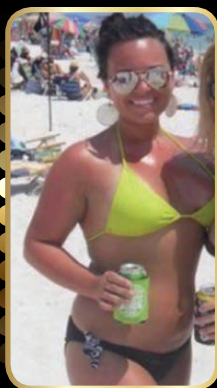


# 2017 Best Self Atlanta Magazine Courage Award Finalist

# AMANDA FORD

BEFORE



AFTER



**G**rowing up, as far as I can remember, I've always struggled with my weight. My weight caused me to have zero self-confidence. As I got older, I developed severe depression, which brought me to a really dark place in my life. I made reckless decisions and came to the point where I couldn't have cared less if I lived.

In 2011, I met my husband Matt. He loved me enough to stick by me while I was getting help for my depression. Fast forward to 2012, I began my fitness journey. Matt got me into bodybuilding. We trained together every day and over the years Matt taught me everything he knew about bodybuilding. We grew in our relationship and became true teammates in the gym.

I looked up to bikini competitors, Amanda Latona, Nathalia Melo and India Paulino just to name a few. I never imagined years ago I would transform my body into a bikini competitor. From 2012 through 2016 I dieted down, but eventually life would happen, and I would gain the weight right back. I never stopped training; bodybuilding became my therapy.

The dream of competing was always in my heart, but not something I ever had enough confidence to try. Years passed and by January 2017 I decided I was ready and that it was time to prep for my first bikini competition, time to make my dream a reality. I began prepping for the 2017 Orlando Europa. My husband and I prepped

for the show together. I believe that process brought us even closer. Over the weeks something inside of me changed. I created a vision board, I looked at the board each day. The vision board kept me focused. I saw myself succeeding at my goal of competing during each workout and each cardio session every day of prep. My body and mind began to transform.

In February my husband and I met Steve Payne and began attending his posing classes at House of Payne Personal Training. Steve helped me believe in myself and come out of my shell. Before I knew it, May arrived. I made it to show day. I had pushed through all the struggles. I had gained the self-love and confidence I dreamed of. I walked across the stage, made eye contact with the judges and strutted my stuff. As I saw my stage photos, I cried. I remember the day I bought my first Fitness RX for Her magazine. India Paulino was on the cover and I thought, "Wow, I could never do what she does," but I DID IT!

Bodybuilding changed my life. I learned self-love and how to have power over my emotions. I can't thank my husband enough for teaching me the sport of bodybuilding, for always being my cheerleader, loving me before my transformation and saving my life. I'm currently prepping for my next competition. It's not easy, but worth it! I hope to inspire others who struggle with mental illness or no self-love. You are worth it! If I can do this, anyone can!

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