

CHECK PLEASE

Whether you call them beauty marks or moles, MALWINA GUDOWSKA reports on the latest ways to keep tabs on your spots.

While most childhood memories are composed of bosom friends and pivotal events, my youthful days can be mapped out in a connect-the-dots trajectory—literally. I rarely spent serious time in the sun, but I have plenty of little dark marks on my skin, including the four moles on one side of my face that I've had since birth.

At seven, when I dressed up as Madonna circa 1984 for Halloween, my mother drew a small mark above my lip with her brown eyeliner to mimic Madge's signature mole. A couple of years later, as if I'd willed it to happen, a mark appeared above my lip, just a centimetre down from where the Material Girl's spot had been. I was no longer a fake; I was part of the Marilyn (Monroe), Cindy (Crawford) and Madonna club. Plus, my mole quintet was complete! But what I thought was a blessing—who wouldn't like the comparison to Cindy Crawford?—became a curse when a cruel classmate took notice and used it as a source of inspiration for his playground intimidation tactics. Upset and teary-eyed, I sought refuge near the balance beams, and a teacher came up to ask what had happened. "David says that if you connect all the moles on my face, they make an upside-down house," I said.

"Those aren't moles, my dear," the teacher replied. "Those are beauty marks."

More than 20 years later, I'm less concerned about the shape my beauty marks make. Like Crawford, who has said she frets that her signature lip mole might one day become cancerous, I worry about my beauty

marks going rogue. According to the B.C. Cancer Agency, one in six Canadians will be diagnosed with skin cancer at some point in their lifetime. "The young person's disease," it's one of the most common cancers in young adults. This year, an estimated 5,500 Canadians will be diagnosed with melanoma, the most aggressive and deadliest form of skin cancer (the other two are

basal-cell carcinoma and squamous-cell carcinoma), and 950 will die from it, according to the Canadian Cancer Registry Database.

"We are in an epidemic of skin cancers," says Dr. Harvey Lui, head of the department of dermatology and skin science at the University of British Columbia. He says that if melanoma is detected early and treated, the survival rate is high. »

