

BODY

MIND

SPIRIT

## Auburn Valley YMCA Success Story : By Jackie Christensen

December 28, 2008 was my “wake up call.” I was transported to the hospital after a car accident and was unable to obtain a CT scan because the medical staff was concerned about my weight and thought I may break the CT table. I was humiliated and *in that moment, something inside of me died*. I refused the procedure, signed the waivers and checked myself out of the hospital, never telling anyone about my experience. I had no idea at the time that this experience was God’s life saving measure for me; and the beginning of my **journey to freedom**.



I stuffed the pain, continued to eat and didn’t take action until I drove by a sign a few months later advertising the YMCA Biggest Winner program and knew I had to do it. Clearly, my behavior was out of control. I was living in a perpetual cycle of guilt and devastating self disgust and hate. I knew what the source of my pain was but didn’t know how to overcome it. I joined the program at 390 pounds with a bad attitude, bitter, resentful, scared and desperate. It was a great thing for me and offered me the accountability that I needed. I was resistant to exercise and was afraid and embarrassed to step into a gym. I took baby steps, joined the group workouts with my Biggest Winner team and slowly began to put into place a reasonable fitness program (and fell in love with Zumba)!

At the same time, I joined a “Journey to Freedom” small group and found out how to work through some underlying issues that were causing my unhealthy behavior and hindering me from living a life of hope, health and happiness. **I discovered that change is a process; it’s not about perfection** and that it wasn’t just my body that needed to heal. I found self-respect and I am learning every day about seeing myself and my life through God’s eyes, not through my own self-critical and negative thoughts. When I got a hold of this truth, it changed me, from the inside out. I knew that it was a forever kind of change when I walked into the kitchen one morning and my husband looked at me like he hadn’t seen me in 15 years, threw his arms out into the air promptly exclaimed *“You’re here, it’s like... where have you have been all these years...you’re alive!!”*

Accountability for me is found in a variety of ways. I journal my food and exercise daily, no excuses. I have shimmied, cumbia’d and shaken off **more than 100 pounds** and have recently become a YMCA Zumba instructor. I am intentional about living life out loud, sharing my goals and aspirations with others and inviting them to journey with me. I continually pursue balance and find my role as a “Journey to Freedom” facilitator rewarding and continually relevant in this journey of a lifetime. My eighty year old grandpa Vernon once told me to “lighten up”...he was wise. I was always so serious... now I walk through life laughing, having fun and living again, no matter the circumstances around me! **I can see her now, the person God created me to be, my life is full of joy and I’m walking in total peace, one day at a time, just waiting for time (and my body) to catch up.**

**Jackie teaches Zumba on Thursdays from 4:30-5:30pm and Sundays from 2:00-3:00pm**  
If you are interested in finding out more about Journey to Freedom small groups, contact Amy Jahn at [ajahn@seattleyymca.org](mailto:ajahn@seattleyymca.org) or 253-833-2770.