

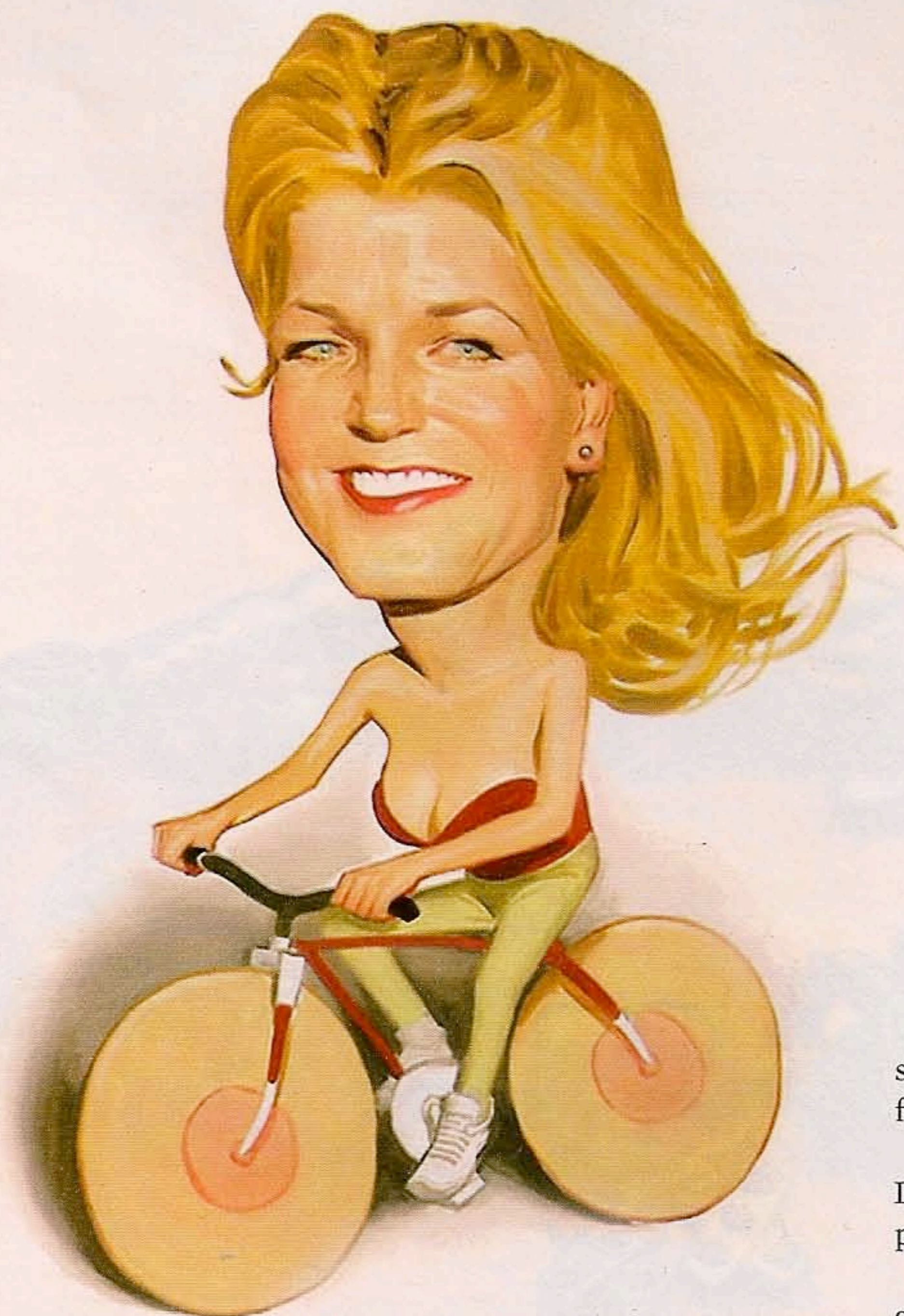
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## Why I'm a beauty scrooge

> We all want to believe in transformation, me included. Makeup, hair color, even Botox—sign me up. But I draw the line at surgery, and my reasons may surprise you >> *by* CANDACE BUSHNELL

BACK IN 1982, before Botox and fillers and lipo and tummy tucks were all the rage, an assignment from a beauty magazine took me to the offices of a famous plastic surgeon. He was an odd man, with unnaturally chiseled features and waxy skin. After our interview, he leaned over and asked if there was any surgery I'd like him to perform.

"Like what?" I asked suspiciously.

He gestured at my chest, best characterized as boyish. "I could fix that," he

said. "I could give you breast implants for a really good price."

For a moment I was stunned. Then I surprised myself. "What kind of price?" I whispered.

