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**FROM COWGIRL
TO COVERGIRL**

JANUARY 2008



FROM COWGIRL TO COVERGIRL

A Patient's Story of Resolution, Inspiration, Weight Loss and Plastic Surgery with Dr. Mark Barlow

One of my life long dreams was to have a horse come to me when I called it in the pasture and to be able to ride it. My daughter acquired a sad black and white paint horse whose registered name is 'Look at Me Now'. He needed a lot of love and attention. She calls him Tex. When he came to us five years ago, I was overweight and in terrible shape. I would watch my daughter work with Tex and wish that it were me. I made a deal with Tex that he did not need to worry because I would not be riding him but just wanted to be friends with him from the ground. Tex saved me! Tex helped me to realize just how much being overweight was really costing me. At 150 lbs overweight, I could barely walk let alone climb any stairs without great difficulty. I wanted to ride Tex. "Two months after Tex came into our lives, I had back surgery to help ease some of the damage done by my weight. Following this surgery, I developed a severe staph infection. I had realized that my incision was infected, but the doctor's office did not believe me. When I arrived at

the office and told that doctor that it was infected, he laughed until he finally looked me and he believed. I missed two months of work since I had to have IV antibiotics twice a day. I could hardly get out of bed or put my own shoes on. I began to consider joining a weight loss program. Our church started a new Weight Watchers meeting and of course they needed just one more person to bring the numbers to the minimum for opening, or so my friend advised. I went and it worked for me. Today I have lost a total of 166 pounds and I've kept it off!

"On my 55th birthday, I was able to ride Tex. My dream came true. I would ride him several times a week. Then my daughter decided to move and wanted Tex to go with her. I thought my life was over. My husband was afraid that without my own horse, that the weight would return. On our 35th wedding anniversary, my husband gave me my own horse. Not only was I able to ride Tex, but now I have Amamiss Rocket, aka Topper.

"A major problem when a person loses this much weight, your skin just hangs no matter how much you work out. It is there as an ugly reminder of what you were. I was walking a lot now, caring for the horses along with cleaning the stalls. I had arm muscle, but the extra hanging skin from my arms looked like bat wings. It seemed almost a cruel joke. I dreamed of plastic surgery to have the extra skin removed, but there were a couple of obstacles.

"First was the expense since insurance would not cover this kind of surgery, and secondly I did not have much faith in surgeons. But all of that changed when an accident involving my finger and a couple of dogs took me to an emergency room where I met plastic surgeon, Dr. Barlow. The dog had bitten off the end of my finger along with some of the bone.

"Normal protocol called for taking the finger to the first joint, leaving no nail. He explained that the finger might not heal properly or as quickly with only a skin graft. Naturally when Dr. Barlow explained this to me, I cried. I begged him to try to save as much of my finger and leave a nail if possible. He listened to me, talked with me and created a strategy to save as much as he could. He managed to save my finger and the nail! It was during my care with this issue, I began to discuss the extra skin that I was carrying around with me. When I was on vacation with my family, they all took notice of my discomfort with the extra skin hanging from my arms and legs. My brother and his wife made arrangements for the financial part of the surgery and told me to consult a surgeon. There was no one else but Dr. Barlow that I wanted to do my surgery.

"During my consultation for the surgery, I discussed with Dr. Barlow how I felt guilty about spending that much money on myself and wondered if I really deserved this. In his gentle way he listened to me and addressed my concern. He said, 'Reba, you've already shed the pounds, now it is time to let go of the shame.' He pointed out that I had done the really hard work by losing all the weight and he was just there to finish the job by helping me to feel even better about myself. The surgery was a huge success. Dreams do come true, not only can I ride a horse, but I can walk wearing pantyhose and the whole world doesn't hear me! I feel like Dr. Barlow and his staff are family to me and when I walk into the office I feel so at home."

Erin, receptionist for Plastic Surgeon Dr. Mark Barlow, says "I'm so excited that Reba is sharing her story! Being part of other's change has been life changing for me! I've worked for six other physicians in three other practices and nothing compares to my experience here. I've always worked hard and cared tremendously for the patients, but here, everyone shares my passion and the rewards go way beyond a paycheck."

She continues, "I feel I know what most of our patients are experiencing because I underwent a bilateral reduction mammoplasty (breast reduction) myself. I did not know Dr. Barlow then, much less



work for him. While I had a good outcome with my doctor, I often envy the fact that Dr. Barlow's patients get more than a great outcome. Everyone here is extremely committed to making the entire experience as wonderful as possible. Plus our patients get complimentary laser hair removal (three sessions) following their surgery. Most of our breast patients chose the axilla area because they feel more comfortable wearing tank tops after surgery. Our tummy tuck patients usually chose the bikini area, and one of our otoplasty (ear) patients chose to have the hair removed from his ears! Our facelift patients get a laser peel. Our patients want to tell their stories and share their positive experiences with others. I'm especially moved by Reba's story because I know that it will give so many other people courage and hope. While our motto here is 'At your service!' our patients have independently created a motto of their own because they all say it, 'I only wish I'd done it sooner!'"

Dr. Barlow says, "The expression of being comfortable in one's own skin seems cliché in Reba's case but it really is my dream for everyone. I hope Reba's story will inspire others to take good care of themselves. Taking control of your health is a journey that begins from within. We are so proud of Reba and all of our patients who have chosen to give the gift of good health and positive change to themselves. The best New Year resolution is to learn to accept yourself as you are or create healthy change and move forward. Christie, Erin, Eileen, our extended team of medical HOSA, nursing students and I want to wish you a happy and healthy New Year!" 🍷

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