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“How I got active? Baby steps!”

When it came to exercise, writer **CHERYL KRAMER KAYE** was definitely what you'd call a slow starter. Here's what finally got her to take the plunge.

THE WORD LAZY DOES NOT EVEN BEGIN TO DO ME justice. I take the elevator to my second-floor apartment every day. I have, more than once, hailed a cab to go five blocks. One of my favorite things about having kids is that they'll fetch me my shoes or my seltzer.

You wouldn't know it to meet me: I have the kind of personality people call “bubbly,” and I face life with an enthusiastic smile. Emotionally, I'm very high energy, but if I'm required to physically move, I look for a work-around. I used to say, only half-jokingly, that I have so much energy because I don't waste it exercising. But now, at long last, I've finally tapped into what makes working out actually work for me. Only took me 30 years on my couch to figure it out!

The funny thing is, I was super active as a kid, participating in every after-school activity imaginable—dance, gymnastics, swimming, soccer, softball, cheerleading. Puberty slowed me down a bit, thanks to D-cup boobs that seemed to arrive overnight. But I didn't go into full sloth-mode until college. My suburban Philly campus was small enough that you

Turn to p. 66 for more →

could get to your classes and the dining halls in under 3,000 steps (some days I didn't even make it to class). And nightly cheesesteak runs made my curves a whole lot curvier.

After graduation, I just couldn't find a good enough reason to exert myself. I made a few lame attempts at going to the gym, largely to lose weight. Each time I gave up pretty quickly. When I fell in love with a man who needs to exercise to relieve stress, I sort of tried, but I couldn't relate. My stress-relief comes from sleeping ... or sex ... or getting a massage. Pretty much anything I can do lying down. So during our courtship, I matched this metabolism machine of a man bite for bite but not step for step, and by the time he proposed, I was the heaviest I'd ever been. I wanted to lose weight for our wedding, which I managed to do by writing down everything I ate. But after I had twin boys, Ben and Jacob, journaling meals was replaced by journaling poop and sleep schedules. My weight fluctuated until I joined WW and the pounds slowly but surely came off. Great, but exercise was still a foreign concept—except on vacation.

Every year, for one week, I'd visit Rancho La Puerta, a fitness resort in Mexico. I was active four or five hours a day—dancing, hiking, water aerobics, strength training, you name it—and I'd reward myself each evening with a spa treatment or two. Muscle memory would kick in and I'd feel like a dancer, a swimmer, an athlete again. But at the end of each visit, I'd invariably think, "Phew, that's enough exercise for this year."

Fast-forward to a camp reunion my whole family went to a few years ago, where we set off on a group hike up a



local mountain. It was tiny—an easy uphill walk when I'd first tackled it at the age of 8—and Ben really wanted to go with me. Ten minutes in, I was huffing, puffing, and lagging behind. When I stopped to catch my breath, Ben turned back to me and said, "You can do it, Mommy!" My heart broke a little. I realized I was failing my sweet little boy by letting myself become so weak. How would I be able to keep up with him and his brother as they grew stronger and faster? Reaching the peak—dead last—only showed me how far I'd fallen. I was beet-red, but resolved: It was time to get in shape to keep up with my kids.

I wish I could say that I came right home and joined a gym. I didn't. Of course, I already had a gym membership, which continued to go unused. The next spring, I was helping Jacob learn to ride a bike. Of course, he wanted me

to run alongside as he pedaled so I could steady him. All I could think was No! No, no, no, no! But I did it, and felt thrilled to be a part of this major kid milestone.

The next day, my body ached everywhere and you know I went and had a massage. But then, the day after, I grabbed a swimsuit, took a cab to the gym (baby steps, right?), bought a swim cap and some overpriced

At the end of a week at a fitness resort, I'd think "Whew! That's enough exercise for this year."

goggles in the shop, and hopped into the pool. Swimming laps, I rationalized, wouldn't be so bad: I'd be horizontal, after all. I swam for 20 minutes, stopped a jillion times, and felt like Michael freaking Phelps.

Here's the thing: I'm a

MY WHY

I want to be able to keep up as my kids Ben (below left) and Jacob (right) grow stronger and faster.



hedonist at heart, so I absolutely need an exercise routine that feels good once I get started. Swimming fits the bill. Now you'll find me in the pool three or four days a week for about 40 minutes, stopping between laps only when my goggles leak or my swim cap slips. Once a week I take an Aqua Boot Camp class that has me leaping like a dancer and jumping like a cheerleader (oh, the joys of buoyancy!)—all things that remind me of the fun ways I moved as a kid.

More than any workout, though, it's the time I spend with my boys that reconnects me to a feeling of physical power and freedom. I'll never be a gung-ho exerciser, but

when I find myself literally chasing them around our apartment, playing a round of bedroom basketball (sorry, downstairs neighbors!), or running after them on their Rollerblades, I am reminded why I move my body, and why I can't stop now. ❧