

A Worthwhile Resolution

31 December 2008

Stephanie Stant was a cute child from the beginning.



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And from the earliest age, she loved nothing more than to be at the beach, in the sun.



Photo by Jim Stant

She spent countless hours, endless days, creating worlds of sand and eating gritty sandwiches on the beach...



Photo by Jim Stant

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...and laying out in the sun.



Photo by Jim Stant

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As she grew into a youth, her love for the beach and the sun never wavered,



Photo by Jim Stant

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and, if anything, grew stronger.



Photo by Jim Stant

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Even the distractions of a teenage life,



Photo by Jim Stant

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and the roaring 20s never took her far from the sun and the beach.



Photo by Jim Stant

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In Steph's world, the only thing closer to her heart than the sun and the beach was Disneyland.



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All that lasted right up until the day we lost one of our company's best team members to melanoma.



Our first official act was to go get checked by a dermatologist.

The good news was we were being proactive.

The bad news was, as our dermatologist put it, we were paying the price for what we did 20 or 30 years before. For me, that meant a few benign skin spots from spending a lot of time outdoors in sports and work. For Steph, the sun lover, it meant yearly visits to the operating suite of our dermatologist.

So, here's a lesson in reality for all those who think time in the sun and a corresponding tan is one of the ultimate goals in life.

20 or 30 years later, this is what lies in store.

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First, they examine your body closely—every single square millimeter.

Then, they identify areas of your skin or moles that don't look quite right.

They cut off a small section of the offending areas and send them in for testing. That's called a biopsy.

If any of the biopsies come back positive, you get to return for surgery.

The following is what skin cancer surgery looks like.

First, they mark off the spot and inject the area with loads of numbing agents and pain killers.

