



Healthy Living

Healthy living in action—the courage to change

By guest columnist and Girl Scout Alumna Katie Walthall Mehnert

I joined Girls Scouts in the late 1980s. It was a great outlet for me as I had a tumultuous childhood as a young teen. I loved my time as a Girl Scout. It taught me

a lot about being resilient, independent and creative. However, I fell out of Girl Scouts and a lot of things when my parents divorced at 15. I instead spent time caring for my 2 younger sisters. The stress of becoming an adult, albeit at a young age, led me to have a massive love affair with food. As a native Cajun foodie from New Orleans who was taught to “live large” and “clean my plate,” I would eat what I want, when I want and how much I wanted. Food didn’t talk back to me or judge me – it became my new outlet and back then, we had a great relationship.

I left for college in the 1990s and my “Freshman 15” became my “Freshmen 50.” And while I was a bright young lady with a lot of intelligence and wit, my social relationships began to suffer because my relationship with food continued to consume my life. People made jokes and were unkind to me. At that time it was easy to make excuses for my excessive eating.

At the peak of my weight battle, I was nearly 275 pounds and 5’3”. I was unhappy, obese, and physically ill. When you have more than 100 pounds to lose, life seems a little helpless. Just shy of 30, I received a huge wake up call. I was shopping at Kroger when I saw an obese woman carried out of the grocery store after having a heart attack – she died. In her shopping cart, she left a small child to grow up in this world without a mom. It was then I knew I needed to change.

So what did I do? I discovered, connected and took action... that’s what Girls Scouts do! In 2005, I went on a campaign to lose all of the weight and begin a new life. I found every resource I could to help me – doctors, nutritionists and a trainer. I put everything on hold and rid myself of the things holding me back – food, negative people and a poor self-esteem. Not only did I lose the weight – 150 pounds, but I’ve adjusted to a new way of healthy living. I’m married now and have my own daughter. I run marathons to keep in shape and have a full time corporate job in health and safety where I coach leaders on behavioral change – a job I’d never planned to take just a few years ago! I recently refocused my energy on how I want to give back to the community in a way that helps my own child build courage, confidence and character. This reflection has led me back to the Girl Scouts. It’s amazing how the Girl Scout Promise grounds us all to what matters the most.

Healthy living was an easy choice. It took me a while to discover the life I was missing. Once I connected with resources, the hardest part was taking action consistently so I never became complacent to fall back into old ways of thinking and living.

Change is never easy but Girls Scouts give us a great framework to think about how we will better something. In this year, the Year of the Girl, ask yourself:

- Do you know what you want to change?
- Do you have the resources you need to help you?
- Do you have a solid plan that’s sustainable and keeps you accountable?

The Time is Now

What a great year it is to be a girl, and what a greater year it is to be a Girl Scout! The Year of the Girl is about embracing the opportunity we have to develop future generations of leaders that understand the interconnectedness of the global community. “Girl Scouts will understand that they matter. And when they dream their future, they see a world of shared leadership: where the values of courage, confidence, and character really do make the world a better place,” says GSUSA National President Connie L. Lindsey.

Discover

Did you know? The United States leads the world in a growing problem with obesity. The CDC reports that about one-third of U.S. adults (33.8%) are obese and approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2–19 years are obese. Texas is in the top 3 in the nation leading in these statistics.

Connect and Take Action

The Healthy Living Program encourages girls, parents and leaders to participate with hands on, girl friendly strategies to identify, develop and sustain habits for a healthy lifestyle. Visit www.gssjc.org for idea and events.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Walthall Mehnert is a Behavioral Change Leader in Health at Shell Oil. She is an advocate for developing others and has a passion for her community by serving previously on the board of directors with the Junior League of Houston. Katie has a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications from Louisiana State University and enjoys marathon running. She is a busy mom to 1-year old Ally Rees, a future Girl Scout. She and her husband Mark live in West Houston. Contact: Katie.Mehnert@shell.com

