

Losing TO WIN

IN DROPPING 100 POUNDS AND BECOMING A SPOKESPERSON FOR FITNESS, MELANIE LANDANO DISCOVERED HER BIGGEST STRENGTH COMES FROM WITHIN.

by Liz Donovan

WHEN YOU WALK INTO MELANIE LANDANO'S Spin class, you better be ready to *work*. At Maxfit in Tenaflly, the effervescent 37-year-old challenges her students to set fitness goals and “be surprised at what they’re capable of.” Last year Landano, who is also a personal trainer at Oxygen Fitness in Tenaflly, motivated 12 students to train with her for a 100-mile bike ride. Despite the fact that some of them didn’t even own a bike when training began, all 12 completed the ride. This year, Melanie plans to outdo herself by more than doubling that distance in a total of three events. It’s hard to believe that less than a decade ago, this model of vitality was 100 pounds overweight.

Melanie spent most of her young adulthood working at amusement parks, where she indulged in the carefree fair lifestyle, drinking soda and snacking on funnel cake and popcorn. By the time she was 30 years old, she weighed 237 pounds but was unfazed by the extra weight. “My family is overweight, and I have high self-esteem, so being heavy-set never bothered me,” she says. But then came the wake-up

call: In 1999, her father died of a heart attack, and later that year, she almost collapsed onstage while working at Disney World. When her doctor told her that her obesity contributed to her near-collapse, she realized she was on the same path as her father. “It was the first time anyone used ‘obese’ to describe me,” she says. “I knew I had to do something, or I was going to die.”



Let music move you! Visit njlhb.com/health for Melanie's favorite workout tunes.

She hung up her mouse ears and returned home to Brooklyn, where shortly thereafter, her mother passed away from cancer. Determined to live a healthier life, Melanie took a job in customer service at Bally Total Fitness — even though she had never entered a gym before. There, the personal trainers encouraged her to lose weight and helped her develop a healthy, balanced diet. “Until then, I thought a diet was just eating carrots and celery,” she

says. “I learned that I needed to eat protein and whole grains, too.” As the weight began to slowly drop off, she added exercise to her regimen, taking up Spinning and weight training. Before she knew it, Landano had dropped from a size 18 to a size 4.

Once the executives at Bally got wind of Melanie’s achievement, they offered her a position as a national spokesperson. What followed was a whirlwind of radio and television appearances, including on *The View*, where she shared her success story. “People do better with real advice,” she explains. “They want to know how I did it and kept the weight off. The answer is: I changed my lifestyle.” Now, Landano strives to encourage others to change their lifestyles, too. “I didn’t set out to lose 100 pounds; I set out to be healthier,” she says. “I learned to take care of myself because I wanted to live longer than my parents did. *

For more about Melanie and to see before-and-after pictures, visit melanielandano.com.



PHOTOS BY JUPITER (TOP), DAVID KAPTEIN/PHOTOGRAPHY (BOTTOM)