

One Choice

WHERE WILL YOUR NEXT DECISION LEAD YOU?

By Natasha A. Nassar

Cursed with a slow metabolism or perhaps just a weakness for all things chocolate, I found myself on one fad diet after another over the last 10 years. One month I ate nothing but cabbage soup, then next it was grapefruit, green tea, diet shakes and eventually expensive frozen meals. But after losing 30 pounds, several clumps of hair and a few friends while on my latest diet, I packed up my food log for good.

The end of my dieting era was marked by a period of rewards from which I had deprived myself over the past decade: a two-year period of rewards to be exact. My new regimen was not marked with restrictions on fat, calories, sugar

or carbohydrates. In fact, there was only one rule: Splurge every now and then. Unfortunately, during this time there were far more “nows” than there were “thens,” as I managed to indulge my way from a size six to a size 14. Even worse, at the age of 27, I had developed acid-reflux disease and insomnia.

I found myself stuck in a rut between a decade of dieting and years of binging. Neither appealed to me any longer, but I didn’t know where to turn. So I decided to pray for guidance.

Sure enough, a few weeks later I found an answer of sorts: “Right now you are one choice away from a new beginning.” I thought about >

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> the self-loathing I experienced as I looked at myself in the mirror, the exhaustion I battled every morning after another sleepless night and most importantly, the emptiness I felt after polishing off another pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. I needed to make a choice — something to usher in a new beginning. At that moment, I decided that I would run (and finish) a half-marathon.

Recalling my days as a member of the varsity cross-country team, I began my first day of training with an easy run around the block. Twelve minutes later, I was lying in the front yard, tears streaming down my face, wondering when one mile got so long. The next few runs ended in much the same way. Realizing that I would need a far more stringent training program if I wanted to finish 13 miles on my feet and not on a stretcher, those two ominous words uttered by my close friend just weeks before resonated in my mind . . . BOOT CAMP.

Convincing myself that law school and the bar examination had to be far worse than waking up at 5 a.m. to exercise, I decided to forego the two visitor classes. I boldly signed up for a one-month enlistment. Recalling my brief forays into Tae Bo, Pilates and Power Yoga, I figured Boot Camp would be a snap. Fifteen minutes into my first class, I realized just how little those past fitness endeavors had prepared me for the situation in which I found myself (and why I had actively avoided doing push-ups since the Reagan era).

For instance, until Boot Camp I was unaware of how much pain one can actually experience before the sun rises. I also learned that enduring this pain with a few of my closest friends somehow made it more tolerable. Although my first 60-minute class left me unable to sit, stand or walk for the

remainder of the day, the next morning I completed a two-mile run and managed to make several new friends along the way. Ready for another challenge (or too terrified to anger my drill sergeant) I headed back to class for the third day, which again left me unable to sit, stand or walk for hours.

Amazingly, Boot Camp quickly became a way of life — one in which my drill sergeant could point out to the class the striking resemblance between my “bicycle crunches” and a “dying cockroach” one day, and the next, cheer me on as I struggled to cross the finish line after completing my first 5K in almost 10 years. Somehow, it hooked me. When my first month's enlistment was up, I signed up for another. My family and most of my friends thought I was crazy to wake up at 5 every morning to exercise, but it had become my favorite part of the day.

It wasn't until I was relaxing on my front porch with a cup of coffee after finishing a particularly difficult morning at Boot Camp, that it occurred to me just how much that one choice changed my life. It wasn't just that the days of fad-diets, size 14 clothes, acid-reflux and insomnia were but a distant memory — it was far deeper than that. I realized for the first time in my adult life, I was truly happy with myself. Even though I wasn't back to my size six and had yet to finish a half-marathon, I finally had evolved into the disciplined, healthy and happy person that I longed to become.

I wasn't the only one who noticed the change. Friends and family commented on how much I had transformed. They all wanted to know my secret. I told them it was one small choice. So now the question is where will your next choice lead you? A new career? A new city? Or perhaps next to me — at Boot Camp tomorrow morning. ♣