

“Scarred For Life – Now I’m A Model!”



Jordana's had laser surgery to reduce the scarring on her face and chest

When 30-year-old Jordana Ashkenazi was disfigured in a fire, she thought her modelling career was over forever. But surviving her horrific injuries gave her the courage to reach for her dreams

As I caught sight of my reflection in the hospital window, I immediately threw up. I barely recognised the monster staring back at me. My face was bright red and shiny, and covered in scabs, and it had swollen to twice its size. I had no eyelashes or eyebrows and my long, glossy hair was singed, short and spiky. “I’ll never be a model now,” I sobbed to my mum, as I steadied myself on my drip.

I was 17, and ten days earlier, just before I was due to fly to Thailand for my first international fashion shoot, I was hit in the face with a fireball when a prank at a friend’s barbecue went wrong. Now, as I saw my injuries for the first time, I knew my dream of becoming a model and actress had literally gone up in smoke.

Ever since I was a little girl, I dreamt about being famous. I loved being in front of the camera, and enrolled in a talent school at the age of three. I’m of Middle Eastern heritage, but grew up in Australia, so my long, dark curly hair made me stand out from the other kids.

When I was 15, I was shopping with some friends in Sydney when I was approached by a talent scout from a model agency. “I love your exotic looks and unusual features,” he said handing me his card. I called him the next day and was soon booked to star in a TV commercial for a mosquito spray.

I couldn’t believe how lucky I was and fantasised that I’d make it big like my favourite supermodel, Cindy Crawford. Two years on, after landing a print campaign for Hugo Boss, I was asked to

fly to Thailand for a glamorous location shoot. “I’m so excited,” I squealed to my then-boyfriend, John. “Things are really happening for me.”

Dreams Shattered

Before I left for Thailand, I was invited to a barbecue thrown by one of John’s friends. My parents were very strict, but I begged my mum to let me stay out late, just this once. When we got to the party, there was about 20 of our friends from school there, and John and some of the guys started playing around throwing petrol and methylated spirits on the grill to try and keep it alight. “Be careful,” I warned, as I watched the flames go higher, “It’s going to blow.” Seconds later, a huge fireball shot straight for me, hitting me in the face, between the eyes. The force of the blow threw me backwards off my chair and I hit my head on the ground, knocking me out.

When I came around moments later, all I could hear was screaming. I could barely see because the fire had hit my eyes, but I was convinced I was dying. I put my hand up to my face, and I felt my lip hanging off. “I’d rather be dead than deformed,” I thought. Then I remembered my family and I forced myself to scramble up off the ground. “Get me to a doctor,” I shrieked at my friends, who seemed to be frozen in shock. I dragged myself up the stairs and into the shower with my clothes on. Minutes later, I was bundled into a car and taken to the emergency room.

At the hospital, I was taken straight into intensive care and put on a morphine drip. I was in and out of consciousness for the next week, and all I remember is shivering because I was in so much pain, and begging the nurses for more morphine because the oxygen mask was digging into my burns. The morphine was also making me sick, so when I did come round, I was violently ill.

I could barely see, so I had no idea how bad things were, but I found out later that I had first to third degree burns on 30 per cent of my body. My hair was burnt off and my lip and ear were hanging off. There was a fear that I might be permanently blinded, but thankfully over the next ten days, my sight gradually recovered. Still, I refused to look at myself in the mirror, trying to stay positive. But I knew, judging by other people’s reactions that my burns were bad. No one recognised me when



“I couldn’t see, but I was convinced I was dying. I remember thinking, I’d rather be dead, than deformed”

they came to visit, and friends ran out crying, or refused to come in at all.

After ten days cooped up in my hospital bed, I asked my mum to help me walk over to look out the window. “I haven’t seen outside for over a week,” I told her. But the window was reflective glass and I couldn’t help but catch sight of myself. As I stood frozen in horror at what I saw, I knew instantly that my modelling dream was over.

Rebuilding My Life

Over the next two months I had reconstructive surgery, during which skin was taken from my leg and grafted onto my chest. “You’ll be scarred for life,” doctors warned. For 18 months after the surgery, I had to wear a huge pressure

garment to keep the scarring on my chest flat, so I couldn’t wear normal clothing, and I was banned from going out in the sun for five years. I was desperate to cover my scars in thick make-up, but couldn’t in case it prevented them from healing. Returning to school, I was paranoid that everyone was staring at my scars, and I hated the bulky clothes I had to wear because of the pressure garment. I longed to wear cute, girly clothes like my friends. My confidence took a nose dive. John felt so guilty by what had happened that we eventually split. I quit modelling and dropped out of drama school.

Months on, my scars began to heal and I enrolled in beauty school, thinking that if I couldn’t work in front of the cameras, I could at least work behind the scenes in the entertainment industry, as a make-up artist. But I couldn’t bear putting make-up on the stars when I wanted to be the star myself. So I quit soon after and signed up for singing lessons instead. “If I develop a talent, maybe it won’t matter what I look like,” I told mum.

A Fresh Start

Five years after the accident, I moved to the UK and finally plucked up the courage to go to my first audition since the fire. It was for a new girl group, and despite undergoing laser surgery to reduce the scarring, I was prepared for them to turn me down because my skin was too damaged. I was so amazed when I got the gig that I burst into tears. Although I had to leave the band soon after when my UK visa expired, I returned to Australia with a new-found determination to achieve my dream of working as a model and actress.

Back at home, I got an agent and she reassured me that I could succeed, despite my scars. “You can’t even see them,” she said. She helped me get parts in TV commercials, and I realised the only thing holding me back was myself, not my scars. I’ve since landed a role in a new reality show with Shengo Deane – a celebrity bodyguard, and Kim Kardashian’s ex.

I meet other girls at model castings and so many of them are paranoid about their looks. They’ll freak out over a love handle, an acne scar or a pimple. But after going through what I have, I realise life’s too short to get hung up on the small things. It has taught me so much more about life and about what’s really important, like my family and friends. ■