

race

this is not a



by Joanne Bonanno

I WAS ONE OF THOSE PATIENTS WHO RESEARCHED BARIATRIC SURGERY FOR A YEAR BEFORE EVEN MAKING AN ATTEMPT TO CONTACT A PHYSICIAN.

I read everything on the subject that I could get into my hands, in addition to watching everything that was reported on TV. My story is textbook stuff. I was the queen of dieting.

Lose 50 gain back 55, lose 100 gain back 110, etc., etc. As long as I was very rigid with my diet du jour, I was fine. The moment I gave in to “cheating,” it was all down hill. I was never one for “cheating” a little bit and getting right back on track. It was either all or nothing with me.

I used to secretly pray that they would develop a pill that you could take at night, then wake up the next morning and simply roll up the excess fat in the sheets, and it would be over. I was 52, my health was deteriorating, and I used to think that when my doctors told me to lose weight, it was a shortcut for them to blame everything that was wrong with me on my weight. In the world of Bariatrics I was considered a lightweight. On my 5'2" small frame the 273 pounds I was carrying around was crippling me. MY QUALITY OF LIFE WAS ZIPPO!

I developed criteria for myself when I started interviewing surgeons. I wanted a surgeon who performed the surgery similar to the Fobi pouch. For some reason, that silastic ring was something I had to have. I wanted a surgeon who had an aftercare program, and I wanted a surgeon who had a support group attached to his practice. March of 2002, I met David Greenbaum, MD. Instantly, upon meeting him, I was overwhelmingly filled with hope. I made the decision to have the surgery, and I made myself the promise that since this would be my last chance to succeed with weight loss, I would do whatever it took to be successful. I WAS NOT going to fail this time.

My surgery was August 4, 2002. The surgery itself was not nearly as painful as I thought it was going to be, and I made it through without any significant complications. I did develop an infection on my incision line, but that was it. My two week follow-up visit afforded me a 20 pound weight loss. The third week after surgery I hit my first plateau. How could it be? I was barely eating anything, still on pureed food and I truly had no appetite, yet for the next three whole weeks I didn't lose another pound. I wasn't drinking protein because I didn't like it. I wasn't drinking water the way it was prescribed, I just couldn't do it. Other than moving from one chair to the next, I wasn't exercising at all. I realize NOW that my body actually went into starvation mode and just would not let me those pounds. But I also was not keeping that promise to myself... the one I made that said I would be willing to do ANYTHING to make this surgery a success. Once I became more diligent with drinking more fluids, and consuming 60-90 grams of



protein a day, the weight started to come off again. However, I was three months out of surgery and still had not lost 50 pounds when it seemed like people who had the surgery the same time as me were losing a lot quicker. Then a bariatric buddy said to me, “This is not a race, do what

you are supposed to do, the weight will come off.” That statement kind of, sort of, made me feel better, but needless to say I was becoming very discouraged.

I'm one of those people who dump easily. The jury is still out for me whether this is a blessing in disguise or a curse. But grazing on a couple of cookies here and there never did bother me. In hindsight, I'm wondering if those holiday butter cookies (that were so easy to grab throughout the day) were the reason for my second plateau. By December of 2002, I still had lost only 50 pounds. One friend was down 70, and she was only 10 pounds more than I was to start with, and she had her surgery just a week before me... so it wasn't as though I was comparing myself with others that were quite a bit larger. Another

friend started out almost three months after me and had already lost 40. Here I was four months out of surgery with only a 50 pound weight loss. And once again, I reminded myself of the promise I made to me, that I would do anything and everything I could to be successful this time. I wasn't diligent about taking my protein, I was grazing instead of planning meals, and I did find a way to grab two or three cookies at a time throughout the day and didn't think it would matter much (I was counting on that malabsorption issue to take care of those calories). It was winter after all, and drinking all the fluid in

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the middle of winter was something I just couldn't do. Was I keeping my promise...? NO!

