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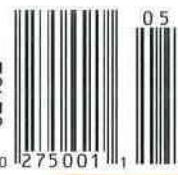
**ON FAME, JOSH
& BEING SUPERSEXY
(AND OH MY, THAT HAIR!
GET HER LOOK ON PAGE 262)**

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PIECES OF YOU

As an insecure teen, Sabrina Weiss thought a nose job would solve her problems. Now, as her father's health deteriorates, she discovers what the surgery really erased: a trace of him



Sailing up New York's Sprain Brook Parkway in my father's beige, ocean-liner-size Cadillac, I declared from the backseat: "I want a nose job." A few girls in my ninth-grade class had returned from winter vacation with snazzy new snouts, and I was resolved to do the same. I had, after all, inherited my father's nose, complete with its protruding bump and long, beakish tip. A cuter, daintier model, I argued, might soften my boyish face. Both of my parents wholeheartedly agreed. I wish I had a recording of the conversation so that I could replay the long sigh of relief that discharged from my mother's mouth.

My father married her later in life; by the time I was born, he was 50. Raised in a poor immigrant neighborhood in East New York, Brooklyn, he had cultivated a distinguished look and a self-styled British accent that gave him the enchanting air of Cary

Grant. In all things, I sought his approval. At 10, I toiled alongside him in his workshop in our basement; later I took up his passions of writing and painting. He taught me to love Laurel & Hardy. Just as Hardy would lock eyes with the camera, expressing his irritation with Laurel's antics, my dad looked to me for understanding.

On a trip to California when I was 16, we left my mother and sister at the hotel; in the rental car, he told me we were on our way to an important meeting in Hollywood to discuss the possibility of producing his screenplay. It was a journey that could change his fate, and I was his chosen copilot.

Despite this bond, by the time I hit puberty, it was clear that, unlike my younger sister, Sophia—who was popular, well accessorized, and boy-crazy—I was not living up to his definition of womanhood. My father was born in 1928, the same year as Mickey Mouse, and possessed an old-fashioned, Disneyfied view of women: We should be soft, feminine, gentle—and con-

stantly on a quest for our prince. Next to the label-conscious, salon-styled girls at my private school, I resembled a prepubescent boy, both aesthetically and spiritually. Rail thin, breasts hidden under oversize flannel shirts, I spent weekends wolfing down pizza and playing video games.

And then there was my nose—his nose—which grew more exaggerated at the onset of puberty. It became the focus of my self-loathing, a manifestation of all my shortcomings as a girl. Altering it was one way, at least, that I could become more feminine.

So, a few days after high school graduation, I finally got my nose job. The surgery flattened the bridge of my nose but left it with a lengthy tip and asymmetrical nostrils. A second procedure shaved down the tip and reshaped the nostrils. As promised, it made my face softer. Less self-conscious, I began to put more care into the way I dressed and even wore a little makeup.

But the anxious, tugging sensation in my chest was still there. Surgery eliminated the one problem that had so preoccupied me, but it forced me to acknowledge another, bigger issue—my sexuality—that would make me a failed woman in my father's eyes.

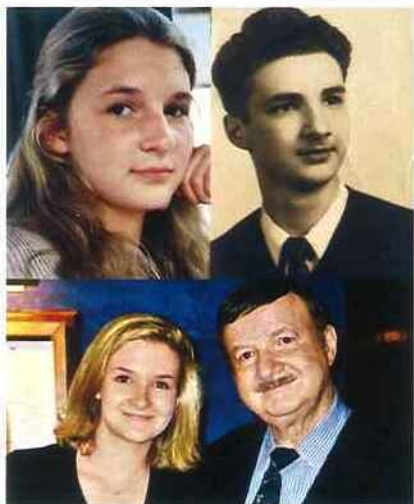
With time, I was able to crack my former self-perception. In college, I entered my first relationship with a woman and began to feel attractive and desirable—another first. I spent a semester in Florence, suspended in what seemed like a whirling dream of bicurious girls trying to bed me. Would that have been possible with my old nose?

