



Elizabeth Fadley

As long as I can remember, I have always loved being fit and being strong. Growing up with five older siblings, hanging out with my older brothers meant always working out. It did not matter if their workout was 1000 crunches, handstand pushups, or heavy lifting, the harder the workout the more I enjoyed it. I loved the feeling of pushing myself both mentally and physically. For this reason, becoming a bodybuilder has always been my ultimate fitness goal.

However, life happened, and I became family-oriented and career-focused. I spent a couple of decades doing what I loved in the beauty industry. Over time, I developed severe arthritis in my neck. Although I tried every treatment, by 2006 I needed a cervical fusion. When I woke up, my neck had a titanium bracket holding it together. However, the surgery put so much stress onto my body that it went into shock—for 10 years. This reaction is called fibromyalgia. Due to cervical nerve damage, my spinal cord was sending electrical impulses that kept my muscles in a constant state of “fight or flight.” I felt like I was being electrocuted 24/7, my body was constantly inflamed, and I could barely move. So, the majority of my time was spent eating, sleeping, and thinking. As I reflected on my life, I was proud of the achievements I made throughout my career and I loved being a wife and a mother... However, my biggest regret was that I never competed in a bodybuilding competition. At that time, I remember asking myself, “At what age do you give up on your dreams?”

Whenever the pain was tolerable, I would go to the gym. It was the only thing I looked forward to doing until it was too painful again. At 53 years old, I woke up for the first time without pain. I just felt better. The doctors and I do not understand how or why—it just kind of happened... Immediately, I got up and looked at myself in the mirror for the first time in years. I did not recognize myself. Chronic pain, depression, the passing of both parents and comfort food led me to weigh heavier than when I gave birth to my daughter. Standing at 5’6” tall, wearing a 2XL shirt, I weighed myself and saw 207.5lbs on the scale. Nonetheless, that did not matter to me. I was not in pain! I felt like I was reborn and given a second chance at life! I made my way to the nearest gym and purchased a membership. After doing so, I was approached by a personal trainer who just graduated from college. He offered me a free training session and asked me what my goals were. “I want to be a bodybuilder. No—I will be a bodybuilder, and I am looking for someone to help me get there.” Joe Socarras from Crunch Fitness replied with a smile and said, “Well, let’s get started!” Without judgment or disbelief, he became my trainer and an important person in my journey. Fast-forward, I decided to remove all the negativity from my life—people, things, or anything else that reminded me of the past. Instead, I joined bodybuilding Facebook groups to surround myself with like-minded and inspirational women. Social networking led me to my mentor and friend, Lisa Ward. Who then introduced me to my nutritionist and bodybuilding coach, Red Connor McCollough.

After 16 months of dedication, discipline, gallons of sweat, and a few tears, I lost 65lbs. At 57 years old, I walked across the stage at The NPC Hurricane Bay weighing 142lbs. I competed in physique at my first bodybuilding competition! My story is about persistence. I did not let nerve damage stand in the way of my success. Instead, I learned how to live with it. Although I am naturally shy and nervous about standing in front of crowds, not only was I able to put those self-doubts aside for the competition. I had a blast! Most importantly, I fulfilled my lifelong dream of being a bodybuilder; and I love the persistent, confident, and happy woman, I am now.