



## **“You Have Saved Your Life!”**

I sat uncomfortably on the doctor’s couch in the little smock they give you, waiting to talk to a stranger about my health. “You have high blood pressure and are pre diabetic. If you don’t get your weight under control you will not see your daughter graduate. I will give you a year to see what you can do; at that point we are going to need to talk surgery.” I broke down at the thought of not seeing Aria graduate or my son, Bennett, getting married. It took me several minutes to compose myself. After that terrifying conversation on that drizzly February morning in 2010, I went to a drive-thru and ordered two double cheeseburgers and a large Coke. I had lost 40 lbs. on my own by eating salad over the course of a month in preparation for my doctor visit. At my largest I was over 390 pounds. Sitting in that doctor’s office I was 354 lbs., but I had no confidence, no energy, I slept poorly, I got winded after a flight of stairs. I had crossed my fingers walking in that I had done enough to improve my health. After receiving my test results, I knew it was not enough. I was depressed, and ready to give up. I was tired of trying and tired of failing. All I wanted was to go back to that drive thru and get another couple of burgers. I walked in the door and my wife immediately knew I was down. “That bad?” she asked. “Worse” was all I could say. After a hug and a kiss we sat in silence for several minutes. She had no words. I had no words. I went through the next week devouring everything in sight.

Luckily, two things happened. The following week, my wife’s friend Rachael began to talk about the Farrell’s eXtreme Bodyshaping program. She talked about how hard it was and how rewarding. She had amazing results and relished her accomplishment. I laughed at the thought of me doing kickboxing. I couldn’t even walk down my driveway to check my mail without breaking a sweat! Thankfully, Rachael had planted the seed in my mind. The second thing that happened was my wife, Erin, received a sizeable bonus from her employers. She decided she wanted us to use the bonus to improve our “quality of life.” She had always needed very thick glasses, so she chose to get Lasik. She asked me what I was going to do to better myself. I had decided it was time for ... guitar lessons! Seriously, this is how I was thinking at the time. I was killing myself with food, but thought that guitar lessons would improve my quality of life! Erin looked at me with a strange expression, but said it was my choice. Luckily, I was driving home from work one day and I saw the Farrell’s banner at the Ashworth and 60<sup>th</sup> St. location with 2010 winner Merit S.’s picture on it. I actually stopped in the parking lot. I did a double take. I saw a before picture that reminded me of myself. A person trapped in a body that acted as a prison, keeping them from living their life to the fullest. I saw her

after picture. Her smile on her after picture highlighted the difference from her before picture. I had never met her, but I saw kinship in the sadness of her before picture. I wanted a smile and confident stance like her after picture. If she could do it, I would do it! I would ignore my insecurities and excuses. I would be the man my son, daughter, and wife needed me to be. I went to the door determined to sign up on the spot. I pulled the door ... and they were closed. I was so sure, that I set my phone alarm to remind me. I titled the reminder "The First Day of the Rest of Your Life." I came back after 4:30 and met Jesse and Colleen, two of the most enthusiastic people I have ever met. "You are going to succeed at this, I have a great feeling!" Colleen assured me. "We have lots of big guys do really well in the program," Jesse began. "You get what you put in. Work hard and you will get the results." I handed them my money and made the choice that not only would I get through the program, I would follow it to the letter, never cheat myself and learn everything I could. I would do the hard work Jesse talked about.

Farrell's instilled in me two great benefits to help change my life. The first was information. I grew up in a single parent home in a housing project in Pennsylvania; my mother struggled to get food on the table, let alone nutritious food. My mother worked long hours, contributing to unhealthy meal choices. I only knew two ways to eat – either fare like a full frozen pizza, doughnuts, macaroni and cheese, etc. -- or "diet" (salad, salad, and salad.) I could never keep this diet going; any weight lost on the diet would immediately return when I returned to old habits. Farrell's changed my relationship with food. Food is a fuel for my body to help me punch, jump, and kick. I am more reflective now. If I am unhappy, I go on a run and make a plan instead of buying a pint of ice cream. If I want to celebrate, I talk with friends instead of gorging on pizza. As a child, I was terribly inactive and that grew worse as I grew older. Before Farrell's, physical activity was a frustrating chore. It felt like all eyes were on me, and everyone was laughing. It is hard to get off the couch and get moving.

The second gift Farrell's gave me was the network of support, enthusiasm, and praise. I have made some relationships that will be life-long with people with similar goals and struggles. The personalized attention from my coach Sara has continued to this day. She seems as happy to see me successful as I am! Whether it is Allison asking me to run after bands, Lauren asking me to throw a Frisbee, Jason giving me tips on resistance ("band up, that was too easy!"), or Jesse giving me 12 hours' notice to run a 5-mile obstacle course, I have found friends who push me. Their support and the support of the staff and excellent instructors helped push me into gear.

After a while, I replaced the pain with new feelings, pride and enthusiasm. Suddenly, I was one of those encouraging people. The weight began to fly away as my confidence began to soar. At work, people were calling me an inspiration and started asking me for help on their own transformations! At Farrell's, I began to coach! I was fulfilling my promise to family and myself. The biggest surprise was that it was easy. Farrell's is not a diet and exercise regimen, it is a system that helped me find strengths buried deep inside me. Farrell's taught me how to transform my life and find confidence and worth in myself.

My wife joined, my best friend joined, his wife joined, casual acquaintances joined and suddenly old friends and new friends were starting their own transformations. I finished a 5-mile run! I can go anywhere and do anything I want. I found the confidence to apply for a job and move my career forward. I lost 134 lbs. in my year at Farrell's. I went from a size 52 pants to a size 31. The doctor was thrilled! "Do you know how often I get to remove a prescription for high blood pressure? I don't think I have ever removed an obesity diagnosis! You are a healthy BMI and you have saved your life. I should get a picture of you for my wall to show people how it is done!" After leaving the office elated, I drove right by that drive thru without slowing down. Farrell's has done so much for me, but the biggest success is seeing my 13-year-old son proudly wear the Farrell's shirt he got for helping with testing. He is very excited to join the Farrell's Teen program this summer. I am giving him the tools to be healthy along with his mother and I. Farrell's helped me transform into the dad he needed to break generational obesity and bad habits. My Farrell's transformation isn't just a personal one. My entire family has been transformed! From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for that.

*Joel Jones, Farrell's eXtreme Bodyshaping 2012 National Challenge Winner*