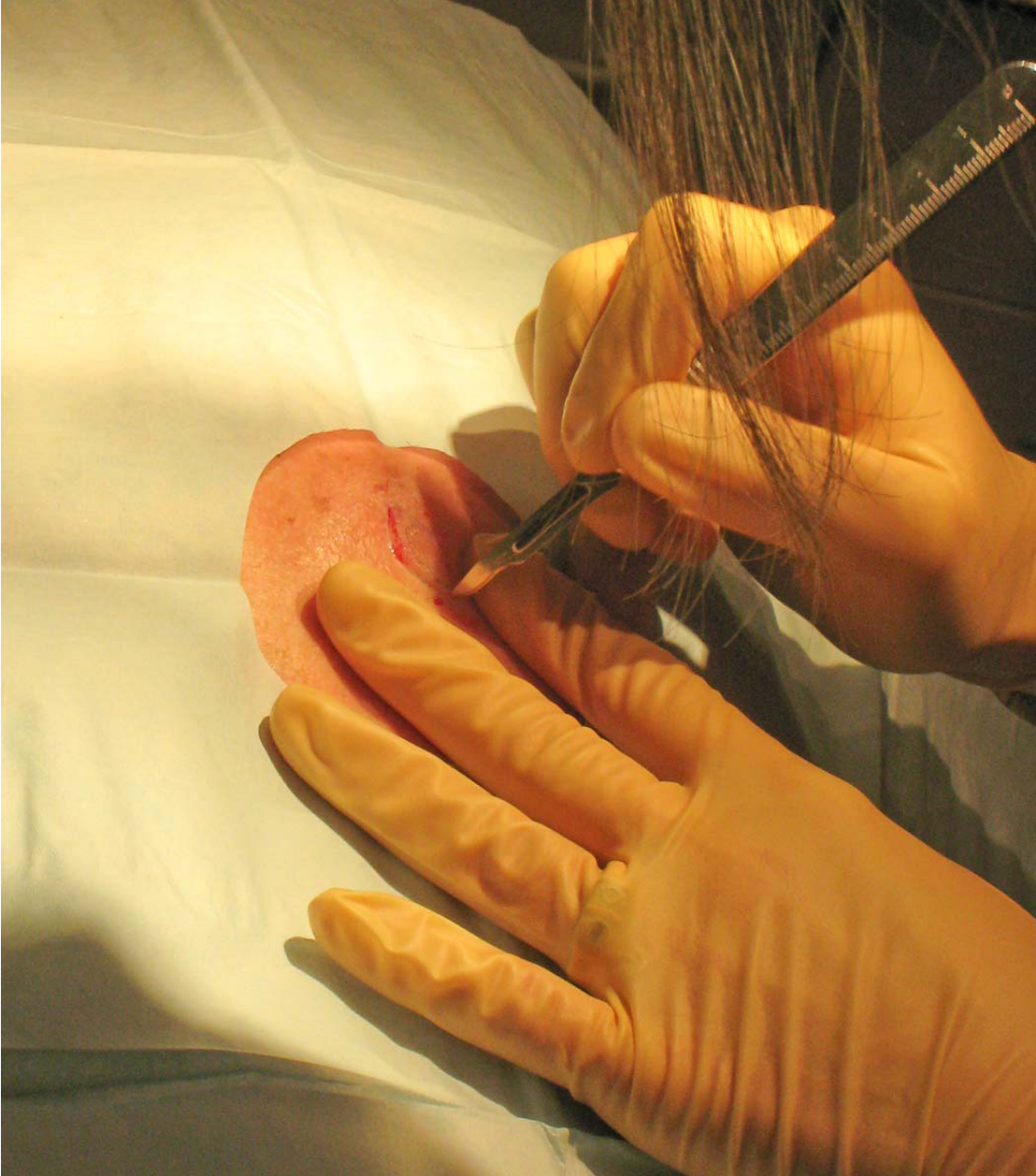


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