

# I Suddenly Have 4 Severe Dents In My Head And I'm Trying To Accept My New Appearance

"When I'm out in public now, I notice the looks I get from strangers, most of which seem to say 'Yikes! WTF!'"



William Felice  
Guest Writer



COURTESY OF WILLIAM FELICE

William Felice, who now has four "holes" or dents in his head after a procedure used to drain blood and other fluids.

I've been a college professor for almost 30 years and during this entire time I've passionately enjoyed teaching and mentoring students. Yet as the spring semester kicks off, I am filled with anxiety and fear about entering the classroom.

Everything changed for me during July and August 2019, while I was working hard, enjoying teaching and juggling two book projects. During this busy and fulfilling time, I started to get headaches, which I normally do not get. Over-the-counter pain medications didn't seem to help and, after the pain became intolerable, I went to the doctor in late August.

A scan revealed bleeding on both sides of my brain, which can be life-threatening. I was immediately taken into surgery to drain the blood and relieve the pressure. We still don't know why the brain bleeding occurred. I didn't fall and hit my head, the most common cause of such bleeding. It's also odd that the bleeding occurred on both sides of the brain, as the vast majority of cases of spontaneous bleeding take place on only one side.

The only medical procedure available to the surgeons was to drill holes in four locations through my skull to insert drainage tubes. While in the intensive care unit, these tubes remained in my head for a few days to make sure all the blood and other fluids were eliminated.

Unfortunately, a complication emerged when the drainage tubes were taken out. This removal process provoked two alarming brain seizures, which led to a longer stay in the ICU.

However, despite this setback, the surgery and the drainage procedures ultimately went well and after six days in the ICU, and a couple more in the hospital recovering, I was able to go home. I owe my life to the outstanding care I received from the doctors, nurses and staff at St. Anthony's Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida. I am now fully recovered with no neurological damage. I am indeed a very lucky man!

Yet, the surgery left me with four significant "holes" (dents) in my skull — a freakish sort of look on my bald head that is a bit overwhelming for me. It is this radical change in my appearance that has created profound feelings of insecurity.



COURTESY OF WILLIAM FELICE

A photo of Felice's head taken in February 2020.

Immediately after the operation, my head was full of scars, staples, incisions and scabs. It was impossible at that time to know what would be permanent and what would heal. After about six weeks, it became clear that the significant dents were there to stay and this was how I would look from then on.

My reaction was to feel incredibly insecure and withdrawn. I worried about the image I would project to my friends, work colleagues and students. Would I now be judged by my scarred appearance?

When I'm out in public now, I notice the looks I get from strangers, most of which seem to say "Yikes! WTF!" Some friends have literally gasped when they saw me and then given me a hug. Others have tried to just focus on my eyes, act like everything is normal and not let me see them look up at the holes. Most friends have been kind and tell me that I'm "looking great," which I know is not true. I have a hard time looking at myself in the mirror.

Humor has helped me deal the most. My husband and I joke a lot about my new "holy head." A friend offered to get some stage makeup putty to fill in the dents, and another put her fingers in all four holes! Such playfulness is wonderful and relieving.

The dents in my skull may not be permanent. There is a procedure whereby titanium plates could be inserted in the holes to make them less severe. I'm in discussions with my neurosurgeon about the risks of such a procedure. If we go ahead with this operation, it will hopefully provide a positive outcome but there are still so many unknowns.



COURTESY OF WILLIAM FELICE

Felice in May 2019, about three months before he underwent the procedure that changed his appearance.

Why does our appearance matter so much? I intend to continue to work hard to inspire, provoke and challenge students. I will continue my life goal of being a "master teacher" and I know the pedagogical techniques I've mastered do not depend on my looks. Yet, we, as a society, put so much value on appearance. Think about the billions of dollars spent on hair products, cosmetics and plastic surgery. Think about the ads that bombard us hourly on social and mainstream media and tell us we need products in order to look good and be happy. Think about [the studies that demonstrate the advantages in life "good-looking" people have over others](#). Think about how much time we spend each day looking in the mirror to affirm the way we want to present ourselves to the world. I now no longer have as much control over how I am presented to the world.

But, I do have control over some things, including my attitude and approach to my new scarred appearance. It may sound "new-agey" to talk about "acceptance" but what other choice do I have? My first step is to accept, and try to be comfortable with, my new look.

And in this regard, I know my students will be incredibly helpful. Over many years, I have found Eckerd College students (from millennials to Gen Z) to be accepting, kind, generous, thoughtful, engaging, nonjudgmental and supportive. Thus, on a very fundamental basis, I hope and believe that these students will not define me by how I look, but by who I am and how I teach. I know that I will gain strength from them and will keep this in the forefront of my mind as the new semester begins. The transition will be tough ... but then it will be over.

Thousands of others have experienced disfigurements much worse than mine. I look forward to the day when our society as a whole becomes less judgmental and less obsessed with superficial appearances.

*William Felice, Ph.D., is a professor of political science at Eckerd College. Felice was named the 2006 Florida Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He can be reached via his website, [williamfelice.com](http://williamfelice.com).*