

VICK! How the Falcons' superstar QB
can save the NFL



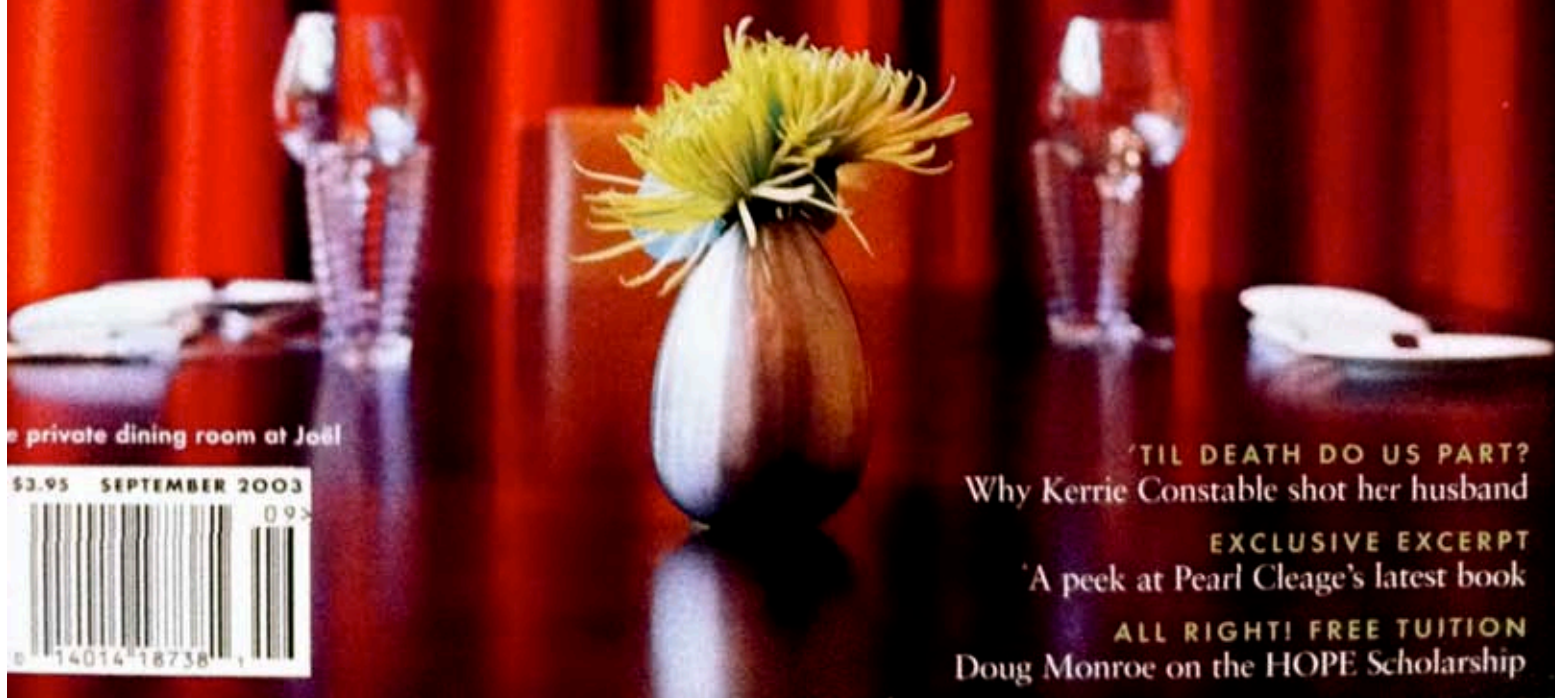
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office into a posh day spa to lure back prodigal patients. In a grand, columned mansion just north of Buckhead, King offers complimentary perks like hand and foot massages, paraffin wax treatments, aromatherapy and special “zen” dental chairs that sink patients into a kind of a musical massage.

Patients can don headphones, choosing music from a massive CD library. A full-time massage therapist is on staff along with the usual dental hygienists and lab technicians.

