

Training changed her life; now she works to do the same for others

Record-Journal (Meriden, CT) - Friday, August 10, 2012

Author: Kimberly Primicerio

MERIDEN - Esmeralda " **Annie** " O'Farrill was serious about losing weight. She walked into a fitness center with a picture of a female model she ripped out of a magazine. She handed it to the trainer and told him, "make me look like that." The trainer told O'Farrill he wanted to give her something that would last for the rest of her life. He warned her it wasn't going to be easy and it was going to be a lot of hard work. He wasn't going to take her money unless she was willing to put in the effort.

O'Farrill's decision to walk into the fitness center eight years ago changed her life. She was fed up being overweight. She had been hurt by people who made fun of her shape and called her names. O'Farrill, 37, wanted to get healthy, and she lost 60 pounds. Today, she is a personal trainer and instructor at the Meriden **YMCA** .

For three months, three times per week, after agreeing to put in the work, O'Farrill saw her trainer at Bally Total Fitness in New Haven. During her first session, O'Farrill said she thought she was going to die.

"I was drinking my sweat," O'Farrill said.

When O'Farrill was 16 years old, she came to Meriden from Puerto Rico. She didn't know any English. Passing her classes to graduate from Maloney High School was one of the hardest things she ever had to do in her life, she said.

"I didn't know the language," O'Farrill said. "They put me in the bilingual program."

When she read aloud in class, she skipped words so she didn't have to pronounce the difficult English verbs and nouns. She did her best to learn key points and subjects and was able to graduate.

Still not having a firm grasp on English, she remembers being the last person to throw her cap into the air on graduation night.

"I was just following everyone else," O'Farrill said.

Eventually, O'Farrill had to better learn English. She had a hard time figuring out what people were asking for while working at McDonald's and Burger King. Her friends didn't want to speak in Spanish all the time and she didn't want to be left out.

"I started learning from my environment," O'Farrill said.

While working at the fast food restaurants, she went to school to become a certified nursing assistant. She got an apartment and started to see herself gaining weight. Her mother moved from Puerto Rico to live with her and told O'Farrill when she was in her 20s she started gaining weight, too. "She said 'you're going to be just like me,'" O'Farrill said. "I didn't want to believe her."

But O'Farrill's mother was right. O'Farrill, a 4-foot, 11-inch woman in her 20s, was

gaining weight fast. She was 170 pounds and decided she would start going to the Meriden **YMCA** .

In aerobic classes, O'Farrill said she would last just 15 minutes before she walked out.

"I was frustrated," she said. "I wasn't healthy."

O'Farrill got pregnant with her daughter, Thalia. After giving birth she went back to the **YMCA** classes, and though she was then able to finish the class, the weight still wasn't coming off, she said. Her nursing friends told her she was chubby and had an ugly shape. O'Farrill said she didn't feel good about herself.

It wasn't until O'Farrill went on vacation that she started taking her weight loss seriously. Someone thought she was pregnant, when she wasn't.

"I laughed it off, but deep inside it hurt," she said.

At that point, O'Farrill sought out help. She went to Bally and starting seeing a trainer.

The first 30 days with her trainer were the hardest, O'Farrill said. She separated herself from her family and friends, who had unhealthy habits. It was just she and her daughter.

By the second month of training, O'Farrill saw results.

"I saw definition in my shoulder," she said. "I started screaming. I had the motivation to keep going."

She also started taking more CNA college courses at Middlesex Community College. In science classes, O'Farrill was making connections about healthy eating and weight. O'Farrill said she threw away all the unhealthy food in her house and made a journal of everything she was eating.

In six months, O'Farrill lost 60 pounds.

"I felt good," she said.

O'Farrill went back to the **YMCA** and the staff was impressed by her weight loss. She was asked to become a trainer. Today, when O'Farrill isn't working as a CNA, she is a personal trainer for a number of people. In the afternoons, she trains **YMCA** members and instructs several well attended classes at the health center.

"People wonder how I do it," O'Farrill said. "I like what I do."

O'Farrill has made connections and relationships with her clients. Julia Kovach, a Meriden native, would go to the **YMCA** constantly to work out. She started taking some of O'Farrill's classes and enjoyed seeing her instructor so excited to exercise. Kovach, 26, decided she wanted O'Farrill to become her personal trainer.

"I was just out of college and I wanted to lose weight and get toned," Kovach said.

"She pushed me. She told me what to eat and the habits I had to start."

Kovach said unlike some trainers, O'Farrill understands what it's like to deal with weight issues and have to work hard to keep weight off.

"She works hard, she gets it," Kovach said.

When O'Farrill was done training Kovach, the duo formed a friendship. They started working out together. In June, they completed a running series called the Warrior Dash.

"Having a partner or friend to exercise with really helps," Kovach said.

Even though O'Farrill helps her clients and friends reach their goals, they help her get to where she wants to be as well. "We motivate each other," said O'Farrill, who hopes to enter a different marathon or race each year.

In the meantime, O'Farrill said she will continue to surround herself with positive people, stay up to date on the latest exercise trends and help people live healthy lifestyles.