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THE
MAKEOVER
ISSUE

NEW
DREW!
HER HAPPY
LIFE NOW

NEW
YEAR

NEW
YOU

FIRST PEEK AT
SPRING'S
HOTTEST
TRENDS

DANGEROUS
SWIMSUITS
ULTRAFEMME
DRESSES

GREAT
ESCAPES!

UNDONE
HAIR:
THE 3 BEST
NEW LOOKS

THE 5 STEPS
TO REAL
CHANGE

EXTREME MAKEOVER
THE TRUTH BEHIND THE TV SHOW

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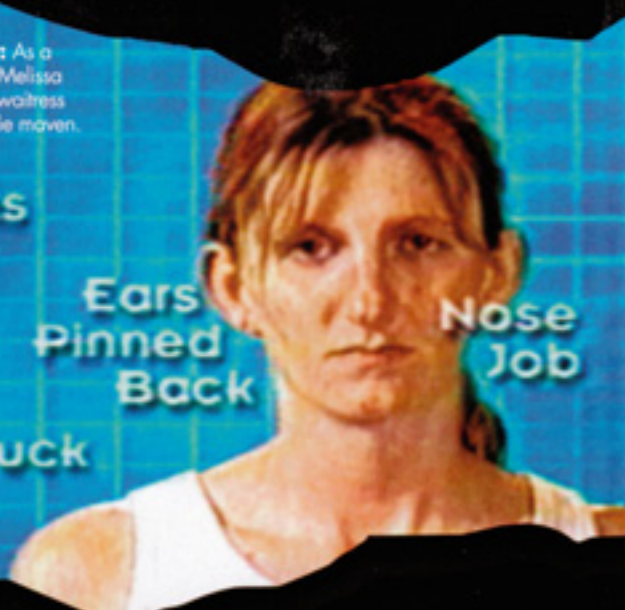
Amazing journey: As a result of her surgery, Melissa Jones went from shy waitress to irrepressible lingerie maven.

Implants

Ears
Pinned
Back

Nose
Job

Tummy Tuck



EXTREME MEASURES



Screen dream: Kiné Corder's new physical confidence is winning her the attention of casting agents—and men.



THE HIT PLASTIC SURGERY SHOW *EXTREME MAKEOVER* PURPORTS TO TRANSFORM PEOPLE INSIDE AS WELL AS OUT. BUT FAR FROM THE SPOTLIGHT, AS PARTICIPANTS NEGOTIATE THEIR RADICALLY ALTERED SENSE OF SELF, ARE THEY REALLY BETTER OFF? RUTH SHALIT REPORTS

Before," says Melissa Jones, "I'd never even think of driving down here." Jones, a petite, bubbly 29-year-old mother of three, is winding her way down a congested local thoroughfare on the outskirts of Sacramento. "It used to be that if I saw traffic like this, I'd panic and start to sweat," she says, gesturing at the lines of cars and trucks snaking along the four-lane highway. "I was that insecure. It was really terrible."

It's a beautiful October day, crisp and windy, and far from seeming unsure of herself, Jones is in aggressive good spirits. A

pretty, narrow-faced blond, she steers her blue Dodge Neon confidently. She is wearing jeans, sandals, and a white sleeveless top that leaves her midriff fashionably bare. Dangling from the rearview mirror is a tiny sign that reads PLEASE IGNORE THESE MAGNIFICENT TTTS.

"I had so little confidence before, I wouldn't even put gas in my car!" says Jones, a former waitress who now runs her own lingerie business, Planet Thong. "I was scared I was going to do something wrong." Jones traces these irrational fears to her trauma-filled Minnesota childhood. A mousy, bespectacled outcast with protruding ears, a boxy nose, and a flat chest, she had nonetheless entertained Walter Mitty-esque fantasies of becoming a model. "I really had this dream that I could be in a magazine," she says. "Then I'd go to school and get tripped in the hallway or have my books knocked out of my hands. And I'd just feel dumpy again."

