

# Improving First Impressions Since 1994

By [RALPH BLUMENTHAL](#)

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There are easily 400 dermatologists in New York City, but only one, it's safe to say, is a Hungarian-born, classically trained violinist who served in the Israeli Air Force. That would be [Dr. Judith Hellman](#), 54, board certified since 1994 and now practicing out of a suite at 30 Central Park South, a few doors from [the Plaza](#).

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Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

Why dermatology? People who meet you don't know if you're a nice person or not. The first thing they see is your skin.

Mantra: Everybody can have good enough skin to feel good about themselves.

Everybody? Whenever I'm faced with something that can't be helped, even if I can't make it perfect, I can make it better.

F.A.Q.: People ask, "Is this permanent?" I say, "Is life permanent?"

Best self-medicating trick: I can do [Botox](#) in the mirror backwards, and some lasers with ease.

Signature procedure: Treating acne by laser. Acne is very debilitating physically and psychologically. In four treatments I can probably give close to a complete improvement of cystic acne, long term.

Style statement: Leather pants, low-cut clingy black top.

Personal odyssey: My mother took me to Israel when I was 15. My parents were divorced. We left Hungary as a trip to Europe. It was a communist country; you couldn't get out. I had a handmade violin someone made especially for me. My violin stayed in Hungary. I studied with the famous violinist [Ilona Feher](#). At 18, I went into the Israeli Air Force as a flight paramedic. The first weekend I got home from training was the Yom Kippur War. The war kind of interfered with my plans. After two years, I was sent a scholarship from the [Berklee College of Music](#) in Boston. What I learned at Berklee was creativity. It's what makes America a special place.

When the music stopped: You make a lot of music for terrible money. I didn't want to go table to table with wedding songs. I had a friend who was a psychiatrist. I started reconsidering. I wanted to see what made people tick.

Father knows best: My father said, "Impossible — you'll go broke," but since I don't have anything, going broke is not a problem. My father was a dermatologist at Mount Sinai. He started twisting my arm. "No, no, no, you want to be a dermatologist." "No, no, no, I want to be a psychiatrist." So I got into dermatology — today it's the No. 1 hardest to get in. You can do it well with more ease than taking care of terminally ill patients. I'm making people feel good. When you feel good about yourself, I feel good about myself. My father was right.

The connection between music and medicine? I'm sure there is an influence, the idea of beauty, aesthetic dermatology. It comes from this training of perfection, the instrument. Harmony is really a good word.

What keeps patients coming in: Hair removal. Nobody doesn't have some hair they don't want to remove.

Her pride and joy: My son, Michael Eliran. He's going to be 12 in April. He's kind of like a Renaissance man. He writes lyrics, he writes music. He knows everything about the Beatles. His father is [Ron Eliran](#). He used to be a very big star in Israel. We're divorced. He inherited the best traits of us and better skin.

What she wants on her gravestone: "Against all odds." To come from Hungary, to come to the U.S., to train in music and to go to medical school was not written in the stars.