

One Woman's Facelift Experience

The response to the AARP article has been unbelievable. Of course, many of the e-mails we get are inquiries about staying at Casa Obelisco and we are working hard to accommodate each request. In addition, there have been so many requests for information about my "\$3,500 facelift" that I am feeling overwhelmed (and guilty about being unable to respond quickly and personally to each of you). So, I thought I would put this link on our website and give you as much information as I can. The first thing you should know is the price was a misquote – it actually cost \$3,800.

When I first contemplated my surgery, in the summer of 2002, I remember not knowing where to begin (and certainly didn't know who to ask). But, once someone blurts out "I've had a facelift" to a writer for a major magazine – I guess you'd have to be crazy not to ask me! So, here goes. I'll cover as much as I can remember and hope to meet you here at Casa Obelisco with your brand new face.

Please remember that what follows is my own personal experience. I am not a professional and any recommendations I make should still be checked out. It is every person's responsibility to do their own homework and make choices they feel comfortable with.

THE REALIZATION: After a hectic year that included moving to Mexico, the stress of watching a parent die, a little too much weight loss, much too much time in the sun and, of course, the passing of my 52nd birthday, I looked in the mirror one day and thought I was seeing my mother's ghost. My jowls were drooping, my eyelids were sagging onto my eyelashes, my chin seemed to have receded into an extra neck and my whole face seemed to be melting from the bone. It was sad!

I wasn't all that shocked because I'd seen the beginnings of this destruction a year previously and began my investigation before I left California. I met with two plastic surgeons there who both agreed I could use a little pick-me-up – and they both seemed to think it would cost approximately \$16,000. GULP!

FIRST THINGS FIRST: The first big task was to find the right doctor. How do you do that in a foreign country (especially when your Spanish skills are dismal)? Well, I didn't know either. So, I contacted some friends who I thought might have Mexican friends who had experience with things like this. With just a few inquiries I got back a pretty lengthy list of recommended surgeons– but two names came up over and over. They were my doctor (**Dr. Lazaro Cardenas Camarena**) and a Dr. Jose Guerrerosantos – both in Guadalajara, Mexico. I had originally hoped for one in Puerto Vallarta because it is closer to my home, but I didn't get a single recommendation. I suppose that makes sense – Vallarta is a tourist destination where people go to play. Guadalajara, on the other hand is a very upscale city (the 2nd largest city in Mexico) with a large number of universities and medical schools. In addition, the people in Guadalajara are

sophisticated and many are affluent. Makes sense there would be a good selection of fine doctors (not just plastic surgeons) there. I then called my family doctor here in Mexico and asked him to check them out. He came back a few days later with nothing but good reports (he even talked to a few patients who had used them both).

SAFETY FIRST – My impulse was to just call both doctors and make an appointment with the first one that could do it – but I decided to do the right thing and take a trip up there to interview them both. Both doctors had immaculately clean offices, professional staff (many of whom spoke English – as did both doctors), and impressive resumes. They calmly answered all my questions about their education, their backgrounds, their experience and their recommendations. I felt no pressure to choose. I went back to my hotel that night and my husband and I talked it over and I finally went with my gut reaction and chose Dr. Lazaro Cardenas Camarena. The clincher was that Dr Cardenas told me that if I wanted one of those “pulled too tight” lifts, he wasn’t the guy. He said his goal was a natural appearance and that I wouldn’t look 30, I’d look like myself – just better.

THE WHEELS ARE IN MOTION: The next day I went back to see Dr. Cardenas to find out the details. Before anything else, he insisted I have an EKG because I am a smoker. He also wanted a series of blood tests to uncover any hidden problems. I had the option of doing it right there in his clinic or doing it with my own doctor. (I would think you could do it in the states). I chose to have the tests done closer to home rather than spend an extra day in Guadalajara. He also gave me a list of medicines to get in advance (everything except narcotics are available over the counter in Mexico) so that I would have everything I needed before and after the surgery. I can’t remember what they all were, but the one I do remember is Arnica. He had me take it for a week before the surgery to keep me from having excessive bruising – it works! There were also vitamins and pain pills (just in case).

