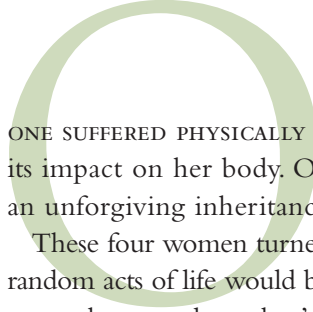




# COSMETIC SURGERY CHANGED MY LIFE

*Four local women tell how  
their procedures brought  
new hope and comfort.*

BY DENISE SCOTT  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEFAN ANDREEV



ONE SUFFERED PHYSICALLY FROM HER HUSBAND'S SLOW DEATH. ONE CELEBRATED NEW LIFE—BUT NOT its impact on her body. One felt prodded by the passage of time. And one feared the ravages of an unforgiving inheritance.

These four women turned to cosmetic surgery in the hopes that pieces of themselves lost to the random acts of life would be returned to them by kinder reflections. Their personalities are as different as the procedures they've chosen, but the end results are the same. Loretta Fox, Monique Wright, Adrienne Madrid and Leslie Starkey are just a few of the many women along the Gulfshore for whom cosmetic surgery has changed their lives—not to become different, but to become themselves again.

## A NEW BEGINNING

*"It diverted my attention from my grief"*

A decade ago, the anguish of four long years watching cancer take her husband and the breath-taking sorrow after his death were apparent on Loretta Fox's face.

"I had lost my husband, and my face just hung," says Fox, now 71, of Naples. "All the muscles just collapsed in that year of my grief. I had aged tremendously. I was like a zombie. I really didn't care."

Her daughter, Naples plastic surgeon Dr. Elizabeth Fox, says her mother's grief-induced weight loss made her wrinkles more pronounced. A year after her father's death, she performed face and neck lifts on her mother to help her refocus her life. "She was single, and she wanted to date

again," Dr. Fox says. "She wanted a nice, rested, refreshed look on her face."

"I have to say, it did work," Loretta says. "It diverted my attention from my grief to a new life, a new beginning."

A few years later, Loretta again turned to her daughter for a breast lift and implants. Then, after she complained to her daughter about what she thought was a fat stomach, Elizabeth explained that it was not fat but excess skin and loose muscles from having three children. That led to Loretta's tummy tuck. A similar complaint by Loretta about what she thought was cellulite led to thigh and arm lifts for excess skin.

"It wasn't a matter of me asking [for surgery]," Loretta says. "It was a matter of me saying, 'I have to



Bright future: Cosmetic surgery helped Loretta Fox begin a new chapter in her life after the death of her husband.

lose more weight.' She said, 'You're never going to lose it. It's excess skin.' I wouldn't wear a bathing suit for years. I thought if you didn't have a perfect body, hide it. We went on vacation last year, and I wore a bathing suit. I felt a lot better than when I had the lumpy-bumpies. When you're young, your body's in good shape. You don't even realize it. When you lose that, that's when you feel bad. [The surgeries] broke a pattern of just sitting. It broke that pattern of grief."

### IT'S OK TO FEEL GOOD

*"I just wanted back what I had before"*

After giving birth to two daughters, Monique Wright's proportionate C-cups grew to double-Ds. She thought they would return to normal after she finished breastfeeding and resumed her active lifestyle, but that didn't happen. Her daughters are now 10 and 12, and Monique, 40, has long since dropped the baby weight. But her breasts remained so cumbersome that she had to wear two bras at a time for support when she went jogging. The straps dug into her shoulders, and she had constant back pain from subconsciously shrugging her shoulders to conceal her chest. "We learn to live with the pain like it's normal," she says.

Then, during the summer before her 38th birthday, Monique took part in a Naples triathlon. "That was it for me, running in a bathing suit," she says. "That was the turning point."

She had been hesitant to seek help because she considered cosmetic surgery to be all about vanity. "As women, we don't put ourselves first," Monique says. "I just wanted back what I had before. Some things you can't do with just diet and exercise."

After consulting with Dr. Fox, Monique decided to have a breast lift and reduction. She also opted for a tummy tuck when Dr. Fox explained that muscles loosened from childbirth were also contributing to her back pain. Stretched skin would also not return to pre-childbirth condition from exercise alone.

"I questioned, 'Do I really need that? But it really did help with my back pain. It supports my back muscles, and now I have a waist. I think I have a nicer belly button than I did before.'"

It took a while to go from the guilt factor to appreciating the benefits of the surgery. "The biggest thing for me was getting over the feeling I was being selfish," Monique says. "It was expensive, and insurance

didn't cover it. If I had gone smaller [breast size], it would have been medically necessary. But I wanted to look like I did before. I'm happy when I look in the mirror now. I was wearing minimizing bras, and they're ugly. I can wear Victoria's Secret now, and the straps aren't three inches wide. Buying a bathing suit before was always such a monster chore."

Dr. Fox says she reassures her female patients (she says male patients don't need reassurance because they don't generally feel guilty about it) that feeling good about yourself has nothing to do with vanity. "It has to do with nurturing yourself," she says.

Monique says she knows many other women are still suffering from the same problems she has finally left behind: "Women need to know this is OK. Have the procedure done if it makes you feel good."

