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Julie Hadden

## THE BIGGEST LOSER'S BIGGEST WINNER!

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# Worth the

**FIT FAMILY**  
Julie with her husband,  
Mike, and their sons,  
Noah (left) and Jaxon



# WEIGHT

## TV's *The Biggest Loser* helped this contestant and suburban mom drop the pounds. Something else helped her keep them off

By JULIE HADDEN, JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA



**I TOOK** A DEEP BREATH and pushed the dumbbells up from my chest. My arms shook uncontrollably and I felt like I'd break in two. I signed up for this, I reminded myself, when I became a contestant on *The Biggest Loser*—four months away from my family, suffering through the most intense workouts and dieting I'd ever done, competing with 17 others to lose the most weight. I knew it would be a challenge, but here it was, my first week, and already I was cracking under the strain. Quickly, I brought my arms back down and let the weights fall to the ground with a crash. "It's too heavy," I gasped. "I can't do it."

Jillian, my trainer, glared at me. "Why are you here, Julie?"

"To lose weight," I answered.

She shook her head. "Get out of my gym," she snapped.

"What, why?"

"Don't come back until you

can tell me why you're *really* here?"

I trudged back to my room, wiping the tears from my eyes. *God, what's the right answer?* It seemed like all my life, when it came to losing weight, I only knew the wrong ones.

That's how I'd ended up 5 foot 2, 218 pounds, at age 34. A few months earlier I'd been in my kitchen when my friend Melissa called. "You'll never guess who's in town," she said. "*The Biggest Loser*. They're holding auditions." Melissa and I were both addicted to the show, but for different reasons. Melissa was thin—she just watched for entertainment's sake. For me, watching those people go through such an intense weight-loss program—and succeed—was like watching an impossible dream.

As out of reach as having another child, something my husband, Mike, and I had been talking about. The doctor told us that pregnancy would be too risky at my weight and

KELLY LAJUKE; RIGHT: PETE MCARTHUR/VEER; INSET: TRAE PATTON/NBC PHOTO BANK

with my existing health conditions. We considered adoption, but I doubted I'd even be able to handle raising another kid. Our Noah was a rambunctious six-year-old. I didn't have the energy to keep up with him. At the playground, I'd sit swathed in my baggy black clothes, watching him from afar. I'd grab fast food for dinner, too tired to cook. When I did find time in the kitchen, I usually baked chocolate chip cookies—hardly healthy (but my favorite!). My weight had gotten so out of hand I refused to go to my husband's company Christmas party for the past five years. Mike had a picture on his desk from our wedding day, the last time I could remember being thin. I didn't want to face the embarrassment of hearing his coworkers ask him, "What happened to your wife?"

I said goodbye to Melissa and went to the mirror—one of several half mirrors we had in the house, which hid the reflection of my full figure. What had happened to Mike's wife? Noah's mom? All that was left was a worthless failure. *The Biggest Loser? This could be my last chance*, I thought.

I went to the auditions and made it on the show. Our first challenge was a race across California's Mojave Desert. First two contestants to get to the trainers Bob and Kim would get to choose their weight-loss teammates. Those not picked would have to go home—and lose weight without the show's help. *It must be a hundred degrees out here*, I thought, looking at the sandy stretch in front of me that seemed to go on for miles. *I'll never make it*. Huffing and puffing, eyes blinded with sweat, I finally reached the

finish line. But I wasn't picked for either team. I'd blown my chance.

Then I heard the roar of a motorcycle. Jillian, the third trainer on the show, rode up to me and the rest of the rejects. "The others don't think you can lose the weight," she said. "We're going to prove them wrong." I could barely contain my happiness. Our group worked out for a week in the desert, staying in spartan dorms, away from the comfy confines of the other teams. The happiness I'd felt quickly faded. Jillian's workouts were unforgiving, every part of me burned. And now she'd kicked me out of the gym.

I collapsed on the bed in my dorm room. I pulled off my sneakers and threw them to the ground. Sand flew everywhere—picked up from all our time running in the desert. I grabbed one shoe and flipped it over. The grains of sand sifted through my fingers, too many to count. *How precious are your thoughts about me, oh, God. They can not be numbered...they outnumber the grains of sand*. One of my favorite psalms. I watched the sand settle onto the floor, and for the first time, I thought about what those words really meant. My weight didn't make me worthless. I may have failed before, and failed often, but I wasn't a failure. I was precious to God—didn't that mean I deserved the best life he had to offer? A long, happy, active life with Mike, Noah and the child we hoped to add to our family. A life that God wanted for me as much as I did. I put my sneakers on again and marched back to the gym. "I'm not just here to lose weight," I told Jillian. "My goal is to live my life the way I deserve to live it."

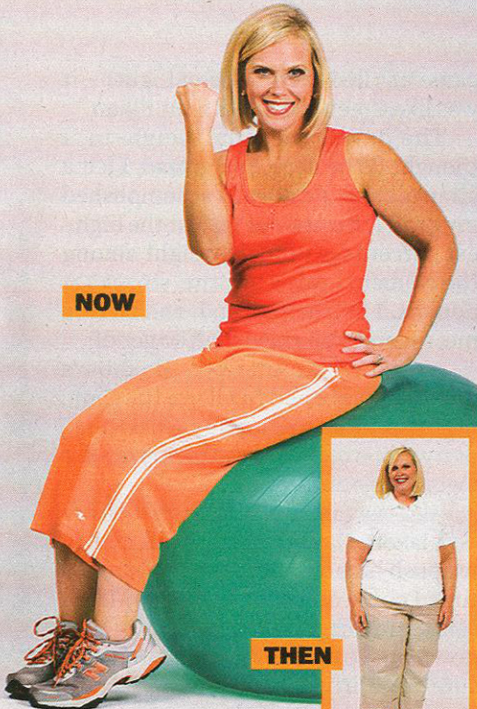
"That," she said, "is the right answer!"