LOGISTICS: I went to have a chat with Stan and Jose, the proprietors of a beautiful B&B in Guadalajara. I had stayed there before and knew it would be a perfect place to hide out in case I looked a little scary. They assured me that their full time and professional staff would be there to bring me ice packs, soup, juice, whatever I needed. Besides their great service, they have all these beautiful gardens and private areas where I knew I could sit and read a book and be undetected. I also pre-arranged all the travel back and forth to the clinic with Hector, a great taxi driver who works with Casa De Las Flores.

THE LAST MINUTE DETAILS: I had all the tests and my family doctor faxed the results to the surgeon. Then I called him and he said “I could do it tomorrow, but I won’t until you’ve gone at least a week without a cigarette”. Apparently, even a week off improves your circulation and lung capacity --- both important under anesthesia. So we scheduled a date for 10 days later.

THE JOURNEY: Having seen a few of my friends after surgery, I decided to spare my husband the first couple of days of stitches and puffiness (who wants that burned on the retinas of those we love?) So, I took the luxury bus (only \$42.00, 3 ½ hours, with totally reclining seats, clean bathrooms and movies) to Guadalajara. I had pre-arranged to be picked up at the bus station by Hector (the taxi driver). Hector drove me right to the doctor's office where I had one last consultation with the Doctor, got my orders about what to do (and not do) that night and an outline of what to expect the next day. Then, Hector drove me to Casa De Las Flores (www.casadelasflores.com) where the whole staff was waiting to assure me that they would be there to serve me. My good friend from the states was already there waiting for me. By the way, I highly recommend bringing a good friend – someone who won't mind looking at you on day one and will keep you comfortable and entertained when you are feeling a little bored that first day. Well, it was my last night so we went off to an early dinner in Tlaquepaque and I made my first mistake – I had one little margarita (I paid for it the next day when I woke up nauseous – I knew it was the drink!)

FACE LIFT DAY: Tuesday Morning. Hector arrived at the B&B at 7:30 a.m. and drove me to the clinic for my 8:00 a.m. surgery. He gave the nurse his phone number and instructed her to call him 30 minutes before I was ready to leave the next day. By the way, the price includes the first night in the clinic – and if you want to stay a few extra days it is very reasonable! I was brought to a room, given a gown and then escorted by two nurses to a room, where they washed my feet (not sure what that was about) put on some booties and helped me up onto a gurney. They rolled me into an operating room that was filled with beautiful young Mexican girls (or maybe they were all old with facelifts). As the anesthesiologist started his work, they all started singing Mexican love songs – it was surreal! Next thing I know its 7 a.m. the following day and I woke up with two nurses holding my hands and saying something (remember, my Spanish was terrible). I was feeling a little nauseous (damn that margarita) and had a killer headache. They gave me a pain pill and I fell asleep until noon. When I finally woke up I felt okay – a bit of a headache and my face was completely wrapped up. The doctor came in, removed the bandages and said to go home and come back on Friday afternoon to have the stitches in my eyes removed.

RECOVERY: Hector came and got me on Wednesday, delivered me to Casa De Las Flores where I fell into bed and slept for 6 hours. Unfortunately, and this was truly the hardest part of the entire ordeal for me, you have to sleep practically sitting up for 2 weeks to keep the blood from pooling and causing bruising. The staff brought me frozen bags of peas every hour and my friend stayed close by in case I needed help to the bathroom or rearranging the hundred pillows. I drank some soup the first day but wasn't hungry. Wasn't in pain either – just tired.

The next day (Thursday) I got out of bed and, once I knew the other guests had left the dining room, I ventured out to enjoy an incredible meal. Stan, one of the

partners at Casa De Las Flores is a renowned chef and was an assistant chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California. I never felt like going back to bed after that. My friend and I went shopping – of course I wore sunglasses, but I wasn't that scary looking after the first day. We even went to dinner on the town that night. (This time the margarita didn't make me sick).

On Friday, my husband drove up to pick me up. We stopped at the doctor's office where he declared me on the mend and removed the small stitches they use on your eyes (no pain – I promise—I'm a big baby with a low tolerance for pain and it was all painless). Then we drove home.

About a week later my family doctor removed the big stitches in my forehead and in the front and back of my ears. Two weeks after that I was standing in front of a class, teaching, with no visible facelift residue.

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL: It's such a personal decision. I just told everyone I was doing it. Now when I meet new people I don't feel compelled to tell them, but I'm not embarrassed to – as you well know – you read it in a magazine. But, if you want to keep it a secret – do it.

