

From Ugly to Beautiful

By DEE WHITTINGTON

Post Staff Writer

BOCA RATON — A young woman has forced herself into self-imposed exile, afraid to face the world because she is ugly.

A 5-year-old boy is treated like a freak because he was born with a rare, congenital disease that distorted his face.

A man served time in San Quentin on an assault charge because he struck someone who teased him once too often about his big ears.

The stories are true. They are patient histories of some of the 200 plastic surgeons meeting at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club this week.

But the stories don't end there.

The "freakish" boy underwent lengthy, sophisticated plastic surgery at Duke University Hospital and "turned out to be a handsome kid."

The man with "Dumbo" ears was operated on and years later is so grateful to the surgeon he still corresponds.

And the woman had a nose job and "turned into a knockout. "She looks like Elizabeth Taylor," said Dr. Tony Marzoni of the University of Alabama, who performed the one-hour operation that changed her life.

Cosmetic surgery — at its peak, the art of turning the ugly duckling into the beau-

tiful swan — is changing in refinement and public acceptance.

"Formerly, it was something you slipped out of town to do and you didn't want anybody to notice," said Dr. Robert Reeder of the University of Tennessee. "But people are more willing to improve their appearance surgically and that's created an increasing demand for this surgery. Look at Phyllis Diller. She capitalized on it."

An increasing number of men are showing an interest in cosmetic surgery, the surgeons say. Not long ago, Reeder did a facelift on an attorney, who said he was losing clients because he looked so old.

But more than half the plastic surgery performed is reconstructive rather than

More and More Capitalizing on Benefits Of Plastic Surgery, Doctors Say

cosmetic, sewing on limbs torn off in accidents, patching fingers and rebuilding breasts following a mastectomy. The latter is quickly becoming a routine operation consisting of three steps, transplant of tissue taken from another part of the body, silicone implant to rebuild the mound and reconstruction of the nipple.

"It sounds so simple now, but a few years ago, we didn't know how to do it," Marzoni said.

Plastic surgery has changed dramatically since a Hindu doctor about 60 B.C. took skin from a criminal's forehead to rebuild his nose, sliced off as punishment.

The punishment was repeated in Italy in

the 1500s and surgeons repeated the crude technique.

Surgeons defend cosmetic surgery against those who say it is unnecessary.

"You can stuff a silk stocking or a prosthesis in a bra, but it certainly improves the quality of life for the patient if she can wear a bathing suit or a low cut dress again," Reeder said.

"The body image is important. If you feel good about yourself, it improves your personality."

The field is small, but growing rapidly. There are 2,200 certified plastic surgeons in the United States, double the number of a decade ago.