

# signs of my times

When it comes to aging gracefully, a woman wants her family to read between the lines.

BY ANNE BOKMA



Anne Bokma, with daughter Ruby, 6, is happy to let her laugh lines show.

**T**he other night as I was nestling next to my six-year-old daughter at bedtime, she looked me directly in the face and asked, “Mommy, why is there a fan between your eyes?” At first I had no idea what she was talking about. Then it hit me. She meant those two vertical lines that have taken a slight hold where my nose meets my brow and are destined to become entrenched wrinkles that will deepen on my face for the rest of time.

I used to worry about my thighs when I looked in the mirror. Now, at 41, it’s my face. Specifically, the shirred skin around the edges of my mouth and eyes and the little road maps leading to nowhere on my forehead. There’s no doubt about it: my lifelines are beginning to show. So what am I going to do about it? The treatments for all this sagging and bagging are endless: chemical peels, laser facial resurfacing, firming gels, eye-tightening creams, facial implants, face-lifts, collagen injections and Botox. ▸

It's tempting to consider the possibilities. Botox, for instance, has become as run-of-the-mill as having your legs waxed. Even family doctors are offering the service to their patients, and Canadian women in the spotlight, such as Jeanne Beker, a fashion celebrity, are happily admitting to having it done. For the price of a weeklong holiday at a tropical resort, a year's worth of Botox treatments will eliminate all those creases caused by frowning, squinting and furrowing, and give you a forehead as smooth as a shiny apple.

The hugely popular treatment involves having the same toxin that causes botulism injected into the lines on your forehead. Talk about head freeze: you wouldn't even be able to raise your eyebrows in surprise when your husband insists you put your feet up while he makes dinner.

## **I think of wrinkles as my autobiography. Wiping them away does more than eliminate the creases and furrows; it takes away a part of who I really am.**

I've decided that even if my face begins to droop like a basset hound's, I won't be Botoxed. While I had no problem highlighting my blond hair once grey started to sprout at my temples, making me look like Grandpa Munster's long-lost niece, having my face permanently rearranged into a bland mask without the ability to so much as lift my forehead in surprise or furrow my brow in frustration is too high a price to pay to be considered beautiful in midlife.

The appeal of a smooth brow is understandable, though. Our culture puts a premium on how women look – the younger, the better. Women over 40 are considered past their “best before” date in terms of beauty, so it's natural to want to look as youthful as possible. In truth, I apply an expensive moisturizer to my face each and every morning and night in an effort to ward off wrinkling. But I draw the line at incisions and needles – puncturing my skin to permanently alter my face would feel like a betrayal of myself. It doesn't seem in keeping with Shakespeare's “to thine own self be true” philosophy for successful living. Sure, it can be hard to live with the fact that

the aging reflection you see in the mirror just doesn't match the person who's at your core. Sometimes I see a frazzled older mom in stretch jeans who drives a van, when deep inside I'm still that 14-year-old in skintight Levi's racing around town on my powder blue ten-speed.

My grandmother, too, was always incredulous about her outward aging. “I still feel like a girl inside,” she'd marvel. She didn't wail about her wrinkles or bemoan getting old. She was just kind of surprised it was happening. She accepted old age with dignity and never lost her sense of style: she refused to wear pants, always donned hats and well into her 70s and 80s, when her cheeks were a crisscross patchwork of delicate wrinkles, she still resolutely spread pink rouge over them every time she stepped out the door. To me, she was beautiful.

Now, when I look at the pure and supple faces of my two young daughters, I'm amazed at the beauty of their fresh complexions. But I know my skin is simply not meant to look like that because they are children and I'm a grown woman, with half a life already lived and stories to tell. And yes, it shows on my face. I figure

when it comes to aging you really only have two choices: fight it or face it. I hope to face it the way my grandmother did – gracefully accepting the marks the passage of time leaves me with, but still having a unique style to call my own.

Some people think of wrinkles as scars, others as badges of honour. I think of them as my autobiography. Wiping away those wrinkles does more than eliminate the creases and furrows; it takes away a part of who I really am. The lines on my face are the sum total of my life – all the worrying I did as a teenager when I wondered if I'd ever find true love, the laughing I've done playing with my babies, the family holidays on the beach squinting into the sun, the tears I shed when my beloved grandmother died. Both the memories and the lines are with me forever. Why on earth would I want to erase all that?

**What's your secret for aging gracefully?  
What are your thoughts on turning back time  
with cosmetic surgery? Talk about this story in  
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