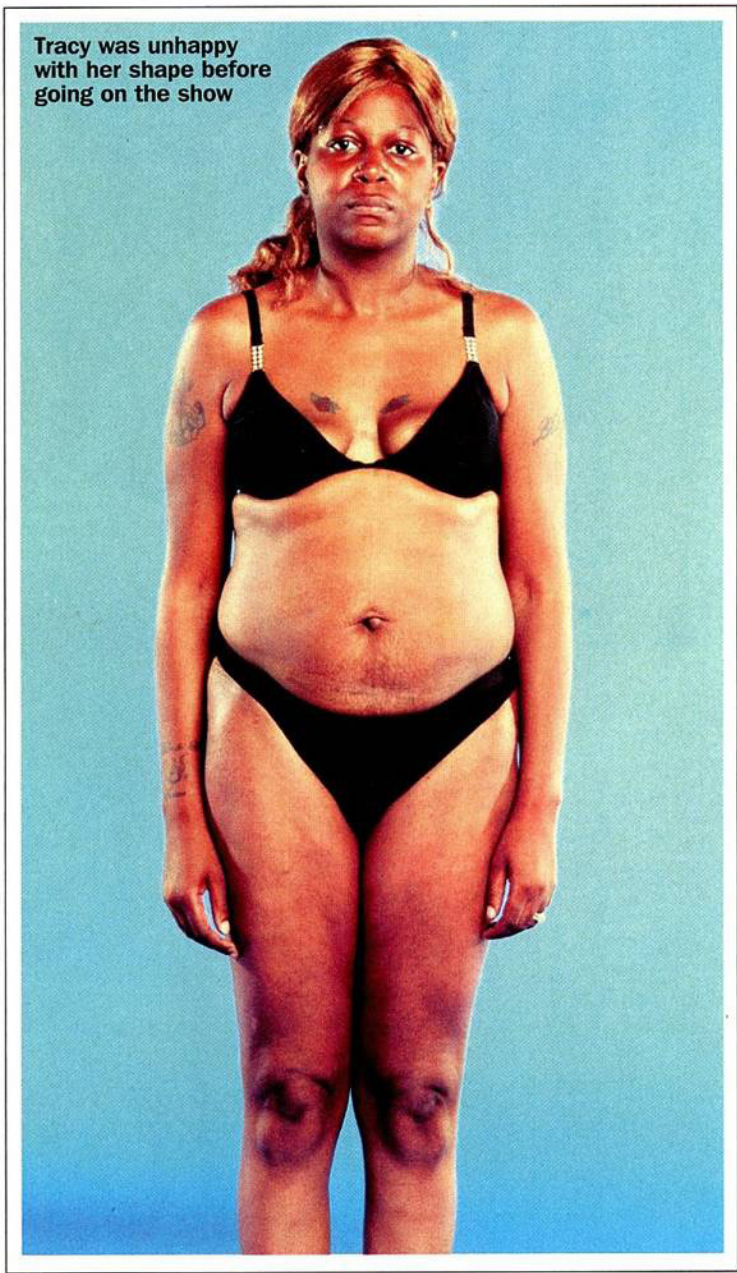


# ‘My extreme makeover saved my life’

After a difficult upbringing and four suicide attempts, Tracy Blake, 37, was at rock bottom. Until she took part in *Extreme Makeover UK*...

**T**racy Blake's life story makes for harrowing reading. She was abandoned by her mum at 13; her absent father became a crack addict; she was raped by her first husband; and two former partners ended up in prison. She's attempted suicide four times and five pregnancies have physically taken their toll on her body. So the former librarian turned full-time mum couldn't believe her luck when LivingTV show *Extreme Makeover* offered her surgery worth more than £35,000. Now 37, Tracy is living happily in Birmingham with her husband Steve, 29, and her five children. Here, she explains the impact of her makeover to **new!**...

