

ANATOMY OF TRACI'S TOTAL TRANSFORMATION

By Mary Nearpass

*“Change your thoughts,
and you change your world”*

— Norman Vincent Peale

*“Nothing in life can be
permanent, except what
you choose NOT to change”*

— Mary M. Nearpass

By the time she was 37 years old, she found her weight at a staggering 237 lbs. Up until December 19, 2005, Traci had convinced herself that she was just a little chubby; a big girl or maybe even big boned....

I had the distinct privilege to meet with Traci Conaway over a cup of coffee. She willingly entrusted me, a total stranger, with her gripping, sometimes shocking and ultimately inspiring story. I am forever grateful for this distinct honor. The following is a recount of her transformation from a once vulnerable woman, to a woman fueled by incredible courage, determination and steadfast perseverance.

By all accounts, Traci was living a wonderful life of a married mother of three beautiful children, in a big suburban home nestled in Bucks County, PA. She had married in 1989, and became a mother of 3 in a matter of a few short years. (A daughter, Danyelle, 1992, and fraternal twins, Mason and Nicole, in 1996) She quit her full time job in order to stay home with her children. Traci began watching children in her home in order to offset the lack of income from her previous full time job. Although she was happy with all the children, she began missing adult interaction throughout the day. At this point, Traci began to start making choices that she felt were *expected* of her, not necessarily *best* for her. Over time, food became less of a source of nourishment, and more a source for comfort to ease the pain and loneliness she lived with day to day. Consequently, Traci was



feeling emotionally and socially bankrupt.

As her children grew, her marriage ended in divorce, so all communication became focused solely on the kids. At the same time, slowly but surely Traci's weight on her 5'5" frame gradually expanded from 167 lbs. to her all time high of 237 lbs.

Most of us at one time or another reach a point in our lives when we realize that we are at a crossroads and something simply HAS to change. December 19, 2005 was *Traci's. Turning point.* On this particular day, Traci turned 37 years old. Something inside her had reached a point of ENOUGH! I'm NOT going to live my life like this anymore. Essentially, she was sick and tired of being sick and tired. She made the decision and commitment that starting her 38th year; she was going to do something about it.

Without telling anyone, Traci began doing 2 months of research on the various Bariatric Surgery options for weight loss; specifically, the two she focused on were the *Lap band* and the *full gastric bypass*. A dear friend had referred her to the Gastric Bypass Barix Center in Langhorne, PA. She had had a procedure done there with great success and highly recommended this group. Visit www.barixinfo.com or call 800-282-0066 for more information.

So in February 2006, Traci made her first appointment. After a

wonderful introduction into the process, she selected Alan H. Brader, M.D.; specializing in Bariatric Surgery, Critical Care Surgery and General Surgery.

She attended an informational seminar, and felt an immediate connection to the practice the minute she entered. The surgeons and support staff were personable yet professional, funny yet incredibly intelligent. It was apparent that the doctors were determined to help as many people as possible regain their health and get back into the life they deserve. Little did Traci know that upon entering that room, she was looking at her destiny!

After the educational and informative seminars, Traci was convinced this was the tool she'd been searching for most of her life. Her past experiences with diet clinics, specialty foods, weight loss centers that preach counting food points, the diet drugs that were pulled off the market, the lo-carb. No-carb, lo-fat, no-fat treadmill she had been on for so many years, was going to be a thing of the past...She hoped.

There is a stringent criterion that all potential patients must go through in order to be a candidate for surgery: A patient must have co-morbidity (at least 2 health-related reasons) for wanting any elective procedure. In Traci's case, hers were being at least 100 lbs. overweight and sleep apnea. She underwent a full psychological examination, did an overnight sleep apnea study, had a full body work up including a CAT scan, a full CBC (Complete Blood Count) etc. Upon completion, Traci was elated to find out she had received medical clearance and was now a candidate.

She and Dr. Brader chose the full gastric Bypass surgery as opposed to the original lap band. Traci wanted the former because it would force her to learn and adhere to self control of her food choices, a behavior she knew she wanted to change for the better.

FYI: The Barix Clinics offer two, well established weight loss surgery procedures- Roux-en-Y gastric bypass surgery and lap band surgery. Although each has its own unique advantages when compared to the other, they both aim to help the patient by reducing the effective stomach size. As a result, you eat less and feel full with smaller portions.

