



BEFORE WEIGHT LOSS

Her supportive husband Tom was amazed when Pauline quietly saved \$10,000 for a stomach stapling operation.

AFTER WEIGHT LOSS

The proud mum lost 40kg.

BEFORE BREAST IMPLANTS



Pauline spent \$40,000 on a total body lift, which included removing her flabby stomach, liposuction to hips and thighs and breast implants.

ALL SURGERY COMPLETED



After a \$50,000 makeover, this mum of five says she's no longer a hermit

I SPENT MY LIFE'S SAVINGS ON PLASTIC SURGERY

REAL LIFE READ

When Dunedin mum-of-five Pauline* hits the town for a spot of disco-dancing or takes her daughter shopping at the local mall, she holds her head up high. For decades, the 44-year-old lived in a virtual fortress, rarely leaving the house because she was so depressed about her weight and size. But seven cosmetic surgery procedures later, Pauline is full of poise and confidence and says she has absolutely no regrets about spending her life savings – \$50,000 – on a total body lift. Pauline's weight problems began when she was sexually assaulted while babysitting at the age of 12. Already 175cm tall and self-conscious about her height, she became deeply depressed and took comfort in food. "I didn't want to be feminine and I didn't want to be attractive," she says. "I didn't want to have the body that had been

abused by my attacker. Inside was this turmoil – complete chaos – but on the outside I seemed calm. I learned not to be beautiful and not to let anyone see the real me." Pauline piled on weight in the belief that if she was fat and unattractive, people would leave her alone. Meeting [husband] Tom at just 17, Pauline slowly began to accept that she was lovable and beautiful – but after having five children, her body was altered, and Pauline hated it even more. On top of the sagging skin and drooping breasts, Pauline's health began to worsen. "I didn't know this at the time, but I was suffering from an under-active thyroid and I was continuing to gain weight even though I was exercising. I couldn't understand it. My hair had started to fall out and I was depressed. I had asthma. I felt lethargic all the time – so much so that I couldn't even lift my hand off my knee if I was sitting down on the couch."

Then, Pauline developed Bell's Palsy – or partial paralysis of the face – which is treated with steroid medication. "I basically doubled in size," she says. **Hated myself** Tipping the scales at 111kg – size 22 – Pauline says it was time to take control of her weight, and her life. "I loathed myself," she recalls. "Even knowing about my medical issues, I felt responsible for my size. I blamed myself. I knew I was always going to be big

'I learned not to let anyone see the real me ...'

and I couldn't live with that." So Pauline investigated gastric bypass surgery, commonly known as stomach stapling. "I told the doctor, 'Either you fix me or I fix myself.' I'm not sure what I meant by that at the time, but I was so desperate. Some people commit

suicide – others have surgery." Getting a night-shift job as a caregiver in a retirement home, Pauline quietly saved the \$10,000 required to pay for her surgery. "Then I booked it, paid for it, had a bath, poured some wine and said to Tom, 'This is what I've done.'" Her husband was astounded. "He couldn't believe I'd managed to squirrel away so much! But he was completely supportive, as he has always been. He'd love me if I was as huge as a house and as ugly as anything, and I've always known that. But I wasn't doing any of this for him – it was for me." Pauline's gastric bypass was a success and, able to eat only small amounts of pureed food, Pauline lost 40kg in four months. But her weight loss came at a price. "I was left with an apron of skin that hung down over my thighs. I would squash myself into jeans, then after an hour I couldn't breathe. I'd get hot, my skin was irritated – it's uncomfortable." Referred to Christchurch-based plastic surgeon Dr Howard Klein,

Pauline learned that surgery would rid her of the excess skin. She also asked about breast augmentation. "After having children, my cup size had dropped from an F to an A and my breasts hung loose." The cost of surgery was likely to be \$40,000 – so it was back to night shifts for Pauline, who estimates she worked for eight years to save the money. "It was important to me that I save the money myself. I didn't want anyone to think I'd taken this money away from my family to do this." Dr Klein performed liposuction on Pauline's inner thighs, hips and buttocks, a tummy tuck, and a hip and thigh lift. Later, Pauline had breast implants and a breast lift. She says she loves her new body and feels indebted to her surgeon, who threw in the abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) free of charge. "Now I have the confidence to go out and do normal things," says Pauline happily. "I'm not a hermit anymore! And I'm able to feel sexy and cope with men looking at me instead of hating that part of myself. By having

a surgeon cut my body, I was really wanting him to cut away the person that had been me. And it did give me the confidence to be feminine again. But there's still a lot of mental work to do." Now 77kg and a size 16, Pauline volunteers to speak to patients about the physical and mental effects of cosmetic surgery, but acknowledges that spending tens of thousands on a makeover isn't right for everybody. "Some people spend \$50,000 easily on cruises or travelling overseas. I put my money where I needed it most. I'm more fulfilled and it benefits the family with a happier mother and a happier marriage. It was the right decision for me."

BY FIONA FRASER
*Pauline's surname has been withheld for personal reasons.

Tell us at the Day
Would you spend \$50,000 to change the way you look?
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PICTURES: ELIZABETH GOODALL; MAKE-UP: LOUISE DORNAN.