

## **'You have to find your own way': Local man loses 166 pounds in one year**

*Byline: Heather Perry*

When Simon Dolan stepped onto the weight scale at his doctor's office in May 2013, he was stunned by what he saw. The scale indicated that he weighed 366 pounds—nearly 100 pounds more than what he thought he did. Panicked, he asked the nurse if there was anything wrong with the device. She answered no, that it was brand new.

Dolan then went home and stepped onto his personal scale.

278 pounds.

He grabbed two 1-gallon jugs of water and got back on.

*Still, 278.*

It never occurred to the now 26-year-old that his scale at home was broken. He had averaged between 250 to 270 pounds while attending St. Marys High School and assumed that he was still around that number.

"In your mind, you have a set weight. You know how you look, but you have a visual image in your brain of what you look like," he explained.

Dolan was diagnosed with a heart condition as a child and he knew that weight would one day be an issue for his health. Fortunately, he has not had complications and wants to keep it that way. His biggest motivating factor for losing weight is to not be a statistic.

"Being as heavy as I was, I didn't want to be one of the people who pass away at a young age because I just didn't want to take care of myself," he said.

Without the help of surgery, diet pills, wishing wells or fairy dust, Dolan lost 166 pounds in one year. He now weighs 200 pounds— ten pounds away from his ultimate weight goal.

In order to accomplish losing all of that weight, Dolan eased himself into an exercise routine. He thought that if he jumped into a full-blown *Rocky*-style regimen that he would burn out quickly, so he began with walking a few nights each week.

On his first walk, he sought to complete two miles. The first mile took 20 minutes. The second took one hour. This made him realize that he was out of shape and motivated him to continue. He kept up his routine by increasing his walks to four days each week.

Dolan knew that exercise alone was not going to get him down to his initial goal weight of 266 pounds, so he completely overhauled his diet. He cut out "pretty much anything that tastes good," particularly grains, beef, pork and starches.

He also changed the way he ate by altering his three-big-meals-a-day routine by eating smaller portions and adding snacks every two and a half hours to boost his metabolism. By changing his diet and incorporating four days of walking, he was consistently losing about six pounds each week.

“Within the first three weeks I think I had lost 16 to 20 pounds,” Dolan said. “It was just inner joy. I knew nobody else could quite notice yet, but it was coming.”

For the first eight months, Dolan miraculously stuck to his diet and did not cheat. Typically in a day, he would eat a protein shake and a handful of almonds for breakfast, a natural fruit-and-nut Lara bar for mid-morning and afternoon snacks, a big salad with tuna fish for lunch, and baked chicken or fish with vegetables and sweet potatoes on the side for dinner.

After a while, he gave himself the opportunity to indulge, but since he knows how hard it is to lose the weight, he does not overdo it. Even with all of his determination, it is still difficult for him to watch other people eat whatever they want.

“One of the guys I work with, he can eat any food he wants and not gain an ounce,” Dolan said. “He eats hot dogs and pizza and stuff for lunch, and I’ll be sitting there eating my salad and I’m shaking my head, because I really want it, but I got to do this for myself. I really got to change the way I live completely.”

Dolan is definitely doing this for himself, and for the kid he used to be, who wore dark, baggy clothing to hide his body.

“I was shy to begin with, and being overweight too, it’s kind of rough to do anything socially— but now, I feel more empowered to do things,” he said. “It’s not something everybody can do, so it kind of gives you a little bit of that special confidence that you’re a small percentage.”

Dolan often feels like a different person when he meets long-lost acquaintances who do not recognize him now, but those instances merely justify his hard work.

“It shows that I made it,” he said. “People really started noticing when I hit the 100 pound mark back in September. They were like, ‘You’ve lost some weight, haven’t you?’ I answered, ‘A little bit.’”

His goal for the summer of 2013 was to be able to walk 20 miles in one day. He accomplished the goal a month ahead of schedule when he ventured out of his house in Belvue to walk to St. Marys and back. It took him about seven and a half hours and he lost six pounds.

“Having those future goals has really helped me just push myself a little bit further,” he said.

Dolan’s all-or-nothing personality has helped him accomplish these tasks. A few years ago, he abruptly quit drinking soda and used the same tactic this year to quit smoking. He said that it is easier for him to just “dive right in” when challenging himself.

“I realize now... you kind of have a mental block about certain things, like, ‘Oh, I’m never going to try that. I just can’t do it.’ I’ve tried losing weight before, but never was successful. It’s just a matter of getting it done.”

At the beginning of May, Dolan participated in a 5K obstacle course called The Warrior Dash—something that he would have never thought about attempting a year ago. He wants to begin running and one day complete a marathon.

Dolan is thankful that his family has supported him throughout his weight-loss journey, but he understood early on that it would be up to him to self-motivate.

“Your family’s not going to be sitting there saying, ‘Don’t eat that candy bar.’ You’ve got to want it yourself bad enough that when you go somewhere you’re not going to break down and grab something,” he said.

When asked what advice he would give people with similar weight loss goals, Dolan answered, “It’s different for pretty much everyone, but if you want to do something bad enough, you can get there. It’s just a matter of— you have to find your own way. And once you find that way, there’s nothing stopping you.”

Seemingly sensing his natural knack for motivational speeches, mixed with the fact that he still can’t believe that he accomplished so much in one year, Dolan simply concluded by nodding his head and uttering, “It’s true.”

Because it is.