

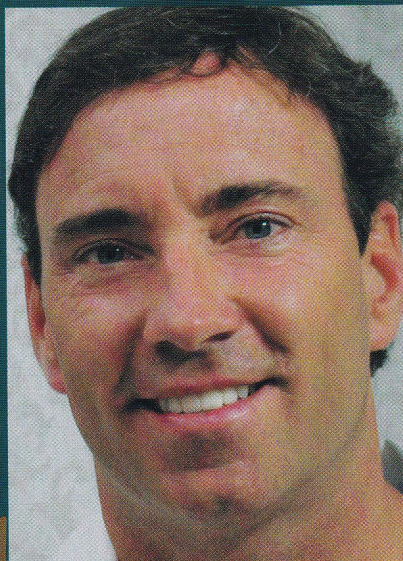
OLE MISS

A L U M N I R E V I E W

Winter 2005

In Search of Beauty

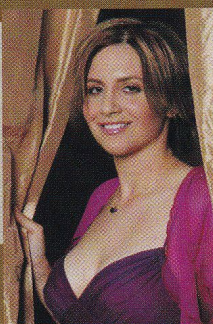
90 Days in Baghdad ♡ Extra! Extra! Extra!



The Master of "After"



BEFORE



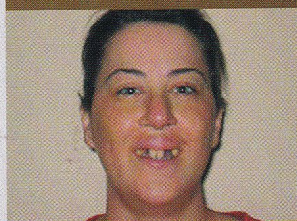
after



BEFORE



after



BEFORE



after

Ole Miss plastic surgeon works his magic in front of the cameras on ABC's "Extreme Makeover"

by Rachel Donahue

Among the "Extreme Makeover" patients helped by Ole Miss alumnus Garth Fisher are (from left) Jeanene, a punk rocker who wanted to tone down her extreme goth look; Kine, who was so self-conscious about her lips she wouldn't let anyone kiss her; and Stacy, who was born with a cleft palate and had given up on improving her appearance after undergoing multiple earlier surgeries. (patient photos courtesy of ABC Photo Archives)

What do a breast cancer survivor from Portland, Ore., a punk rock factory worker from Louisville, Ky., and a dog groomer from Carson City, Nev., have in common?

They've all bared their souls and—to some extent their bodies—for millions of viewers on ABC's "Extreme Makeover," putting their destinies in the hands of an Ole Miss alumnus, Beverly Hills plastic surgeon Garth Fisher.

Fisher (BA 80, MD 84) specializes in aesthetic/cosmetic plastic surgery of the face, nose and breasts, and his practice includes entertainers, celebrities and business executives from around the world. Though Fisher can't release any of his private patients' names, according to *GQ* magazine "his A-list is very, very A."

Fisher's patients on the popular television show, however, are ordinary men and women looking for an extraordinary change in their appearance and,

Cinderella story where they would find people who had been dealt a bad hand in life and help them. Fisher agreed.

"I know I don't have to go to work worrying that they're going to do something on the edge just for rating points," Fisher says. "In the end, it's all about helping people and helping patients, and I think that's what we're doing."

Since "Extreme Makeover" began in 2002, Fisher has performed many life-altering transformations on the show's participants. He continues to keep up with them long after the cameras stop rolling. Patients featured on "Extreme Makeover" waived their right to confidentiality for the show, and Fisher speaks very fondly of Kine (pronounced ka-Nay), one of his most memorable patients. Kine's lip was so deformed that she refused to let anyone kiss her. She was shy and introverted when she first came into Fisher's office, but she emerged from surgery a strong, confident woman and currently tours the country as a

paced world he has chosen to live in. "I am very creative and very meticulous. I've always been detail-oriented and appreciated beauty."

And people who know say his work reflects those characteristics. *Elle* magazine called him a "modern day da Vinci."

This is a big change for a man who grew up in Laurel, Miss.

Born in 1958 into a military family in Sacramento, Calif., Fisher moved frequently with his family before they settled in Laurel. His dad was sent to Vietnam when Fisher was in the fifth grade. During the war, the elder Fisher was taken prisoner and never returned home. The family decided to remain in Laurel and make Mississippi their permanent home. Young Garth attended Laurel High School and then chose to go to Ole Miss.

He worked hard toward his degree, giving up many of the "extracurricular activities" that can sidetrack students. He obtained his bachelor's in biological

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—Garth Fisher

along with it, an extraordinary change in their lives.

"These people have great self-esteem trapped in bodies where they have a poor self-image," Fisher says. "They just pop right out and blossom. It's amazing to watch."

Fisher's practice was thriving when Howard Schultz and ABC approached him with the concept of a new reality show called "Extreme Makeover." Appointments were already booked a year in advance, but believing the show might hurt his business, Fisher turned them down. He didn't want the integrity of both his practice and his profession soiled by some reality TV gimmick, nor did he want to participate in something that would exploit patients for ratings.

But Schultz was persistent; he wanted Fisher to headline the show. He promised that the program would promote a positive image for plastic surgery. It would essentially be a heart-warming

motivational speaker.

