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Sitting with.....

Buthainah Al-Shunnar

Young, beautiful, self confident, charming and supremely gifted, Dr. Buthainah Al-Shunnar is the perfect role model for women of all ages and nationalities. As a Plastic Surgeon who has just recently opened her very own clinic on the Beach Road, she sees her job as helping people to feel better about themselves. While she may have a hand in changing the shape of a nose, or removing extra fat or wrinkles, ultimately she believes that beauty lies not in the shape of things but in a person's attitude and self confidence. *MONDANITÉ* sat with the vivacious surgeon to find out more about this most interesting of people and professions.

First of all, what is your specialization and what does it mean?

I'm a plastic surgeon which is a combination of cosmetic surgery and reconstructive surgery.

How and why did you get into plastic surgery?

Let me give you a little background; I was born and brought up in Dubai. I'm a UAE national. I attended medical school in Dublin, Ireland, and from there decided to go to the States where I stayed for 10 years. There I first became Board Certified in General Surgery, and then Board

Certified in Plastic Surgery, at Johns Hopkins University. I then stayed on another two years in the US, working and practicing, and came here three years ago. I worked a few years in Khalife Hospital in Abu Dhabi and set this clinic up in December.

I've not met many female plastic surgeons, here or anywhere for that matter. Was it difficult for you in the US or here? What were the reactions?

The training itself was tough, very tough. You have to be focused and

know that it's what you want, or you'll quit, and that goes for men and women alike. But if you're passionate and love what you do, you'll put up with anything, you just need a good attitude. Interestingly, though, while it was male dominated in training, when I worked at the hospital I had a lot of female patients. They feel very comfortable with a female doctor, especially since they usually have to remove clothes. In Dubai, again, there's no question about it; it helps and female patients request for me. Even male patients didn't have a problem with the fact I'm a woman. In fact, many are quite proud to have an

Emirati national [practicing surgery]. I've never felt anything negative, if anything it's been very positive.

Is medicine in your family?

Yes, it's huge in my family! Both parents, my sister, all my cousins and my uncles are doctors. Mind you, when I suggested surgery they initially went 'Whoa, that means you'll be away for years', but I feel blessed because they were and are extremely supportive.

My sister is in private practice, in conjunction with my mom, who's an obstetrician/gynecologist with her own clinic.

44 *Mondanité* July/August 2006

Why Plastic Surgery?

You know when you do something and it feels like home? It felt like home. I went to medical school because it was the thing to do, I was brought up surrounded by medicine. I helped my mom deliver babies. Medicine is in our blood. When I went I assumed I would also become a gynecologist, but one summer I did an elective in surgery, because that's what was available, and when we hit plastics, I was sold on the first day. I like using my hands. When I first heard the lecture on burn victims and reconstructive surgery and how it can help people with severe injuries, I was fascinated.

What is the state of Plastic Surgery in the UAE?

I describe it as explosive. It's becoming more and more popular. I think with Westernization comes a concern for image. Women are always interested in beauty, obviously, but in addition, we have the competitive factor here in the UAE. There are so many cultures here and so many people trying to maintain their image. Another important reason for its popularity is that surgery has become so safe that it's almost an extrapolation of beauty products. Technology is advanced and anesthesia is safe now. It's a tool that people are becoming aware of, a tool that is not necessarily that complicated.

What's the age group of most of your patients? And what about young girls, do many seek surgery?

It depends really. Mostly, women in their 30's and 40's ask for botox and fillers, and, if they're done with having their family, they want tummy tucks, liposuction, and other body contouring procedures. After 40, it depends on whether they're still having children, and from 45 onward they start asking for face lifts. Usually when young girls, around 18 to

21, come in it's for one of 3 things: breast augmentation, for their nose or for liposuction.

Is lipo safe that young?

