



AGES 3-7**Item 2**
Respect**LILY THE LEOPARD****By John McConnel**

Lily the Leopard thought there was something gravely wrong with her. Unlike all the other leopards she knew, her spots were not black but pink. It would not have been so terrible if the other leopards had accepted her. But the other leopards would not accept her. In fact, even her own family shunned her. Her mother had cried upon seeing her baby daughter covered in pink spots, and her father and her two brothers, Julian and Ricky, were ashamed to have such a strange looking leopard in the family. The other leopards in the neighborhood ignored her, laughed at her, and sometimes poked at her, just because her spots were a different color from their spots. Sometimes she felt afraid and sad, and other times she got very angry. So she decided that she would stay alone most of the time. She spent her days lying in a bush, watching the other leopards frolic about. Even when they would occasionally call Lily to come out to play, she would remember their past insults and would growl low in response to their invitation.

It was not her fault she had pink spots! She was different and could not help it. Often she wondered why the other leopards didn't understand. She had done her best to rid herself of her pink spots. Lily tried scrubbing and washing them away. She tried bleaching them. Once, she even painted them black, but the pink soon shone through the paint. Nothing worked. After a while, she realized that she was stuck with them. What else could she do?

One day, after four young cubs were teasing her, Lily decided to run away from home. She had had enough. She ran off into the jungle as fast as she could. Lily ran for hours and hours, just stopping to rest now and then and to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Eventually, she came to rest in a clearing and fell asleep. She was awakened by the soft touch of a tongue on her nose. As she looked up, she saw the most amazing sight. Before her stood a great big leopard with bright green spots! Lily was so surprised by what she saw that she blinked twice just to make sure she wasn't dreaming. She had often had dreams of other leopards with different colored spots, but she never imagined that there actually were such leopards. The great leopard with bright green spots told her his name was Lenny and asked her what she was doing so far from home. As he spoke, he seemed to glow with confidence and happiness. His eyes were filled with kindness, and so Lily felt safe and soon found herself telling her story.

Lenny quietly listened to her story. When she finished, he gave her a warm hug and helped her dry her eyes. He then smiled at her and said, "What you need is some self-respect."



“I do?” asked Lily. “What’s that?”

“Self-respect means liking yourself, even when others do not,” said Lenny. “It means appreciating all the special things about yourself.”

“There’s nothing special about me, except these pink spots and I hate them” she cried. “I am so strange and ugly. I wish I was never born!”

“Don’t be silly” said Lenny. “You’re very special. There is no one like you in the whole world, and I can see that you have many good qualities.” Lenny paused for a moment. He seemed to be thinking. “I have an idea,” he said. “Let’s make a list of all the things you like about yourself.”

“Okay” said Lily, brightening a little. She sat for a few moments thinking and then said: “Well, I’m kind and caring, and I try to be friendly. I help my mom and dad and I’m very loving . . . Lily paused for a moment, her voice trailing off. Lenny nodded his head eagerly in order to encourage her. Lily felt safe again and so she continued. “I have beautiful gold eyes and I’m a very fast runner. I’m brave and strong and . . .”

Just then Lucy the Leopard appeared with Laura the Leopard. Lucy was covered with blue spots and Laura in purple spots. As soon as they saw Lily, they were delighted. They smiled grandly and leapt into the air. “What a lovely leopard you are, and what a beautiful coat you have!”

“Thank you” Lily replied, smiling as she remembered there was much more to her than met the eye. Suddenly, she felt much better.

“It’s okay to be different,” she thought. “In fact, I think my spots are rather pretty! If other leopards do not like me because of my pink spots, that’s because they don’t know better. I’m okay. I’m glad I’m unique.”

Lily spent a few more hours playing with her newly found and brightly colored friends. But as the sun began to set, Lily began to think about her family. They might be worried about her, she thought. Lily waved goodbye to Lenny and Lucy and Laura. She promised them, however, that she would visit them again soon and off she went. As she walked home, she watched the sun set. For the first time, she noticed the many brilliant colors in the sky. The sky was pink, blue, green, purple, and orange. “How beautiful,” she thought. “I wonder why I never noticed all those colors before.”

When Lily finally arrived home, her mom and dad and two brothers ran to meet her. As they came closer to Lily, they noticed there was something different about her. She seemed to shimmer and glow. She held her head high as she trotted forward and smiled at them warmly. “She is really quite beautiful,” they thought. And they wondered why they had never noticed that before.