By February of 2003, on my six-month anniversary, I was down 56 pounds and whined to everyone I knew. And I mean I whined. And again, someone reminded me, this was not a race, and the surgery worked differently for everyone. I took a very personal inventory of my behavior. This couldn't be my fault entirely, could it? I decided to throw away the diet mentality. I knew my life would never be the same after surgery, and I remembered my promise. I was not being very faithful to that promise. I started drinking three protein shakes a day; I actually decided what it is I felt like eating before I prepared a meal. I bought water in 16 ounce bottles and put four in the refrigerator every day, and made sure that I drank all four every day. I started walking two miles a day. Some will argue that walking is not enough, but it's what I can do, so it's what I do. Finally, on the day of my first year anniversary, I reached that all so important 100 pound benchmark. My initial goal was 120 lbs, and my surgeon told me to expect approximately 70% of my excess weight to go, but I wanted to lose 120. It just wasn't happening for me at as quickly as I expected. I can say at this point, for the most part, I was really in control and did all the things I promised myself I would do. However, it took me a whole year after that first 100 pounds to lose an additional 40. But it's history. I did it. It's gone. I went from a size 24 to a size 6 petite, I went from 273 pounds to 132. It took me two years, but I did it!

Since my surgery, I have taken on the responsibility of facilitating our support group. I am a patient, not a medical professional by any stretch of the term, and I am not in a position to be giving advice on why some of us

simply lose at a slower rate than others. I only know what I personally had to do to come to terms with this issue. And from what I can understand, rarely is there an explanation as to why some people lose more rapidly than others, it's just usually a case of calories in equal calories out. Our metabolisms are different, and even with that being said, individually our personal metabolism doesn't react the same at all times.

My heart actually aches when I hear new patients complaining about not losing as quickly as others. And I want them to really "get" this is not a race. Perhaps I can quell the fear about the issue that I know so well, by sharing my experience.

We all go into this surgery knowing it will change our lives forever. But did I really accept this as a fact? What I learned from my experience over the last two years is to embrace those changes and accept them. I really understand now that my pouch is a tool, and the responsibility for my success or failure is mine. My surgeon can give me a list of do's and don'ts ad infinitum, but once I leave that office, I'm on my own. I am constantly reminding myself of the promise I made to myself before I had the surgery. "I WILL DO ANYTHING I NEED TO DO TO MAKE THIS SURGERY WORK." And, last but not least, I learned that if I treat my pouch with respect, it will serve me well.

Who knows if in the future my resolve will be as strong. However, in hindsight I did all that worrying and whining for nothing. I was just a slow loser. I lost 140 pounds, something that would have been impossible to do without having the surgery. If I can do it, anyone can. It's not a race it is a lifelong commitment to a lifestyle change. So what was my hurry? I actually "get it" now! ■

rules

Joanne's



This is a list of some of the rules I impose on myself:

- I gave up my diet mentality. (Gone Forever.) I simply have a new lifestyle now.
- I have cut back my coffee intake to two cups a day. (Sometimes, I will give in and have one at night.)
- I drink 64 ounces of water daily. (This has become an easy task.)
- I never, EVER, drink anything carbonated.
- I take my vitamins religiously. (Also easy.)
- I walk 2 miles a day. (Sometimes I talk myself into why I can't, but do it anyway.)
- I drink at least two protein drinks a day; sometimes I get the third one in, sometimes I don't. (This really does help with those cravings for sweets)
- I really do "try" to be conscious of grazing. (This is easier said than done.)
- I never drink with my meals. (This was difficult in the beginning, but I got used to it.)
- I weigh myself once every other week, on my surgeon's scale at the same time of day. If the scale tips 135 pounds, I take inventory of my recent eating behavior.
- I limit myself to one "Carb" day a week, which means that I allow myself to eat whatever I want, one day a week; so if I want potato chips for dinner I eat potato chips. This is usually a Saturday. (Sometimes I take it; most times I don't even want it.) Some may consider this a "cheat" day, but I gave up my diet mentality!
- I eat until I am full and then stop regardless of what is left on my plate.
- I attend support group meetings faithfully. Helping new patients and giving away what I have learned really does help me stay on track.