According to the "Extreme Makeover" Web site, other people Fisher has helped on the show include a man who'd lost 200 pounds and needed an extended body tuck to get rid of the large folds of excess skin left behind. The breast cancer survivor mentioned earlier was accepted for the show after courageously revealing her scarred left chest on her application tape and later underwent an unusual type of reconstructive surgery.

Unusual is a word you also might use to describe someone like Fisher who's made himself at home in Southern California. In the land of plastic—plastic actors, plastic credit cards and plastic surgery—Fisher's kindness and integrity are definitely genuine.

"I was always a people person, and I think it takes a lot of people skills to be in this particular field of medicine," says Fisher, who brings his own attentive touch of Southern hospitality to the fast-

science in 1980 and received his medical degree from The University of Mississippi Medical Center in 1984.

"There were fraternity parties I missed and things that I wanted to do and couldn't, but in the end, it's a four-year sacrifice for a 30-year game plan of happiness," he says.

Fisher was selected for a general surgery internship and residency program at the University of California-Irvine in 1984 and stayed on in the plastic and reconstructive surgery department until 1991. Afterwards, he did a six-month fellowship shadowing world-renowned facial surgeon Dr. Bruce Connell before he set up his own practice in Beverly Hills.

Though Fisher is energetic about his work, he will not hesitate to turn down a patient who he believes wants surgery for the wrong reasons.

He once talked a very famous male actor out of a drastic surgery makeover.

The man was concerned that his aging appearance made him less desirable in Hollywood, but Fisher convinced him that his distinguished look was part of his trademark.

"In the end, it all boils down to being an honest doctor who tells the truth and tells the patient what they can and cannot achieve, and telling them when to stop," he says. "That's my job."

Though "Extreme Makeover" participants don't have to wait the normal two years for an appointment, Fisher is quick to note that the degree of care and quality is the same. He doesn't allow a TV schedule to interfere with a patient's recovery process.

"I don't speed up for anybody at any time; I just want the results to be as perfect as possible," he says.

Fisher also notes that a lot more goes

"The concept of taking all mirrors away for six weeks is ridiculous," he says. "That's a time when [patients are] emotionally very vulnerable and they need help. They need to see; they need to be comforted. I think that's torture."

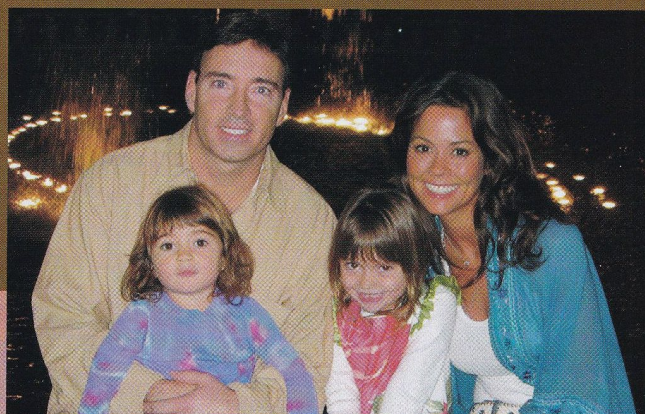
He also believes the beauty pageant at the end of the season is cruel. Despite all that they've been through, he says someone will be inevitably labeled a loser.

Originally, Fisher was contracted to perform every surgery for "Extreme Makeover," but quickly found that his regular practice wouldn't allow it. He now performs at least 30 percent of the surgeries and plans to stay on as long as

With his busy schedule, Fisher is not able to be at home as much as he would like. His goal for 2005 is to spend more time with his family, and he is already working on ways to clear up his schedule so this will be possible.

"I want to be able to see my children grow up. That's a priority for me."

Fisher is only able to return home to Mississippi once every couple of years, but he truly misses the South, especially Southern-style food. Because his wife is a



Patient photos courtesy of ABC Photo Archives

(Clockwise from left) Kine discusses how her life has changed since undergoing plastic surgery; Fisher with wife, Brooke Burke, and their two daughters, Sierra and Neria; Fisher examines Jeff, who appealed to "Extreme Makeover" for help with the large folds of excess skin he was left with after losing 200 pounds.

on than the viewer sees. He estimates that for every minute of time aired on television, 200 minutes have been edited out.

While the concept of plastic surgery reality TV shows is controversial, Fisher believes that "Extreme Makeover" is the most positive. He says that shows like Fox's "The Swan" and MTV's "I Want a Famous Face" are structured in a less sensitive and less appropriate way.

Fisher says "The Swan" gains ratings by exploiting its patients.

the show runs. It's been picked up for another season and now broadcasts in 150 countries.

Fisher's day-to-day life has not changed much since his television debut. He occasionally gets stopped by avid viewers, but says he never gets hassled.

"I do the same things, and I get home about the same time, and I've got the same loving and happy family at home."

His wife, actress Brooke Burke, was very supportive of his decision to go on the show.

very healthy eater, he doesn't get to have his greasy favorites often.

When he first arrived in California, Fisher felt a little discriminated against because of his Southern accent. Though his own accent is now almost nonexistent, Fisher says the sound of a Southerner's voice still stirs memories of home.

"I love hearing a Southern accent. It's so comforting and warm ... so charming," he says. "God, there is nothing better." *AR*