

I'm Back!

For the ladies out there, let me come clean and say that I was one of those women who avoided strength training because 1) I was convinced that the only way to combat the frightening site of my large, dimpled butt was through aerobic exercise; and 2) I was convinced that strength training would cause my body to bulk up and I'd look like...well... a man. Then my marriage fell disastrously apart along with, what felt like, everything else in my life. The result? A 26LB weight gain, 15 different medications, and a numbing journey through depression. I didn't look like me, I didn't feel like me, and certainly wasn't thinking like me. I struggled through each day, very sadly cursing my existence, with just the right amount of energy to fuel my incessant bawling and self-pity.

The truth is that I repulsed myself and not just because I had emotionally eaten myself to an all-time excessive weight, but also because I had metamorphosed into one of life's pathetic victims. My behaviour suggested that life was eluding me. *Oh poor me!* Of course life wasn't eluding me. That thinking presupposes that life is just something that happens to you, when in fact life is something you create. I had just stopped creating.

When the light finally went on, I resolved that it was time to say good-bye to all that self-pity, and hello to just getting on with it. I was not staying a second longer in that hell that I had created for myself. I was determined to create a new reality.

I started with my weight simply because *fixing* my body seemed easier than *fixing* my broken spirit! Then I made a plan and set some goals. The first thing on my plan? To take some before photos of myself. Yuk! I didn't know when or how I'd use those photos, but I knew I would (and I have). At 5'2" I weighed in at a whopping personal high of 156 LBS and felt entirely unhealthy.

I set a weight loss goal of 1LB per week. I wasn't in a hurry to lose the weight, but I was in a desperate hurry to get back to living. I joined a gym, resumed a food preparation routine of three healthy meals a day, introduced vitamins to my diet; and started drinking about eighty ounces of water daily. That was it. No calorie counting, no eliminating any particular foods, no weight loss obsessive behaviour of any sort - no magical, instantaneous remedies - just common sense and perseverance.

Within six months, I had achieved my weight loss goal and was back to my usual 130 LBS. I was proud of the work I had achieved although I was a little dismayed when an attempt at one push-up resulted in an instant face-to-face encounter with the floor. Yes I had successfully lost weight, but while I could run five miles, I had no strength whatsoever. Hmmm.

What to do? Maintain the delusion that strength training would cause me to take on a male appearance, or change my thinking and actually venture outside my comfort zone. I opted for the latter. But where to start? Strength training was an entirely unknown phenomenon to me and I feared that my 42-year-old atrophied muscles weren't up to the task. Solution? I hired a trainer who helped me to understand this unknown world called *strength* and who was (and continues to be) a drillmaster at proper form.

My next goal? One push up.

It didn't take long before I started experiencing the benefits of strength training and before I managed my one push-up - about 2 months. In the 2.5 years that have passed since then, I have lost an additional 12 LBS, with my normal weight now hovering at about 118 LBS; I have a new found sense of energy; I can complete not just one push-up, but entire repeated sets of push-ups; and I have a much better understanding of food and its relationship to strength and weight. But the thing that continues to amaze me is not the weight loss per se, although I would never have imagined that strength training would actually contribute to weight loss, but that I have entirely transformed the shape of my body. And no, I don't look like a man! So now I strength train 5-6 days a week, and do aerobics only 2 or 3 times a week.

Then in June of 2006 I did three things that I could never have imagined myself doing in this lifetime. I joined a local bodybuilding association; I had professional photos taken wearing a...yes...micro-bikini (that was very well glued down by the way, and which I could never actually wear on the beach - don't let those models fool you); and I competed in my first International Natural Bodybuilding Federation (INBF) figure competition, which marked the first athletic endeavour of my entire 43-year-old life.

My next goal? One chin-up. And who knows? I may even enter my first fitness competition, which involves both a physique component and a gymnastics routine. Some have told me that at 44 I'm too old, but to their unsolicited discouragement I say (rephrased politely), "Horse poop!"

The bonus? Oddly enough, my newfound physical strength has helped rebuild my spiritual strength, because I now understand that limitations are a figment of my imagination. I'm not for a second suggesting that strength training is the cure to all my woes. I still have bad days, I still cry occasionally, and my fear demon still rears his ugly head from time-to-



time. In fact, as I write this, I'm in Canada for five weeks trying to digest a major and unexpected turn of events in my life, which terrifies me. BUT, I finally understand that no matter how many times I fall, no matter how dark the hours may get, it's not about mistakes, it's about lessons learned. In this case, I've learned that if I venture outside my comfort zone, who knows what great things might be waiting there for me.

Ladies, as cliché as it may sound, if I can do it, so can you. Regardless of your age or your fitness level, dig deep and find your motivation. Set *realistic* goals, confer with a doctor if you've led a fairly sedentary life, and commit to a strength training routine that is appropriate for you. And then - this is key - DO IT. There's a Michelangelo in you with chisel in hand ready to sculpt a masterpiece; but only you can give him the *strength* to create.

Oh...I forgot...I still have cellulite! But now I wear it well!