I had spent my first postcollege year in San Francisco, but my father asked me to return to New York because of his waning health. Within a few weeks, I met a woman and one night accidentally fell asleep at her apartment, waking at 5 A.M. to discover 16 messages from my mother on my cell phone. I rushed home and tearfully came clean. My mother lambasted me for deceit and pronounced my sexuality a "phase."

From then on, my father was polite to me at family occasions, but increasingly distant. One Father's Day, I had a trophy made for him, which he received with indifference. When I bought tickets to "Seeing Debussy, Hearing Monet" at Carnegie Hall for his birthday, he declined, blaming his health.

My mother filled the gap, vilifying me and my "choices" even after I moved in with my girlfriend. She told me the news had aggravated my father's health, that he couldn't sleep at night because he was so distraught.

Until age 79, he spent his semiretired days in his Brooklyn law office, curled up with copies of *The New Yorker* and the *New York Post*, listening to a crackling radio and trading dirty jokes with the guys down the



Clockwise from top left: The author as a teenager, before plastic surgery; her father's high school graduation portrait; Weiss (post-nose job) and her father

MOTHER, MIRROR

After years of refusing to go under the knife, Lisa Lewis learned to listen to the opinion that matters most: her own

"You would be so pretty if you got your nose fixed," my mother said.

Fixed. Like I was damaged.

She introduced me to friends with a disclaimer: "My daughter wasn't supposed to look like this." She'd chosen my father for breeding because of his handsome face and long fingers, and she wanted her daughter to be a button-nosed pianist. My nose was huge, and I didn't play the piano, and my parents are now divorced. Just saying.

My beak was big, without a doubt—lumpy, crooked, and, I dare say, stereotypically Jewish amid the sea of wealthy Protestants in our Illinois town (voted, in 1997, one of the best in the nation in which to raise children).

"Pain for beauty," was my mother's motto, as she warped my long hair into scalp-pinching braids. A former actress and model, she appeared in a few episodes of *All My Children* before I was born. When I was growing up, she couldn't leave the house without asking, "Do I look beautiful? You're not looking—look. Beautiful?"

My mom had convinced her frugal mother to pay for her own nose job when she was a teen; later, she had it tweaked twice to get it right. So when a salesclerk or waitress recognized us as mother and daughter, she was insulted. Her surgeries were supposed to have saved her from looking like me.

At her best, my mother has always been generous, fun, witty, and deeply concerned about me, and, in her way, she was trying to help. To her, a smaller nose would be one less obstacle to a happy future. But when she asked again and again if she looked beautiful, I'd burst into tears, desperate for her to tell me I was beautiful too.

And yet, oddly, when I *wasn't* crying, I was also totally into my nose. I was convinced that it made me funny, approachable, quirky, Jewish; that my personality, my identity, and my relationship with my mother were all in there. Depending on the day, my haircut, the bathroom lighting, or whether a boy had asked me to a dance (and they did), I ping-ponged between feeling exotic and

hall. But last November, he was hospitalized after a fall, and it fell to me to pack up the office where he'd worked for more than 50 years. I uncovered unsold screenplays and short stories, illegible phone messages, and, at the very bottom of the pile, a stack of pictures. I flipped through them, snickering at the '70s sideburns and wide-collar shirts, until one gave me pause. It was my father's high school graduation portrait. Staring out from this glossy black-and-white photo was my own face: my closed-mouth smile; my dark, deep-set eyes. And there it was: my old nose. Despite everything the surgery did for me—and it did a lot—I wish I could undo it. At 31, I've come to appreciate the things I inherited from my father: his humor, his love of ketchup and Mondrian paintings. When he is gone, how will I reconcile my decision to erase something we once shared? I stared at the image, tears running down my cheeks.

Soon afterward, my father entered hospice care. Twice, his lungs filled with fluid, and he narrowly escaped death. But while his body hangs on precariously, his mind remains remarkably intact. I've spent more time with him this year than over the previous 10, our relationship reduced to its purest form: a father and daughter who have a lot in common and care for one another. We talk or watch Laurel & Hardy while he keeps the nurses laughing with puns and one-liners. It's both a gift and some kind of cosmic joke.

