

# “I was a triple-D, cup”

Everyone else wanted a bigger chest, but Kimberly would have done anything to make hers smaller. So she did.

By Kimberly Fellingham, as told to Hallie Levine

I think the most embarrassing moment of my life happened the summer after my freshman year in high school, while I was baby-sitting a little girl at the local pool. I was holding her in the water and talking to two of my guy friends when she pointed at my breasts and squealed, “Kimmie has big boobs!” The guys turned bright red. I was mortified. I wanted to cry, but what could I say to her? She was only 4.

By the time I turned 14, I was five feet tall and already a 34D. I started developing back in fourth grade. At the time, I didn't really notice, since my mom never made a big deal when we bought bras for me. But as I got bigger, I started feeling weird about it. I'd get upset when boys teased me at school, but my mom told me they did stuff like that to everybody. Then some older girls accused me of sticking out my chest to get attention. I told them I wasn't, but they just got even nastier. I was embarrassed and so bummed out. It didn't make sense that I was getting picked on for something I had no control over.

But I really became self-conscious in eighth grade. Back then, I was into gymnastics, but one day my gymnastics coach said that because of my chest, I wasn't



“I always used to feel so self-conscious about wearing a bathing suit,” says Kimberly (before her surgery, near left, and after her surgery, above).

meant to be a gymnast. I was so upset. I loved gymnastics and hoped to do it in high school, but I couldn't enjoy it after that. I quit at the end of the year. I started feeling really ashamed of my body and hiding behind baggy clothes.

## Hellish high school days

People really began to comment on my chest size in high school. Guys were the worst—they'd whistle and call me names like “Dolly Parton.” I tried to have a sense of humor about it. If a guy yelled something out a car window, I'd laugh to my friends, “Are they so big that he saw them from around the block?” I figured if I made it a joke, no one else would think it was a big deal. But inside, it really bothered me. My friends always stood up for me, which helped.



One day in school, I heard that this other girl with large breasts had a reputation for being a slut. No one ever said anything like that to me, but I couldn't help wondering if I had a reputation, too. I asked my best friend point-blank if people thought I was a slut. She looked away and nodded yes. It was all I could do not to burst into tears. I'd never even kissed anyone—how could people say that? Right then, I would have given anything just to have my breasts disappear.

Shopping for clothes was the worst. I always ended up in tears. Because of my chest, I had to wear a size 16, but I was also underweight for my height, so everything had to be altered. And the only swimsuits I fit into looked like something my grandma would wear. I was too self-conscious to wear little tank tops like my friends, so I wore a lot of oversized tops, and skirts and pants with bizarre patterns to draw attention away from my chest.

My chest was a problem for some

guys I dated, too. When I heard my freshman-year boyfriend was only dating me because of my chest, I was furious and dumped him immediately. Another guy was so uncomfortable with how I looked that he yelled at me for wearing a bathing suit. But my senior year, I dated this guy who was totally cool. He didn't care about my chest size. And he'd get pissed if someone made an obnoxious comment about it. That made me feel better about not hiding my body.

### The final straw

But in college my breasts became an issue all over again. I'd go to parties and guys would "accidentally" brush against my chest. I was known as the "redhead with the big boobs." I started slouching to hide my chest, especially at parties. Plus, I was frustrated by how my breasts got in the way—like I wouldn't realize I had a stain on my shirt because I couldn't see over my chest. It sounds so stupid, but that kind of thing made me feel horrible. I couldn't understand it when my girlfriends made comments like "I'd kill for boobs like yours." At that point, I would have killed to be an A cup.

By sophomore year, I was a triple D, and it was really affecting me physically. I had severe back pain, and high-impact activities like running and dancing left

“I'd go to parties and guys would 'accidentally' brush against my chest.”

my shoulders and chest bruised. I had to give up running because it hurt too much, and I stopped going to the beach because I couldn't find a bathing suit that fit. That winter, I noticed huge dents in my shoulders from my bra straps. I was shocked that my breasts could cause such damage. I'd heard about breast reduction surgery before, but it sounded scary, and I'd always figured I'd think about it later. Now I realized I didn't want to put it off any longer.

