

NEWBEAUTY

You Can Call It Vanity, But Plastic Surgery Saved My Life

Tatiana Bido | August 18, 2025



Getty Images

When Janine walked into the Beverly Hills office of facial plastic surgeon **Kimberly Lee, MD**, she was expecting a cosmetic transformation. At 50, she had already tried Botox Cosmetic, fillers and laser treatments, but she was ready for a lower facelift and necklift to refresh her appearance for both her personal life and her work as a stunt woman in front of the camera.

“I didn’t want the full massive pullback, but I definitely wanted to look for myself better than I felt that I looked on screen,” Janine says. “I’d done everything else. It was time to seek out a professional plastic surgeon, which is why after much research, I ended up with Dr. Lee because she only does from the neck up. So, I felt really comfortable with that.”

A Last-Minute Request Before Surgery

Before surgery, Janine mentioned something that had been on her mind for years, a small lump on her neck. She had a history of fibroid tumors and, over the course of four to five years, had shown the lump to multiple doctors. “Every single one of those doctors said, ‘You have a history of fibroids. It’s probably a fibroid.’ I wanted it to be a fibroid too,” she recalls.



A view of Janine's tumor before her surgery.

Seeing the accolades for Dr. Lee's work in head and neck surgery, Janine decided to ask if it could be removed during her facelift. "That's easy," Dr. Lee told her. "It's about a half-hour surgery."

During surgery, Dr. Lee saw something very different from what she had been told to expect. "It looked very different from what I had originally anticipated. When I saw this mass, it was stuck down to all of these really important structures in the neck, nerves, blood vessels. None of those things happened when I opened her neck," Dr. Lee explains.

Recognizing the seriousness of what she was seeing, Dr. Lee decided to remove the mass with margins and send it to pathology. "I already knew that I was dealing with something a little bit more concerning," she says.

When Janine woke from surgery, the left side of her face was paralyzed. She was told the surgery to remove the lump had taken three and a half hours, and that the nature of the mass "didn't look real good."

A Rare Cancer Diagnosis

Four days later, Dr. Lee called with the results. "She proceeded to tell me findings I did not understand, except for the word carcinoma," Janine says. It was a rare stage two head and neck cancer.

Dr. Lee immediately connected Janine with one of the top oncologists in California, advocating to get her seen before he left for vacation. "Sometimes patients don't really know who to go to," Dr. Lee says. "I have those contacts. It was just a matter of making a few phone calls...The timeline was critical in getting the care quickly."

Life-Saving Results

A specialized CT scan confirmed the tumor had been fully removed and had not spread to other glands or the brain. “She saved my life,” Janine says. “I do not have cancer anywhere in my head.”

Dr. Lee explains, “This had already had signs of invading the nerve. Nerves are like highways, they allow tumor or cancer cells to spread through the body. This cancer would have continued to grow and spread to other parts of the body. That would have been truly life-threatening.”



Janine's before and after images show the tumor along her jawline that was removed during her facelift and necklift surgery.

Why the Right Surgeon Matters

For Dr. Lee, Janine's story underscores why vetting your surgeon matters. “It's really important to choose a surgeon who has both aesthetic expertise and head and neck training. A facelift is about aesthetics, but it also happens to be one of the most delicate parts of the body. When something unexpected, like a tumor, appears, you need a surgeon who can recognize it and act immediately.”



Dr. Kimberly Lee and Janine post-surgery

Janine's facelift gave her the refreshed look she wanted, but it also saved her life. "I just know that Dr. Lee and everything that she did for me completely saved my life and improved it," Janine says. "She's just an angel."

<https://www.newbeauty.com/plastic-surgery-saved-my-life-personal-essay/>