I've had low self-esteem for as long as I can remember, and a lot of it stems from my childhood. I was 13 years old when my mother, Bev, now 56, left England for Jamaica. My parents had separated when I was seven and my dad had moved in with another woman. I still saw my dad Brian\*, 60, a car polisher, but I couldn't rely on him. In fact, he became a crack addict in 2001. For 10 years, my younger sister Marie and I were shunted between him, other family members and even the mum and dad of my school friend, Suzy\*. When I was 15, they became our foster parents but their mum was very controlling. Life was getting me down and, when I was 16, I took an overdose of everything I could find in the bathroom cabinet. But Suzy found me in time. My early relationships were difficult, too. I was 17 when I met Guy, 21, and became pregnant with my son Nathan,



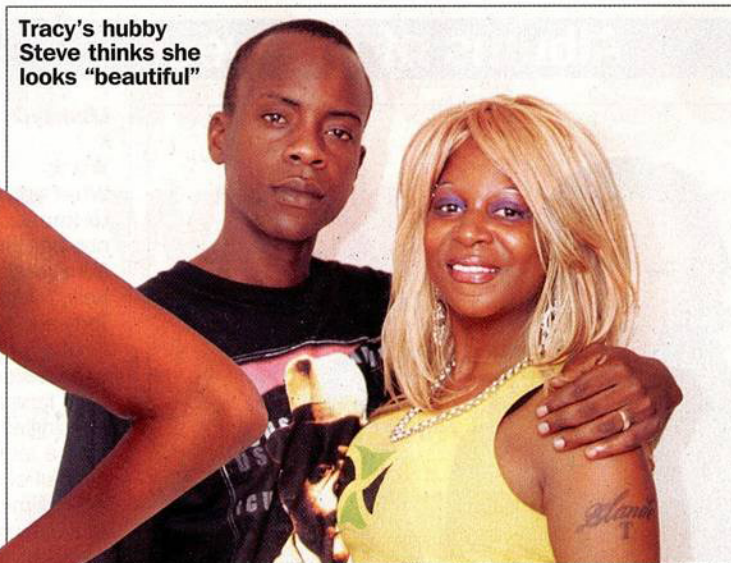
**I felt I was camouflaging all the time – stuffing my bra, holding my stomach in**

now 18. I just wanted a child who would love me. However Guy had other girlfriends and was in and out of prison so we split after four years. It was after giving birth to Nathan that I started wanting surgery. I was skinny and had nice breasts until my pregnancy, when I put on 5st. Then I breastfed for three years so my breasts had turned into big, empty sacks and I hated the stretch marks on my stomach. I attempted suicide again, overdosing on Paracetamol, when I was 24. It was a cry for help, I felt I was never loved.

**bad to worse**

I met Paul, the father of my second son René, 14, when I was 25 and he was 22. But he ended up in prison, too, and we split after three years. Then in 1996, I met my first husband Dave\*, 36, who was classed as disabled and didn't work. We got married two months later. But things went from bad to worse. He used to rape me if I wouldn't sleep with him and he even took overdoses of tablets in front of our kids (Romalo, eight, and Ebony, seven), just to try and keep me. He also made me feel bad about myself by criticising my looks but I stayed because I didn't want the shame of our marriage failing. Because I felt trapped, I attempted suicide a third time, in November 1999, again with pills. But the last straw was when Dave hit me at Christmas, 1999. He had his hands around my throat. I realised I'd had enough and kicked him out. I'd had so much bad luck. But then I met my husband Steve, 29, in January 2000. Steve, who works for Cadbury's, is dependable and honest and he's the first person to make me feel good about my body. But after having Romalo and Ebony, I

Tracy's hubby Steve thinks she looks "beautiful"



became a size 18, and I've since had a daughter with Steve, Kanné, two. I felt like I was camouflaging all the time – stuffing my bra, holding my stomach in. And, after Kanné's birth I suffered such bad post-natal depression I attempted suicide in 2003. Luckily, I got myself back on track after that.