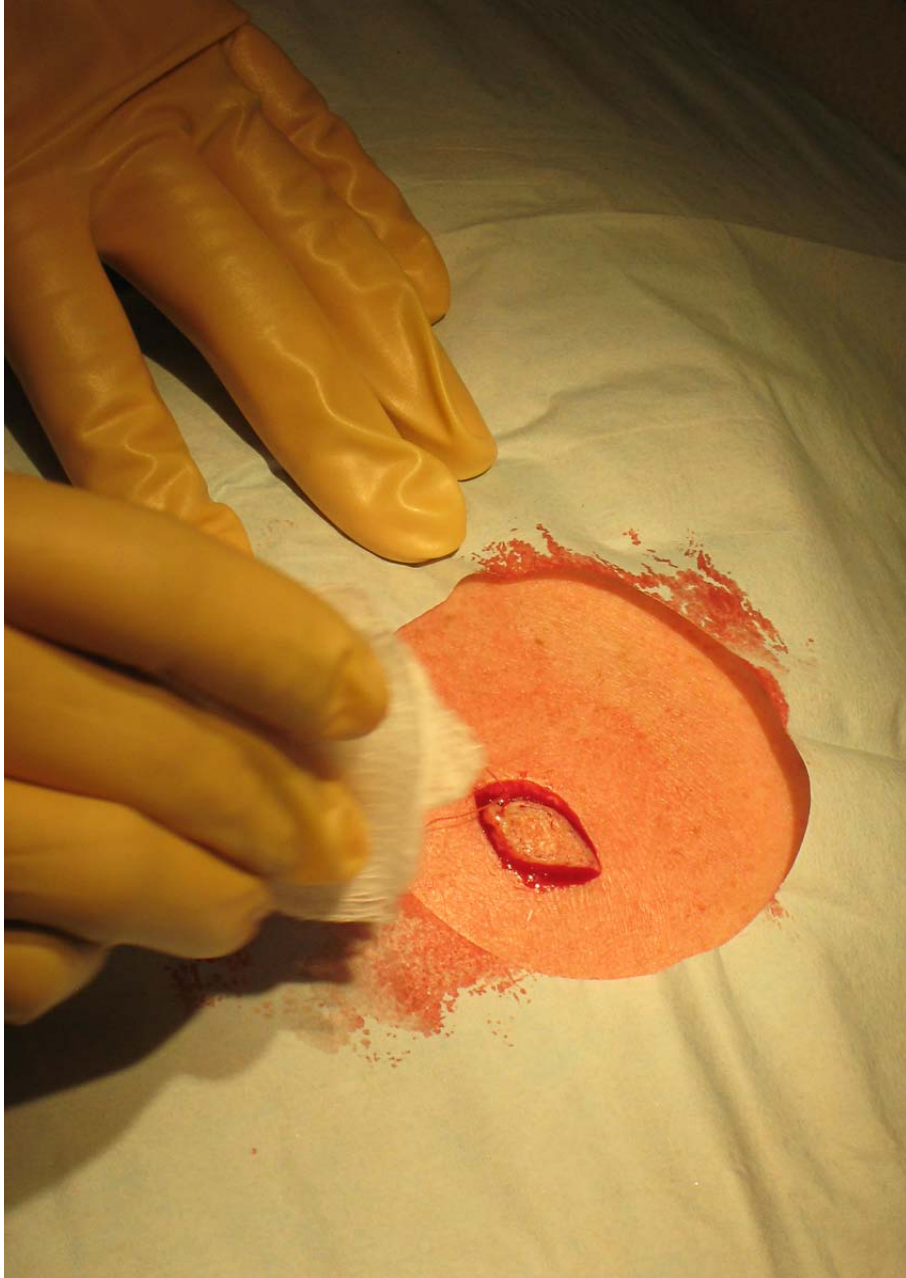
Then, they take a scalpel and carefully cut along the lines.



