

# HIGH SCHOOL REUNION

New York mom gets makeover just in time for class *By Danielle Sutherland*

**W**hen my 25-year high-school reunion invitation arrived in the mail, I thought to myself, “You know what would be even more fun than a high school reunion? Anything. Bedbugs. Jury duty. Getting splashed by the cab that didn’t stop for me for the next year’s worth of rainy days when I’m running 10 minutes late.” Not that I didn’t like high school. I had no emotional scars or old scores to settle, I just had no desire to lay eyes on most of the people I spent high school with. But really, deep down, I think I was a little scared for them to lay eyes on me.

So there I was with the invite in hand, literally on the way to consigning my past to the trash bin of personal history when the phone rang. It was Margot\*. She was the only high-school friend I’d stayed close with.

“Danielle, have you checked your mail?” Margot screeched, before even saying hello.

“Yes.”

“And? Are you excited?”

“I’m sorry, but I’m not going,” I said. I had missed all of the other reunions, why start now? I argued.

But Margot begged. The more she insisted, the more I had to acknowledge



there was something underlying my reticence to see my old classmates.

Over the past 25 years, Margot (a knockout even as a child; she was “that girl” who always had a boyfriend, starting in the sixth grade) had diligently maintained her looks with Pilates three days a week, a personal trainer, New York City’s top plastic surgeon and a nutritionist she practically kept on retainer. A high-school reunion wouldn’t phase a stunner like Margot; she was better preserved than the frogs we dissected in bio. Let’s just say that all of our classmates would say to her, “You haven’t changed a bit!” And they’d say to

me: “Danielle, I hardly recognized you!!!”

If I were honest with myself, I’d have to admit that the reunion loomed as nothing so much as a venue to showcase my shortcomings. Somewhere between motherhood, a demanding legal career, and more failed diets than you could shake a protein shake at, I had fluctuated between a size 4 and a size 12, with every clothing size in between represented in my closet. I was now a size 10, or so I told myself, but in actuality I hadn’t been able to button my size 10 jeans in a year. Add to this a difficult few years of caring for a sick parent while working

60-to-70-hour weeks, and I looked awful. I had really let myself go—gray roots and all. There was little chance I was showing up to that reunion.

However, Margot insisted, begged and then bribed. It literally took Margot’s promise to pick me up with her car and driver and let me borrow her live-in laundress and ironing maid to close the deal: I’d go to my high-school reunion with Margot, but privately, I made a deal with myself. I was going to look my best for this reunion come hell, high water or a Hall and Oates reunion.

This is when I discovered *The High School*

*Reunion Diet* by David Colbert, M.D., and Terry Reed. As I looked for books on diet and exercise at the bookstore, Dr. Colbert’s book jumped out for obvious reasons. The headline said “Lose 20 Years in 30 Days”—I had more than twice that amount of time, so I felt compelled to peruse it. I was genuinely impressed with the book; it was filled with what seemed like (for once) rational good sense and easy-to-follow advice; I liked that the book billed itself as a “food knowledge” book, not a diet book, and promised to re-educate the reader on the subject of food, and so I purchased it, hoping it would deliver on its promise to deliver you to your reunion looking more like your “original self than you have in years.”

Just 10 days after following Dr. Colbert’s menu plans, which incidentally never left me feeling starved, as other diet’s have, I was actually able to zip into those size 10 jeans. Another three weeks later, though I could barely believe it, I was fitting into my size 8 clothes. And while my face was even starting to look better (less bloated), the deep lines on my forehead and crow’s feet were still visible, tormenting me.

And then something really unsettling happened: Walking along Madison Avenue and looking into a store window one afternoon, I noticed an old-looking woman in the reflection. It took a minute to process that I was seeing my own visage! Already impressed with the results of the diet, and knowing Dr. Colbert's dermatology practice is in Manhattan, I picked up the phone in no time, desperately requesting an "emergency visit" that day; lucky for me, the doctor had a cancellation!

The pristine interior of Dr. Colbert's Fifth Avenue office hits you the moment

when Dr. Colbert walked in, he quickly put me at ease. He was personable and fun. I think he might be the first doctor to actually make me laugh since I stopped visiting my pediatrician. Beyond being kind in a one-on-one setting, this successful doctor, with an A-list clientele that includes Angelina Jolie and Rachel Weisz, travels in his spare time to Haiti aiding amputee victims.

