

Derek's Story: Just another face in the crowd

VIDEO	AUDIO
	---nats----
	On the shore of Lake Huron...
	---nats of water---
	... in a small town with just one traffic light...
Derek	"Everybody knows everybody."
	Everybody knows everybody in Harbor Beach, Michigan. A decade ago, the face of Derek Pfaff (Puff) was well-known in this tight-knit community.
Lisa Pfaff	"He was kind of that hometown hero."
	The son of Jerry and Lisa Pfaff, Derek was a straight-A student — captain and star running back on the school's only state championship football team.
	On the night of March 5, 2014, Derek, then 19, was home from college on spring break ...
Jerry Pfaff Derek's Father	"I looked across, and the gun cabinet was open ... I just... my heart dropped."
	... Derek decided to take his own life.
Lisa Pfaff Derek's Mother	"He does not remember getting the gun. He does not remember going outside. He does not remember shooting himself."
Lisa	"We met with the doctors, and they told us that there was no way Derek was going to make it."
	But Derek did survive...
Lisa	"It's a miracle he lived." Jerry: "Yeah, yeah."
	However, most of his face.. was gone.

	"I should have died that night ... I'm thankful to be alive."
	Thankful to be alive, but after 10 years and 58 reconstructive surgeries, what remains of Derek's face is unrecognizable.
	He has only one eye and is unable to blink. He struggles with speaking and breathing normally, and no longer has a sense of smell. He can't chew or swallow food, and uses a feeding tube to eat.
Derek Pfaff Harbor Beach, Michigan	"After my last surgery, the doctor told my parents that there's nothing more he could do except refer us to a place to get a face transplant."
	Nothing more they could do, except refer to a place for a face transplant.
Derek/Dr. Mardini	---nats of appt --- "Hey guys! How's it going? Good, how are you?"
	Ultimately, that place...
Derek/Dr. Mardini	---nats of appt--- "Nice to see you."
	... Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.
Lisa and Jerry	"The thought of this surgery is our ray of hope." Jerry: "Life-changing for him."
	A second chance at life...
Samir Mardini, M.D. Professor and Chair, Plastic Surgery Surgical Director, Reconstructive Transplant Program Mayo Clinic	"The heart is a lifesaving operation. The kidney, for the most part, is a lifesaving operation. With facial transplantation, it's a life-giving operation. You can live without it, but you're missing out on life."
	Dr. Samir Mardini is surgical director of Mayo Clinic's Reconstructive Transplant Program.
Dr. Mardini	"Face transplant is a rare surgery. There are only a few teams around the world that are doing them."
	Derek's surgery is Mayo Clinic's second face transplant and its most complex and extensive procedure to date.

	A face transplant replaces all or part of the face with donor tissue. Dr. Mardini estimates 85% of Derek's face needed to be replaced.
Dr. Mardini	"In Derek's case, the donor tissue included part of the forehead, the upper and lower eyelids on the right side, the nose, the mouth, the upper and lower jaws — including the teeth, as well as all of the skin, muscles and nerves of the entire face and neck."
	The most meticulous part of this complex surgery is reconnecting the many small nerves between Derek and the donor to ensure function, like eating, blinking and even smiling, is restored.
	In extensive preparation for Derek's surgery, the face transplant team spent nearly nine months, including many weekends, rehearsing the procedure. Detailed scans of the face allowed the team to practice the surgery virtually. The latest technology in medical modeling and 3D printing also played a vital role in the planning and execution of the surgery.
Dr. Mardini	"The restorative nature of the facial transplant makes it very complex."
Lisa/Derek	"We're ready."
	February 2024... a donor becomes available.
	----nats "We've got the team here."---
	Six surgeons and a multidisciplinary medical staff numbering more than 80 complete a surgical marathon lasting nearly two-and-a-half days.
	---nats from surgery---
Dr. Mardini	"We're trying to give Derek back functions he was missing for 10 years."
	---nats "59 hours and 38 minutes later"----
Jason First reveal mirror b-roll	Still healing nearly a month after surgery — and 10 years to the day of his suicide attempt — Derek gets the first glimpse of his new face.

	----nats "Looks good. I guess you got your stamp of approval there. How does it feel? Good." -----
	Feels... good.
	---nats of golf swing---
	In the months to follow, Derek has additional surgeries to refine his appearance, improve his tongue and eyelid function, and ensure the connection of nerves is working properly.
Dr. Mardini	"This is not an aesthetic operation, although the side benefits of it are hugely beneficial for the aesthetics of the patient."
Dr. Mardini	"Derek is looking to be normal. He's looking to walk on the street and not have anyone notice anything on him."
	----nats of car going by---
	As he approaches a new year in 2025, Derek is just another face in the crowd now.... with a new smile.
	----nats of Derek smiling/laughing----
Lisa	"It makes my heart so full to see him smile and happy and just be a normal person again."
Jerry	"It's been 10 years since you've seen a nose, lips and teeth on your son. Just totally amazing, a miracle."
Lisa	"And it wasn't just Derek's face that was given. It was his other organs as well. So there were multiple recipients tied to that one donor, and that is the greatest gift that someone can make the courage and the decision to do."
	Because of that donor's gift, Derek, now 30 years old, is ready to start the next chapter in his life.
Derek	"One day, meet someone, start a family."
	And has found purpose as a public speaker for suicide prevention...
Derek	"Always talk to someone. Tell them how you're feeling."

	---nats of reading letter.. "Dear Derek, your story has touched my life in so many ways."
Lisa	"He's received so many letters that it's kind of like his calling now to continue to impact people and share."
Letter reading b-roll	----nats of Derek reading letter... "Derek, thank you for giving me hope, love and faith. You are one amazing guy."
Derek	"Hearing their stories and how I helped them, makes me feel pretty good."
Derek	"I lived for a reason. I want to help others anyway I can."
	For the Mayo Clinic News Network, I'm Jason Howland.