In the end, this is what we're left with: an aging parent wasting away in a hospital room, muscle and fat disappearing from his body. When I visit him each week, I scan his face: eyes, cheeks, mouth, chin. My gaze stops at the nose, and I bring my right hand to my face and run my index finger along the bridge of my own. ●

ELLE BEAUTY PSYCHOLOGY

like a total freak. Still, I rejected a “happy puberty” nose job at 13 and a “sweet 16” rhinoplasty, too.

Yet by 2006, when I was 24, single, and working in film production in New York City, it became clear that my mother wasn't the only one who reacted negatively to my nose. People stopped me on the street to tell me I looked like Barbra Streisand. Japanese tourists wanted to take pictures with me. Hairstylists told me I needed to play down my nose—“no offense.” I started writing down the unprovoked remarks in a journal; in one year, I recorded 59.

September 23, 2006

Gay man at a party in Williamsburg: “Damn, girl, why you never got that thing taken off?”

A woman overhearing: “I like it, don't get it fixed.”

Her friend: “You're Jewish, right?”

The nose hadn't stopped me from dating, getting jobs, or making friends. But it was beginning to feel like some silly outfit I'd put on to annoy my mother. After years of defiantly building an identity around it, was I finally going to admit that I hated it too?

I went to see a plastic surgeon, who created a digital projection of the nose he could give me: scooped, small, with a slight upturn. The picture looked like another girl. And she was so pretty.

But I was worried. Would changing my nose change my identity? Would I lose the thing that gave me character? The doctor seemed amused. “Do you really think you are your nose?” he asked.

Well, yes. And this, I realized, was the



From left, Lewis before and after her nose job. “I feel giddy about the way I look now,” she says.

real problem: My nose overshadowed what I loved about myself. After years of struggling not to be my mother's mirror, it was time to be happy with my own reflection.

My surgery was in November 2007. My mother flew to New York and booked a hotel for us near the doctor's office, where she drew me baths and read to me for the first few days of my recovery—the kind of mothering I had longed for. “Relax,” she told me as she replaced the bandages. “Soon you'll be prettier than me.”

My new nose isn't tiny, but it's smaller, more sculpted. As one colleague said, “Now I can see your eyes, cheeks, and smile, too.” I hate to say it, but my mother is right: It's the nose I was meant to have. I don't have to make excuses for it or cover it with my hair. I can just be.

Asked why she used to be so cruel about my nose, my mother has explained that her own mother made her feel worthless. While that sad cycle helps me to understand her, it doesn't excuse our past. Now each time she tells me I'm lovely, I feel the full force of its opposite—the stinging comments of my youth. But at least I believe her. I hate to admit how much that matters to me.

CHANGING FACES: THE NEWS IN NOSES

AHEAD BY A NOSE



Nicole Kidman, 2010



Faith Hill, 2000



Paulina Porizkova, 1990

Three decades of gold standards, according to Toby G. Mayer, MD, and Richard W. Fleming, MD, the L.A. doc duo behind an annual most-requested-features list.



VS.



In the post-ski-jump era, the best nose job is one that looks like no nose job at all. According to NYC plastic surgeon Steven Pearlman, MD, who specializes in revision rhinoplasty (i.e., do-overs), **spreader grafts**—pieces of the patient's own cartilage he inserts into the middle third of the nose—“create a smoother curve from the brow to the tip, with no ‘drop-off’ in the middle.” For patients with very thin skin, who were previously prone to the bony-looking “shrink-wrap” effect, Pearlman also adds ultrathin grafts of cartilage or tissue taken from the temple to the tip of the nose, a trick he refers to as “carpet padding.”

Scalpel-phobic? Injections of Botox and fillers temporarily smooth bumps, lift drooping tips, and add definition, says L.A.-based cosmetic surgeon Alexander Rivkin, MD. He perfected the profile below in minutes with two vials of the filler Radiesse, which lasts 10 to 12 months. For a long-term fix, Rivkin recently began offering the same treatment using ArteFill, a filler made of Lucite spheres suspended in collagen, which is shown to last up to 15 years.

