

Life

FAMILY • HEALTH TIPS • FITNESS



Monday, March 26, 2007

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STRUGGLE AND SACRIFICE Boot Camp Participants Share Their Stories

By Tina Firetheets
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GREENSBORO — It hasn't been easy, this weight-loss thing.

The 32 participants of Ken Can-ion's Greatest Loss for Greatest Gain boot camp have made some sacrifices to reach their goals.

They've dragged themselves to the gym when they didn't feel like going, and there were a lot of times they didn't feel up to it — like early in the morning or after a long day at work.

They've traded fast-food burgers for turkey burgers on whole-grain buns. Ice cream for fat-free Jell-O. They've had to count crackers and think about why they overeat.

Canion turned down applicants he thought weren't ready to do what it takes to succeed.

"It's about changing your mind-set," Canion says.

Canion, a motivational speaker and author, gained national exposure last year as a contestant on the NEC reality show "The Biggest Loser." Now, he's trying to help others with his own weight-loss boot camp. The 12-week camp ends April 21. He hopes there will be others.

Meet some of the participants.

Karen Canton, 41

Canion's wife, Karen, hopes to lose about 50 pounds during the boot camp. Her biggest challenge so far? Battling her fast-food addiction.

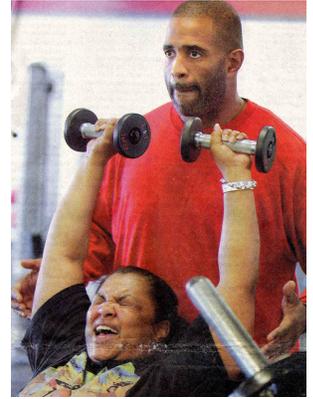
"I was a fast-food junkie. It was easy. It was greasy. And it was good," she says.

The first weeks of camp were hardest. It took every ounce of willpower she had to rive past the fast-food restaurants.

She'd call her husband on le cell phone: "Kenny, I'm n Summit Avenue. You need to talk me out of going to this drive-through."

Exercise was tough, too. Initially, she exercised while reading a magazine or chatting on the phone. She didn't even break a sweat. But then le started to see results. She ad more energy. She began to visualize herself in those size 12 jeans.

The program also has benefited Karen Canion professionally. She's a comedian, and she's had plenty to say about her "other" trainer, Ivor Buffong. The tough trainer never smiles during their sessions, Canion says she can be manipulative, but he's unmoved ' her pitiful complaints in e gym: "He is a



MOLLY BARTELS/News & Record
Karen Canion tries to eke out one more shoulder press during her workout with her husband, Ken, at SNAP Fitness in Greensboro. "As tired as I get working out, it actually gives me more energy," she said Greensboro Harris Teeter.

loving, God-d-fearing man. But I call him the devil because he puts me through hell.

"I tell him, 'Ivor, I think I'm going to pass out.' He says, 'Well go ahead and pass out, and when you get back up, give me 20.'

She gets one free day — day when she can eat whatever 3 wants. Recently, she drove to McDonald's, her mouth watering with anticipation. Then she drove right past it: "I saw those arches; then I saw Ivor."

Ronda Thornton-Jones, 32

Thornton-Jones was tired of gaining and losing weight. On New Year's Eve, she sat in a pew at Evangel Fellowship Church and listened to Ken Canion talk about weight loss and his boot camp. That night, she made up her mind to do it.

She wants to lose about 30 pounds during the camp and about 70 overall. Her journey has been a mental battle.

To do this, she needs to know that others believe in her. She needs to be pushed and encouraged.

There were times throughout the first week when she didn't think she'd make it.

"Then here comes Ken, who is a big ball of energy," Thorn-ton-Jones says. "He's pumped and 'Yee-ah! You can do it!'"

Canion often goes to the gym with his participants, cheering them on and sweating along with them.

He also counsels his participants periodically, checking their progress by telephone. Most of them should eat five to six meals daily, in addition to an exercise routine.

There also are Saturday meetings. The agenda is a surprise. It might be a shopping trip or a group dialogue session. Thornton-Jones doesn't like surprises. But that's why she's doing this, to step out of her comfort zone.

"You have to believe in yourself. You have to know that it is worth this effort, that it's your fight and you've got to do what you have to do to survive," she says. "If s literally the survival of the fittest."

Connie Bush, 40

She used to be naturally thin.

Connie and Tom Bush loved to hike. She was the one who treatments at Duke University Medical Center. Twice, the Bushes moved to Durham for his treatments.

Connie Bush put all of her energy into her job and husband. There simply wasn't any time left for exercise.

But last October, she left her job as a mortgage sales manager to devote more time to her husband. It was he who saw the ad for Canion's boot camp.

Connie Bush told Canion she couldn't join a gym. She needed to exercise at home in case her husband needed her. Canion helped her devise a workout plan.

She starts most days with an hour of cardio in a sunlit bonus room at home. There's an elliptical machine, StairMaster, treadmill, weight bench and exercise ball. She might pop in a

jazz CD and gaze out over the construction of new homes in her Summerfield neighborhood. Canion says Bush is one of the biggest losers of the camp so far. She has lost about 20 pounds.

Bush meticulously logs her meals in her boot camp journal. Her biggest challenge was learning to eat breakfast. She still hates the morning meal, but she does eat — oatmeal — as quickly as she .can. She also wasn't used to eating so often. The fact that she used to eat after 8 p.m. — rich, heavy meals — contributed to her weight gain.

Aside from the physical changes she's seen since her weight loss, Bush says the other boot campers also motivate her.

"I didn't want my after picture to look like pictures.... Then you feel like a failure," she says.

Ozella Spears, 58

She has lost about and more than 20 the start of the ca; weighed about 25, and she wants to 1 She says it's been because she could make excuses for not exercising.

Spears became after her son died in November. He and also was over says she used her as an excuse not to eat properly.

When she started the camp, Canion, the trainer participants were but unrelenting. She had to exercise..

Spears, who has been overweight since she was a teenager says she's tri ed Weight Watchers and other programs. She even underwent gastric bypass surgery in 2004 when she weighed about 400 pounds. Even after her surgery, Spears said she ate foods high in saturated fats—just less of them.

Now, she's eating more protein, fruits and vegetables.

And she even looks to her water aerobics classes. Canion sometimes shows up unannounced to make sure she's there. But she doesn't mind: "He's whoopin' and hollerin' ...It really m feel good."

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JOSEPH RODRIQUEZ/New & Record
Ozella Spears smiles after completing an exercise routine.