



## MISSION STORIES

FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

To the team at Wheeler Regional YMCA:

A long time ago in a galaxy not so far away I was in incredible shape. I remember walking onto my first college football practice and out working the seniors on the team. I had spent a summer of intense training and was more prepared than the vets. However, time and life move on, and it wouldn't be long before I was out of school.

I started a career that involved a lot of hard work, with the promise of large rewards in return. I would fly out on a Monday and come back the following Friday. Some days I would be up at 2am get to sleep until 6am the following day. If I took a break for lunch it was because my flight had a layover or somebody missed an appointment and I had time to kill. I relied on sports bars to give me the primary source of my nutrition and running from terminal to terminal to give me the cardio workout I needed. Eventually I took myself off the road and started a family. Although I was not traveling anymore, my work habits stayed with me- wake up before the rooster and go to bed when the day changes. I began to equate being put on "maintenance" medications just a side effect of getting older. I found myself falling asleep at random times throughout the day. I was in my 20's and believed it had to be narcolepsy. More doctor's visits and a few sleep studies later it turned out that I had sleep apnea. I was put on a pressurized breathing assistance machine before my 27th birthday. I continued paying attention to my career until February of 2011. Without warning I was laid off from a job that I had dedicated 10 years of my life to. 10 years of focusing on my social life and my financial status abruptly ended.



I spent the first months of my newly appointed free time scrambling to find a new job, until one day I was getting ready to serve my daughter her lunch. I noticed that the baseboard molding near her table had drips of paint on it. It was such an odd thing to notice, and I was pretty sure I had never seen it before that day. I figured I would get my putty knife, scrape it off, and then use a cleaner to clear it off. While my daughter ate her lunch I went downstairs to my toolbox, got my putty knife out, and walked back upstairs. I grabbed some Windex and some paper towels to clean up any residue that the putty knife couldn't get. I walked back upstairs, plopped myself down next to the drip and proceeded to scrape and scrub and clean and sweat and curse at that damned spot until it was gone. Out of breath and covered in sweat I sat back to admire my work when I heard a tiny voice behind me. My daughter weighed in on my work by saying, Looks pretty, Daddy. Thank you, sweetheart - sometimes it takes a little elbow grease to make things better. Daddy, are you ok? Yes sweetie, that just took a lot out of me. My response to her

rang inside my head. I took a moment to catch my breath to realize I was catching my breath from scrubbing out a paint spot on baseboard molding.

I was angry. I was hurt. I was in terrible shape both physically and psychologically. I had continued on a path of destruction when I had been given the time to get off of it. I thought to myself, Why didn't my friends say anything to me when this was happening? Where was my fiancé when I was doing this to myself? The answer was simple: It was not their place. In the years of conducting investigations I have heard one response over and over from people being questioned why they did not come forward sooner. It isn't my place to say something. I have said it myself in various situations. I couldn't blame anybody else for not pointing it out to me. I should have noticed it on my own. It wasn't like there weren't any hints thrown my way. Every time I answered a phone call from my mother-in-law she would ask if I had just woke up. I always attributed this to her playing the stereotypical role of mother-in-law before I realized that it was because I was always breathing heavy. My daughter had even given my hints that completely went over my head. Numerous times while playing at the park she would run over to me and tell me to get some water. I always thought it was cute and thought how amazing she is to tell me to go get water. It was because she was concerned that her father was turning a bright shade of red and sweating up a storm when he was pushing her on the swings. I decided that if I was going to get out of this I had to do it myself, but I didn't have any idea how I was going to do it.

One morning my fiancé and I dropped our daughter off at daycare. Instead of going out to our usual Denny's or Friendly's breakfast I told her I wanted to check out the Wheeler YMCA. I had been speaking to one of my old colleagues and he had made the recommendation because of the childcare facilities. We decided to pop in check it out for ourselves. We were greeted by Robyn and promptly given a tour of the facilities. I paid close attention to the people who were working out there. I didn't just see the typical gym rats that I used to encounter while training for various sports, nor did I see the cardio crusaders that join ranks on every machine in the place. There was a balance of people there and although everyone was working hard, you got the impression that they were *happy* to be there. We continued our tour and watched how the staff greeted us and other members. We then sat down to fill out the application paperwork and questionnaire. I vividly remember the questions. How often did I go outside with my daughter? Never. Do I let my daughter explore on her own outside? No, we sit outside of Dairy Queen every now and then. Initially, it was odd that the questions were focused on what I was doing with my family. I read on and understood that the message being conveyed to me was that the Y was here to help me find a healthy balance with my health and my family. We finished our paperwork, got our membership cards, and left.

The very next morning we started working towards a healthier family. I spent time in the fitness center, hitting the weights and running on the machines. My fiancé used the pool facilities and my daughter was being entertained by the finest child watch staff I have had the pleasure of encountering. I was sent a welcome email from Uchenaya and told to stop on by and say hi. I continued to put in hour-long workouts as the weeks went on, and before I knew it I began to get noticed by name each time I came to the gym. I always heard a good morning or have a

great workout when I went in. It was my third day there when I met an older gentleman that was a San Diego Chargers fan, which are extremely hard to find in this area of the country. I had met many different people who genuinely took interest in what I was doing by the end of my first week. I was told about upcoming contests and different programs for my family. I was given honest feedback of what members thought about the programs.

Shortly after starting, I decided to take advantage of some of the programs that the Y offers. I signed up my daughter for the parent/child swimming lessons and decided to take on the "Lose to Win" Challenge. Tim was our swimming instructor and really took the time to teach both Dallas and myself. The swimming lessons were the first formal activity that I had ever signed my daughter up for. He was patient, encouraging, and everything you would expect from a teacher. In three short weeks my daughter was moving comfortably around the pool, and was very confident in the water.

The "Lose to Win" Challenge was something that I was nervous about going through. I knew that despite putting in time at the fitness center, I was in for a challenge. My first workout with April was brutal. I accentuate the word "brutal" because there really needs to be an emphasis on what I was not prepared for. Exercises that I would have done with my eyes closed were extremely difficult. I found myself dripping with sweat, breathing heavily, and wanting to give up. I may have thought it, but I couldn't let myself walk away. April knew how to get that extra bit from us, and despite hearing the groans from yours truly, she always kept the team motivated. I soon noticed my teammates at the fitness center putting their time in. Levels on the treadmill or elliptical that I wouldn't dream of attempting without an EMT standing nearby became my warm-up routine. I would even get a fist bump or a high five from my teammates as we saw each other working out. I began to look forward to the workouts and, with the help of the nutritional exercises; I changed the way I look at my diet.

Six weeks ago I was over 400 pounds. I lost over 10% of that during the "Lose to Win" Challenge. I doubled the amount of pushups and sit-ups I could do at the first (brutal) workout. My t-shirts and pants are starting to fit better, and much to the dismay of my fiancé- my wedding band no longer fits my finger (it is too large). The team at the Y has helped me not only improve my health, but strengthen the bond that I have with my family. I can not thank them enough for their support as I continue to work towards my goal of achieving a balanced life.

Thank You,  
Harley Poulin