### extreme measures

I first saw the American version of *Extreme Makeover* in 2003 and I kept saying, "As soon as that comes to England, I'm going on it!" Steve supported me and said, "Just make sure you're safe."

In February, I saw details of the UK version on the internet and applied.

Amazingly I was chosen and I went for a consultation in May. I'd gone on a diet before the show, after deciding to change my lifestyle, so I got down to a size 12. But I also

worked out every day with a trainer called Jamie as part of the programme.

I wasn't nervous before the surgery, which took place on July 4, although it took four-and-a-half hours. I was expecting to wake up in agony, but when I came round I just grabbed my new breasts and screamed, "Thank you!" I came out of hospital three days later.

My face and stomach looked the most dramatically different. I thought they looked so great that I took pictures of them every day! I've been through so much that I thought, "Thank you, Lord, you've finally given me something." I've now got a scar from

one pelvic bone to the other from my tummy tuck. I've also got scars from my breast uplift which go up to my nipples, but they're not noticeable and no one would see the scars underneath unless they lifted them up!

On August 2, I had veneers put on my teeth, which took five hours. I also had laser whitening treatment, which was really painful!

I recovered in a hotel until August 4, when I finally revealed the transformation to my family and friends. As I made my grand entrance, everyone went mad. Steve didn't say anything. He just kept looking at me. But afterwards my sister-in-law

told me he'd been crying. Later he said to me, "I can't believe how beautiful you look."

As for my children, Nathan was probably the most amazed. He said, "Mum,

you look fantastic!" But Kanné misses my fat. She liked grabbing my floppy boobs!

*Extreme Makeover* has been a turning point for me. I feel happy and free and it's made me a nicer person. Instead of biting the kids' heads off, I'm now a bubbly mum who gives them lots of fun and excitement. It's made me who I always wanted to be. I want to open a beauty salon, so I'm starting at beauty school in a couple of weeks.

It wasn't until I had surgery and regained my confidence that I realised I had been carrying so much baggage around with me. I now know I can't do anything about the past but I can do anything with my future. □

when I came round, I grabbed my new breasts and shouted, "Thank you!"

## Tracy's transformation

Top cosmetic surgeon Peter Arnstein talks us through Tracy's op...

### Brow lift £3,815

"I drilled a hole in Tracy's hairline and inserted a plate with hooks on one end. You pull the skin upwards and clip it onto the hooks to get rid of forehead wrinkles and put saggy eyebrows back into position."

### Eye lift £2,710

"Tracy's brows were a little low so I removed surplus flabby skin from her upper eyelid. The scar is hardly visible but patients have black eyes for three weeks."

### Boob job £3,800

"An augmentation will leave you feeling bruised for about 48 hours and tired from the anaesthetic for two weeks."

### Breast uplift £4,490

"The poor girl had very saggy, empty, low breasts and, without an uplift, Tracy's nipples would have dropped below the implant which is very unsightly."

### Tummy tuck £5,325

"Tracy had quite a big bulge with lots of stretch marks so we got rid of that and she now has a very smooth tummy."

### Liposuction £3,195

"Tracy had liposuction on her upper thighs and knees. Liposuction's really good for localised fat but you get bruising and swelling, which can be treated with paracetamol and goes down after six weeks."

### Teeth £12,000

Tracy had £12,000 of dental treatment, carried out by Dr Rahul Doshi at Perfect Smile Studios. "Tracy's teeth were decayed and discoloured and she had gold crowns on her front two teeth," explains Dr Doshi. "We treated the decayed teeth and performed a full smile design on Tracy, so her teeth are now gleaming!"

**Extreme Makeover UK** is on LivingTV on Thursdays at 10pm. Log on to [www.mcindoe-surgical.co.uk](http://www.mcindoe-surgical.co.uk) or [www.theperfectsmilestudios.co.uk](http://www.theperfectsmilestudios.co.uk) to find out more about Tracy's procedures

Tracy had a tummy tuck and breast implants to improve her figure