

ABOUT FACE

On a journey through loss and despair, one woman finds happiness by balancing inner and outer beauty

By Chris Sutton

When Lydia Treager tried to imagine her life without her husband of nearly 30 years, she saw nothing but darkness. That was two years ago and, talking to her today, it's difficult to imagine such a positive person in such utter despair.

Thanks to a new career, a new love, and a rejuvenated appearance, Lydia has a sparkle in her eye and a note of vitality in her voice. It hasn't been an easy journey, but she's definitely rediscovered her zest for life.

"I feel better today than I did in my forties," says Lydia, 61. "I feel fabulous."

Lydia Treager in her place of business: In 2009, she had a lower facelift, a neck lift, and facial laser skin resurfacing.



“I’d spent years taking care of my family. I decided now it was time to do something just for me.”

“I WANTED TO DIE”

Lydia’s story offers hope to people faced with rebuilding their lives after a traumatic loss.

“For some reason, numbers ending in nine are associated with very significant events in my life,” relates Lydia. “I was married at 29, I was pregnant at 39, and I was widowed at 59.”

In late 2007, Lydia and her husband Jeri, a retired Lt. Colonel in the Army, were enjoying life on their Sand Springs, Oklahoma, land a few miles outside of Tulsa. They were empty nesters, their daughter having left for college a year earlier. Lydia was considering a new avocation. Her lifetime career path is somewhat unusual, including a stint as an airline stewardess in the 1970s, an oil and gas employee in the 1980s, and a wood artist in the 1990s. She decided to follow her daughter’s lead and go to school. She chose barber school, with the goal of opening her own shop.

“I was enjoying my new career and life was very good,” relates Lydia. “My husband was 14 years older than me and he’d had some health problems, but he was still very active and we were always doing things.”

Two days after Christmas in 2007, Lydia’s life changed irrevocably. The couple was on their acreage, cleaning up the aftermath of an Oklahoma ice storm, when Jeri had a heart attack that killed him before they could reach the hospital.

“I was devastated. I wanted to die, too,” recalls Lydia of the terrible days following her husband’s sudden death. “I remember laying down on the floor and screaming. I had no idea what I would do without him.”

As time went on and the shock eased, Lydia’s natural optimism

reasserted itself. She credits the legacy of her mother, a German war bride.

“I guess I inherited her strength. The German in me said ‘Okay Lydia, you can sit around and waste your life feeling sorry for yourself or you can pick yourself up and get going,’” she says.

DOING SOMETHING FOR HERSELF

Lydia took her own advice and started to build a new life. In time, she found she couldn’t maintain the land by herself. She sold it and moved to Tulsa, spending her days running a barbershop that specialized in military haircuts. She was happy, productive, and energetic, but began to feel that her outward appearance didn’t reflect how she felt inside.

“I’m not sure, maybe it was the effect of sadness on my face. When I looked in the mirror, I saw someone different,” she says. “I’d spent years taking care of my family. I decided now it was time to do something just for me.”

In April of 2009, Lydia had a lower facelift, a neck lift, and facial laser skin resurfacing. She couldn’t be happier with the results.

“I had just one week downtime and a very successful recovery. I went into it healthy, and I followed all the instructions. One of the most surprising things is that there’re no visible scars,” she says.

New Techniques, Better Results

Lydia’s surgeon, Tulsa-based Dr. James Koehler, says facelifts have vastly improved in recent years.

“When they did facelifts years ago, they simply removed extra skin and pulled back the remaining skin. That led to the ‘windblown’ look that was so unnatural looking,” he says. “Today, we make inci-



Dr. James Koehler

ARE YOU A CANDIDATE FOR SURGERY?

Dr. Koehler says every patient goes through a consultation process designed to determine whether or not the person is a good candidate for surgery. “I don’t do any surgery until I learn the patient’s motivation. The consultation process ensures that my expectations and the patient’s expectations are on the same page,” he explains.

Whatever their motivation, people who are rushing into the decision aren’t good candidates. Dr. Koehler’s goal is patients who have thoroughly considered having a procedure, have thoroughly researched the procedure and have realistic expectations for the potential outcome.

“The goal of cosmetic surgery should never be changing your life. If the result is that your life changes, that’s great,” he says.

“We all thought Lydia was beautiful just as she was, but...realized that this was more about Lydia’s heart than it was about her face.”

sions beneath the chin, in front and back of the ear, and reposition the muscles. The key is that not every patient gets the same ‘pull.’”

But removing excess skin is only part (albeit a major part) of the process. Once you’re lifted, it’s time to improve the way the skin looks and feels.

“As we age, our skin loses collagen and structure,” explains Dr. Koehler. “It begins to show damage from the sun, smoking, or just from pure genetics.”

Dr. Koehler uses a CO2 laser that essentially removes the top layer of skin, making way for a smooth, flaw-free surface, while also stimulating production of new collagen.

“The result is smoother skin of uniform color,” says Dr. Koehler. “The down time is one week because the skin is quite red post-operatively.”

More Beautiful than Ever

Lydia anticipated at least a week’s downtime after her procedures and was very open with everyone about her plans.

“This is not something to be ashamed of—it’s something to celebrate. I told all of my friends what I was planning, and I was also very open with the customers in my barbershop,” she says. “Everyone was very supportive and positive.”