King, who was the dental whiz on ABC's *Extreme Makeover*, says her motivation is simple. “I was tired of hearing people saying they hated going to the dentist. I started wondering what I could do to make people stop saying that.”

Apparently, her pampering helps. Patient Martha Dickey of Vinings had dreaded some major dental work that was going to take hours. “I shouldn't have even worried,” Dickey says now, after visiting King. “I found myself falling asleep during the procedure because I was so relaxed.” She e-mailed all her friends about Dr. King. “I want them all there. I think they deserve it.” ❖

CALMING YOUR FEARS

Does the thought of the drill give you hives? Here are some tips on relaxing in that dental chair.

- ★ Bring headphones and some relaxing music.
- ★ Avoid caffeine and sugar before your appointment because they can make you more jittery.
- ★ Schedule your appointment in the morning so you don't spend all day stressing.
- ★ Talk to your dentist about your fear. Either before you go or when you first arrive, let him or her know that you're nervous.
- ★ Ask for an explanation of any procedures before they happen. Knowledge is power.

FEAR FACTOR

AFRAID TO VISIT THE DENTIST? YOU'RE NOT ALONE—SO ARE NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF ADULTS. HERE'S HOW ATLANTA DENTISTS ARE MAKING IT PAINLESS.

BY MARY JO DILONARDO

ROSWELL DENTIST ANNE Koenig remembers a patient who arrived for a routine dental appointment, only to make it as far as the parking lot. He sat in his car, panicked, then went home. This happened four times before he finally got enough nerve to make it through the door.

And you thought *you* dreaded those six-month checkups.

Koenig—whose slogan is “We cater to small children and large cowards”—is one of a growing number of metro Atlanta dentists determined to help patients overcome their fears of drills and needles, picks and probes. They do it with improved chair-side manners, pampering treatments and nerve-dulling chemicals including, in at least one local office, full sedation.

Of course, general anesthesia isn't something to be taken lightly. Marietta dentist Dave Kurtzman sends only his most phobic patients to the operating room at neighboring Kennestone Hospital—patients like Bill Moody.

Moody, chief of security at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, has good cause to be fearful. As a soldier in Vietnam, he had to have a broken tooth extracted *without* anesthesia. His military training also makes him resistant to semi-conscious sedation. “With nitrous oxide, my subconscious fights it,” says

Moody. “I jerk my arms and strike out at whoever’s around me.”

Now 54, Moody has textbook dental phobia. He avoided regular dentist visits for nearly a decade until he was finally directed to Kurtzman. Moody went in—and went under—for 10 hours of dental surgery. Now, he appears for regular check-ups.

Kurtzman specifically designed his

before they set foot in an examining room. Although he offers complete sedation for everything from routine cleanings and fillings to major dental surgery, Kurtzman says only about 15 percent of his patients end up in the OR.

Childhood experiences are to blame for many dental phobias, he believes. “A lot of the dentists, especially back 30 or 40 years ago, were trained to be stern.

But it really was brutality,” Kurtzman says. “Couple that with the fact that (in the dental chair) you’re in the most vulnerable position you can be in, on your back with your throat up.”

Dental phobia often goes hand-in-hand with other anxiety disorders, says Dr. Barbara Rothbaum, director of the Trauma and Anxiety Recovery Program at Emory University School of Medicine. “A lot of people with panic disorder don’t like to be in any situation where they feel trapped. They hate going to the dentist because they feel trapped in the chair with the dentist right in their

face,” she says.

A study published in *The Journal of the American Dental Association* found that nearly a third of respondents were anywhere from somewhat nervous to terrified about going to the dentist. More than a third of Americans don’t go to the dentist at all, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Dentist Debra Gray King turned her



office, full of warmly decorated rooms and soothing music, to help patients feel at ease. If they're nervous, Kurtzman consults with them by phone first or meets with them in his lounge-like office

MIND OVER MATTER

Soothing music, aromatherapy and massages are just some of the ways Atlanta dentists are putting anxious patients at ease.