

Turning Tragedy into Triumph

People often ask me how, as a man, I became so committed to improving the quality of women's lives. It wasn't until age forty that I realized what had started me down the career path that was to become my passion in life.

One morning more than thirty-seven years ago, I was awakened by the passing school bus. I was thirteen years old, living at home with my two younger brothers and our mother, Doris Joy Heavin. She had just passed her fortieth birthday. She was a committed mother of five children and had wrestled with emotional and physical problems most of her life. Her doctors had placed her on an array of medications with little benefit.

As I awoke to the sound of the passing school bus, my brother Paul came in and told me that I'd better come quickly because mother was sick. As I knelt beside her bed, I could feel the absence of warmth. I put my arms around her, first to feel for a sign of life, and then as a final embrace. I took my younger brothers, ages eight and nine, in my arms and gently told them that our mother was in heaven.

Her premature death was unnecessary. The high blood pressure that contributed to the blood clot that took her life was unnecessary. Rather than medicate the symptoms, she could have dealt with the cause of her high blood pressure: We now know that exercise and proper nutrition will almost always alleviate the causes of hypertension and most other chronic diseases.

Many years later, while teaching a fitness and weight loss class to a group of about a hundred women, I realized I was subconsciously scanning the crowd for the face of my mother. I had what you would call an epiphany. It was then that I realized what had driven me all of my life and what my destiny was to be.

It is my desire that no little boy has to find his mother as I found mine.

Gary Heavin

Epilogue: Gary Heavin and his wife Diane are the founders of Curves, the world's largest fitness franchise company. With more than 9,000 centers worldwide and over 4,000,000 members, Curves is the fastest growing franchise in history according to Entrepreneur

magazine. And through Curves franchises, the Heavins have created entrepreneurial opportunities for more than 30,000 people, 90 percent of whom are women.

In 1976, Gary completed three years toward a pre-med degree when he realized that he could help prevent the onslaught of deteriorating health and resultant illnesses by teaching proper fitness and nutrition/weight loss. He opened his first fitness center at age twenty and the rest is history!

Curves is a revolution in the fitness industry. Gary knew that the first step in promoting women's wellness is to get them into the gym; many feel uncomfortable exercising in the presence of men, which keeps them from joining traditional gyms. He also noticed women's social tendencies; even while exercising, they like to talk and benefit from each other's company.

With this in mind, Curves was designed to allow women to exercise in the comfort and camaraderie of a club designed exclusively for them. The Curves structure combines a 30-minute circuit-training workout with fun and friendship mixed in, thus allowing a natural support system to fall into place.

With a degree in health and nutrition counseling, Gary is the author of two *New York Times* best selling books on exercise and nutrition. He was honored with the first ever "Visionary of the Year" award by the International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association, and was named a 2004 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year, the first time in the history of the national competition that a health and fitness club operator had won this prestigious award. Currently, Gary is funding a \$5 million study at Texas A&M University to study the effects of exercise on women's bone density and metabolism.

To learn more about Curves, please visit www.curves.com or call 1-800-848-1096.

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