**"THE BIGGEST THING FOR ME WAS GETTING OVER THE FEELING I WAS BEING SELFISH."**



### THE ODDS WERE AGAINST HER

*"Take them both, but I want implants"*

Leslie Starkey was as prepared for the news as anyone can be. Her mother was one of five sisters diagnosed with breast cancer and one of two to survive it. Still,

knowing the odds were against her when the mammogram results came in—one call each year for nearly 20 years—didn't make the news any easier when her time finally came at age 46.

"It was devastating because of my boys," says Leslie, now 48, of Fort Myers. "My two children at the time were seven and 13. I wasn't ready to go anywhere yet."

But like her mother, her mother's twin and her cousin, Leslie was diagnosed with a form of cancer that was encapsulated in her breast. It would not require chemotherapy or radiation. But it would require the removal of her right breast.

"I said, 'Take them both, but I want implants.' I'm a young girl. I want to keep my confidence. I'm an outside sales rep. I run charity auctions. I'm on an apartment association board. It would be intimidating for me to go back with nothing. It wouldn't have boosted my self-esteem at all. This way, there are less questions. I just wanted to look normal."

Her cancer specialist, Dr. Jeffrey Lewis, worked in tandem with plastic and reconstructive surgeon Dr. Ralph R. Garramone, who has offices in Fort Myers and Naples, to complete the reconstruction after removal of the cancerous tissue. "It is very difficult if not devastating news to hear you have to have a body part removed," Garramone says. "A breast is a significant body part that makes a woman feel like a

woman. We can restore how a woman feels in clothing and, in some cases, even out of clothing restore some normalcy. Women older than Leslie and younger than her have [reconstruction] for the same reason."

He says Leslie's reconstruction is more lifelike because her skin and nipples didn't have to be removed. The reconstruction required multiple phases because expanders were required to stretch the skin and fill the implants in small increments.

"I was a 34B, if that," she says. "I could have gone to a double-D. I didn't want to do that. I was just trying to get the same size and look nice in my clothes still. I think it's all about feeling like a woman. I'm engaged to a guy who doesn't care what I look like. He wouldn't care if I had three [breasts]."

During the surgery to remove both breasts, the doctors found the cancer was also in her left breast, a diagnosis missed by the mammogram. Today, she said, a weight is lifted. She no longer has to fear the dreaded call each year. She even enjoys shopping for camisoles and other low-cut tops that she couldn't wear prior to the surgery.

"Now I've got some oomph," Leslie says. "I might as well get a little cleavage out of the deal. I was happy with how I looked. I would never have gotten a boob job. God gave me my body. But this was the hand I was dealt, and I'm fine with that. I'm like, 'Look at me.' I'll show them to anybody. I have probably a three-inch scar on each one—in the form of a smile."

### IT WAS MY TURN

*"Keep cutting until I look cute enough to date"*

Adrienne Madrid started to dread those passing glimpses in the mirror. Instead of seeing herself, the image of her aged mother was beginning to stare back at her. At age 58, after spending her life taking care of her husband, four children and three grandchildren, it was time to take care of herself. "I didn't look like me anymore. I was very unhappy with the way I looked. It was worse day by day. My 60th birthday was coming up, and I just decided it was



Lesley Starkey

**"NOW I'VE GOT SOME OOMPH. I MIGHT AS WELL GET A LITTLE CLEAVAGE OUT OF THE DEAL."**



my turn. So this was my birthday present to myself."

Adrienne, now 60, of Lehigh Acres, says her upper eyelids were droopy and her lower eyelids were puffy, so she turned to Dr. Stephen Laquis, an ocular plastic surgeon with offices in Bonita Springs, Fort Myers and Cape Coral. She was excited for the consultation, during which he discussed her expectations and what he could provide. "I said, 'Knock me out and keep cutting until I look cute enough to date, and then I'll be done.' He just laughed," she recalls.

She wasn't afraid to go under the knife to get the results she desired because she's already been through a much more traumatic medical experience. "When I was 45, I was run over by a car and had a titanium rod put in from my knee to my ankle. Once you've been run over by an Acura, everything's relative. When he started marking my face, I said, 'Oh, my God, this is like

being on *Dr. 90210*. That's what I call him."

Laquis remembers Adrienne's great outlook on life, but he also recalls her sadness. "The eyes are the first thing you see when you look at the face. That's the first thing that catches you, and that's the thing that bothered her most. She was really upset. She said, 'People think I'm sleeping.' At one point, she almost cried in the office. But she had realistic expectations and a good outcome."

Adrienne was so pleased with the initial surgeries on her eyelids—which improved her vision as well as her looks—that she opted to return for Botox injections for the temporary elimination of wrinkles in her forehead and between her eyebrows; and Juvederm injections to plump her lips and crevices between her nose and mouth.

"I know I don't look like I'm 30," she says. "I look rested. I *know* I don't look like I'm 60. I told Dr. Laquis when it was all said and done, he gave me my face back. I look like me. That's what I wanted."

She said she isn't shy about sharing her experiences and jokes that she'd shout it from an ice cream truck: "I got my eyes done! Do I look better? I have every kind of glittery, shiny [eye shadow] that a 14-year-old would own. Sephora is my nirvana. I love it. I have mirrors everywhere now so I can admire myself." ♣