Gastric Bypass Surgery involves reducing your stomach size and connecting it to the intestine, a large part of which is bypassed, limiting the calories you can absorb. Gastric bypass helps in long term behavior modification by reducing tolerance for foods with high sugar and fat.

Lap band surgery provides the flexibility of changing your stomach size and requires committed doctor visits, at least initially, to become comfortable with the band.

June 12th, 2006, Traci went into the hospital weighing 237.9 lbs; BMI (Body Mass Index) 39.5; Clothing Size 18/20 for her much anticipated surgery. (BMI, Body Mass Index is based on a ratio of weight and height). With a BMI of 39.5, anyone can be a candidate for Bariatric surgery, as long as he/she has one or more of

the following weight related health problems: Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, Sleep Apnea or High Blood Pressure.

It wasn't until she was on the gurney that she actually realized she was embarking on this journey, and it suddenly became real. It was a profound moment that changed her life forever.

She spent 2 nights and 3 days in the hospital, and was up and walking around doing laps the very next day. Traci had no, measurable pain nor problems following this miraculous surgery. She was, understandably, a little afraid of her new stomach as she didn't know if it would adjust. It must be like an out-of-body experience; to have something inside your own body having been drastically changed from the only way you've ever been known to be; to once again learn how to eat, what to eat and what not to eat. According to Traci, the plan was simple, and if the new tummy doesn't like something, it'll let you know. It has rarely been a problem. Traci followed the rules and guidelines that Dr. Brader set forth (See below for specifics)... By the end of 2 weeks, her gastrointestinal discomfort subsided as her body learned to adjust to its new digestive pathway.

Follow-up with her surgeon occurred 2 weeks, 6 weeks, quarterly and annually from there on out. She always went armed with questions for him at each visit. The good Doctor happily and concisely answers them all. She, as are all bypass surgery patients, will be lifetime partners in maintaining their newfound health.

Here is the follow-up plan if you or anyone you know is considering this option:

After Plan Daily Goals:

- Eating: Full liquids days 1 – 20
- Pureed Foods Days 21-34
- Soft Foods Days 35-41
- Regular Foods Days 42- on
- Fluid intake 64 oz per day
- Protein main source of nourishment
- Fat 27-45 grams (11 grams maximum per meal)
- Sugar 10 grams or less
- Vitamins 2x daily

Restrictions immediately after surgery:

- No lifting of more than 5 lbs the 1st 6 weeks after surgery
- 6-8 weeks after surgery return to usual lifting habits



Post-Op surgery: guidelines:

No lifting of more than 5 lbs the 1st 6 weeks after surgery

6-8 weeks after surgery return to usual lifting habits

Driving: Two weeks after surgery

Work: Light housework after 4 weeks

Heavy house work after 6 weeks

Return to work within 4 - 8 weeks

Sexual Activity: Resume in 3 weeks

Additionally, the Gastric Bypass Barix Center holds monthly, optional support groups from everyone interested in having the surgery, to those who have successfully undergone the procedure. She has made some of the best friends she ever had in this very intimate and personal support group. It is facilitated by volunteers.

Although many bariatric surgery patients are grateful to lose such significant weight, they are often discouraged with the excessive loose skin that remains. These patients often still feel trapped in their old body and want to enjoy their new slim figure that is hidden underneath. An option many choose is to have a body contouring surgery to complete their makeover.

Many patients are extremely displeased with a large overhang of abdominal skin (called a pannus) that massive weight loss leaves behind. This pannus not only hides their new body contour but often times can be uncomfortable, cause rashes and yeast infections. A tummy tuck (abdominoplasty) is a surgery that is performed to remove and tighten loose skin. It also restores weakened or separated muscles creating an abdominal profile that is smoother and firmer.

Depending on how much weight is lost other patients may develop irritated redundant skin and tissue of their arms, thighs and/or back. In order to restore their natural shape a brachioplasty (arm lift), thighplasty (thigh lift) or body lifts can be performed.

In addition females who have undergone weight loss procedures often time suffer from flat, sagging breasts. Breast implants (breast augmentation) and breast lift surgeries are often utilized to restore the breasts natural position.

After Traci's weight loss she desperately wanted to shed the outside façade that caged her true self in. She needed to feel as beautiful on the outside as she did on the inside. Traci came to the conclusion that she had only come halfway in her transformation. She wanted to regain her prior silhouette of a flat stomach and firmer fuller breasts.

