

MILITARY OLYMPIANS

Jumping her way to the top A SPOUSE EXERCISES HER RIGHTS DURING DEPLOYMENT

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At 220 pounds and struggling with a drinking problem, Adriane Stone never dreamed she'd be competing in the U.S. Olympic trials.

But here she is today—eighth in the nation for high jump.

Stone may not be going to Beijing, but this military spouse knows she accomplished something far greater than competing in the world's most prestigious athletic competition.

"I believe my life now is about helping others—giving back," said the 28-year-old Stone, who is stationed at the Schofield Barracks in Hawaii.



In a year and eight months, she lost more than 80 pounds, fought off depression and alcohol addiction, saved her marriage and became a role model for her three children. She even began coaching high school athletes competing in track and field.

And it all started with walking and pushing a stroller while her husband was at war.

STARTING OUT

Stone attributes much of her success to her faith in God, as well as using fitness to set goals in life. Dr. Blake Chaffee, vice-president of Integrated Health Care Services at TriWest Healthcare Alliance, emphasized that exercise is one of the best ways for a military spouse or the parent of a military child to cope with the stress of a deployment.

Chaffee, who holds a PhD in psychology, said for a new "single parent," exercise is especially important because it helps increase stamina, endurance, energy and better sleep patterns, all which will help the parent deal with the additional responsibilities. It also helps relieve stress.

"What you frequently hear from people is, 'I don't have the time (to exercise).' The reality is, if you don't take the time, the kind of prolonged stress you develop can be more difficult to deal with," Chaffee said.

The key to starting such a program is taking small steps, just as Stone did. Stone still remembers her life before the transition began, back in 2005. "A week before (my husband) left for Iraq, I was 220 pounds," she said. After he left, "he's gone and my marriage was completely about to crumble because of my alcoholism."



Stone knew a lot of her problems began after her father died in 2001. Before that, she was going to college at St. Augustine and competing for her school in high jump. Her father was her inspiration.

After he died of cancer, Stone stopped any activities that reminded her of him. Even though she married her husband that same year, nothing could fill the emptiness of her father's death. She smoked, she drank and she gained a lot of weight.

But a month after her husband deployed to Iraq in 2005, Stone began looking at herself differently. One day, Stone's neighbor approached her and said she was quitting smoking.

"And I wanted to tell her so bad, 'me too!'" Stone said. "I sat on my couch that day, I looked up and I said, 'Lord, if you're there, would you please, please help me.'"

The next day, Nov. 1, 2006, was the first time in her adult life Stone went without smoking or drinking. "I had no cravings, no withdrawals, nothing," she said.

And that's when she started walking and pushing her child in the stroller every day, except for the weekends. She began meeting people along the way and lost 30 pounds in one month, all naturally.

"It was more than just weight loss," Stone said.

MORE THAN EXERCISE

Military spouses may feel isolated while their husbands or wives are deployed, said Kristin Musch, a registered nurse and case manager with TriWest. Musch is also an integrated behavioral health educator. Meeting others helps build a support group, and Musch therefore highly recommends exercising with other people.

"It helps a person to feel like they're not alone; feelings of shared experiences," she said. "Feeling that connection to other people is always so important."

On a scale of one to 10, Musch said making time for exercise, especially during a deployment, is a 10.

Stone's weight dropped to 190 pounds by December 2006. This time, dealing with her husband's second deployment, Stone started setting goals. She got bored with just walking and began some aerobics classes.

Then one day, she decided to join a boxing team—and she loved it.

"I just became determined to lose the weight," she said.

Stone lifted weights; she trained hard; she lost the excess skin without surgery. She formed the body of a body builder and when her husband came home, he was shocked. Suddenly, they could go hiking together and do more activities together.

"I lived life now and it was phenomenal," Stone remembered with a smile.

Both Chaffee and Musch said activities can range from joining a sports team to taking dance classes. Some communities may even have kickball leagues, volleyball teams, and more. It just takes some research for people to find an activity fit for them. Chaffee said being part of a team, having a role in that whole, can be very beneficial for parents who are alone.



'JUMPING' TO THE TOP

Things took a spin for Stone in December 2007, when she ran into an old friend who needed a lift to a conference. When Stone decided to park and go in with her friend, she ran into her old high jump coach from college, who was now an Olympic coach.

"And the first words out of his mouth were, 'Are you jumping?' He told me I needed to be jumping. It lit a fire inside me," Stone said.

Two weeks later, she flew to North Carolina and competed in her first track meet in seven years.

She won.

"I didn't think about the Olympics at first. It was just a track meet," she said.

One thing led to another from there. She began coaching at Mililani High School in Hawaii and in turn, used the school's track to train. On May 12, 2008, she qualified for the U.S. Olympic trials during a meet at the University of Hawaii, even though she'd been recovering from bronchitis.

"It was such an awesome jump, and I said, 'Oh my.' My husband grabbed me and we just went crazy out there," she said, laughing.

Stone flew to Portland, Ore. and pushed her way through the trials in Eugene all the way to the finals. At 5'11, Stone jumped a whopping 6-feet, $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, which brought her to eighth in the nation. She didn't qualify for Beijing, but that's OK.

Today, Stone's marriage "rocks," her kids are proud of her, many doors have opened for track and field, and she does a lot of motivational speaking.

Musch re-emphasized the importance of starting small, just like Stone. "Don't start and say, 'tomorrow I'm going to start my exercise program and play football with my kids for an hour.' Set yourself up for success."

That's what Stone did, and she learned how exercise also served as a distraction during her husband's deployments.

"[Fitness] motivated me to do more," she said. "If you don't set goals, you don't have anything to strive for. Once you get there, you have something to celebrate. And we like to celebrate."