

in(t)-spe-'rā-shen *n* 1. a divine or supernatural influence 2. to be an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on another; to spur one to act 3. to draw forth or bring out



# At Face Value

## My Struggle With A Disfiguring Cancer

By Terry Healey

Today, at the age of 39, eighteen years after becoming disfigured, Terry is a professional speaker, author, high technology strategy consultant, board member of The Wellness Community, and honorary board member of The Cancer League, Inc. His popular program, *At Face Value: My Struggle With A Disfiguring Cancer*, is presented to companies and groups nationwide, and he has authored a book with the same title. To contact Terry Healey with questions or to inquire about a speaking engagement call 925-932-3648 or email: [terry@at-face-value.com](mailto:terry@at-face-value.com). Terry also has a web site at [www.at-face-value.com](http://www.at-face-value.com).

I was a junior at the University of California at Berkeley. At the age of twenty, my life had been smooth sailing, seldom interspersed with adversity or difficulty. I was handsome, smart and athletic. I was confident and not concerned much with my appearance. But over a period of a couple of weeks, a few people asked me what was wrong with my nose, a nose I had always remembered to be pretty normal. I hadn't noticed myself, but upon looking at it closely in the mirror, I assumed the bump pushing against my right nostril would just go away. When it didn't, I made an appointment with a doctor who suggested a biopsy.

### Diagnosis

The pathology report concluded I had a rare fibrosarcoma. Since the biopsy removed the bulk of the tumor, my doctor indicated that outside of having a CT Scan to ensure the tumor had been removed, a follow-up procedure would be necessary to excise any remaining tumor cells that may have been present. Given what he said, I somehow felt that even the ensuing surgery would be minor. My assessment of the situation was that I had little to worry about. The follow-up procedure did prove to be minor. With only a few sutures along the wing of my nose, and a few more inside my palate, I returned to classes looking like I had been in a fight with someone, not something.

But six months later, I discovered a new lump rising from the lower portion of my



right nostril. Then I began to feel tingling sensations in my cheek. Doctor visits, a CT Scan and evaluation by the U.C.S.F. Tumor Board confirmed that my previously unthreatening tumor had procreated itself seemingly overnight into a horrific, life-threatening and potentially disfiguring malignancy. My doctor informed me that I could lose half my nose, half my upper lip and possibly my right eye, but that saving my life was his main concern. I suppose I was too young to contemplate dying, but the realization that I could be disfigured was devastating.

### Treatment

I awoke from my first major surgery (third procedure) with a full-thickness skin graft attached to my face from the skin and fat of my shoulder and chest. Half my nose and

upper lip was gone, the muscle and bone from my right cheek had been excised, the shelf of my eye had been removed and six teeth and part of my hard palate had been resected. My doctor's only promise to me was that he would make me "streetable" before I left the hospital. Initially I did not understand that saying I would be "streetable" was a nice way of preparing me for a life of disfigurement.

### Recovery

When I was released from the hospital, I noticed adults staring at me and children pointing and sometimes laughing at me. I realized that my hospital room had protected and comforted me. Outside of it, I was vulnerable and exposed. How was I going to face the world? My self-esteem was sinking lower than I thought possible.

### Coping with the After-Effects

Five years later and after twenty some attempts to reconstruct my face, I was still coping with the insecurity. When I went for my last procedure I met a wonderful woman who helped me to see that the bulk of my problem was not my physical appearance, but my emotional insecurity. I realized that surgery would not fix the mental and emotional scars that had become far more disfiguring elements of my person than the appearance of my face ever had.

I became a volunteer at The Wellness Community (San Francisco/East Bay

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