

# "I did it for the health of it"

*By Angela Farley*



I've struggled with my weight all of my life. Throughout school, I was bothered by the fact that I was overweight and it greatly impacted my high school years. I never had a date, went to any dances or to my prom. I didn't have many friends.

As a teenager and young adult, I tried several fad diets - Cambridge Diet, grapefruit diet, diet pills, laxatives, diuretics, cabbage soup diet, etc. Many I concocted on my own and always managed to lose weight. However, once I returned to my unhealthy eating habits I would immediately gain back all the weight I lost and more.

In my mid-thirties, after numerous years of physical, emotion and mental defeat, I finally decided to try a "structured" means to lose weight and it began with finding something I could do the rest of my life.

At my highest, I weighed 278 lbs. By utilizing the tools listed below, I was able to lose more than 130 pounds and have kept that off for five years. At times it's difficult to maintain my weight-loss, but it was more difficult living my life morbidly obese.

## "I Am Not on a Diet"

The difference between losing weight this time and other times is that I realize I must do this the rest of my life. All my other "diets" were temporary things that I did until I lost weight. I am not on a "diet;" I am living a healthy lifestyle. This involves exercising regularly as well as added lifestyle activity such as taking the stairs whenever possible, mowing the lawn myself, running nearby errands on foot, etc.

I think all of these things are a recipe for success: eating sensibly, exercise 4-6 days a week, drinking water, an active lifestyle, recording my food intake and group support.

My source of group support is Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) Club, Inc. I think that group support is vitally important to long-term weight-loss success. Group support is also critically important to my continued success. It means I have a group of people I can turn to when I am presented with challenges and struggles. There are people that believe in me when I don't believe in myself. Someone is always there with pats on the back when I do well but, more importantly, they are there with hugs when I'm not doing well.

When I was nearing 100 pounds lost, one of my friends from my TOPS chapter arranged a “card shower” for me. Throughout that week, I received 65 cards from my TOPS friends encouraging me to stay on track and letting me know they were behind me. Cards were scattered everywhere; on the kitchen table to remind me to make good choices when I was preparing my meals; in the bathroom when I got ready for work as a positive way to start the day; on my desk to help me resist the challenges such as vending machines and donuts at the office; and even in my car to help me avoid temptations on the road.

It wasn't a matter of me not wanting to let them down as much as it was me wanting to make them proud! I did reach my 100 pound milestone that week and waiting for me was a large banner that they placed across the room that announced my success!

### *It's All about Support*

The friend that arranged the card shower joined TOPS about the same time I did, and we were both about the same weight. After suffering a bit of a backslide, she is still on her health and wellness journey. However, to this day she is my biggest supporter. She's the person I'm able to turn to when I'm struggling, and she's always there for me. Someone that can be so supportive and encouraging despite their own trials and tribulations is a true friend and she's the epitome of a TOPS pal. That's the essence of TOPS!

It helps to surround yourself with people that are seeking the same outcome as you – a healthier, happier life! Whether male or female, young or old, any race or religion... we're all fighting the same battle. It's one we must continue to fight day in and day out. We might not win every battle, but if we never give up we can win the war on obesity!

In January of 2008, I was selected to be a TOPS Area Captain. The duties of the Area Captain are primarily to assist the chapters in a defined area with membership or general questions, field calls and emails from prospective members, participate in chapter events and visit the chapters throughout the year.

Being an Area Captain allows me to get personally involved in the lives of other TOPS members. I would love to see them succeed in their health and wellness goals and will do whatever possible to see that happen. I try to make myself readily

available via email and phone, and I believe the members in my area recognize that I'm as committed to seeing them achieve their goals as I was to reaching my own.

Whenever I visit a chapter, I always tell them that you never hear of someone that's morbidly obese dying of natural causes. It's always due to complications related to their weight: high blood pressure, heart attacks, some cancers, diabetes. It breaks my heart the number of lives that will be cut short because of obesity and the number of lives it will impact. People don't realize that their lives touch many other people. Think of the child that doesn't go to the park because their parents aren't as mobile as they should be; the parents that have to bury a child that died too young; the children that don't meet their grandparents because they died before their birth; or the kids that aren't learning healthy habits because their parents don't practice them. The list is truly endless.

### *A Different Life*

If my life prior to 2001 (when I joined TOPS) was compared to my life today, people would probably believe that they were peering into the lives of two different people. The difference is remarkable. I went from wearing a size 28 to a size 8 or 10, and from a 3X shirt to a medium. When I began exercising, I completed a mile in 1 1/4 hours. My normal pace now is 4 miles or more per hour, and I'm planning on running a half marathon later this year. A few years ago, I went bike riding for the first time in many years. My

husband and I now average more than 200 miles each summer and biked as many as 50 miles on a single bike-riding trip.

My cholesterol, which was once more than 230, is now below 200. I have a resting heart rate in the 50's; at one time it was as high as 92. I once dreaded doctor appointments because I was sure eventually I was going to get the dreaded news that I had diabetes, but now I look forward to them because I'm anxious to see how my health has improved from one year to the next.

By far, the greatest change in my life has been my degree of happiness. While I'm still faced with the everyday pressures of life, they are much easier to deal with because I'm a much happier person. I'm also more open and will now say “Hi!” or “Have a good day!” to a stranger. Someone asked me once if people treat me differently since I've lost weight. My initial response was, yes. Then I realized, after self-examination, that a happier person is more approachable than someone that appears unhappy.

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TAKE OFF POUNDS SENSIBLY

A lot of people are under the misconception that I've overcome my food addiction. I haven't overcome it; I've learned to manage it. There are still backyard barbecues, buffets at weddings and showers, cake and ice cream at birthday parties and bagels and donuts at work. But, I've learned to never go to a party hungry, always have a healthy snack available and that everything can be enjoyed in moderation. The first bite of cake tastes the same as the last bite, so eating the whole cake is no longer necessary. The first spoonful of ice cream has the same flavor as the last, so a small bowl can satisfy me as much as the whole container. A single-serving bag of potato chips accompanied by a diet soda brings the same gratification as a large bag of chips with a regular soda.

It's hard work – there's no question about that! But, the trade-off between long-term health and happiness outweighs the short-term enjoyment derived from food. And, when all else fails, my TOPS friends are there to pick me up, dust me off and set me back on the right track!

### *The Ultimate Reward*

Some of the ways that other people's lives are affected aren't immediately apparent. Other times, they are. In October of 2006, I was found to be a donor match for a friend needing a kidney. I was able to donate in August of 2007. I knew that losing weight would prolong my life. I never dreamt it would help me to prolong the life of another.

*If you would like to speak with Angela Farley about her weight-loss journey or the TOPS organization, please email [amfarleytopsac@aol.com](mailto:amfarleytopsac@aol.com).*