I told Dr. Colbert my situation, and, hearing that I had my high-school reunion coming up, he smiled and said, "You've come to the right place.

many stars the day before the Oscars, the Triad gives patients a youthful and dewy glow. My skin did look fabulous when I left, but unfortunately, I wasn't going to the Oscars, just home to an empty apartment (the kids were at camp and my husband on a weeklong business trip).

Before I left Dr. Colbert's office that day, he explained to me that once the Botox took effect, it would take five years off my face, and if I was willing to come back in a week, he could take off another five. Dr. Colbert said he would be able to reconstruct my face in the office without surgery, just by using Restylane to give me back my fuller cheeks that were now a thing of the past.

Seven days later, with the Botox having taken effect, Dr. Colbert finished the transformation. Holding up a small handheld mirror, Dr. Colbert asked me what I thought. I barely heard the question; the tears welling up in my eyes said more than anything I could put into words. Within seconds the Restylane gave me back a youthful face! I couldn't believe the combined results; they were breathtaking. Before meeting Dr. Colbert, I thought one needed to have a face-lift to achieve effects this noticeable, but I was wrong.

The things that happened next were, in short, beyond my wildest imagi-

nation. On the street, I noticed men, young and old alike, were turning and taking note—an appreciative glance here, a nod of approval there and even requests to go on a date (sometimes despite seeing a ring on my finger). At first, it was impossible to believe.

Then one night, I noticed a look in my husband's eyes that I hadn't seen in years. He couldn't stop telling me how great I looked and, not knowing what I'd done, asked how much the face cream (he presumed I bought) had cost us! The romance started coming back into my marriage, too; my husband was paying more attention to me, sending me flowers with notes telling me to meet him at the Lowell Hotel after work, where we had gotten married. Work was also improving. I had more confidence all around—a bounce in my step.

The night of the high-school reunion, I found myself—now a size 6 with a smooth face (and sans the gray roots)—standing in front of my full-body mirror a completely different person than the one that needed to be bribed into agreeing to go a few months ago. Who needed Margot's maid to iron my sheets, I thought to myself, when I looked this good?

My 25-year high-school reunion ended up being not just a great night (after all, everyone wanted to

know my secret; someone even commented, "You win for who looks the best 25 years later") but one of the most eye-opening, perspective-changing events, too. One of the boys I had a major unrequited crush on a quarter-century before, now middle-aged and twice divorced, was suggesting we get back in touch, and his hug goodbye felt filled with regret (on his side). "Why didn't you ever go out with me back then?" I somehow marshaled the nerve to ask. "It never occurred to me you liked me, you were so shy, a little awkward," he remarked, "but always a cutie."

In the days that followed, Margot and I had a good time reminiscing and re-playing the evening. But in my private moments, I realized something else.

I wasted a lot of time being insecure when I was young. I wasn't as unattractive as I thought I was. I just lacked confidence. Then, having never felt pretty in the first place, I suppose it was that much easier to let it slip away. Looking great at this point in my life felt like I had been given a second chance. The first time around, when I was young and pretty, I lacked perspective to embrace and enjoy it—or just even recognize it.

I wouldn't make that mistake again.

\*Names have been changed.

## *I made a deal with myself. I was going to look my best for this reunion come hell, high water or a Hall and Oates concert.*

you walk through the door, instantly letting you know you're in good hands. Naturally young-looking women—and men—wait for the doctor inside. This was not my mother's plastic surgeon's office, where the wind-tunnel, pinched-face look abounded.

Waiting in the exam room, I was nervous; rationally, I knew Botox and fillers were commonplace, but on some level I had always been nervous about the procedure. Thankfully,

Don't worry, I'll make you look years younger before the reunion."

After receiving quick injections of Botox into the forehead and around the eyes, I sat with icepacks on my face for a few minutes and wondered what I had been so afraid of. Sure, it was uncomfortable, but compared to my three C-sections, it was a walk in the park. Dr. Colbert followed up by treating me with his signature medical facial, the Triad. Used by