself. I wear cropped shirts and low-waisted pants and a bunch of jewelry. I don't want to have a boring outfit and be like everyone else," Han said. "I was like that when I was closed so when I came out I wanted to be different and not like everyone else."

Along with fashion, Han has found another way to express himself: makeup. After watching his mom and YouTubers while growing up, he decided to try it out for himself.

"I got into makeup at first because I was insecure about my acne scars, but then I stopped caring about that and just started doing it for myself. I feel like people think I wear makeup for others, but I honestly just do it for myself. Putting on makeup is like free therapy. It's like my own time for myself," Han said.

Now that Han is able to exhibit his own beauty within, he can confidently define the phrase, knowing that he is able to not just show physical beauty, but the beauty he has within.

"You build your own definition of beauty, but to me beauty is expressing yourself. Of course there will always be a beauty standard, but whatever standard you put yourself to is the best version of yourself. Being yourself is the best way to show the beauty within," Han said.

Story by Lily Higgins
Designers Clara Barresi

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EXPRESS
YOURSELF

Ty Han, 12, finds beauty in being true self

OPTIMISTIC

DISTINCTIVE

STYLE