

# LAST THE STITCH

## A FOIL AND AN EPEE, FOLLOWED BY AN EPIPHANY

It took a change of weapons in the hands of Nina Naidu, MD, New York, to bring the epiphany that would inform the rest of her life. In essence, the sport of fencing brought her to the realization that her instincts are sound – and deserve to be followed, she says.

A member of the The Johns Hopkins University women's fencing team, Dr. Naidu was relegated to competing with the foil – the epee and sabre are the other fencing weapons – due to the foil-only restriction placed upon college women at that time. But during a lull in one practice, a coach told her to grab an epee. That seemingly innocuous request had far-reaching consequences, she says.

"He had me use my left hand – and at that moment I remembered that I had been a 'lefty' as a child," Dr. Naidu says. "I was a converted 'righty' and fencing foil, and I wasn't totally comfortable with that. But I was unbelievably comfortable using my left hand with the epee – much better than with the foil in the right hand. There was a surge of self-realization, the kind that you just know something works for you. That was a turning point for me."

The lesson Dr. Naidu drew was that she was much more capable in fencing (though collegiate rules wouldn't allow epee competition) than she gave herself credit for. "We're always fighting with ourselves," she says.

"Our minds try to trick us; we'll talk ourselves out of things, even when we know instinctively what the right thing is. As I've gotten older, I've been able to trust my inner voice much more. The fencing experience was my 'eureka' moment."

She's brought that confidence into her plastic surgery practice, she says. "When I'm hiring someone, for instance, I'll have a gut feeling about that person during the interview," Dr. Naidu says. "I find that when I don't listen to that instinct – when I just look at their resumé and don't acknowledge that feeling – the hire doesn't work out. Our instincts can't lie to us, but our brains can mess with us. In plastic surgery, following what you know to be instinctively right and maintaining that sense of integrity is very important. If you try to do something that's outside your sense of 'right' and integrity, you'll be called on it right away."

Dr. Naidu will never claim to have been the women's fencing team star, but she brought to the team a singular work ethic, focus, responsibility and drive – so much so that a letter of reference for medical school from a fencing coach was so impressive that the interviewer told her how complimentary it was. "Fencing gave me focus, dedication and time management skills, which have stayed with me," she says. "The sport is very disciplined – every move and every millimeter makes a difference – and so is plastic surgery, where we need an analytical mindset and to know how to do things in a very calculated and careful fashion. In fencing and plastic surgery, focus is the most important skill to have."

To feed her fencing "jones" these days, Dr. Naidu visits nearby Columbia University to watch its team compete. "The clubs out here are incredibly competitive," she says. "They're meant for Olympic-quality fencers. I don't have the time to become that competitive again."

So she lives somewhat vicariously by watching Kiran, her 7-year-old son, don her old fencing jacket, mask and foil. "He's interested in it, and he's done some fencing at his summer camp," Dr. Naidu says. "He's actually more into tae kwon do." **PSN**



Dr. Naidu at home in her fencing jacket.

## 5 YEARS AGO IN PSN...

The decade that passed since Botox had been granted FDA approval for cosmetic indication in 2002 teemed with new science and revolution in the aesthetics market, with Society leaders marveling at its versatility and the ways in which it was changing the practice of plastic surgery in the article "FDA approval of Botox 10 years ago revolutionized cosmetic medicine," printed in the April/May 2012 issue of PSN:

"Prior to the widespread adoption of injectables, cosmetic plastic surgery was almost entirely operative procedures. Once the advent of injectables occurred, a whole landscape of cosmetic medicine opened up."

– Edward Luce, MD  
2002 ASPS President **PSN**



## SURGEON SPOTLIGHT

**Editor's note:** The bulk of PSN's pages are devoted to specific elements of our mission statement – to keep members informed of the social, political and economic trends and educational opportunities that affect the specialty of plastic surgery.

PSN is pleased to take liberties with the "social" aspect of its mission statement by presenting a good-natured look at the lives of notable members who we believe are making significant contributions to the specialty.



Karen Horton, MD

IN THIS ISSUE, we present to you **Karen Horton, MD, San Francisco**, a member of the ASPS Emerging Trends Subcommittee, Social Media Committee and Annual Meeting Program and Instructional Course Committee. Dr. Horton completed her general and plastic surgery residencies at the University of Manitoba, Canada, and a Senior Clinical Fellowship in Hand and Microsurgery at The Buncke Clinic, California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco. Dr. Horton, whose father was a surgeon, and who has twin girls and a husband named Mike, carved-out time in her schedule to answer the following questions for PSN:

**The worst thing I ever purchased for my office was...** A featured advertisement in a national beauty magazine. I've found that print ads and radio are the least useful to spread the word about who I am and what I do. After reaching patients in person, social media and the internet is now where I spend my time and energy to reach a broader audience.

**The last book I've read was...** I don't have time to read for pleasure – or don't take the time. Instead, I create content on my blog, website and social media. Actually, I read to my kids every night. One of my favorite kids' books is *The Book With No Pictures*. I have to read it several times – they can't stop laughing.

**The best vacation I ever took was ...** To Kihei (Maui) with my family! Hawai'i is a trip we take every year. My twin girls are now 6 and fairly independent. We can travel without drama, enjoy water sports as a family, eat at adult restaurants (with coloring books and markers in hand), and enjoy the Aloha lifestyle as it was meant to be.

**The best dish I cook is...** Probably throwing together a pasta dish at the last minute with whatever's available in the fridge! That's a helpful skill after a long day when I've missed restaurant takeout hours and there's not much food in the house.

**If I had to start my career over, I would...** Still be a plastic surgeon! As a child and young adult, I wanted to be an artist. But given my aptitude and love of math, science, biology, body image, and using my hands and brain to help people, plastic surgery is the very best career for me!

**The first website I check every morning is...** Twitter. While I've been surpassed by other colleagues (Dr. Heather Furnas!) as the "Twitter Queen," this site provides real-time updates and headlines about plastic surgery, breaking news, medical advances and trending topics.

**The best part of next weekend will be...**

Skiing with my family in Lake Tahoe! My twins have recently taken up skiing and I have resumed the sport after a 20-year break. I love having a family activity where we can be together, ski at our own level, get exercise, work on improving our skills and have a blast, together.



Dr. Horton, her husband, Mike, and 6-year-old twin daughters Sarah (left) and Lizzie take a ski break at Lake Tahoe.

**My all-time favorite movie is ...** *The Shining!* This usually surprises those who know me well. I'm a lighthearted, positive, energetic person, and this movie is dark and disturbing. However, I love Stephen King and read this book as a pre-teen. Jack Nicholson is incredible as the protagonist – and it's suspenseful, eerie and spooky, with hints of the supernatural (totally opposite to me)!

**The funniest tattoo I've seen in the O.R. said ...** "I - LOVE - ANESTHESIOLOGISTS" on the chest of a female patient who most definitely had BDD, Munchausen's syndrome, borderline personality disorder and many other psychiatric issues. She changed her name each year and arrived in the E.D. in disguise each July 1, fooling the new crop of residents who stared in amazement at her X-ray file that showed an entire cafeteria collection of forks, knives and spoons in her stomach. She enjoyed going under general anesthesia to have the cutlery retrieved.

**I seriously collect ...** Shot glasses! Each trip I take, I buy one at the airport or hotel. I probably have 200 or more. While they aren't in use, I've moved them up to my summer cottage in Canada. One day they'll be on display, or I'll host a party sometime and put them to use! The funny thing is, I don't do shots of alcohol. **PSN**