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# JOURNAL

OCTOBER 2009

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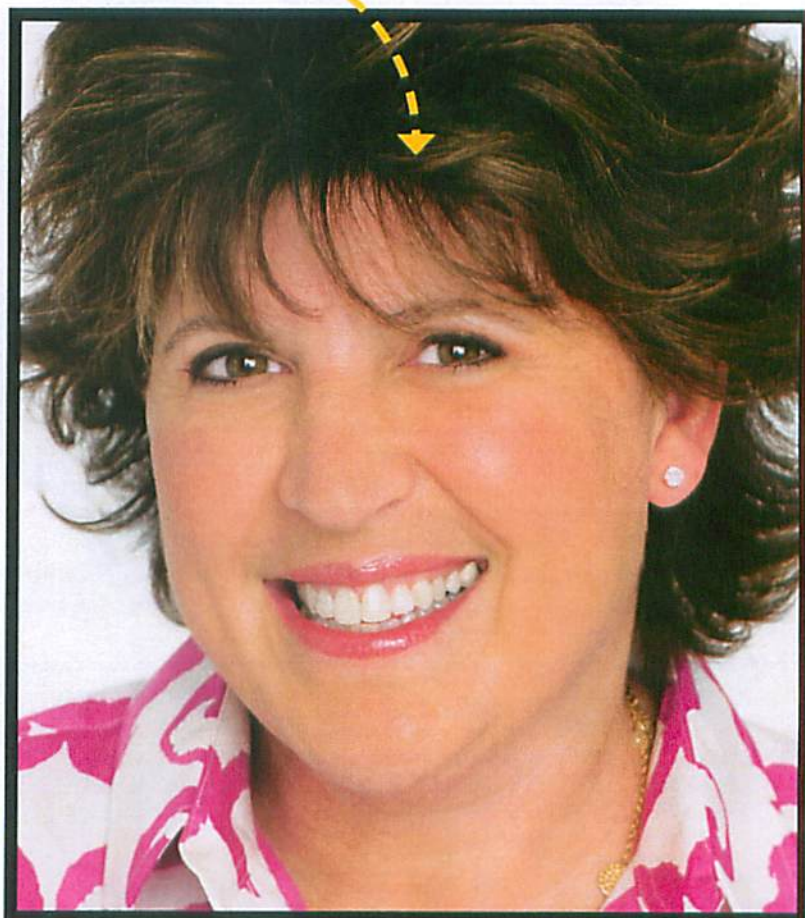


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# The Eye Lift Diaries

Ever been tempted to turn back the clock? Reader Jane Grauer decided to go for it—and was shocked to discover that the results weren't just physical.



**I** never thought that I, of all people, would get an eye lift. It's not my style. I'm a jeans and T-shirt kind of woman who applies mascara at red lights on the drive to my job as a kindergarten teacher. Often I don't bother to look in a mirror again until 5 P.M.

So I really was just joking around last November when I mentioned to Yael Halaas, who happens to be a facial plastic surgeon and the mother of one of my students, that I should do something about my tired eyes. Not only was the loose, sagging skin on my upper eyelids making me look older than my 50 years, but it was also drooping over my lashes. This made my eyes feel heavy all the time, to the point that I couldn't read a book at night because I couldn't force my lids open any longer.

But I began to seriously consider a surgical fix when Dr. Halaas explained how an eye lift could help. During the procedure (called a blepharoplasty), she would remove some of the fat and excess skin that was weighing down my upper eyelids, which would also open up my field of vision.

It sounded scary at first, but when Dr. Halaas told me that I'd only need local anesthesia I felt more at ease. Even my husband, who's usually against surgery of any kind, didn't panic when I discussed the operation with him. With little risk involved, we both said, "Hey, why not do it?"

That's not to say I was 100 percent sold on the idea, though. If I'm remembered for anything in life, I hope it will be for my commitment to inspiring children and helping others, not my appearance. But then I was asked to write about the experience for *Ladies' Home Journal*. As a teacher, my



calling is to share knowledge—even on delicate subjects that people don't readily discuss. So when I began talking about my eye lift I was happy (and surprised!) to discover that almost everyone I knew had either had the procedure, knew someone who had it or was contemplating getting it.

## Prepping for the unknown

Once I'd decided to have the operation, I only had about a week to back out—my appointment was scheduled for the

The jitters didn't set in until the night before my surgery. To cope I stayed up until 1:15 A.M. cooking, since spending time at the stove never fails to soothe me. As I measured and stirred all I could think was, *What the heck am I doing?* My father always warned me not to play with Mother Nature and it became one of my mantras. I've never abused drugs or alcohol, and I delivered my two kids without any painkillers. I have such a blessed life—why was I messing with it now?

Once the operation began I realized I'd panicked for nothing. The only pain came from the two injections of anesthetic, and those were quick pinpricks. You're permitted to keep your eyes shut during a blepharoplasty so I never even had to see the scalpel. Dr. Halaas and I chatted throughout the procedure while a Justin Timberlake CD played in the background. I almost forgot that she was operating on me.

The surgery didn't even last an hour. After Dr. Halaas stitched me up I



following Friday! I promptly visited my doctor to get medical clearance and began taking vitamin C, zinc and arnica, which are thought to help healing and limit postoperative bruising. Dr. Halaas also prescribed a painkiller.