“Plastic surgeon Dr. Benjamin Lam has helped me reclaim my figure and my self confidence”

After in depth research Traci chose Dr. Benjamin Lam, a double-board certified Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon, to complete her transformation from a once unhappy obese person to a happy and self confident woman with a positive body image.

Within minutes of meeting, Traci knew she had found the doctor she would trust to carry out her next major operation. Dr. Lam's

extensive experience in post-bariatric surgery coupled with his upbeat attitude, positively contagious energy and most important, his ability to truly listen, were more than she could have asked for.

After having an abdominoplasty, breast augmentation and lift done by Dr. Lam she felt like her body was restored and she now had a new outlook on life. For the first time in a very long time she was able to look in the mirror and smile at her own reflection. She is proudly able to look others in the eye and not be embarrassed or ashamed of her body.

Dr. Benjamin Lam is a partner of Bucks County Plastic Surgery and he has been servicing the needs of the community for over a decade. He has offices located in Newtown, Bensalem and in Huntingdon Valley. His many accolades include being the Director of plastic surgery of BARIX clinic, President of the Plastic Surgery Division of the American College of Osteopathic Surgeons and is the Associate director of the Plastic Surgery Residency at Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. Dr. Lam also has national publications and patents pending for technological advances in plastic surgery. For more information on Dr. Lam or the procedures he performs please call 215-702-8600 for a free consultation or visit www.BucksCountyPlasticSurgery.com

Celebrating HER Rebirth

Today, Traci's celebrating her almost three-year anniversary of the day she was given a second chance. She's lost almost exactly 100 lb and continues to keep it off.

After: Weight 142

BMI 23.7

Clothing Size 4/6

Total Inches Lost 54"

But it's not what she's lost that's been her greatest accomplishment; it's what she is gaining! The self consciousness is slowly being replaced by self confidence, the lethargy turning into zest and boundless energy, and the self-loathing is gradually being traded in for self-love and appreciation. No one has to tell Traci just how fortunate she is to have been given this priceless gift...a second chance at life.

Traci feels she owes her life to her lifesavers, Drs. Brader and Lam respectfully. How does one put a price tag on giving someone life? Today, she can picture a future with her in it! Pre-surgery, Traci knows now that she was indeed digging her own grave with a fork. .

That has all changed forever. This is no quick-fix, and she must remain diligent in her crusade for health. She struggles to embrace her personal truth and live by it without feeling like she has to apologize for what might not please others.

Although she realizes she is in the infancy stages from people pleaser to self pleaser, it still is very hard for her to deal with outsider's misconceptions of her reality. The surgery forces her to change those reasons why she was eating for comfort... painful as they may be. Of the 41 years of her life that she has

lived so far, she doesn't want to waste any more time with regret. Instead, what she wants most of all is to start over better.... not bitter.

Traci would like to thank her children, parents, friends and extended family for all of their support on her extraordinary journey. They have been, and continue to be, encouraging, considerate and very proud of what she has achieved.

She continues to attend monthly meetings with the hope that perhaps one day; she will be viewed as a veteran, bypass patient that inspires someone else to choose what she has done. Pay it forward, as so many have done for her in these past 40 months since deciding this path. Traci wants to empower others to take control of their lives, and strive to live authentically. The resources and the options are available. You too, can enjoy a healthy, wonderful life in a body that works for you not against you! Living exceptionally from the inside out is the key to success in maintaining your weight loss long term. She will never forget the events leading up to the decision to have the surgery, the journey while waiting, and all the on-going changes mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically.

How about you: Everyone deserves to be a participant and not just a spectator. Maybe today is that turning point for you!



Mary Nearpass is a Health Counselor, Yoga Teacher and Behavioral Health Counselor, specializing in addictions. Mary has an extensive background in both the traditional and holistic healthcare settings. The first part of her career focused on teaching, sales and marketing, and training and development. She has worked in the classroom setting (from elementary to the college level), for a major weight loss corporation and a leading hospital in the Philadelphia region. Her focus began to shift, as did her hunger for knowledge in the numerous aspects of complementary modalities, and how they assist in both the preventive and healing components toward health. With several certifications in Massage Therapy and Yoga, Mary also holds two master's degrees in Health Education and Behavioral Psychology. With an almost equal number of years experience in both traditional and alternative healthcare, she brings a working knowledge from both sectors. Mary's current passion focuses on the union of Mind/Body medicine and it's role towards health and wellness. Contact MaryNearpass@phillyfitmagazine.com