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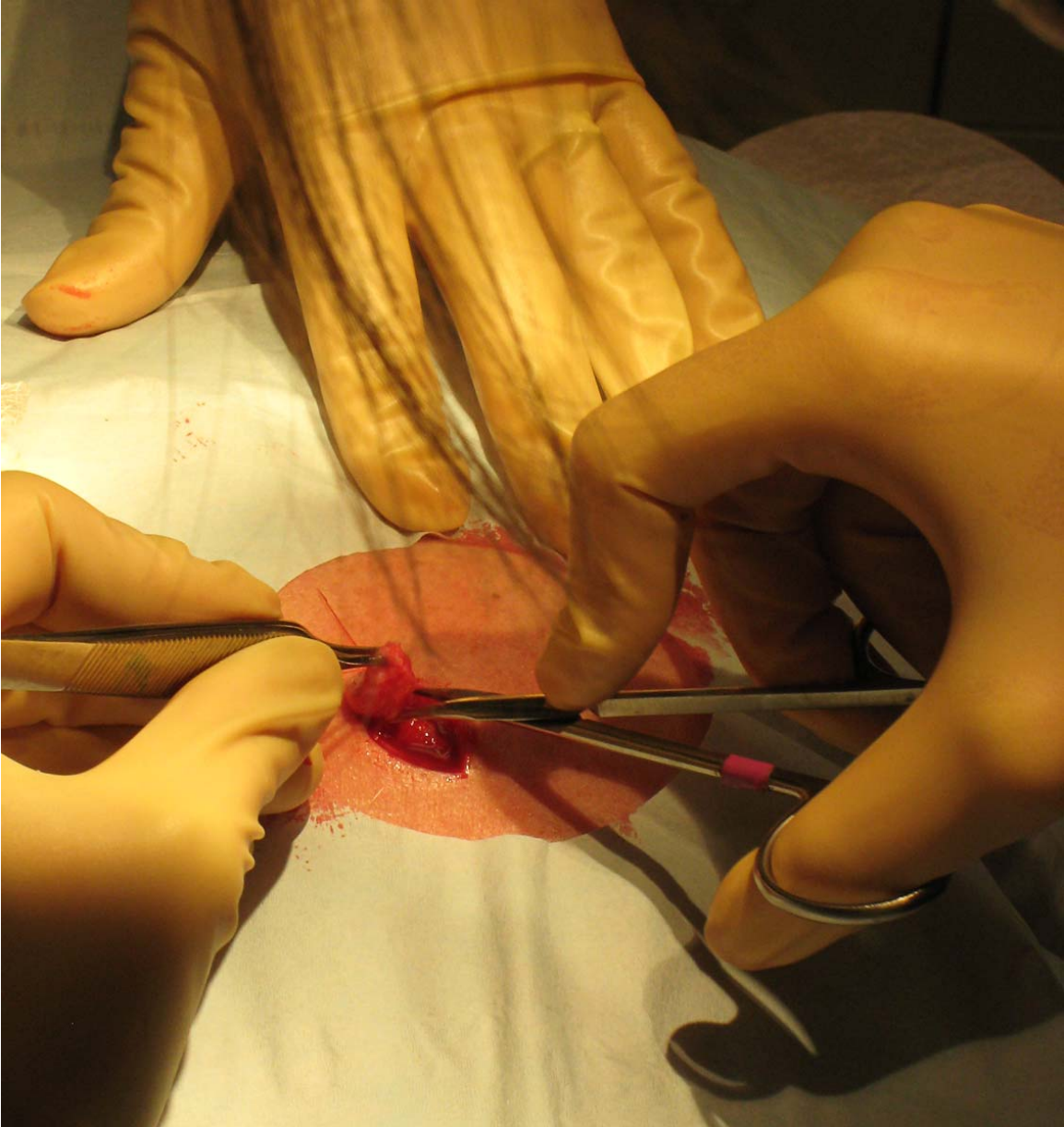


