

DANCING QUEEN

An autoimmune disorder destroyed Nicole Magson's nose – but a reconstructive procedure restored her nose and her confidence.

BY MARISSA STAPLEY-PONIKOWSKI



When an autoimmune disorder resulted in the collapse of high-school teacher and dance instructor Nicole Magson's nose, she refused to put her life on hold. She found a surgeon to correct the deformity, and barely missed a beat.

Thirty-four-year-old Magson was diagnosed with Limited Wegener's granulomatosis in 2006, although she'd been suffering undiagnosed from the disease for 12 years. The uncommon condition causes inflammation of blood vessels, and affects the kidneys, lungs and upper respiratory tract. It can also inflame granular tissue in the middle ear, resulting in hearing loss – Magson experienced this and now wears a hearing aid – and sometimes attacks nasal tissue, too. “The disease can destroy supporting tissue, and the nose can collapse,” says Toronto-based Dr. Andres Gantous, MD, FRCSC, who specializes in facial plastic surgery. “Nicole's nose did collapse, and that's why she came to me.”

Prior to the operation, Magson explains that she “wore black-rimmed glasses to mask the deformity – it looked like I had a dirty nose or a shadow from the glasses. I never acted like anything was wrong, so people never really noticed, although they could tell that something was slightly off.” Her nose looked like it had shifted down her face, leaving a large ridge on the bridge. Despite her brave front, she was desperate for a solution. “It affected my self-esteem. I hated having my picture taken, I didn't date. Of all the things that have gone wrong [because of the disease] the collapse of my nose was the worst. I could deal with my hearing loss better than my nose.”

Magson was referred to Dr. Gantous by her Wegener's specialist at Toronto's

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St. Michael's Hospital. “The first meeting was pretty quick. Dr. Gantous took one look at my nose, and said, ‘Yes, I can help you, this is what we're going to do.’ He gave me hope, and made me feel it wasn't the end of the world.”

According to Dr. Gantous, his response is not a common one. “Many facial plastic surgeons will tell patients there is nothing they can do. Other surgeons will attempt to correct the collapse with implants, and that often causes more problems. I'm one of the only surgeons in Canada who is doing this for Wegener's patients.”

After meeting with Dr. Gantous, Magson was “desperate” to have the operation. “I felt that my life was on hold until my nose was fixed.” But she had one more barrier to overcome.

“I got very ill. One of my medications worked ‘overtime’ and lowered my immune system to a dangerous level.” Magson had febrile neutropenia, a Wegener's complication that causes a dangerously high fever and low white blood cell counts. “Because of this I had to have a six-month course of chemotherapy. We were trying to avoid this as it can cause fertility issues, and I haven't had children yet.”

The complication delayed the surgery Magson was looking forward to. “Once I was stable, Dr. Gantous said he would consider doing the surgery.” It finally happened in April of 2008.

Dr. Gantous performed the two-and-a-half hour procedure, which involved taking a graft from Magson's rib, then using it to rebuild her nose. Dr. Gantous told Magson the graft would likely cause the greatest discomfort. “The swelling and discomfort of the nose generally lasts seven to 10 days, but the pain in the chest may last up to

six weeks,” says Dr. Gantous.

But, says Magson, recovery was a breeze. “I was anticipating so much pain and it wasn't too bad. I can understand why people have cosmetic surgery – the bruising was gone in about two weeks. Taking the cast off my nose was particularly painful, but then the result – to see my profile – was spectacular.”

Although her rib was still sore, Magson was determined to resume regular activities. “I took three weeks off work, and when I returned, I needed to take it fairly easy. My students were fantastic and understanding.” It took Magson about two months to be able to dance without pain. “But now I only feel pain when I lift something heavy or twist a certain way.”

“I think she's great, because she's so outgoing,” says Dr. Gantous. “She had a severe deformity, but she kept going with her life. She's been through a lot, but what the operation did was restore a more normal function to her nose, and that restored a lot of her confidence.”

Magson says that although she still struggles with the disease and some of the medications she must take – including prednisone, which causes weight gain – she's very happy with her nose. “It looks just like it used to, complete with the little bump I inherited from my mom. I think I would have been upset if it had been too perfect.” She's looking forward to continuing to stay positive, and raising awareness about Wegener's. “My advice to others in the same situation is to stay hopeful and be an advocate for your life. I know I have a disease, but I refuse to be sick.”

Magson's graft and reconstruction procedure cost about \$8,000 to \$9,000. In her case, it was covered by Ontario's Health Insurance Plan. **e**

To see before pictures of Nicole Magson, visit www.elevatemagazine.com.