My parents were really supportive when I told them I wanted surgery. My doctor, Dr. Lukash, was great. He explained the whole surgery to me, which made it sound much less intimidating. I told him I wanted to be an A cup, but he explained that I'd look out of proportion and would be better off as a C.

I scheduled the surgery for June 2, 1997, the summer after my sophomore year. I was nervous, but excited. I kept thinking, finally I'll feel comfortable running, swimming, clothes shopping—all things I'd dreaded or been unable to do.

The operation lasted about five hours—I was out cold the entire time and spent all day and night in the hospital drugged up on pain pills. When I woke up all groggy the next morning, I immediately looked down at my chest. It didn't look any smaller, but Dr. Lukash explained that it was swollen and bandaged and that pretty soon I'd see a difference.

I went home that afternoon, but I was out of it for the next few days. My chest felt really sore, and I was completely exhausted. My friends were great. They watched me whenever my mom

had to go run an errand, since someone had to be with me constantly because I couldn't even sit up on my own.

The swelling went down after a week. I got out of bed and realized that for the first time in years, I could look down and see my feet. Then I looked in the mirror and was stunned. I thought, wow! I actually have a torso! I'd always assumed I was really short-waisted because my chest hung down so low. For the next week, I'd just stand in front of the mirror after my shower and stare at myself.

A few weeks after my surgery, I charged into Victoria's Secret and tried on every bra there at least twice. The salesladies must have thought I was crazy, but I was so excited. Then I went shopping and was shocked when I fit into a size-seven dress. I got all these sleeveless outfits I could never wear before. Shopping was suddenly easy!

My big fear was that no one would notice my smaller chest, but I was wrong. When I went back to school, everyone said I looked great, but no one could pinpoint what it was. They all asked if I'd lost weight. It was such a relief not to get all that negative attention anymore. My current boyfriend doesn't care about superficial things like chest size. He thinks it's cool that I had the surgery, but he'd still like me if I were a triple D.

It's been over a year since my surgery, and I don't regret it a bit. My scars have faded to the point where you can barely see them. Physically, I feel great—my back doesn't hurt, and I can jog. Plus the breast reduction has really affected how I see myself. I used to be so self-conscious about my chest—it hurt that people looked at me and that was all they saw. Now I feel more confident about people viewing me as me. I stand up straight now, and even my family and friends say I seem more outgoing and comfortable.

It wasn't easy going through such a major operation, but my breast size was affecting my whole life—my health, the activities I could do, even how I felt about myself. I'll never forget the way everyone made assumptions about me just because of the way I looked. And the thing is, people may treat me differently now, but I'm the same person—just a bra size or two smaller. @

## Breast reduction basics

If you're a double-D cup or above, you could be a candidate for breast reduction surgery. Here's what you should know:

**Be prepared to wait.** Most good plastic surgeons won't do the surgery until your breasts are fully developed (around age 17 or 18).

**Do it for the right reasons.** The main reason for breast reduction is to correct physical probs like back pain and difficulty exercising. If your breasts don't interfere with your everyday life, remember that surgery will reduce your breast size, but it won't necessarily boost your self-esteem.

### Talk to your parents.

Having surgery is a big deal, so sit down with your parents and discuss exactly why you want to have it done.

**Shop selectively.** Call the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons at 800-635-0635 for the names of five board-certified plastic surgeons in your area. You should also ask your regular doctor for referrals. It's good to meet with at least two surgeons before making a final decision. (FYI: Breast reduction surgery is usually covered by insurance.)

**Ask questions.** Your doctor is there to help you, so don't be shy. He or she should give you names of former patients to call and show you "before" and "after" pictures. Ideally, you want a doctor who does a lot of work with teens.

Sources: Laurie Casas, M.D., Assistant Professor of Surgery at Northwestern University Medical School, and Frederick Lukash, M.D., a Manhattan plastic surgeon.