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Then they remove the tissue, down through all the layers of epidermis that could potentially be affected.

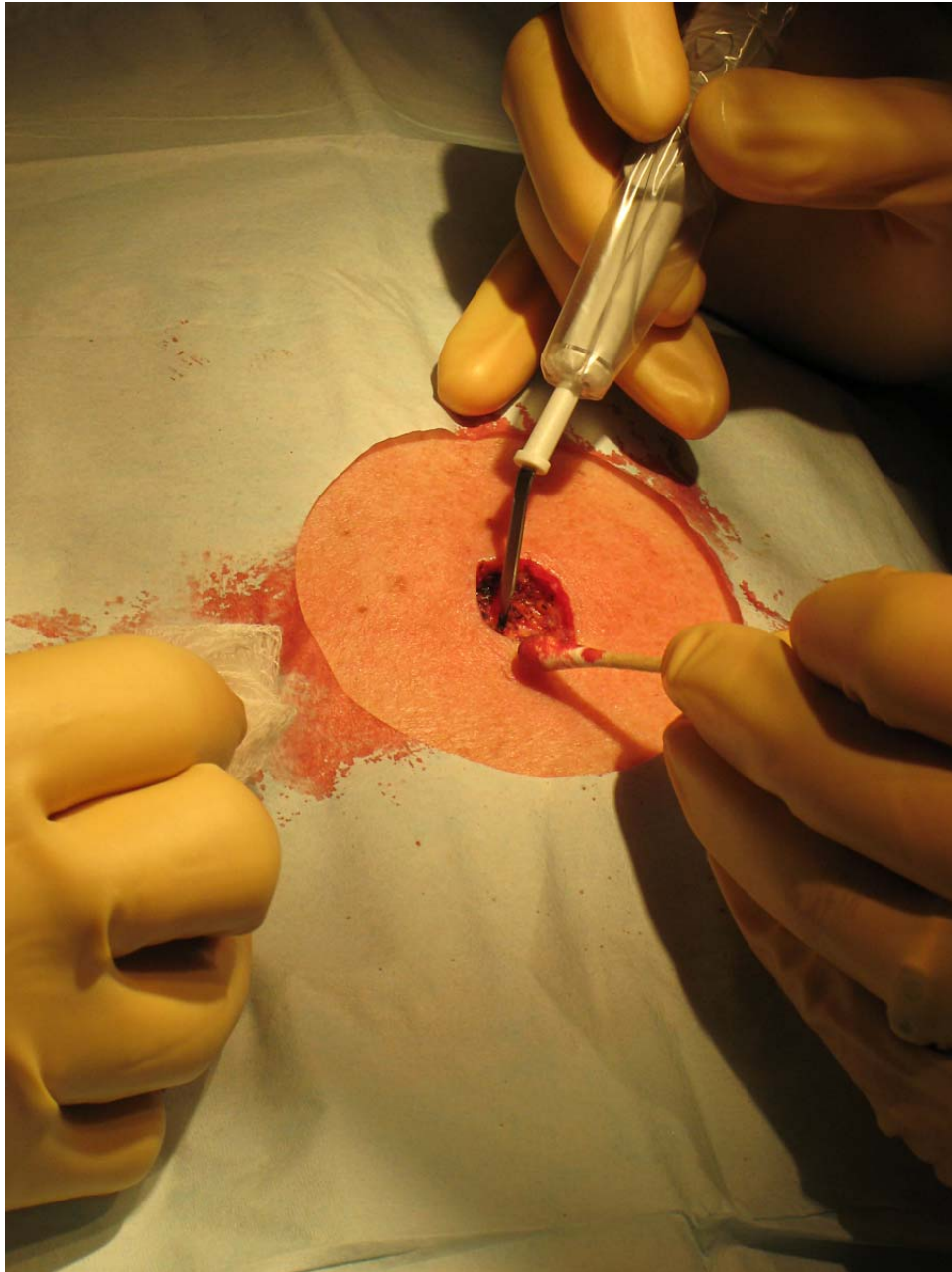


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Usually, the area of surgery will bleed. Consequently, the standard approach is to inject the area, prior to surgery, with epinephrine, the chemical equivalent of adrenaline, which constricts the blood vessels and limits blood loss.

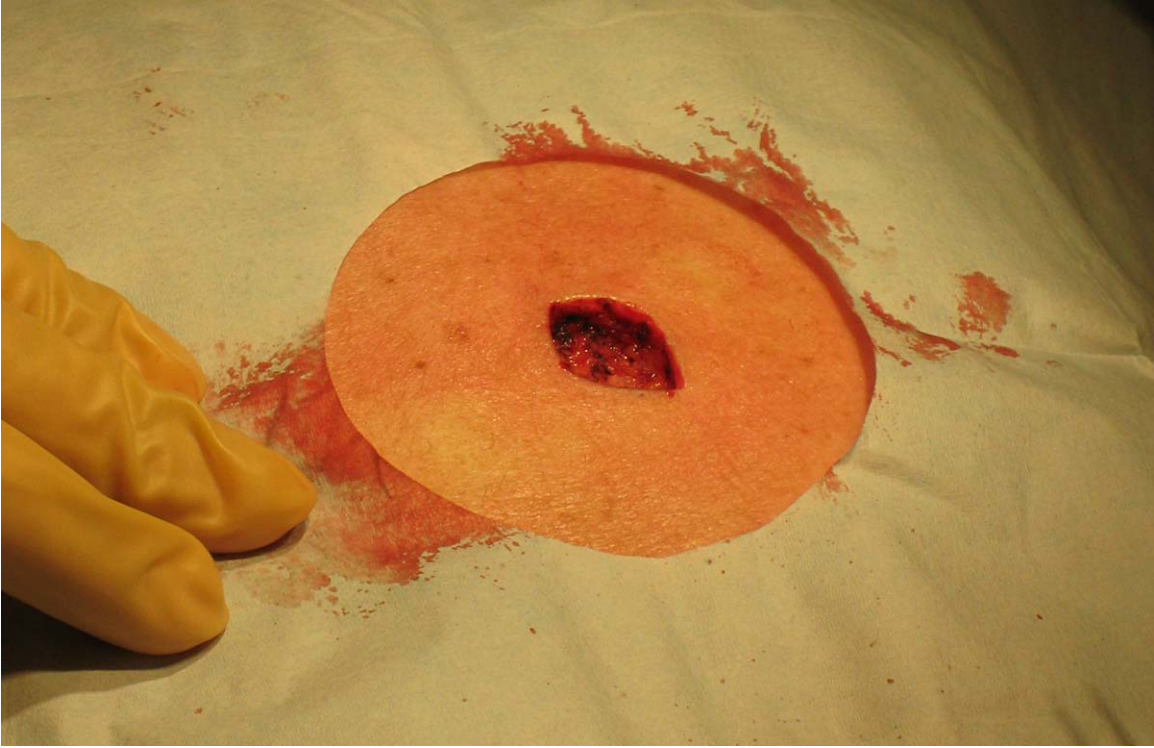
Unfortunately for Steph, her similar surgery two days earlier using epinephrine had nearly resulted in an ambulance trip to the ER due to a coronary reaction to the drug. So this time around, more cauterization than normal was required to burn closed the exposed blood vessels.

