

that's hair-raising!

# My botched brows

When Cheryl received distressing news, she thought a trip to the beauty salon would lift her spirits. She was wrong

Cheryl Mills, 51, Ridgewood, WA

A feeling of dread swept through me. *Did I have cancer?*

As the doctor explained I'd need a lump I'd found in my breast removed, I couldn't help but think the worst. Five years earlier, I'd had a cancerous tumour taken out. Fortunately I'd made a full recovery. But what if things were worse this time?

Instinctively, my thoughts turned to my partner and three sons, twins Ben and Joel, now 32, and Aaron, now 20. How would they cope with the news?

Flustered, I wondered if I should cancel the appointment I'd made that day to have my eyebrows tattooed.

Having plucked them into fine arches as a teenager, the hairs had never grown back and for years I hated the

sparse brows I'd been left with. It wasn't until I turned 40 that I found cosmetic tattooing to be the answer. Twice before I'd had them done and been really pleased with the results.

But this time my usual tattooist wasn't available, so I was trying a new salon.

Now though, with my head all over the place, I wondered if I should cancel. I had more important things to think about after all...

But at the same time, I felt guilty about not going. And in any case, didn't I deserve some cheering up? *I'll go*, I decided, heading to the salon as planned later that day.

Arriving, I instructed the technician on what I wanted – a light, natural brown effect, just like I'd had before.

As I lay on the treatment bed and the electric needle whirred to life, naturally my thoughts lingered on what the doctor had said to me that morning. So an hour later, when my eyebrow treatment was over and I finally looked in the mirror, I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

Thick black stripes that looked like permanent marker covered the areas where I'd had subtle

brown tattooing done before. 'What have you done?' I stammered in horror. 'They're far too dark.'

But my technician didn't seem fazed. She reassured me they'd fade in a few days.

Feeling emotional, I rushed out of the salon, bursting into tears the moment I got outside.

'I look like a cartoon character,' I cried to my sons at home. This was all I needed on top of everything else I was going through.

A week later, my eyebrows were still as dark as before, so I returned to the salon.

'I'm not happy,' I said. 'My brows look terrible.'

While I was given my money back, the damage was already done.

Returning to my job in childcare, I felt my confidence plummet. The kids would stare at me. 'Why are your eyebrows funny?' they asked innocently.

After undergoing surgery to remove the lump in my chest, I was thankfully given the all-clear. But although I'd overcome one ordeal, my eyebrows were making me feel incredibly depressed.

Wanting to do something, I saw a cosmetic tattooing specialist who was shocked by the quality of the work I'd had done. She told me the black ink

used would turn blue over time. There was no choice but to have expensive laser treatment to try to correct it.

*I don't want to look like this forever*, I thought, signing up to sessions every four weeks.

Each left me with terrible headaches and red swelling around my eyebrows.

I needed 20 painful visits, costing \$5000, before the colour started to fade.

It was a relief, but I was also left with scarring where my eyebrows used to be.

Each time I left the house, I would hide behind my fringe and dark glasses, my self-esteem in tatters.

Thankfully, in December 2008, a court ordered Do Thi Thy

Hong of Sensation Devine Nails in Clarkson, WA, to pay me \$3000 compensation for what I'd gone through.

Even so, for a long time, I really didn't feel like myself. It was only 18 months ago, that something changed.

I was sitting at home one day, when my thoughts turned to hair transplants. I'd heard that doctors could replace hair on someone's head. Could they do it for my eyebrows?

Jumping online, I decided to find out and was astounded when I discovered such a



My eyebrows after tattooing...



...and after laser treatment

procedure existed!

Soon, I was making an appointment with hair transplant surgeon Dr Jennifer Martinick.

She had nearly 30 years experience and explained that for \$5000 she could harvest hair follicles from the back of my scalp and replant them, creating a brand-new set of brows! She did have a warning though. 'Because of the deep tissue scarring, there's a possibility the hairs might not take,' she said. Thinking about it for a while, I decided to go for it. What did I have to lose? In August 2012, I went in for the delicate procedure. During the three-hour operation, Dr Martinick and her

team carefully implanted over 200 individual hairs above my eyes, re-creating the natural curve and direction of brows. Waking in recovery, I was thrilled to see my new look. 'They're incredible,' I cried. In August this year I had a follow-up procedure to implant some additional hairs and I'm now happier than ever. Having thick, luscious eyebrows has given me my confidence back. I just hope that by sharing

my story, I can stop anyone else going through what I did. For any cosmetic procedure you're considering, do your research and trust your gut. I didn't. But thanks to my hair transplant, I'm ready to tackle life head-on! ■

As told to Stacey Hicks

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## A NEW TREND

Hair transplant surgeon Dr Jennifer Martinick says

When Cheryl came to me, I could tell the damage to her brows was making her very depressed. But with deep pits and scarring, I wasn't sure what results we could achieve. The delicate process combines surgery and artistry to create a natural shape and curl the hair in the right direction. Luckily for Cheryl, we had a great result and I'm so pleased I was able to give her the thick, natural brows she's always wanted.

However Cheryl's not alone. Lately I've been inundated with women wanting thicker brows and men wanting full beards. Some men I've seen even had their beards lasered off years ago and now want them back.

There's not a week that goes by now when I don't do one of these procedures.

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I'm now ready to tackle life head-on



I'd plucked my eyebrows quite thin as a teen

PHOTO: SAMUEL MARSHALL