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Judi Hall likes working overtime.

Normally the Santa Barbara County sheriff's deputy works in court services, but when she works weekends, Deputy Hall gets to work in the jail.

It's times like those when Deputy Hall feels she makes a difference, by speaking with mothers who she thinks may abandon their children for a life of crime.

On a recent night, Deputy Hall said she spoke with a woman who was booked on suspicion of methamphetamine use, and after the woman thanked her for caring, the deputy said, "I do care, because I was your child. I've been there. Think about what you're doing and how it will affect your kids."

Deputy Hall, 35, recently went through a transformation, both inwardly and outwardly.

Previously private about her past, she went public about the abuse she suffered as a child at the hands of her mother, as well as her background in foster care.

She opened up about being beaten by a boyfriend at the age of 15 when she refused to have sex with him. The beating left her with a broken nose that she could not breathe through for 20 years.

Finally ready to put her past behind her, Deputy Hall planned to have reconstructive surgery. And after hearing her story, Beverly Hills-based Dr. Brent Moelleken wouldn't let her pay a dime.

On Nov. 28, Dr. Moelleken performed the surgery through his nonprofit organization, About Face Surgical Foundation, which provides cost-free surgical services for victims of crime.

The surgery, he said, was not typical. Deputy Hall's nose was broken inside and out.

"I think her beating was very severe," the doctor, who also practices in Santa Barbara, told the News-Press by telephone from his Beverly Hills office.

"For a (teenage) girl to have her nose broken, but also the internal bones of her nose, we usually see that kind of injury from baseball bats or car crashes, so it was a significant trauma that she had sustained."

Deputy Hall's surgery, which Dr. Moelleken said normally lasts about 90 minutes, took three hours.

With very little bruising, however, the deputy took no pain medication and was only away from work for two weeks. She came back to light duty and worked at a desk before returning to her regular duties Dec. 27.

With a new nose, Deputy Hall also has a new outlook on life.

"I feel great," she told the News-Press, sitting on a bench outside the Figueroa Annex of the Santa Barbara County Superior Courthouse. "I'm not ashamed for people to see the side of my face. ... I feel like a whole new person."

But her nose, which she can now breathe through normally, was only part of the struggle. It's emblematic of the pain and suffering Deputy Hall had to overcome to rise above her circumstances earlier in life, which is why she wanted to work in law enforcement in the first place.

Deputy Hall wants to help others, she said, "to become that adult role model that I never had."

Now, she has been given that chance. Deputy Hall said she was recently approached by the department about taking a child forensics investigator course that will enable her to work with children who are victims of crime and sexual abuse.

"Of course I said 'Yes,'" Deputy Hall said, smiling widely. "That's what I've always wanted to do."

She starts the training Monday in Bakersfield.

Through this whole experience, Deputy Hall said she couldn't believe how supportive both the Sheriff's Department and the community have been. People approach her frequently to congratulate her on her strength.

"It's very hard to share such a traumatic experience because it was such a huge part of (my) life," Deputy Hall said with tears in her eyes. "Not only was (my) innocence stolen, it was degrading. I didn't have a choice."

But things have changed now that she has taken back control, and she perked back up instantly while talking about it. In fact, she can't stop smiling.

Friends even tell her she's glowing.

"People say, 'What did you do? You look so happy,'" Deputy Hall said. "This has been another chance in my life for me to regain my self-esteem and my confidence."

Deputy Hall continues to be grateful for the surgeon's gift.

"I will always thank God for Dr. Moelleken," she said. "I'm grateful for him every day. He's given me a chance, an opportunity to take back what was mine."

Dr. Moelleken thinks he should be thanking Deputy Hall. He said he's glad women like Deputy Hall give his daughter someone to look up to.

"She really transformed from a vulnerable (teenager) and now she packs heat," he said. "She's really someone I think young girls can look up to. ... Judi's story is one that you'll remember for the rest of your life. It makes your life a little better."

That's exactly what Deputy Hall intends to do: use her experience to help make the lives of others better, showing that victims can be successful and productive members of the community.

"It doesn't matter the circumstance and how unfair your life is," she said. "You can make a change."

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Before her surgery, Judi Hall is seen in November in front of the Figueroa Annex of the Santa Barbara County Superior Courthouse.

THOMAS KELSEY/NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS



About two months after her surgery, Judi Hall can't stop smiling.