Two days before my eye lift I traveled to New York City for a photo shoot with *LHJ*. I couldn't help but feel out of place. The first thing I saw when I walked into the studio was a gorgeous model being photographed wearing only a towel. But I started to relax and have fun when the hair and makeup artist went to work on me. It was like being queen for a day.

## The big day arrives

On the morning of the surgery it rained heavily, and the highways were backed up or closed because of flooding. Was this an omen? Should I turn back? No, I've made a commitment, I told myself—I have to stick to it.

When I finally arrived, several lovely receptionists and nurses greeted me and explained everything that would happen. I then met with Dr. Halaas in an exam room so she could mark the incisions she'd make on my upper eyelids. Everyone was so nice and reassuring, but still, I was worried.

swallowed the painkiller she'd prescribed and rested for 20 minutes with ice packs on my eyes. This was easier than having a cavity filled, I thought. The hardest part was learning how to pronounce and spell "blepharoplasty"!

## Going undercover

When I got home I couldn't resist peeking in the mirror. My eyes were bruised and swollen, as if I'd been in a fight. My husband was pretty shocked, but he tried to be matter-of-fact about it and simply gave me reminders to follow Dr. Halaas's instructions: Keep ice on my



eyes for the next two days (20 minutes on, 20 minutes off) and cover the incisions with antibiotic ointment to prevent infection. The area was tender but I wasn't in pain, which surprised me.

I was a little nervous about going back to work on Monday since I was still swollen and the bruises hadn't faded much. I mainly worried about how the students would react since they notice everything. To conceal the stitches I wore my reading glasses higher up on my nose, which covered the incisions and bruises perfectly. One kid asked about the two tiny bandages that held the stitches in place, but that was it.

I didn't expect to get compliments so soon, but after Dr. Halaas removed the stitches the next day two people commented that they had never noticed my pretty hazel-green eye color before. I was also shocked by how well I could see; I didn't realize how badly that extra flesh affected my vision until it was gone. I was looking at a new world.

## Doubts creep in

A week later I got the okay to use makeup, which is a no-no immediately after a blepharoplasty because of the risk of infection. The school's holiday party was that week so I decided to go all out (for me, anyway) and wear eyeliner, mascara, blush and lipstick for the occasion. I almost didn't recognize myself in the mirror! And that was kind

## The Lowdown On Eye Lifts

**HOW IT'S DONE** The surgeon makes an incision along the crease of the eyelid (for an upper eye lift) or the lashline or inside the lower lid (for a lower lift) and removes excess fat, muscle and skin. This usually takes one to two hours and can be performed under a variety of types of anesthesia.

**RECOVERY** Expect to see side effects such as bruising and swelling for up to 20 days after surgery; scars heal within about three months. Patients can usually return to work after several days but may not be able to exercise or do other strenuous activities for a few weeks.

**RISKS** These include inflammation, dry eyes and temporary numbness of the eyelid. There's also a small risk of losing the ability to close your eyes as well as an even smaller risk of blindness.

**COST** \$3,000 to \$6,000, depending on where you live (anesthesia, operating room fees and other related expenses not included). *Source: Alan Gold, M.D., immediate past president of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. To learn more, visit [surgery.org](http://surgery.org).*

of unnerving. The eyes are the window to the soul, I thought, and now mine looked so different. Did this mean that I had changed? This eye lift was so indulgent and "un-Jane." Though everyone at the party told me I looked nice, I felt uncomfortable and a little bit fake.

A short time later my husband and I headed to Florida to relax over my two-week holiday break. Maybe it was simply because the swelling had gone down and the scars had faded, but that was when I began to see "me" in the mirror again. I realized that while the eye lift had made me look and feel great, I'd need to give myself more time to process the change emotionally.

## Loving the new (yet old) me

When I returned home in January, the reaction to my younger, brighter eyes was beyond anything I could have imagined. A friend I'd known for 30 years said, "You look so sexy! You have such pretty, almond-shaped eyes." A parent of one of my former students told me I looked 10 years younger. Naturally, my husband was thrilled too, though he thoughtfully said that Dr. Halaas didn't have to do much work because I looked great to begin with (aw).

Now, almost a year later, I firmly believe getting an eye lift was a wise decision. I'd always worried that indulging myself might fundamentally change who I am. And the surgery did transform me, but in a wonderful, unanticipated way. The experience inspired me to take better care of myself inside and out: I got highlights and a new haircut, and I'm more motivated than ever to slim down. I've dropped more than 10 pounds so far and I can't wait to lose more. It took me a long time to learn this, but I've finally realized that doing good and looking good aren't mutually exclusive. My eyes may look different, but at heart I'm still the same Jane. ■

## How To Choose The Best Surgeon

**Before you set up an appointment**, do your research. Check out [certifieddoctor.org](http://certifieddoctor.org) to make sure that the surgeon you plan to see is certified by the American Board of Medical Specialties in plastic surgery, ophthalmology or otolaryngology. In addition, you should google your state's medical board to find out if there are any complaints against her on file.

**During your consultation**, ask the surgeon to show you before and after photos of her previous patients. Be wary if she doesn't answer your questions clearly and thoroughly, avoids discussing the potential risks of surgery or pressures you to consider additional procedures.