

Patti's Story

Nothing could be done. That's what the emergency team at the nearest hospital told Patti. She would just have to learn to live with the hole where her nose used to be.

Patti's dog, her "baby" for 10 years, had done a thorough job of it. A neighborhood firecracker had gone off just as Patti knelt down, and a millisecond of madness had caused the dog to bite off her entire nose.

"I was in the wrong place at the wrong time," she says—but not for long. The right place was the Plastic Surgery Department at Palo Alto Medical Foundation (PAMF), where Patti heard a whole different story.

"Don't worry," the PAMF surgeons said. "It's going to be okay. We'll put you back together again." And, they did, with cartilage, blood vessels, nerves and skin from Patti's own ears, leg, forehead and cheeks. Nine operations later (Or was it 10? Patti has lost count.), she can sneeze and blow her new nose like anybody else. She can pucker her lips and whistle too.

Most important of all, it isn't just any nose on Patti's face, because her plastic surgeon is also a sculptor. Working from photographs of Patti before the accident, he rebuilt her entire face in clay before he ever picked up a scalpel. He carried those pictures around in his briefcase as reminders, and by the time he scrubbed in, he knew every quarter inch of Patti's "real" face. Now, when Patti looks in the mirror, it's her own true self that looks back.

That's not surgery. That's art.