## Julie's top tip

**"Find your true motivation. For me it was to be a better mom and wife. Don't just aim for a number on the scale."**

**👉 For more tips, check out Julie's blog at [guideposts.com/julie](http://guideposts.com/julie).**

**NOW**



**THEN**



Jillian's workouts were worth it—punishing, but worth it. Our team surprised the others at the first weigh-in, losing the most weight. But it wasn't clear sailing. One week we walked into the gym and found none of the equipment was working. Not the treadmills, the ellipticals, the rowing machines. "It's Green Week," Jillian announced. "We're going to exercise the old-fashioned way!" Jump rope, hula hoop, push-ups, and pull-ups. I couldn't do a single pull-up without Jillian's help. My arms felt like they were about to pop from their sockets. But this time, I didn't give up. *God doesn't think I'm a failure. He wants the best for me. I've got to keep working toward it.* By the end of the

week, I was able to do a few by myself.

I made it to the finals. Now I'd have to spend four more months at home, working out for hours every day to ready myself for that final weigh-in to determine the winner. The second I came through the door, Noah ran up and gave me a hug. I looked at Noah's arms around my waist, all the way around. Something I thought I'd never see. Part of that life I deserved to have. "I'm hungry, Mommy," he said. "Could you bake some chocolate chip cookies?"

I stopped in my tracks. How could I say no? I hadn't exactly been around for him lately. I had to go back to being a good mom. So I went to the kitchen and got out my big mixing bowl. I stirred in the flour, sugar, eggs, butter, chocolate chips. Slowly they blended into that familiar golden batter I used to love. I licked a tiny bit off the spoon. A chunk landed on the counter. I scooped that up too. Then I took another taste. Soon I was scraping the bottom of the bowl, wanting just one more sweet, gooey bite. *Stop!* the alarm sounded in my head. I looked at the cookie sheet—I hadn't even baked them yet, and already half the cookies were gone. I thought about that time in the desert. The prophets in the Bible often went there for puri-

fication—and to resist temptation. One thing I was happy to be away from were temptations like these cookies. Now I had to hold myself accountable—not just to God but to the new life I wanted. *I can't move out to the desert. But I can move out dessert.* I dumped the cookies in the trash. “I’m sorry, Noah,” I said, “but Mommy just can’t have chocolate chip cookies in the house right now. Let’s go to the mall and get you one of those hot fresh ones.”

“Yeah!” he shouted.

I spent the rest of the day going through the cabinets and the fridge. Anything that wasn’t healthy I threw out or set aside to give away. From now on, I’d only keep healthy food in the house. I looked at all those half mirrors—ways to avoid holding myself accountable. I bought some full-length—no hiding now. When I took Noah to the playground, I didn’t sit idly by. I did pull-ups on the monkey bars, sprinting in a

game of “Red Light, Green Light”—it was like Green Week, without Jillian.

The day of the final weigh-in, I thought I’d be nervous. Instead, I felt a strange calm. I’d already accomplished my goal. It turned out I’d lost the highest percentage of body weight among the women. I was a healthy, strong 121 pounds. I finished second, and believe me, second place never felt so good!

A few months later was the show’s finale. It happened to fall on the same night as Mike’s company Christmas party. This time I was sad to miss it. But I won’t miss it this year!

And last January, we adopted a baby boy, Jaxon. I lay him on his back and do my push-ups over him. He giggles every time I come down and kiss him. Then I lie on my back and raise him up and down above me, 20 pounds of love. It sure beats lifting dumbbells. **G**

FOR MORE ON THIS STORY, SEE FAMILY ROOM.

LEFT TO RIGHT: KELLY LADUKE; MICAH KANDROS; LORI EAMES; MARCUS SWANSON

## Guideposts New Year, New You! Contest

**WIN A BODY- AND SOUL- CHANGING EXPERIENCE!** Our Guideposts Dream Team will come to one Grand Prize winner’s home to develop a personalized healthy living plan.

**TO ENTER:** Go to [guideposts.com/newyoucontest](http://guideposts.com/newyoucontest) to tell us what changes you want to make in your life and why (in 200 words or less), and include a photo of yourself.

The entry deadline is February 28, 2009.



**Julie Hadden**  
*The Biggest Loser* contestant and inspirational mom



**Theresa Rowe**  
Fitness expert and author of *Shaped by Faith*



**Rebecca Katz**  
Healthy Cook and author of *One Bite at a Time*



**Kevin Carroll**  
Motivational expert and author of *Rules of the Red Rubber Ball: Find and Sustain Your Life's Work*

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A PURCHASE WILL NOT IMPROVE YOUR CHANCE OF WINNING. Mail-in entries must be postmarked by 2/28/09 and received by 3/5/09. Open only to legal residents of the 50 U.S. and D.C. who are 18 or older. See Official Rules at [guideposts.com/newyoucontest](http://guideposts.com/newyoucontest) for additional eligibility restrictions, prize descriptions/restrictions/ARVs and complete details. Or, for a copy of The Official Rules or to enter by mail, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: New Year, New You Contest, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512. Mail-in entries should be submitted to the same address. “Dream Team” representatives subject to availability. Void where prohibited.