

An[other] Adventure in Breast Augmentation  
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*Note: Since I wrote this, I discovered that “Vitamin K” is slang for the anesthetic drug Ketamine. Most likely I either suffered a reaction to ketamine on the operating table, or the induction of anesthesia went out of order, putting me into respiratory arrest prior to unconsciousness. This speaks volumes for how the “transparency” of medical errors has changed over the years. Clearly the medical staff was covering their backsides. It also reminds me of how execution by lethal injection can so easily go wrong.*

I got some idea that things might not go so smoothly when I almost died on the operating table during my breast augmentation surgery. The anesthesiologist started an infusion of Vitamin K, for aiding in blood clotting, and I had an allergic reaction to it. I couldn't breathe, and I started to panic... the last thing I remembered was my surgeon leaning over me, telling me that I had a bad reaction, that I would be okay, though, and they were putting me to sleep.

Later that day, recuperating in my hospital room, I learned the details. Despite the difficult start, the surgery went smoothly, and I had a wonderful pair of breasts. The kind which are silicone bags filled with saline solution. They kept me in the hospital one day longer than usual to keep an eye on me, and within a couple more days I was back at work. The discomfort was manageable, far outweighed by the delight in having my new breasts.

During my postoperative care period, however, it became evident that while my left breast was coming along all right, my right breast was not normal. After the stitches were removed and the bruising and swelling subsided, my right breast became hard as a rock. Sleeping on my stomach was out of the question, and when sleeping on my back, it felt as if there was a rock atop my chest.

My surgeon explained that a capsule of scar tissue had enveloped the silicone bag. He would try a conservative course of treatment that was successful in some cases.

Every two weeks, I would drive two hours each way from Philadelphia to New York City for my office visits. The doc would check the breast, and then proceed to put one hand on each side of the breast and squeeze until the capsule was ruptured. I could feel a ripping or popping sensation when this happened, and although it usually didn't hurt, the sound and feel was unnerving. Then he would give me a cortisone injection directly into the breast...not the most pleasant experience.

Each time, the breast would feel nice and soft for about a day, and then the hardness would set in again. Time after time, the procedure was repeated. Once during the squeezing process, a blood vessel was broken inside my breast which caused excruciating pain and created huge bruises. After a year of this therapy it became clear that it simply wasn't working.

Repair surgery was done under light anesthesia. I was awake during the whole procedure, during which the implant was removed (Now that was a weird feeling!), the scar tissue trimmed, and the implant replaced. After a short time in the recovery room, I was sent home.

This time everything went well – the capsule never reformed, and I have enjoyed having my breasts for the past ten years.

So, although this story ultimately had a happy ending, the point that Kelly Roberts made in her article “My Breast Augmentation Nightmare” (TS Voice, April 1990), is a valid one. The media has done a lot to make us think that cosmetic surgery is mundane and common, while it is certainly not.

For example, who ever heard of a botched rhinoplasty (nose job)? I didn’t until I met a young woman who unfortunately had one. Now she has no cartilage in her nose, with the result that this otherwise beautiful woman has a nose that looks like Porky Pig’s. Additionally, she has suffered recurring infections. My experience with her has convinced me that rhinoplasty is not worth the risk in my particular case.

And that brings us to the point of this story. If a person wants a cosmetic procedure, all the horror stories in the world aren’t going to change that person’s mind. But these stories can make the potential candidate think about what they are going to do and take every care to check the reputation of the physician, the hospital, and study the possible complications associated with the procedure. Be an educated consumer as Kelly Roberts says, “do your homework.”

*Ironically, I had those implants for 40 years, and over time they had gradually deflated. Thinking it was time for a “tune-up” I scheduled a breast lift and implant replacement when I was 66 years old. The surgeon was reputable, but again, it was a bad day: He discarded part of my nipple and areola, leaving me with a nasty-looking breast. Skin grafts and tattooing followed in an attempt to allow healing and give me an acceptable-looking cosmetic result. Then, a couple of years later, the implant spontaneously deflated. Back to the operating room, this time with a new surgeon, who set things right. I am hoping these implants will accompany me to the cremation chamber.*