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HEALTH

HEALTH TIPS THAT SAVE YOU TIME AND MONEY

(and might even save your life)

IN DEPTH

Found! The perfect bra

Yes, really, it does exist...

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COVER STAR

Gerri Halliwell

Gorgeous, glamorous and all grown-up

FASHION

GREAT CLOTHES FOR REAL WOMEN

And how to wear them

FOOD

LESS HASSLE LESS COOKING MORE TASTE

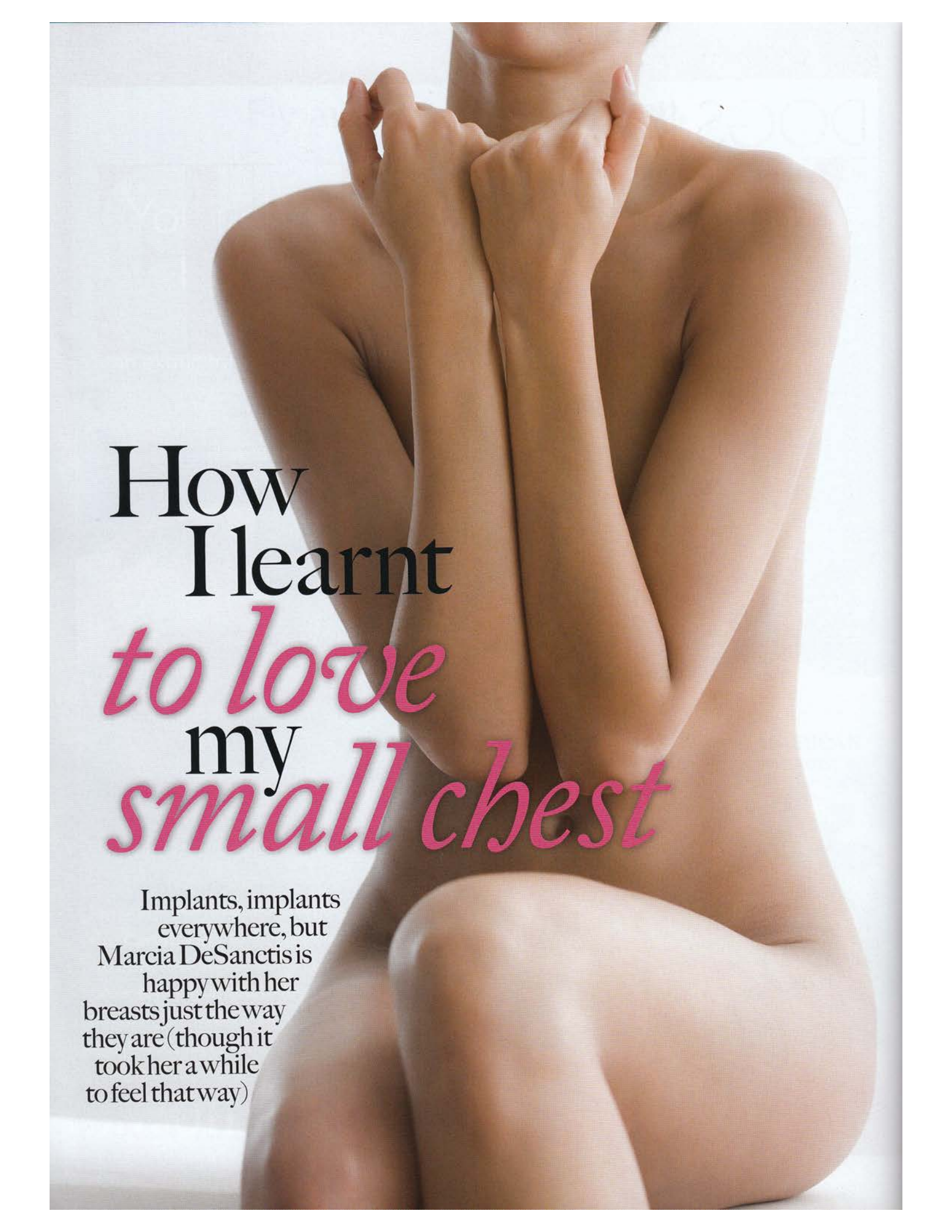
The meals that just keep on giving

BEAUTY

WINTER SKIN SOS

How to calm, soothe and nourish it





How
I learnt
to love
my
small chest

Implants, implants
everywhere, but
Marcia DeSanctis is
happy with her
breasts just the way
they are (though it
took her a while
to feel that way)

BREASTS

All a matter of perspective

I have always had small breasts, and was generally content with them. Over recent years, though, at every cocktail party, some woman who used to be as mammarily challenged as I suddenly appeared with a firm new pair, and a visible preference for snug tops. I found myself increasingly abandoned on a flat-chested desert island with the few remaining oddballs who stubbornly refused to go under the knife. I began to think, am I crazy? Do I really want to go through life as a flat facsimile of a woman? How lovely it would be if, for once, words like 'curvaceous', 'voluptuous', or 'shapely' could pertain to me. This could be an easy fix, I reasoned. Instead, I made peace with my breasts. But it wasn't easy.

