

Interview with Theresa Knox

by Dan Foley

Theresa Knox has been training with me for about a year now. She is part of the company IDD, Inc. that trains with me. She also has an advantage because her partner Bob also trains with me. In the last year she has made some tremendous progress. Theresa who is 55 started our program at a weight of 135 lbs. and is now down to 121 lbs. She has also lost about 10% body fat through the course of the year, which is a huge change. Theresa has recently hit some benchmarks in term of her strength. She is now able to back squat with her bodyweight on the bar, deadlift 1.5 times her bodyweight, and do real pullups and pushups. In the last couple of months she has really embraced the nutrition side of the program and the resulting changes in her body have been dramatic. In the last couple of months she has also gotten noticeably leaner and stronger. The following is an interview that I did with Theresa in order to share her experience. Theresa has some great tips for those who need help continuing to get leaner.

I know that you have had experience with other trainers before. How do those experiences compare with your experience at Foley Performance?

Twice before, over the past six years, I joined the Weight Club and hired a personal trainer each time. Both trainers were essentially the same; they'd walk me around from machine to machine and set up and note the weights I was to use with each machine and record the number of repetitions I did on a clipboard. I'd come in early to warm up on the treadmill and would occasionally go on my own to use the machines. It was boring (the trainers acted bored, too) and it felt like I was just going through the motions. I lost a few pounds but...I sure lost interest and stopped going to the gym after my 6 weeks with the trainer was over. There was little talk of nutrition. I found the whole experience with the trainers, the machines and the gym atmosphere uncomfortable and unrewarding. I started working at IDD when I was still with the 2nd trainer. I listened to Mary and Chris S talk every day about the workout they went through that day, mostly how hard they were. They also talked a lot about what they had brought to eat for lunch and snacks based on your talks on nutrition. They were enthusiastic about all of it and I began to get interested. When my block of time with the trainer ended, I decided to come see you. From day one when I meet you, I knew this was a completely different approach to exercise. I had had little positive experience working out and I know that I was overly cautious and timid for quite some time. I also had misconceptions about women and gym work...I didn't want to look muscle-bound and was also afraid that I would hurt myself. I was, however, very impressed with how thorough you were in discussing your views on exercise, nutrition and taking specific measurements to get a baseline. The individual attention and level of detail was very interesting and impressive.

What are some compliments that people have given you since you started with us?

I've gotten a lot of compliments lately from friends and acquaintances, some specific but more often just someone saying that I look great and asking what was I doing. My daughter was stunned when she saw me...she thinks it's amazing that her mother is so fit and she thinks I look better than I ever have and I agree. I'm certainly healthier and stronger than I've ever been. It's nice to be more slender but it's even better to be strong and know that I'm healthier than I have probably ever been.

What are some of the benefits that you have seen with the program?

I think I've told you that almost from the beginning, even while I was still tentative, that I knew that this was important, that I considered working with you my "life insurance policy" for the future. In addition to that, I've come to realize that it's about my quality of life, too. I have an increased sense of well-being, confidence and enthusiasm that spills over into all aspects of my life. I feel stronger and healthier than I ever even imagined. I'm delighted to look a little bit more like I did when I was in college and not like everyone's idea and expectation of what middle-aged women look like.

What was your exercise program like before you started training with us?

I've always been fairly active but not in an organized way. I always liked to ride my bike, play some tennis, hike and camp and do some mountain climbing and sail. I've been an off-and-on swimmer. I didn't learn to swim until I was in my late 30s but pursued it aggressively and eventually got my lifeguard certificate. I would routinely swim $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile and felt aerobically fit. There is a 30-minute exercise program on PBS TV called the Body Electric that I used to do a lot and felt really pleased about at the time. It looks pretty wimpy now.

How has your view on exercise changed since you began with us?

Initially, I didn't think that I could do intense exercise or that I'd ever be strong enough to lift heavy weights or even do one pull-up. I'm really amazed now... I never imagined that I would push myself to do intense exercises or that I'd could lift increasingly heavy weights. Now I realize that there is a progression and that I can continue to get stronger, healthier and more fit as long as I'm working with you!

How has your diet changed since you started the program?

I've changed my eating habits dramatically but the most significant changes have been in the last few months; I'm not sure exactly why I suddenly bought into the full idea...I think I mentioned that listening to you talk to Carol about her diet made me think more seriously about being more conscious about what I eat. I used to eat a lot of pasta, bread, potatoes, pancakes, desserts, ice tea and soda; all the bad stuff. I often had heartburn and now that's gone. Now I make sure I get protein with every meal and lots of salad and green veggies. I drink almost only water; half the times with apple cider vinegar mixed in, and have given up drinking milk in the last couple of months.

I have to say that having a partner who is in the same program, working out with you and sharing the same ideas on improving nutrition and fitness, makes a tremendous difference in making the eating part a real part of both of our lives. It's fun, interesting and something we enjoy sharing.

What does a typical day of eating look like for you?