The smell of burning flesh is one of the many bonuses of this surgery.

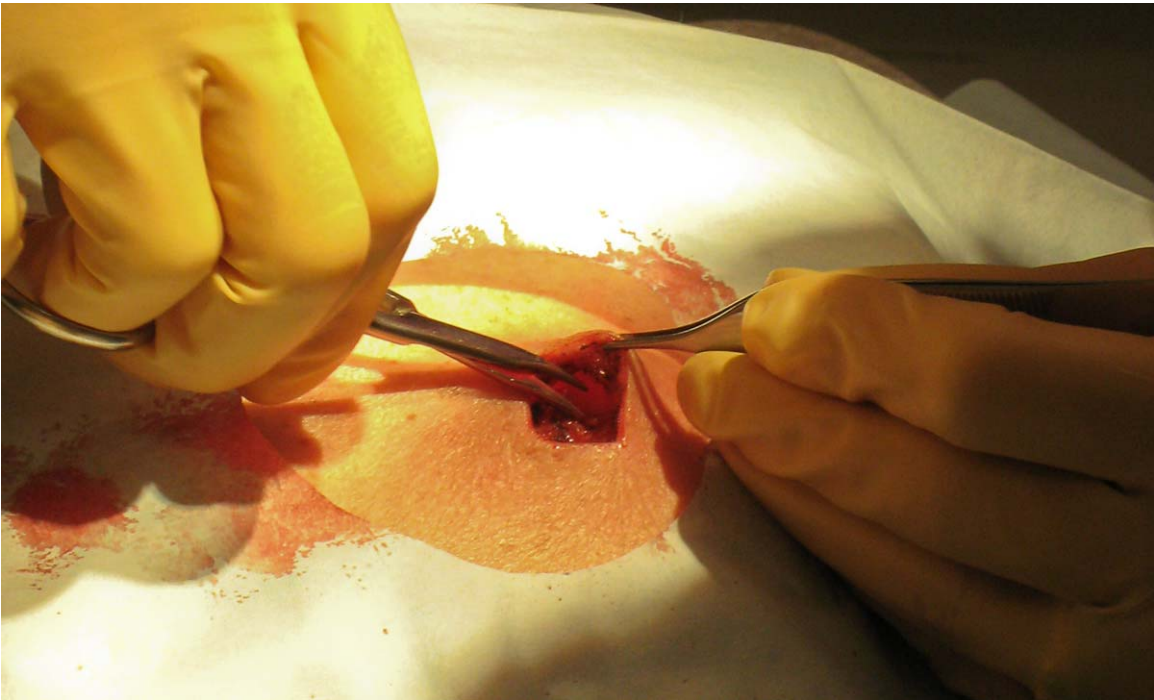


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The process yields a large recess where part of your body used to be.



Once the tissue is removed, there's lots of probing and clipping.



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All the while, you are hoping that they are getting it all.

Every last bit.



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So if they want to look around some more, that is OK.



