

LOUD AND CLEAR

You wouldn't know it by looking at her, but Blake Carter was once uncomfortable in her own skin. That all changed, though, when the radio host underwent a cosmetic transformation that changed her life.

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Clothing, styling and makeup by Espy. Hair by Pure.Form Salon/Studio.

FOR YEARS, SHE WOULD AVOID HER OWN GAZE WHEN GETTING OUT OF THE SHOWER, quick to hide her perceived shortcomings with several layers of padding tucked into her bra. And it took her the better part of a decade, not to mention a tidy sum, to make a move that would change those feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy.

But Blake Carter, a radio host formerly based in Calgary, says the long road she took to her breast augmentation surgery is one she would never go back on.

"I was never happy with the way my chest looked," confides the 24-year-old Vancouver native, who says she wanted to go under the scalpel as early as Grade 8.

"I was always wearing padded bras because I felt the shape was off. Women in the movies had big, round breasts, but mine didn't look like that. I never had cute, perky boobs — even at a young age, they were kind of droopy."

Visits to the doctor as a distraught teenager brought reassurances that she would "grow into them" — but Carter says she never did. As she got older, her insecurity worsened.

"No one ever saw me when I changed — I always made sure to cover up," she says. "Even while dating, it took me a long time to feel comfortable going shirtless around my boyfriend."

Moving to Calgary from a year-long radio gig in Saskatoon, she felt emboldened by her new surroundings. She conducted painstaking research — "I Googled it, read people's blogs and asked every girl I knew" — and plunked down the \$10,700 required for her breast augmentation.

After going in for gel breast implants last June, increasing her cup size to a D from her former A-cup, Carter says she now feels she finally looks the way they she was meant to be.

"This is the choice I made, and I'm really happy about it," she says.

As part of an emerging demographic that is not only more inclined to research, consider and get cosmetic procedures at a younger age, Carter is also not afraid to talk openly and unapologetically about her surgery. >>



“He always said, ‘If it makes you happy, do it. If not, I love you just the way you are’

Dr. Kristina Zakhary credits that to cosmetic surgery entering the mainstream.

“More and more people are entering or becoming involved in the business of beauty through cosmetic enhancement — from tattoo artists to dermatologists and dentists, says Zakhary, a fellow of both the Canadian and the American academies of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, and accredited by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery.

“There are so many choices and such easy access to a wide variety of specialists who can improve how they look, that it’s become more acceptable than ever.”

A recent American Society of Plastic Surgeons survey, for example, showed 13.1 million cosmetic surgery procedures were performed in 2010 in the U.S. alone.

“This represents a five per cent increase over 2009,” says Zakhary. “Out of those, 1.6 million were surgical and 11.6 million were minimally invasive procedures. Out of the surgical procedures, the number of facelifts performed grew by more than nine per cent.”

This is indicative of a shift in patients’ perspectives on plastic surgery, which Zakhary says is now more commonly viewed as not an indulgence or luxury, but as just another tool in boosting self-image.

“Plastic surgery is just an extension of nutrition, fitness, makeup and fashion — all of which help enhance our attractiveness to ourselves and to society,” she says.

“One of the biggest myths surrounding people who get plastic surgery is that they are seeking a dramatically different appearance. Most clients happen to like everything about themselves, expect for one feature that they want to make more harmonious. What they are actually trying to do is to blend in to join a group of people they perceive as normal or average.”

Dr. Tom Woo, a dermatologist at the Laser Rejuvenation Clinic and Spa who has been practicing for 26 years, says he has seen firsthand a tremendous change in the number and age of people seeking cosmetic procedures.

“I see many patients in their late 20s and early 30s who are now realizing that if you want to prevent wrinkles, you have to treat them at an early stage,” he says.

“But we also have a population of baby boomers who have decided

that we don’t want to get old. Plus, with the economic changes, we now need to work longer, so we also want to look younger.”

This newfound awareness is coupled with patients generally knowing more about their cosmetic options, as well as new advances in the field that reduce recovery times.

Often, the more informed the patient is, the less apprehensive they are about other people knowing the particulars of what they had done, says Woo.

“They’re not ashamed of it,” he says. “A lot of times, they’re proud of keeping up their youthful air, whereas in the past they may not have wanted anyone to know.”

Daniel Côté, an interior designer, says his decision to undergo a series of Botox treatments was inspired by his work.

“When you work in an area like interior design and product management, the image of one’s physical appearance is crucial. It’s like handing an invoice that’s crumpled to the customer,” he explains.

“It may sound silly, but I feel I can now go into negotiations more confidently without worrying about how wrinkled my forehead is.”

Minimally invasive procedures like Botox work best if the results they deliver can meet your expectations, says Zakhary.

“Like many things in life, you get out of it what you put into it,” she says. “When you talk about sculpting or restoring vitality and youth, usually surgical intervention is the best long-term investment and the most rewarding choice because it gets you the best definitive results.”

“Obviously, there are some procedures where the non-surgical route is the best alternative, which is where Botox injections, chemical peels and synthetic fillers can come in.”

Motive also remains an important consideration behind any procedure.

“The point of it all is to make you the best version of you — not somebody else,” says Zakhary. “Can it change your life? That contentment and satisfaction comes from within, not from being in competition with the person next door.”

In the case of breast augmentation, it’s a common enough procedure that most patients understand what they’re getting themselves into, says Calgary-based plastic surgeon Dr. Greg Waslen, who performed Carter’s procedure.



It is one of the most common operations performed throughout the world — “maybe half a million a year, all told,” he says.

“In the last 10 years, thanks to research and development, the implants have also become much better. They last longer, are more inert and compatible with the patient, and the shape and consistency mimics that of the natural breast.”

Because it’s also a procedure that spans three generations, the self-consciousness behind it is gone, too, he adds.

“Fifty, 60 years ago, mothers were having it done, and now it’s their granddaughters,” says Waslen. “It’s talked about everywhere — from high school and at work to retirement parties — so it’s easier to go through with it and not be criticized.”

“It’s also not uncommon to have it done and then show their breasts to their friends a week later. I don’t think I ever saw that 20 years ago.”

While Carter’s parents always knew she wanted a breast augmentation, she admits she was terrified to tell them afterward.

“My dad said, ‘I understand you weren’t happy with them before, but if you’re happy now, that’s good,’” says Carter. “My mom said, ‘Wow, they look really good — they just sit up there.’”

She returned to work five days after the surgery.

Her boyfriend flew into town from Saskatoon to sit with her in the waiting room and take care of her during the recovery.

Carter’s quick to point out that while he was supportive of her decision to undergo the procedure, he was not the reason behind it.

“He always said, ‘If it makes you happy, do it. If not, I love you just the way you are,’” says Carter.



When she woke up, she felt a throbbing pain in her chest — not unbearable, she says — that was relieved with some painkillers.

She slept a lot the first few days, but by Saturday, she was ready to get out of the house. “By the fourth day, I was renting movies and sitting on a patio with friends. I was back to work on Monday.”

“It has made me really happy. It’s exciting to put on a low-cut shirt and have some cleavage — to buy a demi-cup bra at Victoria’s Secret that I could never fit into before.

“My friend said to me, ‘Why did you do that? You already have a man.’ And I said, ‘this has nothing to do with it. This was 100 per cent for me.’”