Some things to know:

1. Don't read that stupid book called "Welcome to Your Facelift". It scared the heck out of me and made it sound like open heart surgery. Save your money to buy a pair of big sunglasses
2. Don't get your hair cut super short before the surgery. I did and was sorry! You need all the hair you can have to hide the stitches the first few weeks.
3. In advance, buy Estee Lauder's GREEN foundation. Not sure how it works but somehow the green makeup combines with the ruddiness of your skin and makes it look normal. You'll be able to use it about 3 weeks after the surgery to cover any little marks or bruises
4. It takes 6 months for the facelift to be completely healed. That means you will be getting better looking every day! But don't be alarmed. By the end of 3 weeks you will see huge improvements and by the 4th week people who don't know you won't be able to detect anything. Your friends will just think you look great.
5. Mention my name if you use my doctor. With the response we are getting I fully expect a huge discount for future work if only 1/10th of you use his services.

What I had done:

I let the doctor make the recommendations (after all, he's done this a few times before) and here's what he recommended:

1. forehead lift – lifts the whole brow up. Try it yourself – just lift your forehead up and see how much younger you look with your eyebrows back where they used to be. Downside? Stitches in the hairline that itch until they come out. I can still feel the scars but you can't see them.
2. upper and lower eyelift – I have small eyes and always had smallish eyelids. But over the years, the upper eyelid took over. It just opens up the eye and makes you look refreshed. The lower lift gets rid of that sagging under the eye. The stitches are tiny and after two weeks you can't see where they were.
3. Facelift – well they grab it, pull it and tuck it in – not really. What they do is reattach the skin on the inside to your cheekbone so all that flab now looks like a youthful cheekbone. There are stitches in front and behind the ear. The ones behind the ear drove me crazy until they came out – not pain but itchy and a little oozy. Remember no short hair cuts just before!
4. Chin implant and lipo suction on the neck. No pain, no problem, no discomfort – its great. I've always had a weak chin – it really improved my profile.

Ladies, good luck! I don't know what else I can tell you. I've tried to think of everything, but I'm sure I've missed something. The important thing to remember is that you have to be comfortable with the decisions you make. I've included contact information below (including Dr. Cardena's price list – with his permission). If you have other questions you may e-mail me at hartinsanjose@hotmail.com. I'll try to respond, but if it gets to overwhelming I hope you will forgive me for short answers.

We sincerely hope you will come to see us at Casa Obelisco after the Doctor releases you. By then you will be feeling great (but maybe not looking so great just yet). Casa Obelisco is a perfect place to relax and recover. We are a B&B and not a full service hotel, but we have given some thought to how we can meet your needs. When you are ready to reserve your room, we will be happy to review some options for your post-operative needs.

Below is contact information for your use.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kirkwood

A few notes from Barbara's husband:

I attended Barbara's interview with the Doctor and visit of Dr. Cardenas' clinic. I wholeheartedly agree with Barbara's assessment, the clinic and professional care is first class, and the prices (due to no need for malpractice insurance and lower overall healthcare costs), are very attractive. For anyone interested in the "ok, what is all this

really going to cost me". Here is approximate cost scenario, as a starting point, the difference between the quote from The US doctors and getting the cosmetic surgery completed here in Mexico for Barbara amounted to a cost savings of 13,000 US dollars.

For your travel and two week stay in Mexico, here are approximate costs of what you would most likely incur:

- Airfare for two, from most US cities to Guadalajara, depart from Puerto Vallarta for your return to the US. +/- \$1200
- A one week stay in Guadalajara at CASA DE LAS FLORES: +/- \$650
- A one week stay in San Francisco (San Pancho), known as the Riviera coast of Mexico at Casa Obelisco: \$945
- One week car rental while here: +/- \$500
- Bus fare from Guadalajara to the coast: +/- \$50 (Limo service is available).

Except for food and beverages and any other incidental costs, the savings would have amounted to over \$9,000 dollars. Not bad for the cosmetic surgery wanted in the first place and returning home after a two week vacation, rested with most signs of the cosmetic surgery already healed.

Bill Kirkwood

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CASA DE LAS FLORES
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Hector (Cab Driver) can be reached through Casa De Las Flores