All that changed, Jones says, following her April 2003 appearance on *Extreme Makeover*, the ABC plastic surgery show in which self-proclaimed ugly ducklings are resculpted into Hollywood-style beauties. "After I got back, I didn't feel any limits anymore," she says. "The instant the bandages came off, all my pain, all my insecurities were gone."

There were a lot of bandages. "I had rhinoplasty, obviously," Jones says. "I had my ears pinned back. Breast implants. Botox and collagen. Then they did the tummy tuck. It was just a whirlwind! And then the brow lift. That's what makes me look so much more vivacious and alert." The new Melissa has finespun blond hair, a curvaceous figure, and a subtle nose. Thanks to LASIK surgery, the Velma Dinkley glasses are gone; and her once-thin lips are rosy and bee-stung. "I look hot," Jones says.

Since its premiere one year ago, *Extreme Makeover* has been slammed as dark, disturbing, and macabre—a harbinger of a *Twilight Zone* future in which women are turned into Barbie dolls and all that is unique and treasurable is obliterated by the surgeon's scalpel. The Associated Press has declared that the show "reeks of exploitation." On CNN, a health magazine editor criticized the show for sending a "frightening" message: "[It] tells us that we are broken. And that the best way, and sometimes the only way, to fix ourselves is through

extreme, and also extremely expensive, plastic surgery."

Not surprisingly, those chosen to appear on the show couldn't disagree more. "This wasn't about vanity," argues Lori Floyd, a 38-year-old mother from Tioga Center, New York, who says that her weak chin and hooked nose made her the town pariah. "I used to stand out. Now I blend in. It just feels so good to finally be free." Says Jones, "This show isn't about picking size 4 women and making them into a size 0. It's about the underdog doing something extraordinary. That's something we as Americans love to watch."

She's right. The show's bathetic formula is as appealing as it is predictable. At the start of the hour, we are introduced to this week's plucky subject, whose stoical exterior, we are told, conceals grievous emotional wounds—the legacy of an unlovely nose, a concave chest, a Himmlerian overbite. But wait, there's hope: "All her life, Paula has sacrificed for everyone else," the show's announcer intones. "Now we want to do something for *her*."

The money shot, of course, is the climactic "reveal," in which the former plain Jane, who has spent seven weeks hibernating like a gauze-wrapped caterpillar in a Beverly Hills aftercare facility and hotel, comes pirouetting out from behind a curtain in a twirly evening dress as bouquet-clutching family members gasp in joy and confusion. "I sent a five out," commented one husband on a recent episode. "I got back a 10."

It's easy to understand all the critical piling-on. There is something cringemaking about the show's efforts to package voyeurism as uplift, to intercut footage of surgical saws grinding through bone with New Age platitudes ("This is just something Mommy's got to do for me"). But all the sneering occludes, as the show's celebrity dentists would say, the real questions. Months after surgery, after the klieg lights have faded and the groomers and stylists have departed, are the participants better off? Has the show made good on its audacious promise to "transform [these patients'] lives and destinies"? Or are some just trading in their body image problems for a whole new set of woes?

"WE'RE BREAKING NEW GROUND"

It's certainly true that *Extreme Makeover* has transformed lives and that the transformation is as much internal as it is external. With evangelical zeal, participants speak of careers rejuvenated, self-esteem nourished, and pent-up emotions released with a deft twist of the scalpel.

"For as long as I can remember, my nose has hindered me," says Floyd, whose before photos reveal a bedraggled-looking woman with a prominent nose, drooping eyelids, and a chin flowing diagonally into her neck. "I quit high school because of it. My kids would get in fights because of it. I was always crying, depressed, upset."

Every year, when she and her husband received their tax refund, Floyd fantasized about getting a nose job. Then she'd think about all the other things that \$5,000 could pay for. "Property taxes, school clothes. A thousand for home fuel oil. A thousand for a cow and a pig—that's enough steak and pork chops to feed the family for a year." >