The fact is that, in my experience, life is stacked against the small-breasted these days. The consolation prize. Some stores do not even carry tiny-cupped bras and, if they do, they are unsexy, seamless, elasticised little numbers that feel somewhat like the consolation prize. Recently, I ordered some bras online – balcony style, the kind I used to buy in France when most women in the world still had their own breasts and many of them were small. When I tried them on, the A cups could have held a healthy couple of peaches, maybe, but not my breasts. So, I returned them and it was back to my humiliating bandeau. I have tried the super-padded variety. On me, they feel like empty shells strapped around my ribs and my false silhouette looks absurd in the mirror. I have spent a small fortune on fillets and push-ups and wireless demi-lunes, all of which have propped up nothing but my sense of inadequacy.

Man (and woman) kind's breast fixation shows no signs of abating. Even the most magnificent Hollywood actresses and models, whose bodies are toned and elsewhere free of any excess flesh, have surgically-enhanced cleavage. On the red carpet, they pour out of their couture dresses and how we worship their accentuated curves. My husband claims to love my chest, but if I told him I wanted implants, I wonder what his honest reaction might be.

At a certain point, many women address their self-perceived

imperfections, and cosmetic surgery has allowed this almost defiant freedom. Lots of us find a hallelujah moment, when at last we can consider correcting those parts on us we have never liked – a bump on the nose, a low-hanging eyelid, Grandpa's thin lips. And, of course, no one needs to live with a chest that has always been too small, or which shrank down to insignificance if babies drained our breasts not only of milk, but, more permanently, of density and fullness. One of my friends who had implants said that it was a part of her body that she could control, as if – literally – to insert a measure of youth back into her. She did not want her womanhood to be a casualty of motherhood – its irony was too brutal. Being a mother was supposed to make her feel more like a woman but, physically, she felt like less of one. I understood and, I have to confess, even envied her conviction.

So, I'm all for it. But, where my breasts are concerned, I decided to go the other way entirely. I opted against an expensive operation and the list of potential complications. I found not the need to change what I thought was wrong, but rather, the desire to accept it. Okay, so my breasts barely cast a shadow but, in the sea of implants firm and fake, I actually came to believe that small breasts have their advantages.

Small breasts keep me light on my feet. They don't get in the way. When I was nursing my children and grew from an A to a DD, I could barely move from the protuberances. My back hurt. I had to brace them when I ran, they made me too buoyant when I swam and I couldn't button my tailored bouclé coat that I bought one wine-drenched afternoon in Rome. Once my breasts had served their biological purpose, I was happily deflated and, once more, brazenly braless. I felt entirely more athletic and streamlined again, rather like a boat.

My husband has always insisted that this is true: small breasts have an advantage in bed. They are more sensitive, their own erogenous zone.

This is discussed among my friends on the small-breasted rumour mill. Any man who has loved one of us has some rarified knowledge about what women find exciting and usually cares enough to use it.

Another thing I've noticed is that, odd though it sounds, as I get older, my breasts do at least match my body. Recently I was at a resort, which teemed with augmented mothers, many around my age, showing off their glistening orbs under teeny bikinis. Sure, the tops looked good, but more often than not, their behinds were saggy, their thighs untuned. The top didn't correspond with the bottom and the effect was disarming. When I am 80, my chest will be in harmony with my age. I wonder how a generation of artificially rounded breasts will look in the nursing home.

My chest matches the economy, as well. This is no time to be worrying about my bustline. My role models

are Ali MacGraw, Audrey Hepburn, Jackie Onassis – small-chested gals whose couture bodies are truly and archetypally glamorous. And Eve.

Yes, that Eve. A portrait of her and Adam by the

renaissance painter Lucas Cranach The Elder hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. This paradigm of womanhood would be hard pressed to find a bra that fits her these days, but her tiny breasts are round and lovely and Adam certainly seemed to like them.

I finally have the presence of mind to know that, in some areas, I have nothing left to prove. Marriage, children, friends and work take up more time than I can conjure up. I need to address a lot of things in life, but my breasts are not one of them. Don't misunderstand me: I still experiment with make-up (lavender eyeshadow most recently) and will never allow myself to go grey. Facelift? If it gets easier one day, I won't rule it out. I exercise to keep the other potential sags at bay. True, I'll never know what it's like for a man to stare at my cleavage. But I decided that doesn't make me half a woman. The pressure to lift, boost, enhance is officially off. That, to me, is real freedom.

"Eve's tiny breasts were lovely and Adam certainly seemed to like them"