



Gari Carter, who will read and hold two book signings in Charlottesville this week, said she hopes that her story will help others.

A Time To Heal

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It took just a few seconds for the large car to lose control on the snow-slick road near Orange. The station wagon slammed into Gari Carter's compact car. In one shattering instant, Ms. Carter was transformed from an attractive model to a woman with such terrible facial injuries that people would turn away in shock.

But the gifted hands of University of Virginia plastic surgeon Dr. Milton T. Edgerton gave Ms. Carter a new face. Determination, courage, inner reflection and help from many people gave her a new life.

Now, 12 years after the accident, Ms. Carter can speak candidly about her once disfiguring and disabling injuries.

"My son, who was 11 at the time, and I both had our seat belts on," Ms. Carter said. "But the major impact was on my side of the car and just crushed everything into me.

"My son was uninjured, but the steering column was smashed into my face and the engine was pushed back so far it nearly cut my right leg in two.

"Despite my face being an ugly, bloody hole, my son who was a Boy Scout gave me CPR and saved my life," she said. "But in that one awful moment, I went from someone who had been a model and who people looked at with admiration, to a thing peo-

ple looked at with horror."

As she hovered near death, rescue workers had to use the Jaws of Life to extract the former owner of the Orangerie dress shop in Orange from the mangled wreckage. She wouldn't realize it for some time, but she had left her former self and her former life in the twisted metal.

From the terrible accident that destroyed her face and almost claimed her leg, Ms. Carter gained a new insight into her life. As her mind and heart changed, she began to discover she was more than a reflection in a mirror.

Ms. Carter tells about that transition in her recently released book, "Healing Myself: A Hero's Primer for Recovery from Tragedy." She honestly and graphically describes the physical and mental agony of enduring the many operations it took for Edgerton to create her "new face."

At 7:30 tonight, Ms. Carter will give a talk and sign her book at the Quest

Bookshop. On Saturday morning at 10:30, she will talk and sign books at the New Dominion Book Shop.

Ms. Carter now looks back on the accident as a blessing. But in the days and months followed the life-changing crash, it seemed anything but a blessing.

"A few weeks after the accident, my two children were allowed to see me and my poor daughter nearly fainted," said Ms. Carter, who now makes her home near Tampa in Florida.

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A disfiguring accident didn't scar the spirit

Heal

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"When my attorney came in, he had to turn away to keep from crying," she said. "It was just horrible. I was going through a divorce at the time, and my daughter had opted to live with her father."

"Then the accident happened, and I was reduced to a ugly, deformed cripple. Every time I tried to think realistically about my future, I was crushed by the hopelessness of it all."

Edgerton was first exposed to massive facial injuries while working as a plastic surgeon on soldiers during World War II. He has seen worse injuries than those suffered by Ms. Carter, but they had been caused by high-velocity bullets, shrapnel and burns.

"Carl's injuries were certainly very severe, and were complicated by the loss of a great deal of soft tissue around the lips, cheeks and nose," Edgerton said.

"I was very impressed with her strength and courage, because during the course of re-creating her face, we had to change her appearance significantly three or four times," he said. "She understood these changes were temporary, and I never heard her complain."

"When a person's face is destroyed as hers was, there's enormous anxiety and terrible emotional distress. But she was very positive and wanted to help with her recovery."

Ms. Carter said she worked hard to project a cheerful and brave exterior, but poured her true emotions of despair and doubt into a journal. This practice proved to be a great healing tool as it exorcised the demons of hopelessness and revealed the healing power of time.

What initially seemed like an insurmountable challenge would, in time, be reduced to an insignificant bump on her road to recovery. Gradually, Ms. Carter said she be-

gan to discover an inner-self, which had been buried before the accident by superficiality and misplaced priorities.

"In my first life, I was always looking at the lamp shade," Ms. Carter said. "But now in my second life, I look at the light bulb inside. "One of the most positive things I brought away from this experience was learning about my inner-self."

But before the journey inward could take place, Ms. Carter had to deal with excruciating pain. Pain so severe that for several weeks she agony of a shattered tooth was masked by more intense pain in her face and leg.

Fortunately, a friend told her about a series of audio cassettes that proved to be a godsend. According to Ms. Carter, the Hemi-Sync "Emergency Series" tapes proved to be nearly miraculous.

The tapes are the result of years of research by the Monroe Institute in Faber, developed by Robert Monroe, the founder of the institute, the tapes utilize a system of low-frequency tones, beats and a soothing voice.

The tapes contain no hidden messages or words as do those associated with subliminal tapes.

"Hemi-Sync, short for hemispheric synchronization, refers to the establishment of coherent, synchronized brain waves in the right and left hemispheres of the brain," said Shirley Bliley, professional division director for the institute.

"Proficiency with the Hemi-Sync technology allows a greater communication with the involuntary nervous system," she said. "This communication provides easier access to the body/mind interface for the purposes of enhancing health and for promoting healing from injury and disease."

By using the tapes, Ms. Carter said she was able to undergo surgery with only local anesthesia and recovered much faster.

"I was very skeptical at first, and if I wouldn't have had a pushy

friend I never would have tried the tapes," Ms. Carter said. "But with some practice, they enabled me to relax my whole body."

"I actually feels like you're floating on a cloud. I can't tell you what a gift it is to be able to control your own pain and not have to wait for someone to bring you a shot or a pill every four hours."

During the reconstruction of her face and mending of her leg, Ms. Carter said she searched for a hero. What she looked for was a person who had gone through what she was going through — someone she could draw courage and motivation from.

"I never found that person I could identify with and look up to," Ms. Carter said. "I hope my book will serve in that capacity for someone else."

"Through my book I want to reach out a hand of hope to people who are going through what I did.

"I'd like my story to help people see they can overcome tragedy."

Today, with 11 operations behind her, and now well into her second life, Ms. Carter is planning a national speaking tour and is working on a sequel to her first book.

Although her outward life has changed completely, Ms. Carter said her inner life has gone through an even more remarkable metamorphosis.

"I went from a person who was totally concerned with my outward appearance to someone who doesn't mind having a few scars on my chin," Ms. Carter said. "I went from a person who had artificial compassion to having the real thing."

"By looking inward, I discovered a whole new world I had ignored before," she said. "Today I have serenity and peace, and I look at the inner qualities of people and not the outer shell."

"This is truly a blessing."



Carl Carter, with children Emily and Tom, before the accident. Photo courtesy Tom Brown