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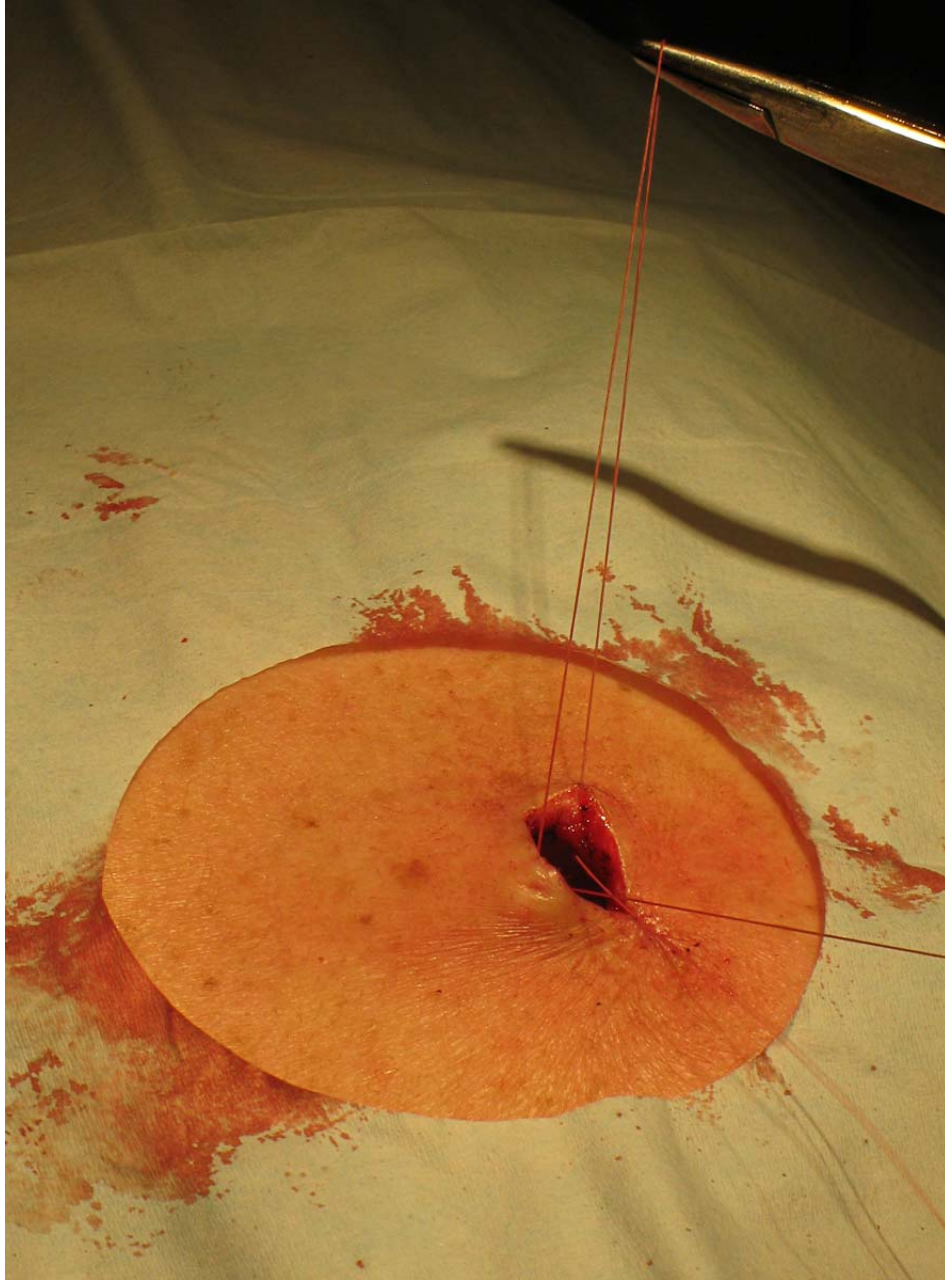
Just as long as there is never a reason to come back to this spot.

Ever again.



