

## Sometimes The Gym Member Is The True Inspiration

By Lenore D. Kaiser

From time to time throughout the years, there have been gym members who have come up to me after class or while I am passing through the gym to let me know how much I mean to them, what a difference it makes in their life to spend that one hour or two a week with me, enduring the sweat and encouragement. There has been many times members have surprised me with birthday gifts, Christmas gifts, and "just because" gifts to show their appreciation and for some time I took it with a grain of salt - flattered I was, but I just saw it as my "little" part-time job. There was a time where I would walk into an aerobic room filled with awaiting members and I saw them as a whole, not as individuals with different needs and different reasons for being there.

Then, a day just like any other day, I had just started my class when a lady walked into the aerobic room. She was average height, medium length reddish hair, and weighed about 325-pounds. I could tell she was new by the way she migrated to the corner of the back room, almost hoping to disappear behind those in front of her. Not thinking much of it, I went through my one-hour class, finished, and was wrapping it up when this shy and overweight lady came up to me asking me if I could help her get the step movements down. Without hesitation, I did. I went through the movements with her over and over again until she felt confident about her ability. While I finished rewinding my tapes, she put her step away and thanked me before walking out the door. I smiled back and told her, "No problem...." Again, I didn't think much of it. What I didn't realize was what that moment represented, not only to the lady that I didn't bother getting her name, but what that moment would mean to me years later.

Two years went by, and I continued to teach my classes from gym to gym still holding a care-free attitude about what I did and what it meant to others who gave me their time. It was a Sunday morning when I noticed someone "new" in the front of my class. She was average height, short reddish hair, and weighed about 110-pounds. The only interaction we had before or during class

was a smile. After class, she came up to me with a gift and a card introducing herself as Carol. She went on to tell me what an inspiration I was to her and how much my encouragement in class has helped her be a third of the person she was the day I met her. Needless to say, I was floored by not only the dramatic change she made in her appearance, but to think I never put two and two together. I never saw her as an individual, only as part of a room filled with people. I can't even remember what her gift was, because the best gift was the card attached where she went on and on with such wonderful admiration for what my "little" part-time job represented to her. That was the first realization I had on the importance of what my one or two hours a week meant to each individual in my class. My second realization was yet to come.

A few years went by and Carol was my number one fan as I was hers. Where ever I was teaching, regardless of where it was in the city, she was there. Summer was in the air by this time and I started noticing Carol's absence from my class. A couple of month's went by and I started asking mutual friends about her, but no one knew. By luck, I subbed a class one morning and ran into a friend of her's. Her friend told me Carol was diagnosed with cancer. Worried and not knowing how to reach Carol, I gave her friend my telephone number and asked her to have Carol call me. A month went by when I received a call. On the other line, it was Carol's sister from out of town. Apparently Carol's sister had been trying to find me and was able to track me down through the gym after I gave them permission to release my telephone number to her. She told me Carol passed away, leaving two children and a husband behind. She went on to tell me that I was the only person outside of the family Carol left in her will, a bracelet and a note. She was calling to get my address to send it to me. I asked Carol's sister why Carol didn't call me or let me know and she simply said, "Carol thought the world of you and couldn't bare burdening you with her illness." Carol's last note to me was filled with beautiful words beyond description, but apart of that note talked about her cancer and how long she knew about it. I thought back at all those times she

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would come to class with a smile and upbeat attitude so eager to be there. She never once possessed the image of a person who was dying. I was her inspiration, but I never got to tell her she was mine. WM

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