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(Photo courtesy of Andrea Baptiste)

Hollywood and hard work brought Andrea Baptiste back to reality

By Bridgit Brown

Two years ago, Andrea Baptiste experienced a life-changing moment.

"I was visiting my friend who was a pediatrician," she says, "and there was a scale in her office ... so I stepped on it."

It had been nearly four years since the last time she weighed herself. Then, the number was a nice 140 pounds.

But time had passed a little too quickly.

"I thought I had gained maybe 10 or 15, but when I saw my weight, I nearly had a heart attack!" she says.

The scale tipped at a painful 215 pounds.

"I knew I had hit rock bottom at that point," says Baptiste, who ironically had worked as a personal trainer and holds a degree in exercise science from Northeastern University.

"I had taught health and wellness for years," she says, "but I stopped taking care of myself. And if you're on a weight loss regime, you have to get on the scale to account for what's going on and where you are.

"I never gave gaining weight any thought, but life happens and now I realize that I was very depressed, and eating had become my solace."

Denial played a major part. Baptiste says that she knew what was going on with her weight, but found ways to ignore the problem.



Andrea Baptiste weighed 215 pounds before she signed up to be one of the first contestants on the reality television show "The Biggest Loser." By the end of filming — a three-month period packed with workouts, hikes, jogs and healthy meals — she had lost 65 pounds and started a new chapter in her life.

"I knew, and that explains why I stopped wearing shorts, and why I stopped going out as much as I typically would," she says. "I even stopped walking by mirrors and doing things that I [normally] would do."

For Baptiste, a bad relationship finally ended, and with it went her self-confidence. Baptiste admits that she simply did not want to deal with the heartache.

After getting off the scale that day, she had a panic attack in the reception area of her friend's office.

"The children were crowded around me and asking their parents what was going on," she recalls. "I was curled up on the floor, screaming, 'Jesus! Help me.' I was a hot mess."

Once she had calmed down, Baptiste got into her car and drove away, having what she calls "a deep conversation with the Lord."

Given her educational background and experience as a personal trainer, she knew what to do. The problem was actually doing it.

Her answer came the next day while listening to the radio as she drove in to work. She heard an advertisement about a casting call for the reality television show "The Biggest Loser."

"Do you need a catalyst to jumpstart yourself to wellness?" the announcer asked. Baptiste says she felt like he was talking to her.

Still, though, the idea of going on a national stage seemed a bit too much. Later that evening, she had forgotten all about the show. But as fate would have it, Baptiste was reading a book, and as she turned a page, an old photograph of herself on the beach in a two-piece swimsuit fell into her lap.

"That was it," she says. "I got up and got into my car and I drove downtown to the bar where the call was taking place."

The long line of people competing for the spot dismayed her. Frustrated, she found a seat at the bar and ordered a Sprite. A man sat next to her and politely asked what she was doing. She told him that she just didn't have the patience to wait in a long line for something that could potentially be very embarrassing.

That man turned out to be the casting director for the show.

"He told me that I really needed to be on 'The Biggest Loser,'" she says.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Baptiste says being on "The Biggest Loser" was no easy task. At first, she saw the show's three-month filming stint as a glamorous Hollywood vacation, packing up her makeup and dressy clothes. The reality was quite different — she worked out an average of 16 hours per day, never wore makeup and had to keep a scarf on her head to keep her hair tamed.

"There was no relaxing for three months," she says. "My average workout days included getting up at 6 in the morning and running for an hour. Then Bob [Harper] the trainer would come and we would walk for another hour."

Things were just getting started.

"Then coaches would come and we would all work out, and then after that we would eat," Baptiste continues. "Then I would swim for a couple of hours or we would go on a hike for a couple of hours. It was nonstop. No joke."

The work paid off. Baptiste lost 39 pounds during her time on the show and has kept her weight down since. She says she has promised herself that she will never go back to the way she was.

More important, she says, she now understands that maintaining a healthy body weight is about exercising as well as keeping healthy social relationships.

"When I returned back home from the show, I was the outgoing 'Drea that I loved and missed," she says. "But 99 percent of the people that I thought were my friends were not happy about my success. I realize that they were content with me being in the position that I was in before I had gone on [the show]. So I

have had to purge a lot of friends because they were too happy feeding into my negative moments. It's just so necessary to self-preserve and take care of you."

Fate has presented Baptiste with a loving fiancé and a new job as the executive director of Healthworks Fitness Center, a nonprofit organization specifically focused on meeting the fitness needs of children and women in the Codman Square neighborhood of Dorchester. Nowadays, she's building her success on her own self-confidence. □

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