"Normally I charge \$5,000. But I'd give them to you for \$2,500." He paused, no doubt taking in my shocked expression. "It will change your life," he insisted. "Breast augmentation will make you so happy. There's nothing like the experience of going to a lingerie store and buying new bras for your new breasts."

Whoa. Take it easy, dude, that sounds kind of pervy, I wanted to say. But I was too scared to be rude. "I'll think about it," I said politely, and skittled out of there as fast as I could.

Despite his creepiness, for the next few days I thought of nothing but the possibility of bigger breasts. One of the top plastic surgeons in the world had just offered to "fix" me—for a bargain price! It was like the yearly white sale at Macy's. How could I resist? But then common sense took

over. I didn't have \$2,500. I could barely afford my \$300 a month rent. Even at 50 percent off, I simply couldn't muster the money. I was just going to have to soldier on with my grossly imperfect body.

Nevertheless, the idea of what I'd turned down nagged at me for years afterward. I was inadequate, and especially when times were tough, I'd wonder what my life would have been like if I'd somehow found the money for those bigger breasts. Maybe I would never have had to struggle. With those silicone beauties on board, maybe I could have married a billionaire, lived in a mansion and spent my days being pampered. That person wouldn't be me, of course. So why couldn't I let go of the fantasy?

Maybe because beauty—the kind most of us strive to achieve with hair color or Botox or surgery—is less about looks, per se, and more about

Spa treatments make me claustrophobic. I approach hair and makeup on a need-to-be-seen basis and measure all antiaging treatments on a time-money-effectiveness scale. Which is why, when Botox came along, I eagerly trotted off to my dermatologist to try it. Not only did it work, but you only have to do it three times a year, compared to shaving your legs, which you have to do three or four times a week. But Botox, at least for the moment, is where I draw the line.

For most women, the day will come when they'll look in the mirror or see their image in a photograph and will no longer recognize themselves. For me, that day came a couple of years ago. My mother had died of breast cancer, and I became severely depressed. My hair seemed to be falling out, so I cut it. I couldn't eat and lost 10 pounds. Which might seem like a good thing, but it wasn't. People

lazy. Cosmetic surgery always sounds intriguing until you talk to someone who's actually done it. Then it just sounds like an endless to do list. You have to interview doctors. You have to get blood tests. Then you have to have the surgery itself. Then you have to lie in bed with ice packs on your face for a week. It's messy, all that cold water dripping on your pillows. Then you have to go back for checkups. No. It's too much time and effort.

Or maybe I'm a beauty scrooge because I learned at an early age that I was going to have to get by in life without being perfect. Not that I don't love a good transformation story as much as anyone. I was one of the few people who watched *The Swan* and didn't throw up. I watched it because the women seemed so happy at the end, and I was happy they were happy. Although, later, I worried if they were going to stay happy. I worried that they were going to look in the mirror at their bright, shiny, perfectly symmetrical faces and think, now what?

Because, if you really think about it, age is the great transformer anyway. Over time, everything about you is going to change, from the shape of your face and body to the hair follicles on your head. But most profoundly, age transforms what you feel inside. You have a sense of what matters and an ability to let go of what doesn't. Personality and accomplishment and empathy seem much more interesting, and achievable, than the pursuit of a flawless visage.

And there's that time issue. Now that I'm 50, I've decided to spend more time doing what I want to do and less time doing what I don't. And what I don't want to do is worry about how I look. What I do want to do is work. I have no idea what will happen in the future. I have even less of an idea of how I'll look. But I don't really care. What I do know is that right now I have more focus, concentration and drive than I've ever had before. And that will transform my life in a way that fillers, tucks and implants never could. ☘

**For those of us over a certain age, the message is this: Keep your youthful looks and we'll let you keep your life.**

the age-old myth of transformation. The message is simple, and we've heard it a million times, in fairy tales, advertisements, magazines and reality shows: Change your looks and you can change your life.

Change your looks and you can transform your life. You can become the person you've always wanted to be, that woman who is hiding inside. All it takes is a little coaxing with the right cellulite cream or maybe an eye-lift or double-D breasts. And for those of us over a certain age, the message is also this: Keep your youthful looks and we'll let you keep your life.

What I say to that is, "Bah, humbug." Yep, I'm a beauty scrooge.

started whispering that I'd had a face-lift. And not just any old face-lift—a bad face-lift. One blogger wrote that she was going to one of my readings, not because she liked my work (apparently, she had a "love-hate relationship" with me), but because she wanted to see how the face-lift had settled.

At first, the blogger's comments depressed me. Hadn't we gotten beyond those kinds of judgments? Of course, the best way to attack a woman is to demean her accomplishments and criticize her looks. But then the idea that I'd had a face-lift made me laugh. I'm not saying never, but it's unlikely I'll do it—not because I'm too principled, but because I'm too