Oh yes. Let me give you an example: many young girls may be thin but they may have the typical Arab pear shape, with wide thighs or hips. Well, that

"I'D LIKE TO SEE PEOPLE BECOMING aware OF THEMSELVES AND NOT focus ON SMALL THINGS"

can be life changing for their image, for how they dress and fit into clothes. So we remove a bit of fat from either side, and it's not damaging at all. Plus they feel much better

What about men? What do they ask for?

If we're talking about cosmetic, it's mainly liposuction, especially love handles, and noses. And for women it's body contouring and botox. Body Contouring is anything that changes the contour, shape of the body, and that includes liposuction, breast augmentation, weight loss surgery, tummy tuck, etc.

What about the 'complete makeovers' we're seeing on TV? What's your opinion on them?

It really depends, I'm really aware of

the psychology of things as well. We have to be careful of the impact of surgery. It's a difficult question to answer. If a person has feasible issues, for example someone lost 50 kilos and has extra skin then that's not an issue. But if they want to become someone else, it's another story. If I find someone whose features are all quite attrac-

tive and they just want to look like someone else, I don't condone it, but if they're genuinely not feeling attractive then I can help. We can assess the reasons when they visit and consult. Ultimately, if they like the way they look, they will feel better.

What's your ideal of beauty?

Ultimately beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I define beauty as three things; Peace of mind, Self confidence and self esteem. Sometimes you see a very attractive woman but she's not confident and so she's not as attractive as she could be, and other times see an average looking woman who turns head with her self confidence and how she holds herself. People are aiming for perfection, and it's almost going out of control. Some people even say they can't leave the house because of their nose. I say don't look at the detail, look at the picture. I'd like to see people becoming aware of themselves and not focus on small things.

Mondanité July/August 2006 45



About yourself, what's your passion?

I love painting, I like art, I like visual stimulation in terms of color and layout and interior design.

How do you unwind after a hard day or week at the clinic?

Either I paint or I go look at interior design shops, or at interior design magazines. For me, all art is very therapeutic.

How do you spoil yourself?

I go shopping and travel. I also consider myself blessed, and spoiled by my family.

When you want to 'get away' where do you go?

Since I set up the practice it's been hard to travel. Normally I go to a conference; it's not really spoiling myself but do I enjoy it. Or I just walk on the beach.

How would you describe your personal style?

I'm very straightforward, very realistic. I consider myself very insightful, I look into the deeper meaning of things. And I don't 'sweat the small stuff.'

How is Buthainah the surgeon different from Buthainah the person?

Ultimately a person is a person, and you inject your personality into your work. At work I'm passionate and detail oriented, which is part of my job. I'm very caring and look at each patient as a person and follow each one through. When I take my coat off I'm the same! I'm very bubbly and cheerful and I have a good attitude. Kind of down to earth.

What's your motto in life?

Just to be passionate about what you do. I also think you have to have a good attitude, and always be thankful

for what you have. Some people have it all and are miserable because they don't appreciate it.

The family unit is also very important.

Also, never compare yourself to others, that's how I got through residency. Always compare yourself to what you could be.

What are you most proud of in the last 5 years?

Definitely setting up my practice. This has been my dream for the past 15 years. I've been collecting things for years, such as the logo, the color schemes, etc. I designed most of the clinic, other than the reception.

What do you want to accomplish in the next 10 years?

I think expanding the clinic, to have a center that's inclusive of all plastic surgery, such as congenital, etc. It's

such a huge field, it's difficult to do it all. I'd also like to have a medspa with skin care, massages that target cellulite, etc...

Words to impart to those not happy with their image in the mirror?

I think it's a combination of things and depends on how unhappy they are. Most women are unhappy with something, large breasts and vice versa. If you're not happy and have something valid to fix, then fix it. But I don't always operate on everybody, I definitely turn people away if I feel I can't improve them.

Words to impart to other Emirati women with big dreams like yours?

Go for it! Be focused. It's not an easy road, but if you're passionate you'll enjoy it, so stay focused. **M**



46 *Mondanité* July/August 2006