

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

What Cute Buns You Have, Grandma!

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SCRIBBLING NOTES as the ex-professor explained some precise triangular correlation and the point of maximum projection, I was briefly confused as to whether this was about building a bridge or a woman's butt. In either case, you don't want the darn thing falling down.

"We know," said Dr. V. Leroy Young, a Creve Coeur surgeon, "there are attractive buttocks and unattractive buttocks."

Well, some of us know that more than others.

Maybe I need to get out more, but it never occurred to me that there was such a thing as a bona fide, butt-ugly butt.

Silly me, I always thought all God's children's butts are cute, cute, cute, from the moment they are born.

But ... I'm wrong.

Take Lulu, a St. Louis-area grandma in her 50s. We agreed not to use her real name, as she has not told anyone about her cosmetic surgery. And she was kind enough to show us her butts.

Trust me, this hardly ever happens.

Lulu is on the cutting edge (ha, ha) of a new trend in cosmetic surgery, gluteal augmentation.

You know, breast implants for your butt.

In gluteal augmentation circles, (or maybe triangles; I'm in over my head here) this is commonly known as the J. Lo phenomenon. Although there's something about the word gluteal that makes me think of Jell-O.

In the photos on page 3 you see Lulu's Before Butt, poor little thing, no more than a couple buttermilk pancakes that made clothes shopping much like the hunt for Osama (except her hunt went on much longer).

In Lulu's perky After Butt picture, well, "You know those 16-year-olds bopping around with their tight butts?" Lulu says. "I AM THERE. I honestly feel like I have the J. Lo butt, perfected. Hers is a little big, don't you think?"

Asked, basically, why anyone would pay him about \$7,500 to insert FDA-approved, solid, leak-proof silicone gel implants in their derrieres, Dr. Young, a retired professor of surgery at Washington University Medical School, said, "Clothes are the issue."

Or, as Lulu put it when I asked how her recent surgery has changed her life, "I bought a bunch of slutty clothes." And nice grandma outfits, too. As she walked through Penney's the other day, modestly attired, a man in his 20s gave Lulu a long, rubberneck smile. People are telling her, "You look so good!" and they can't quite put their finger on why. A 26-year-old woman encouraged her to get her bellybutton pierced to accent her great shape.

"I'd kill for a body like yours," the woman told Lulu.

Now, I know, some people think cosmetic surgery is vain, self-absorbed and, most of all, cheating.

And hair coloring isn't? A Wonderbra isn't? A half-hour a day of face paint isn't?

Like the woman who admits she would sleep with a stranger for \$10 million, we have established what she is, now we only have to haggle over price.

There certainly is pressure on women to conform to nearly impossible standards of youthful beauty. But most of us can stand the pressure. Very few of us have gone 'round the bend. We just like to look nice. Like mountain climbing and raw fish, plastic surgery isn't for everyone.

I agree with Dr. Young that if you feel the body is a sacred landscape that should not be altered in any way, "then you should never have plastic surgery. But why make that decision for other people?"

Also, you're going to have to line up the orthodontists, manicurists and lots of other folks and shoot them, too. It will take up most of your time.

"When you look good, you feel good," Lulu said. "I think most people will agree with that. Do you know anybody who doesn't do something to make themselves look good?"

Booty enhancement was performed 614 times in the United States last year. More men surgically beefed up their pecs. But the operation is just coming into its own, thanks to advances in the surgical technique (leaving an invisible scar, you know, up the middle), the implants themselves, which now are shaped more like butts and less like softballs, and a scientific classification of gluteal aesthetics.

In other words, humankind's long search for the perfect butt is complete. They have mind-numbing formulas to prove it, but I never let math get in the way of a column about butts.

Dr. Young and his colleague, Dr. Robert F. Centeno, traveled to Mexico City to learn the latest at the feet (or hands, probably) of the master, Dr. Jorge Abel de la Pena. The St. Louis docs decided to investigate the procedure after attending a conference where they saw photos of some Before and After Butts. "Like you, I thought, 'What's this?' But I couldn't believe what a difference it made," said Dr. Young.

So few doctors are skilled at the procedure that a surgeon is flying here to observe the next one. She's coming all the way from Planet Plastic Surgery - California.

So now, to schools for the deaf, dog food and beer, we can add perfect butts to the list of things St. Louis is known for. The bottom line is: Now there really is no reason to live anywhere else.