

Moultrie News

Section B

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Smile of the Week

"I'm smiling because I'm glad the cooler weather's here."

- Fritz Love

'I'm still me, just a better me.'

Plastic surgery patients discuss their personal experiences

BY BRIGITTE SURETTE
SPECIAL TO THE MOULTRIE NEWS

You wake up one morning, look in the mirror and the face staring back at you is one that you don't know. Scattered across your vanity are lotions, potions, and creams that tout promises of younger-looking skin and reducing fine lines. You try one, then another and those lines and sagging jowl are still there. Sure, topical products smooth out the lines and pump up the skin temporarily, but tightening and firming? More than likely, no.

Plastic surgery's been around longer than some may realize. According to an online article (plasticsurgerychandi-garh.com), it began in 3500 B.C. in India. There are documented accounts in Sushruta Samhita, The Father of Ancient Indian Plastic Surgery, of surgery ranging from rhinoplasty to limb transfers. Fast forward to 1997 when a trend began, not just with the rich and famous, but for the rest of us as well. Cosmetic surgery and procedures have soared from over 2 million to over 8 million in a span of seven years. We've come a long way, baby, and there's no sign of it slowing down.

I interviewed four women who chose the more permanent route and opted for facial plastic surgery. The women, interviewed separately, were all educated, active, professional women between the ages of 45 and 53. We talked about why they did it, their choice of surgeon and their lives before and after surgery.

The patients

Sharon Nichols, 53, is a real estate agent and a massage therapist who specializes in massage for cosmetic surgery patients. Married for 23 years with two children, ages 23 and 19, Sharon chose plastic surgery because she wanted to look more "refreshed." She had an eyelid and forehead lift when she was 46. A year later she had a chemical peel.

"I exercised regularly, ate a healthy diet, but when I turned 46, I'd look in the mirror and think why do I look so tired? My eyes looked droopy and I wasn't sleepy!" Nichols said. "My life was great and still is. I'm blessed with a wonderful husband and children, love my life and job, but I wanted to look as youthful as I felt. I did this for me."

Susan Meissner, 48, married for 23 years and an Eng-

lish teacher at West Ashley High School, had a face lift. "I know it sounds like a cliché, but I just wanted to look as good as I felt. Being around my students, I feel so young. But I'd look in the mirror and think, who the heck is that? My husband would tell me I didn't need it. But the really cool thing is, he loved it after I had it done. I still look like Susan, just a Susan of 10 years ago."

Debi Hegler, 51 is a single mother with three children and works as a deli manager at a local grocery. Winning a smile makeover contest through a local radio station, escalated into a transformation. With the expertise and help from a dentist, plastic surgeon, personal trainer and weight loss center, Debi's story is similar to what we see on popular television programs. Local media broadcasted her transformation. Hegler lost 45 pounds and had reconstructive dental work, rhinoplasty, forehead and neck lift and lip augmentation.

"I'd dreamed of a makeover, but never thought I could afford it and then I won the contest. I wanted a change. I had a dip in my nose I never liked and I love the way I look now. It's (makeover) changed my life, helped me with my self-confidence and in ways I can't even explain," Hegler said.

Laura Adams (name changed to respect privacy), is a 45-year-old nurse who owns her own medical business. She has been married for 22 years and has two young children. Laura had a brow and forehead lift, eyelid lift, fat transfer to the face, and lip augmentation.

"It sounds a lot more dramatic than it was," Adams said, laughing.

"I was ambivalent about plastic surgery because I never thought it affected me. I've always worked out and felt and looked young. But around 43, something changed. I looked tired all the time. People kept asking me if I was mad or tired or depressed because of the bags around my eyes. I didn't think it was that noticeable until one morning, I looked in the mirror and it wasn't me any more. It was very depressing, and I never thought it would bother me, but it did."

Each woman seemed to have something in common: they were happy with their lives, both personally and professionally, before plastic sur-



These are before and after photographs of Debi Hegler, who says "my life has changed in a very positive way" as a result of plastic surgery, dental work and weight loss. Hegler is a 51-year-old single mother of three children.

gery. They all stated they didn't choose surgery to fix something missing; they chose it as a positive affirmation of who they already were.

Recovery and expectations

Both Nichols' and Meissner's recovery time was not as difficult as they thought it would be.

Nichols: "Oh my gosh, I didn't look in the mirror until a week after surgery. I was so excited when I saw myself and it just kept getting better. I walked every day after Dr. Funcik gave me the go-ahead and within two weeks, I was up and about and starting my regular exercise program." She said that a massage technique known as cranial sacral therapy helped with her healing process. "I remember feeling some discomfort the first couple of days after surgery, but there was no significant pain."

Meissner: "I'd heard different horror stories about bruising and swelling post op. I was prepared for it because I wanted it that much, but I was amazed at how effortless it was for me. The first night after surgery was painful, but I was feeling like myself in two weeks and was online two days after surgery taking a recertification test. About four

weeks later, school started and my students thought it was my haircut that made me look younger. I handled it much better than my husband!"

Hegler and Adams' recovery was more difficult. They each stated that there was a period of pain and swelling.

Hegler: "At first you look so bad. I was very swollen. I kept a journal every day during my recovery and cried every night wondering why I did it." Hegler got an infection in an incision in her ear where cartilage was taken to perform rhinoplasty. The infection was treated with antibiotics. "If you'd asked me two weeks after the surgery if I was glad I did it, I would have said no. The pain and discomfort lasted about a month, and it was scary. But now, I love it, and I would do it all over again tomorrow."

Adams: "My recovery was worse than I expected. It's certainly not my doctor's or the staff's fault. I didn't do the prep things that they recommended. But I really think it's unrealistic to think you're going to have all this (surgery) done and you're not going to be distorted in some way. I thought I looked like an alien! The swelling was worse than I expected, and I was back in public after two weeks, but I

didn't look quite right. I'd say it was more like six weeks before all the swelling went away."

Adams said that she was told prior to surgery what to expect. "They tell you about it (swelling) and I'd prepared myself mentally, but the first time you see yourself right after surgery, it's a scary thing and you can't see past that to the end result. But it was worth it. All of it," she said emphatically.

Life has changed

Plastic surgery inevitably has an effect on a person's life, both physically and emotionally. I was curious if the women noticed if people responded differently to them after surgery and how their lives had changed.

Nichols: "I've always had an outgoing personality so I haven't noticed that people respond any differently to me, but that wasn't what I was going for. I have a wonderful marriage and life, and it wasn't strange seeing the new me. I didn't look any different, I just looked more awake!"

Meissner: "I don't look as if I've had surgery, my face doesn't look artificial. I feel better about myself and because of that, people may respond differently. It has nothing to do with how I look; it's how I feel about me now. It's not as if I'm looking at a different person in the mirror, it's gradual, like if you lose 10 pounds and you see yourself."

"I'm still me, just a better me."

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On Vacation with The Moultrie News

TEXAS TREASURES

Don and Jill Goldman of Mount Pleasant (left) recently visited their friends George and Anita Freeman in Texas. The Freemans lived in Mount Pleasant before moving to the Lone Star State.

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