

## K. Lusk

### Before....

If you asked me right now, “Why do you go to Purdy’s Wharf gym?” I would answer that it is typically the best part of my week. If you had asked me nine months ago, I would have said something very different.

I call myself a career dieter, joining programs, sometimes repeatedly hoping to see a different result each time. I counted points, kept food diaries, used food cards with pictures on them, counted calories (on paper, then online), tried to figure it out on my own, spoke to dietitians, worked with three trainers and the list goes on. Many things that worked for others, I could not make work for me. I was doing nothing, resigned to just being happy with who I was.

But at thirty-four years old, I had reached the point where I could not walk from the bus stop to my office without experiencing pain in my legs, back and feet. Walking anywhere took forever and hurt so much I became dependant on my car. I had difficulty tying my shoes and climbing the stairs in my own home (there are two flights). And I began to have difficulty breathing. I was uncomfortable and unhappy, my body told me so every day. So when a friend recommended Purdy’s Wharf gym, noting his great experience, I said yes but I wasn’t looking forward to it. I had a shoddy track record.



Before I start, you should know that I live with a clumsiness and stubbornness that inevitably trips me up, especially when it comes to self-oriented tasks. It is a mostly entertaining and bumpy path that I am on. But I know now that it is the right one.

### Then.....

As with all great adventures, I had lots of energy and motivation at the beginning. I was on a mission, so I did/tried to do everything that came my way. It was challenging and fun and slightly ill-informed. The first thing I learned was that your work-out should be customized to you because we are not all created the same and have different needs. But I was doing the work and having fun so I kept going. *I didn’t need help.*

I used the equipment, sometimes without asking how, including what I like to call the “death machine.” It is really a leg curl machine but when you use that sucker wrong, you end up with a fully bruised chest, stomach, and legs. I had to hand it to me; I was purple but not really hurting so I kept on. ☺ *Seriously....without asking for help.* I maintained my focus and did whatever I could. Then, I tweaked my wrist and my shoulder...and kept going until I pulled a groin muscle. *You remember I said stubborn, right?*

The adventure was over in a matter of weeks. The muscle pull was bad enough that it impacted both hips so badly that I was walking and/or limping most days. It required six weeks of physiotherapy. I was immediately frustrated that I could not keep up with my “good” work. I felt defeated. The pain I was going through was not as bad as knowing that I could not keep going to the gym. My rhythm was broken and I knew that going back would be really hard. History was not on my side and I had made up my mind that I had lost the fight before it had even started.

I needed help but I didn’t know what kind of help I needed. So, I stalled. And like many people who need help, I did nothing. I stayed home. What changed the picture for me, was an email from the Purdy’s staff asking how I was doing and offering some advice. It encouraged me to go back to the gym and get started again. So I did. I went to the gym twice and I was not feeling great about it. When asked, once again, “How I was doing? How are things going?” I was honest and said I did not want to be there. I did not know what I was supposed to be doing. I was lost and the motivation from the start of my great adventure was gone.

That is when Greg recommended a trainer, someone to provide some guidance and motivation. I said yes but my mind was screaming, “*Don’t do it*”. My past experience with trainers was not that great. I was conditioned to be told what was best for me and the best way to get there with no alternatives or options. They boxed me into categories: a certain place on the BMI chart = equals a proper height, and the “perfect” weight + the amount of time to get there. It was the same at every gym, weight-loss program, and up to that point, every trainer too. I fully expected this trainer to be the same and that I would fail again.

“Why did you do it then?” you ask. *I wasn’t ready to give up on myself*. So I said yes and I started to work with Darryl. Darryl stumped me on day one with a question and a stability ball. *Seriously* ☺

I have never been asked, at a gym or by a trainer, what I wanted to get out of it. I usually got the “look” and the “weight loss pamphlet”. So when he asked the question, I had to think about it and this was the beginning of a mental shift. I had to figure out what was really important to me and then Darryl was going to help me work on it. There was no box BUT there was a stability ball and I was afraid of it. *Seriously* ☺

I was of the mindset that big people did not sit on small or fragile things. I had no trust and did not want to be embarrassed. That stability ball was huge and all I could think of was just how loud a noise it could possibly make if it exploded. I was not going to sit on that thing...it makes me laugh now just how much I wanted to run away at that moment. Darryl standing there with a giant blue ball, waiting for me to sit down and me waiting to meet my doom. I didn’t run. I accepted my fate and hoped that everything would work out. And I sat down.

Fear of a stability ball may seem foolish to some but it was my first important moment on my journey back to the gym. It meant believing that while it might break, I had to pick myself back up and keep going. I would also learn that there would be others to help me up off the floor if I needed it. And I learned that I needed to trust.

#### **And now.....**

I have been going to Purdy’s Wharf gym for nine months (longer and more consistently than I ever have in my life). I believe this is largely due to the fact that the staff and my trainer are not typical in what they do. As previously mentioned, they care to ask how you are doing, if you

need help, and they follow-up...not after years and years of continuous membership but from day one. I believe a big part of who they are revolves around building relationships with clients, so I am not just a membership number; I am part of the community. It sounds cheesy but for the first time in my life, I go to the gym without questioning why I am there, because I belong there. They are committed to my personal investment and helping me to succeed and because of that I have accumulated a number of awesome moments that I carry with me each day.

My favorites of these moments/discoveries include:

- The mental shift. I can't exactly remember when it happened but I look forward to going to the gym, understanding that it does more for me than just a thirty minute workout. I am surprised and happy to say it is a necessary part of my routine that helps me balance work and life.
- The stress relief part is totally true. Working out turns my bad day into a good one, almost instantly.
- My challenge is no longer getting to the gym. It is where I want to be. I have off days just like everyone else but my default is now the gym rather than the couch.
- I have conquered mountains (okay...sort of). I have successfully climbed all 22 flights of stairs (up and down) of Purdy's Tower II, something I never thought possible (okay...never thought of at all). I did it twice, 45 minutes the first time, and 22 minutes the second time. Automatic results with hard work and the support of my trainer.
- I discovered my strength, physical and mental, and I am getting stronger every day.
- Health-wise, I am great. I can walk anywhere I want and for long distances, up hills, even did a custom-obstacle course at the gym. I am more flexible and have tons of energy.
- Food-wise, I still have challenges, especially sugar, but this does not scare me. I chose to take on and completed a one-week sugar-free challenge (courtesy of my trainer) and did an additional six weeks. I know the positives of making better food choices and how good it feels.
- My relationship with the stability ball is great. There have been no breaks or explosions but if they come, I will be ready for it.
- My journey will be long and this no longer bothers me at all. It is not about how much and how long...it's about continuing on and being worth it. This one took a really long time to understand on my part.

Finally, I am a work in progress and I no longer focus on the end of the road. The positives of present far outweigh a finish line I cannot see... *YET*. I have learned that there are a lot of great bonuses along the way though. I no longer think of health in terms of points or food check boxes, black and white, and rarely right and wrong. I make decisions knowing the implications and I am willing to do the work to validate them.

I no longer have pain when I walk a straight line, a steep hill, or twenty-two flights of stairs. I am a size smaller but do not get on a scale because I know that focus does not lend itself to success for me. This is not a numbers game. Instead I am making changes in my eating habits at my own pace, focusing on every success, big or small. I look forward to trying new things at the gym and conquering new challenges. I plan to enjoy the benefits, tangible and not. And as I continue on my journey, my true success is that I am now happy with *ME* and continuing in that vein is the most important part of my journey. Because that is where the magic happens.