Tulsa realtor Rose Weaver, one of Lydia’s closest friends, admits to some initial reservations.

“We all thought Lydia was beautiful just as she was, but she was insistent. After many long lunches and talks, I realized that this was more about Lydia’s heart than it was about her face,” says Rose.

Lydia’s mother, Kathryn Curtis, says her daughter appears “happier and much more upbeat and self-confident” since her surgery. Lydia’s friend Rose says she, too, is impressed with the changes.

“I admit the change in her appearance was significant, but the change in how she felt about herself was amazing,” she says. “It gave her a new zeal for life. She is more self-assured and willing to take risks in her life that are paying off big for her. She’s an amazing woman, a terrific friend and more beautiful than ever.”

FACING FORWARD

Lydia is so pleased with her facial surgery that she’s decided further work is in order—this time below the neck.

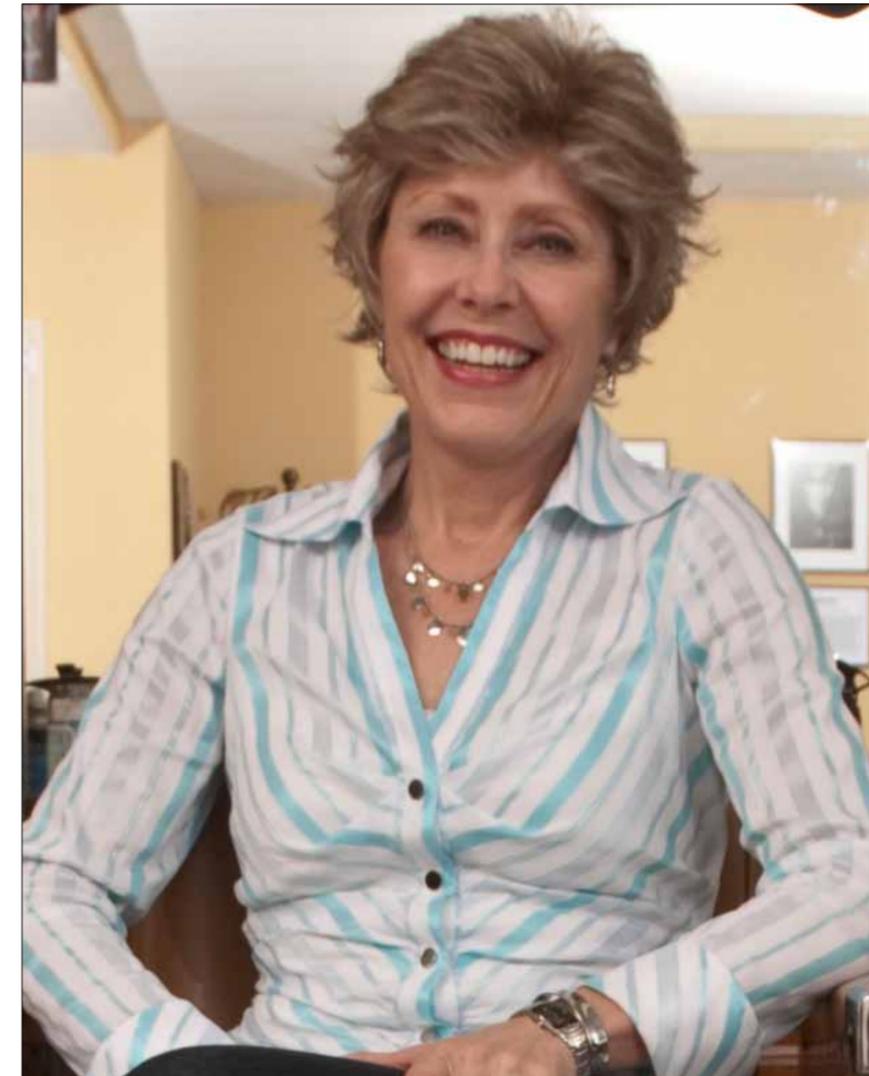
“I work out regularly and do a body pump routine that I really love, but when you’ve had a baby and done breastfeeding, there are changes that exercise will never fix,” she says.

So Lydia has now scheduled herself for a tummy tuck and breast augmentation. “My fiancée doesn’t want me to do it,” she admits.

That’s right, Lydia has a fiancée. Two days before Christmas in 2008, she logged on to eHarmony and “met a really nice man” from the Oklahoma City area. They recently got engaged and, though they haven’t set a date, she says “it’s getting harder and harder to be apart.”

Lydia’s final words of advice?

“If you’re going to do it, do it for yourself and nobody else.”



THE ‘TYPICAL’ PATIENT

Though Dr. Koehler believes there is no “typical” cosmetic surgery patient, he says that a common thread connects many of them—like Lydia, they’re women at a crossroads in their lives.

“I see women in their twenties, usually for breast augmentation,” says Dr. Koehler, who has practiced for five years with Tulsa Surgical Arts, a three-surgeon cosmetic surgery group. “Most of my other patients are women in their thirties, forties and fifties.”

Tummy tucks and breast lifts are popular with women in their thirties and early forties. “They’re finished having children and they want their bodies back,” he explains.

Women in their late forties and fifties can no longer ignore the effects of time and gravity on their faces and decide to fight back. “Some are competing in the job market; others are nearing retirement and want a new lease on life. They’re tired of wearing turtlenecks and they decide to do something about it,” he says.