

Stephanie Hoaglund

Inspiring Others

BY GWEN HOPKINS-SADOWSKI

Evaluating and redefining one's life can be infectious, and this woman's passion inspires others.

An initial meeting with Stephanie Hoaglund can be spellbinding. There is no tentativeness about her personality or approach. She is enthusiastic and energetic, nearly glowing against the dark backdrop of her CrossFit gym. A marketing and social media professional for K-12 Inc. and CrossFit Impavidus of Ashburn and a blogger, she is also a woman redefined. She is full of passion with a desire to inspire others so they can find their passion regardless of their circumstances.

Life, however, hasn't always been easy for Stephanie and her family. Five years ago they faced their most difficult challenge. In 2008, after her husband, Scott, had been suffering health complications and feeling unusually exhausted, Stephanie urged him to make an appointment for a routine physical. In the meantime, the two celebrated their 10th anniversary at Disney World. Though they enjoyed their getaway, Scott had difficulty keeping pace on the vacation. When she looks back at the photos of their trip, what wasn't noticeable in the day-to-day now becomes strikingly obvious...her husband was extremely ill.

Scott didn't fit the profile for colon cancer. He was 37-years old and didn't have any genetic links or risk factors. However, the blood tests from his first



Photo by Michael Vonal

physical signaled a serious problem. He was dangerously anemic, and an expedited colonoscopy was scheduled. Stephanie remembers going into the recovery room after the procedure and noticing the disturbing difference in the nurses' demeanors. Where there had been laughter and joking beforehand, everyone was

quiet. "No one wanted to look [me] in the eyes."

Scott was diagnosed with Stage II Colon Cancer and underwent difficult surgeries and procedures, including the removal of half of his colon. Fortunately, he found his way into a clinical trial at Georgetown University. Unlike so many

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cancer protocols, his didn't have some of the outwardly severe effects. He retained his hair, he lost 35 pounds but appeared healthy, and he remained in good spirits, working most days throughout his treatments. The family modeled resiliency. Stephanie explains, "After the initial shock of the diagnosis, Scott and I refused to consider the chance of him dying from colon cancer. It just wasn't an option as we went through his treatments."

Stephanie came to the conclusion that she was not happy with her body or energy level and resolved to find a fitness regimen when she returned home. She had fallen into the trap that she now helps other women escape. "Many women lose sight of who they were before [having] kids. They forget that they used to have hobbies, preferences, looked a certain way – all of those things that their husbands fell in love with. They get lost in their role as 'Mom' and put all their focus and commitment on their kids and use it as an excuse not to take care of themselves," Stephanie asserts.

One might imagine cancer's entrance would table Stephanie's resolve, but that is where her story takes a remarkable twist. She had started a high-intensity interval training and lifting boot camp just two weeks before her husband's diagnosis. Rather than quit, she reasoned that no one else in the house was awake at 5:45 a.m. when she would be at boot camp, and she summoned her determination and persevered through the regimen. In retrospect, those early mornings, the positive energy and camaraderie, and the goals and achievements probably helped her maintain an optimistic attitude through difficult times.

There were many challenging activities, and Stephanie learned to laugh at herself.

She set and worked towards her fitness goals. She had reached and embraced a turning point by the end of the boot camp. She changed from the person who sat on the couch in the evenings drinking diet soda and watching television to the person who works out. She was amazed at some of the things she had accomplished, and she liked this workout style. When she happened to catch a tweet about a gym opening in Ashburn, she never looked back.

Stephanie says that CrossFit has brought so much to her and her entire family's lives – great friends, a good body image, a healthier lifestyle, and an ability to accomplish goals she never thought possible. CrossFit appealed to her ambitious nature with its always-progressing workout style. There is always a challenge, a new complexity and a goal to scale up to. She became a Level 1 Instructor a year ago and is more comfortable with her body than ever before. "It was very important for me to stop wishing I was pencil-thin. I am not built that way and no matter how hard I work, it's not going to happen. And that's why I love the phrase 'Strong is the New Skinny.' I am learning to take pride in being strong and consider that my goal – get stronger!" she says. And she shares the importance of fitness and well-being with her children. "I am committed to doing my part to help my kids grow up healthy. I believe you lead by example. My kids are seeing that exercise can fit in with a busy life. I think of it as helping set them up with the right foundation so that they can lead fit and healthy lives on their own."

As her outlook and focus changed, Stephanie redefined the blog which initially shared information about Scott's

health into "Live Fit and Sore" (www.livestrongandsore.com), a daily dose of inspiration for "living your best life." While striving to encourage and empower her readers, Stephanie is completely honest. If she skips a workout, she admits it. If she's having a bad day, she shares it. She wants her readers to know that she is a real person and, for those in poor physical shape, she wants them to understand that she was once like them. She became a CrossFit athlete because she worked really hard to meet her goals. She became the person she is now through work and dedication. When asked what she'd most like to impart to her readers, Stephanie states emphatically, "I'm a normal person. I'm not rich. I don't have a personal chef or trainer. I have the same pressures others have – two young kids, a husband, a full time job. And to top it all off, my family had a major health issue to cope with. During that time, I managed to change my life and find my passion. If I can do it, anyone can!"

"We are redefining beauty standards. We are re-defining health and wellness in our lives. It doesn't happen overnight but it takes practice just like CrossFit. