

Our animals may peck at our plates, scarf our scraps, sleep on our satin sheets, and pilfer our pillows, but we love them. As pets become a treasured part of our families, their welfare takes on increasing importance. Thousands of dollars might be offered to locate a lost pet or nurse it back to health, yet when our kids start fighting in the car we are ready to drop them off at the side of the road.

How can we say no to our pets when they look at us with those adoring eyes? Should we limit the amount of prescriptions and pampering—or do whatever it takes to keep them happy? They say pets lower our cholesterol and our blood pressure. If they save our health *and* our sanity, surely we can't put a price on that.

Want Fries with That?—The Fight for Fitness

If losing weight were an Olympic sport, I'd fare worse than the Jamaican bobsled team. Even a child on Christmas morning shows more self-restraint. I am like the woman in the picture that reads "I was on a diet for two weeks and all I lost was two weeks."

When my sons began wondering if they were getting a new brother or sister, I decided to take action. Didn't I owe it to my family to look and feel my best? Was it time to check out the weight loss centers? I conceal my middle-aged spread quite well under strategically layered outfits, but I was self-conscious about entering a room full of "foodies" at the nearest weight loss center.

Am I chubby enough?

In my quest to beat the statistic of adding one pound a year after marriage, I shied away from the group therapy approach and weigh-ins of Weightwatchers and headed to the nearest Jenny Craig outlet. Here they pile you up with enough frozen food varieties to make you desperate for a home-cooked meal. The consultant's bosom practically exploded out of her low-cut sweater, as she leaned over to describe the prepared meal options in mouth-watering terms.



I tactfully asked, “Are you still seeing results from the Jenny Craig system?”

“After my baby was born,” she replied evasively.

I resisted the urge to ask how old the baby was now, since she obviously had packed on a few extra calories since then. This was hardly an inspiring testimonial for weight loss maintenance. I resorted to other means.

Why do we find it so difficult to stay motivated in our exercise routines, and justify it by claiming that the pounds will climb right back on?

To answer this question, I delved into the complex subject of motivation, looking to various athletes for inspiration. I attended a Leukemia Team and Training Information session and listened to inspirational tales of overweight and ill people conquering triathlons, marathons, and century rides. What keeps the average person going? What possesses a swimmer to plunge in the pool at five in the morning? What inspires a woman to train for a marathon on a treadmill in Alaska? How does a person handle the inevitable setbacks that make it so much more inviting to throw in the towel?

I questioned Olympic athletes. Few people display the stick-to-it spirit of the former University of Texas athlete I talked to named Shaun Jordan. I had read his story in a *Sports Illustrated for Kids* book; he was called “Scrawn” by his varsity swim coach and benched the entire first year until he bulked up. Finally he had a chance to compete in a big college meet at Berkeley. He perched in the starting blocks, peeled off his final layer of protection against pelting rain, and dove into the choppy water. As he broke the surface, his bathing suit slid in the opposing direction, coming to a stop between his knees and his ankles.

In dogged determination “the man in white” paddled on, to the cheers of the announcer, classmates, and the competing team. Shaun not only helped his team rally from last to second place in the meet, he went on to win gold at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul and the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona.

We don’t all have Olympic drive, but we can hop in the pool. Secretly, I eye the YMCA pool deck hoping the lanes are too overcrowded or some kid has had a bathroom emergency forcing everyone to evacuate. But once I set a goal, I can usually crawl out of my cozy warm clothes and paddle at a faster pace than the senior water aerobics class.

Inspired by a thirty-six-year-old Leukemia Team in Training athlete I met named Louie Bonpua, I began preparing for my first triathlon in 2001. At the height of his leukemia treatment—when he could barely stagger from his bathroom to the living room couch—Louie decided he would one day enter the San Francisco Alcatraz Triathlon. Preferring to be a participant than an honoree, Louie went on to complete six triathlons in one year and an Ironman competition (112-mile bike ride, 2.4-mile swim, and 26-mile run) within the last months of his life. His final victory was carrying the Olympic Torch on its way to Salt Lake City, after which he lapsed into a coma and never awakened.

If Louie could accomplish superhuman feats, then surely I could complete a little triathlon. Feeling sporty in my high-top Speedo, I sprinted into the lake, thrusting my thighs high and thinking of Louie. I was soon surrounded by swarms of thrashing arms. A few brave souls resorted to the backstroke in an effort to stay afloat; it was all I could do to avoid being whacked in the head.

After pulling my biking shorts on over my bathing suit, I grabbed my bike from a sea of wheels and eagerly approached the twenty-five mile biking portion. Initially I kept a safe but chatting distance with the cyclist peddling next to me, but must have slowed her down too much, for she sighed at her stop watch and lunged ahead.

During the running portion I staggered in the noonday heat as temperatures soared into the high nineties. My ego plummeted faster than a present down the chimney as I watched two Santa-haired ladies