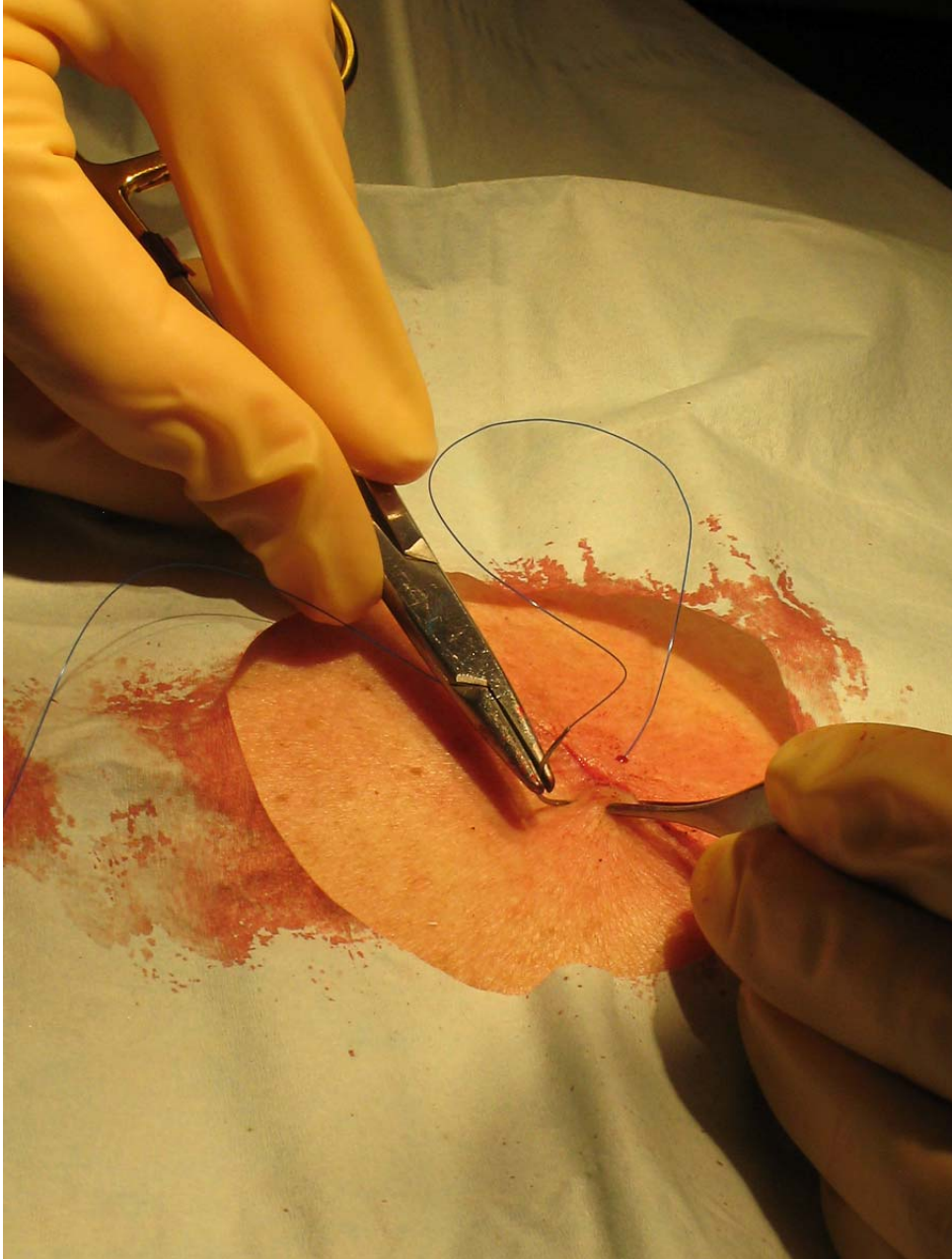
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And then they sew you up.



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With a needle that looks like a sterile fish hook.



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And if your surgeon is very, very good, you end up with a reasonably minimal scar.
Even if it is on your face instead of your back.



The moral of this story is:

1. Extended exposure to the sun without effective, high SPF protection guarantees this surgery will happen to you.
2. Tanning beds are not efficient at anything other than creating optimal circumstances to recreate this surgery on your body in the mid- to long-term future.

And, most importantly:

Go get checked by a dermatologist for skin cancer.

Now.

That's one New Year's resolution that is worth fulfilling.

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Even if you have never spent a second of your life on the beach or in the sun, you can still be at risk for skin cancer. For instance, if you have light eyes, light hair, fair complexion or are of English, Scottish or Irish descent you were born with a highly elevated risk of skin cancer.

You can learn more about skin cancer here:

Basal and Squamous cell: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/lrn/lrn_0.asp

Melanoma: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/lrn/lrn_0.asp

Stephanie Hackney has had six surgeries for skin cancer. Three were basal cell, one was squamous cell, and the last two are currently undetermined, non-melanoma, types.

Surgery photos by Douglas Hackney.



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>