Breakfast: Thankfully, I like to eat almost anything so I have lots of options. I'm a morning person and like getting up early and enjoy cooking breakfast. I really like breakfast and don't mind at all eating non-breakfast foods in the morning. I often have an omelet with peppers, onions, mushrooms and zucchini. Fish for breakfast is really good, too. Italian friends of mine introduced that to me. Tilapia is my favorite, and I just fry it in a little olive oil and seasoning. I like to fix black beans, a couple of eggs with onions, peppers and salsa on top. I also eat steak, ham and eggs (omega 3s now, Bob's influence and they taste great), and the other day I finished off a can of herring for breakfast (told you I'd eat anything!)

I have stopped eating oatmeal, pancakes, French toast, cereal...all of that made me feel lethargic within just a few minutes...I do much, much better eating real protein. I've noticed that I have an almost immediate reaction to what I eat...I guess I've become fairly insulin sensitive. And those foods that I once ate a lot of don't taste as good anymore. I also eat lots of blueberries, breakfast lunch and dinner. I have coffee in the morning and put a little honey in it and also drink green tea.

Lunch: Salads! I've never eaten so much spinach and lettuce in my life! And now I love it! But these are really good salads. I add raw zucchini, raw mushrooms, apple, some kind of meat like steak, bison, ham or seafood like shrimp, scallops, salmon, tilapia, and then some peppers, sometimes nuts, a hard-boiled egg, some olive oil, feta cheese...just about anything that is around. I also like sardines and canned fish fillets. A lot of us eat lunch together at work and we all have salads and share with each other.

Dinner: This is a variation of what I eat for lunch and often Bob and I eat together. We usually have salmon or some other kind of seafood, steak and recently bison roast. Then a separate salad with raw or par-boiled broccoli, or zucchini quickly cooked with garlic, yellow squash. It's always really good and satisfying. And we usually have blueberries with a little yogurt on top for dessert.

Are there any tips that have really helped you that you can share with people who are having trouble getting leaner?

Having a partner like Bob, who is as interested, motivated and committed to the exercise and nutrition as I am, is a big, big part of making this fun and easy. Bob and I are on the same page about a lot of things and being fit and eating well is part of that. I enjoy cooking for both of us and will even eat his cooking, including steamed cabbage. I believe you when you said that 90% of getting leaner and stronger is the diet. The IDD support group is also a big part of my getting more fit...we all are part of a team and support each other.

Your strength levels and mental approach to weight lifting have really improved and I often say that women must go through a mental change in order to go from timid to aggressive with the weights. Can you talk about how this transformation happened for you?

You're right; I was initially timid and wary about almost everything you introduced me to. I'd never done anything like this though I've never shied away from hard work. I think I had to get through that

mental block that women didn't lift heavy weights. There's a stereotype of the steroid, muscle bound, freakish looking women that I think uninformed people like myself believed. Thank goodness I was committed to this and trusted you. I had made a commitment to myself to be healthy and fit as I get older so I've had a mental shift in what women can do physically and still look attractive. It took some time before I made this mental leap and I'm not exactly sure what happened in the last few months; something clicked and I got really motivated and pushed myself harder. I really like the weight lifting and am surprised at how much I'm able to lift. And I am just a little bit competitive in a fun sense, I think.

A significant part of the mental approach is working out with the IDD group and having Bob as such a positive partner in all of this. We support and encourage each other; even the competitive element has been part of it. I have become increasingly enthusiastic and excited about getting stronger. It has just become a whole lot of fun. And I've surprised myself. I like being strong and working hard at this. I also trust you and admire your commitment and dedication to what you are doing. The approach you take to this is like the book you recommended, *Think and Grow Rich*; this pursuit of life-long health and fitness is one that can be applied throughout all endeavors in life. You have to be willing to take some risks, push yourself more than you think you can and try something new. I've done that a number of times in my life in different ways; this is just another new one for me. It's also about recognizing and taking advantage of opportunities and pursuing your goals for the kind of life you want to have. Bob says that if it was easy it wouldn't be as much fun or as rewarding.

Another eye opener for me was taking care of my aging father a couple of years ago; he had always been strong and active...a very purposeful, interesting and interested man. He developed Alzheimer's and in his late 80's began to decline rapidly, both mentally and physically. He died at age 90 and except for one year, was able to live on his own. He was a good role model. I want to be fit, strong and mentally sharp as long as possible...so Bob and I can fly airplanes and have fun together. I believe that is all about nutrition, fitness, having a sense of purpose and a sense of humor and nurturing good relationships.

You have come a long way since starting the program. Do you have any last words of advice for people who are just starting out with the program?

Work out with friends and/or make new friends in the group sessions. The mutual support and taking pleasure in your own and others improvements is wonderfully motivating and a lot of fun, too. You can't beat having a partner like Bob who enthusiastically shares common goals and is so supportive.

Don't quit...make a real commitment to having a better quality of life, good health and fitness. You will feel and look great. Be patient with yourself; it might take months to get the mental adjustment to embrace the nutrition part and realize that you can get very strong and fit. You want this to last a lifetime no matter how old you are when you start.

Do what Dan tells you to do!

Thank you Theresa