



## Second Look

by Marlena Blavin and David Roche

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The first time I met David, I didn't see his face. I heard his voice. We were volunteering at our local hospital and being trained to give massage to patients. I had arrived late, so had only met Karen, my partner for our first exercise. We were on one side of a two bed hospital room. She was giving me a wonderful foot massage. The warmth of her hands coaxed me into a light-headed trance. I began to ignore the hospital sights and smells. Then I became enchanted by what I heard on the other side of the room's dividing curtain.



David Roche and Marlena Blavin (by Jo Anne Smith)

He spoke slowly, his voice appealing—distinct, deep, naturally sexy. He paused between the questions he asked his partner, seeming to listen intently. I was becoming hypnotized and began to imagine the man behind the voice. I saw him so clearly in my mind: six feet tall, curly brown hair, olive skin, dark eyes, tight jeans. Oh, and cowboy boots.

When the practice session ended, I was eager to meet this mystery man. I pulled the curtain open. There was David. He was not six feet tall. And his face was shocking—distorted, deformed, just...*wrong*. Wordlessly, I turned and walked away, filled with embarrassment, confusion and shame.

*David: It was irritating, especially in that context, but nothing new to me. I've learned that the first five minutes does not really count. A reaction like Marlena had does not really define a person. Anyway, I was absorbed in the class and moved on.*

For most of the day, I hid myself among the other students. I stole looks at the swollen purple mass on the left side of David's face and neck. He had scarred tissue for a lower lip. I travelled back and forth between repulsion and attraction, between what my eyes saw and my heart felt. After many stares, I began to notice other things, like the fact that David, unlike me, did not hide himself. He went up to greet others and speak. He was interested in the class and in other people. I liked his blue eyes, his graceful hands.

Near the end of the day, I realized I wanted to get to know him better. My first look had shocked me. My second, longer look found a deeper beauty. Now, years later, I can easily list David's attractive qualities. But how did repulsion become attraction in less than a day?

Chemistry began with the sound of his voice, stayed in my gut and prevailed over the more shallow visuals. Conditions were right. We were in a hospital setting where it is not strange to meet ill or injured



people (dressed in unflattering gowns!). And it was a massage class, where touch was the primary sense engaged. Most of all, I simply think that I got the time (and took the time) to take a second look.

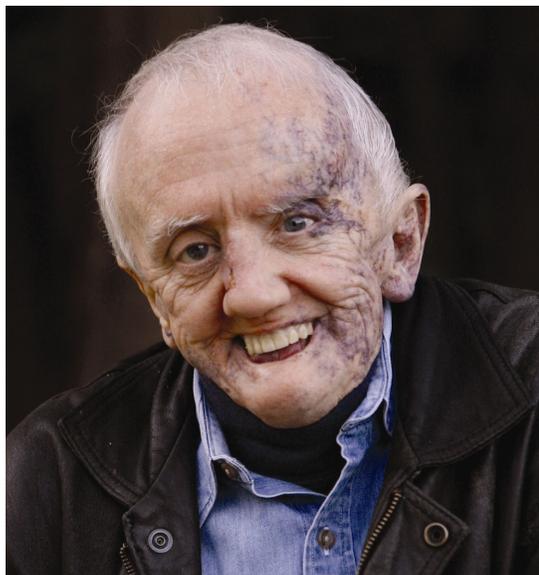
I shyly asked him if he would be my partner for the day's final exercise. He agreed. David's right. The first few minutes are not the ones that count. It's what happens afterwards.

*David: But you know what? It wasn't just about Marlana getting past my appearance. Acceptance is a two way street.*

We continued to practice together for the next six months. I discovered that, despite his self-confidence, David never talked about his face. For half a year, he never asked me if I wanted to know what happened. And I could tell I was not supposed to ask.

*David: That is very real denial. But it was part of my coping mechanism.*

I would ease a small pillow under his head to help him breathe more easily. I put my right hand under his upper back, my left hand on his head and asked him to breathe deeply and feel my hands. Ever so gently, my fingers explored the blue-violet malformations that colored the swollen left side of his face. He slowly let me in. I did not turn away. I felt the bones of his face under my palms. No softness around the left eye, only angular, hard, scarred bone and toughened skin. As he began to relax, his expressive blue eyes flashed a smile of warmth and his jaw relaxed and opened slightly, exposing an over-sized purple tongue.



*David casual close-up (by Kim Komenich)*

I learned about David as I silently touched him. My hands seemed to know where to go and what do when they got there. The more I trusted them, the more they heard what David's face had to say.

*David: My difference was always an open secret, one that I was ashamed of. It took six months to build the trust I needed and it could not have come from just words.*

Now we have been married for almost 17 years. I do not see David as different at all. I was given the grace of being able to take a second look on that first day. Yes, love takes a lot longer to build, but the process of seeing the true inner beauty of another person is the same no matter what their appearance is.

*David: Recently a middle school student asked if I would have fallen in love with Marlana if she had been the one with facial difference. In truth, at that time, I would not have. Because I did not yet fully love myself, I could not really open to another. Now? I would fall in love with her in an instant.*

David saw my inner beauty too, along with my flaws, my own "disfigurement," and accepted and encouraged me. The truth is that we were two sleeping beauties who awakened each other.

*David: After you take a good second look, facial difference can seem like nothing more than a speed bump on the journey to love.*

**David Roche is an author, inspirational humourist, motivational speaker and performer. He has performed and spoken across Canada, the U.S., England, New Zealand, Australia and Russia and has just written his first book, the Church of 80% Sincerity. To find out more about David Roche, visit his website [www.davidroche.com](http://www.davidroche.com)**