

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Woman saves her own life by determined weight loss

By Patti Jares
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Victory is truly sweet, and for Wittmann resident Kathy Langley, it is saving her life.

Kathy accepted a second place award this month at the TOPS State Recognition Day ceremony for the most weight loss in her division for the State of Arizona. She was overwhelmed with pride, and the realization that two years ago she faced certain death from weight-related illnesses. She was 400 pounds.

Both of her grown children, April (Carrillo) and James stood in the audience, applauding her achievement.

"When I saw them it took everything not to tear up, I was fighting a lump in my throat," she said. "It touched my heart they were so proud of me."

It was the culmination of a two-year journey. Thus far, she has lost a total of 133 pounds with the help of her family, her faith in God, and TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly), a weight-loss support group.

When Kathy walked through the doors of the Surprise TOPS support group, she was desperate to lose weight. Her doctor had recently confirmed her greatest fear, giving her less than three years to live if she remained so dangerously overweight.

At 400 pounds, Kathy feared death everyday. Both of her parents had died young from obesity-related illnesses – her father at 52 and her mother at 36 – and Kathy's health was

deteriorating. With 12 to 14 different medications daily, she suffered from high blood pressure, high cholesterol and deteriorating cartilage in her knees. But it was the diagnosis of uterine cancer that gave Kathy the wake up call. After determining she was too obese for surgery, she knew it was time to seek help.

Ruling out a gastric bypass, Kathy researched various weight-loss methods and liked what she saw in the TOPS organization. She gathered her courage and attended a meeting.

"I waddled in and could barely make it to the front table," recalled Kathy. "I was petrified – I knew I was going to be the largest person there, but I knew the alternative."

As Kathy sat through that first meeting, instead of finger pointing and gasps, there was kindness and encouragement. The leader told Kathy, "We're here for you."

"I finally found a safe place," she said.

One of the biggest changes in Kathy's life was conquering her fear of leaving her house. Because of her obesity, people made comments loud enough for Kathy to hear, and their disgusted expressions were painful to see.

"People are really harsh out there – and not just the kids," she admitted sadly. "I figured I was everybody's eyesore so I just stayed home; I became a prisoner in my own house. I was tired of being shunned."

Today, Kathy is her chapter's leader, weighing 267 pounds and still losing. She has eliminated all but five of her medications. She is no longer afraid to go out of her house, and is gaining confidence daily. Her cancer is in complete remission.

With daily prayer and support from TOPS and her family, Kathy makes good food choices, and even when she makes an occasional bad choice she has learned to pick herself up and move for-



Photo by Patti Jares

Kathy Langley, holding a before-TOPS photo, when she weighed 400 pounds.

ward. April and James continue to encourage her, telling her how proud they are of their mother, how pretty she is and how great she looks. Kathy is beginning to believe it.

"I have such a great support

group," she acknowledged. "I've learned that I'm going to keep going even if I gain during a week. I have to keep going, and holding myself accountable. That's what's going to see me through, and so far it has."