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Breasts, buttocks and boomers redux



By Gary Silverman In New York Author alerts

Our happy plastic surgeons are showing that we don't get older, we just get better



I used to cringe whenever they played it on the campaign trail. That old anthem of the Clinton crowd – the Fleetwood Mac song featuring the lyric “don’t stop thinking about tomorrow” – just wasn’t my musical cup of tea.

But as theme songs go, “Don’t Stop” was well chosen. The Clintons and their brethren in the baby-boom generation (including your humble narrator, at the tail-end) can’t stop thinking about tomorrow.

No matter what it says on our birth certificates, we are invariably busy being born and not busy dying, to paraphrase Bob Dylan. We don’t get older – we get better.

If you think I’m kidding, just check out the burgeoning breasts and buttocks of our female boomers.

US plastic surgeons reported this month that growing numbers of women in their 50s and 60s are opting for surgeries to augment these body parts for aesthetic reasons. Doctors say this is a big change because these procedures were largely the province of the young until recently. “There has been a cultural shift in the population that is saying this is something I want to do,” says Jack Fisher, president of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery and a boomer who can empathise with his patients.

“I just turned 67... and I don’t feel 67,” he told me during a telephone interview. “I don’t feel much older than when I was 16.”

Dr Fisher says when he began practising three decades ago, candidates for aesthetic breast implants were almost all under age 40. Last year his group said 33,224 women aged 51 and older had their breasts enlarged surgically, almost 11 per cent of the total, up from 14,571, or 5 per cent of the total, a decade before. The number of women of 65 and older getting implants rose to 3,748 last year from 1,010 in 2003.

The trend is similar for buttock augmentations, which are less common in the US, but are gaining popularity (with women accounting for 98 per cent of the surgeries). Of the 11,527 people who had their posteriors padded last year, 1,220 were age 51 and over, and 300 of them were age 65 and over. By contrast, when Asaps began counting buttock augmentations in 2002, it could find only five recipients over 50 years old.

It’s easy to poke fun at these fountain-of-youth-seeking Ponce de Leons of plastic surgery. Let’s face it, when The Commodores sang the praises of curvaceous women in their 1970s hit “Brick House”, I doubt they anticipated major construction work continuing past retirement age.

But I see these women as symbols of a serious force in our public life – the forever young baby boomer getting back into the game.

One of the best recent examples comes from the sports world. Phil Jackson, who has won more championships than any other US professional basketball coach, came out of retirement this month at age 68 – he was born shortly after the war – to sign a five-year contract to serve as president of the long-suffering New York Knicks.

Mr Jackson isn’t what he used to be. The man known as the Zen Master – for practices that include encouraging his players to meditate

– told reporters that he has had five surgeries in recent years for problems with his “knees and hips and other things”. But he jumped at the chance to heal the team where he began his career as a player – once the capitalists who own the club offered him \$12m a year.

Another boomer who might be on her way back is Hillary Clinton. It’s no secret that the former US secretary of state has been thinking about tomorrow (and tomorrow and tomorrow). The world wants to know whether she will press ahead with a second attempt at the presidency.

Age is an issue. Were she to win, she would be 69 on inauguration day, the second-oldest president to assume office after Ronald Reagan. According to The Wall Street Journal, some members of her inner circle wish Mrs Clinton would take it easy. They reportedly worry about how she will put up with the rigours of a campaign and the inevitable talk about her husband Bill’s relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

But from a boomer perspective, I suspect the focus on Mrs Clinton’s health and past unhappiness will only spur her to run for president. A campaign would be therapeutic in this context. She would get out and about, and meet new people.

Someone would play that song again – and Mrs Clinton could hear those comforting words at the end. “Yesterday’s gone, yesterday’s gone,” it goes. “Don’t you look back.”

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