

Linking Beauty and Function, Skill, and Human Kindness



“Donna”: Before and after rhinoplasty.

“RHINOPLASTY IS ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING PROCEDURES WE DO, BECAUSE EVERYONE’S NOSE IS DIFFERENT . . . BONE, CARTILAGE, MUSCLE, SOFT TISSUE, AND SKIN—ALL ARE INTRICATELY CONNECTED.”

A woman we’ll call Donna, married, now in her forties, and the mother of three, was engaged in active play with friends when she was 18 years old. She fell, and suffered a badly broken nose. The event changed Donna’s appearance in an obvious and undesirable way.

“After the break my nose was extremely crooked,” she shares. “I had a closed reduction procedure at the time by a doctor I found to be arrogant, who didn’t listen, and who made me quite uncomfortable. The result of the procedure was depressing. My nose remained crooked, causing one nostril to be compressed and making it difficult to breathe.”

NASAL SURGERY

Dr. Cynthia Gregg, an expert in her field of facial plastic surgery, and owner of Cynthia Gregg Face & Body Specialists in Cary, explained the complexity of nasal surgery—known as rhinoplasty—noting how easily (and frequently) it can be done incorrectly.

“Rhinoplasty is one of the most challenging procedures we do, because everyone’s nose is different,” Dr. Gregg observes. “We share all the same parts of the nose, but everyone is unique, and we simply cannot perform rhinoplasty the same way on every potential patient. The nose includes bone and cartilage, muscle, soft tissue, and skin—all intricately connected. One surgical move begets another and another, and it’s often necessary to adjust the plan or approach once the surgery has begun to get exactly the desired outcome. Furthermore, the nose is a structure we want to be aesthetically appealing, but also—importantly—perfectly functional. We need to be able to breathe freely, in a healthy way.”

THE AGING NOSE

Getting a rhinoplasty “just right” means correcting the presenting problems—whether cosmetic or functional or both—

and also it necessitates fitting the nose to the face in a balanced, harmonious, and attractive way. “The ‘nose job’ in the distant past got a bad name in large measure because we used to do all these procedures in the same way,” Dr. Gregg notes. “In the 1980s and ’90s, every rhinoplasty was a reduction, meaning the focus was to take a big nose and make it smaller. This is where stereotypical ‘ski slope look’ originated. We came to realize that not only was this not an ideal look for most people, but that the structure wasn’t holding up over time, and people were developing breathing issues as they aged.”

In part because of her aging nose, Donna was strongly motivated to finally seek help—both aesthetic and functional—two decades after her accident and unfortunate surgical outcome. “As we age,” Dr. Gregg explains, “the sides of the nose, which are kind of like a tent, begin to collapse. We lose volume and bone on the face, cartilage continues aging, and this assortment of changes can contribute to difficulty in breathing. When I’m doing a rhinoplasty for any reason—aesthetic or functional or both—I have to consider the changes I’m making in terms of the immediate outcome, as well as how the aging of the nose, over time, will be affected by the surgical procedure.”

This approach was not well understood in the world of plastic surgery when Donna had her original surgery, so she lived with a poor-quality outcome, in terms of function and aesthetics, unaware that surgical options could be of help.

“I simply got accustomed to what was, while longing for what could be. And still I realized how much of a constant daily impact my nose had on my life. Practically,

it was difficult to breathe. I was constantly wiping and blowing my nose because it was just always draining. And its appearance caused me to feel self-conscious all of the time.”

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-ESTEEM

Donna’s feelings of self-consciousness illuminate the proverbial elephant in the room: while breathing is a top priority, the damage to self-image, self-confidence, and self-esteem caused by a prominent defect in one’s appearance has as real an impact on quality of life as a constantly runny nose.

“I never felt comfortable wearing my hair pulled back,” she recalls, “and I would find myself angling my head down when speaking with someone one-on-one. I felt like all anyone was thinking about when talking to me was how crooked my nose was, even though that may have been far from the truth. Anytime I would attend a professional function with my husband, in my mind I felt just like a kid with a broken nose again—like that appendage was the most obvious thing in the room.”

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Donna’s mental and emotional pain surrounding the long-standing aftermath of her accident are not only relevant to her own life but, as Dr. Gregg explains, quite relevant to her eligibility to have corrective surgery as well.

“Realistic expectations are the very first part of any conversation I have with patients when consulting about a rhinoplasty—or any cosmetic procedure,” Dr. Gregg says. “Donna in every way was a perfect candidate

for rhinoplasty surgery. She didn’t want to look like another person, she just wanted her nose to be her own again. She wanted it to fit her face, and for her breathing and general function to improve. These were very strong and realistic goals.”

Dr. Gregg remembers Donna becoming overwhelmed with emotion during a pre-surgical appointment. “I simply drew out what I was hoping to do, and she started weeping at the projected computer image of a straight nose on her face. My heart went out to her then and there, and I became really excited to work with her. The opportunity to help someone heal internally as well as externally is a special gift, and one that I cherish when it walks in my door.

“Nasal surgery has to be done for the right reasons,” she explains. “If a prospective patient wants a surgical procedure to alter the appearance of a nose they were picked on as a child—a nose that has likely changed over the years—or because their boyfriend doesn’t like something about their appearance, they are not a good candidate for surgery. The psychological impact of plastic surgery is real—good or bad. I believe it’s my job to be invested not just in the physical outcome of the surgery I perform, but to support the true well-being of my patients over time.”

IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

It was this genuine empathy and compassion Dr. Gregg has for her patients that helped Donna, after suffering for so many years, finally go through with a second rhinoplasty. “I was instantly comfortable with Dr. Gregg,” Donna says. “I had been scared to do a second procedure for years, but when I sat down with Dr. Gregg, I just knew right away that I was in the right place at the right time. Dr. Gregg listened to me, really took her time, and walked me through the process of this new surgical journey, step by step.

“And the results were nothing short of amazing. It’s just incredible how straight my nose is now,” Donna says with a smile. “Dr. Gregg is so very talented. The healing process was just as she said it would be, with minimal pain. What’s been most surprising is realizing how much I don’t think about my nose anymore. It’s natural and it fits my face. I feel like Dr. Gregg restored my original self. It’s been a great experience.”

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