



Alicia at 283 pounds

Alicia's Challenge: Overcoming the Weight, One Pound at a Time

By Melissa C. Navia 

Looking back, Alicia acknowledges that everything revolved around her weight, to a point where she felt helpless to live any other way. "It really is an addiction," she says. "Do you tell a drug addict to just stop doing drugs?" That is precisely what Alicia felt people were instruct-

ing her to do. Rather than being equipped with an effective arsenal to combat her struggle with food, she found herself fighting an uphill battle alone. The weight remained, and not only that, it got worse. Her life was negatively impacted in every way, from the types of clothes she wore to the places she went to the way people interacted with her. Even a night out at a Broadway show was an embarrassing hassle after Alicia realized she no longer fit comfortably into the seats. And going to the gym? Forget about it. "When you're heavy, you stay away from skinny girls," she laughs. "You don't want them to see you struggle." So Alicia gave into her weight. It had become the deciding factor in her life, and before she realized it, the pounds started accumulating. She silently acquiesced.

Until, of course, that visit to the doctor. "I snapped," Alicia admits. "It was a profound realization: 300 pounds. It's coming, I thought, and when it hits, where am I going?" Wife to Jeff and mother to Aidan, a beautiful 5-year-old boy, Alicia knew that confronting the weight was no longer just about her. She wanted to be a healthy and fit example for her husband, who was experiencing similar weight issues, and a positive role model for her son. "If I couldn't take charge of my health, what kind of lesson would that be?" she asks. "How could I be a role model for Aidan when I was choosing to pretend there wasn't a problem?" But as much as the two men in her life were counting on her, the decision ultimately rested with Alicia. Staring at the scale, she knew what she had to do: "I decided right there that I wasn't going to try to lose the weight...I *had* to lose the weight." Now it was just a matter of how exactly she was going to go about doing that.

Tuesday, August 11, 2009. It was an ordinary summer day, pretty unremarkable, probably very hot. For many, like Alicia Delano, it was also a workday that began much like any other: coffee, emails, meetings, errands. She even managed to rush to the doctor for a checkup on her lunch break. At the time, she thought nothing of it, but if you ask her today, Alicia will tell you exactly what happened at that appointment and long afterward. No, she didn't receive terrible news or a lecture from her physician. As it turned out, she was, surprisingly, relatively healthy. Why surprising? Because Alicia was 283 pounds. The attending nurse read the scale, jotted down the result, and moved on with the examination. Alicia, however, began to panic. She was almost 300 pounds—the heaviest she had ever been. Her bill of "health" was fleeting, and while the doctor's numbers couldn't see it, she knew it. It was a moment of realization, a rallying call to take back control of her weight, and she was determined to succeed. After all, her life depended on it.

"I was always the girl with just the pretty face," says Alicia, talking candidly about how she had been overweight and scrutinized for most of her life. "So many emotions contributed to my weight gain, but trying to take control only made it worse." Failed attempts at dieting began at the young age of twelve, and denial quickly became a way for Alicia to cope. "It was clear that I had quantity issues, but it was the only way I knew how to eat. Sometimes I would feel like if I ate another piece of chicken, I was going to turn into a chicken," jokes Alicia. "But I would do it anyway."

One woman's weight loss journey challenges, reinvigorates, and inspires all of us to demand better for ourselves and take back control of our lives.

Weary of traditional gyms and fully aware that her weight was going to require more than her own resolve, Alicia wanted a place that would empower her with all the tools she needed to lose the weight and keep it off for good. In October 2009, she found what she was looking for in a fitness center that emphasizes one-to-one fitness and nutrition. "I could tell this wasn't a regular gym," Alicia remembers. "They were looking at me, the person, not the weight, and they developed a program that was unique to my situation." From her very first session, she made a commitment to go "full turkey," an apt way of putting it considering that her journey began just as the holidays were getting underway. Alicia welcomed the added challenge.

More than a year later, the results speak for themselves: Alicia has lost 130 pounds and 27% of her body fat (and counting). "For anyone who wants to diet without exercise, or vice versa, it does not work!" she insists, attributing much of her success to an individualized approach centered on nutrition as much as fitness. Of course, she admits that it was incredibly tough, especially toward the beginning when she found herself crying at times because everything just hurt. Her strategy? "You have to focus on the little goals," she says. "The number on the scale, the way you feel that morning, the looser fit of your pants. It all contributes to the bigger picture, but you have to celebrate one small triumph at a time." And it always helps to have a friend join in on the celebrating. For Alicia, it was her husband, who has now lost more than 150 pounds of his own.

In every way, Alicia has become the role model she wanted to be for Aidan and a dynamic example of determination in action. Her incredible story has even paved the way for her to become the spokesperson for Long Island's Million Pound Challenge, a 12-week Health Media Group event where participants train, lose weight, eat right, and raise money for every pound

they shed. They are required to weigh in with Distinct Form, an in-home personal training program, for official pound tracking, and are invited to sign up for a free nutrition and fitness session similar to the one that helped make Alicia's weight issues a thing of the past.

But beyond just the numbers, the Challenge and Distinct Form trainers emphasize that the benefits of getting rid of excess weight are far more than just physical. Your overall health improves, and you become a changed person with a future less uncertain. "I do things now that my weight used to keep me from doing," says Alicia, acknowledging that there was so much she had resigned herself to just accepting because she didn't know any other way to live. "I now enjoy exercising. I understand portion control and what foods are right for my body. I have

energy that I never thought was possible." With a smile she adds, "I wear red now," a color once banned from her wardrobe for attracting too much unwanted attention. Alicia is excited to be able to get dressed now without reservations. That's a major accomplishment, especially when you consider that getting ready in the morning can be enough of a saga.

They say that losing weight requires a lifestyle change, and for many, that alone sounds terribly daunting, enough to ignore the issue for another day. Alicia asks you to reconsider. Her life did change, in every possible way, and she will never look back. Healthier, stronger, and more confident today than ever before, she looks forward to continuing her journey long after she has reached her goal weight. It has now become much more than that. "Alicia doesn't stand behind you anymore," she says beaming, "she stands next to you." Clearly, Alicia is a woman on a mission with a story to tell, friends to make, and changes to inspire. Will you join her?

The Challenge is Sponsored By:



Long Island's Million Pound Challenge will be kicked off on May 1, 2011, at the NAVEL Expo. The event is a Health Media Group original, created to inspire the community, promote health consciousness, and demonstrate the power of fitness in our lives. Participants are required to register at DistinctForm.com and enlist friends and family to sponsor them at \$1 per pound. The winner will take home half of the money raised, while the other half will be donated to Strength for Life, a not-

for-profit organization that develops fitness programs for cancer patients during their recovery process. For more information about this year's event please visit www.DistinctForm.com.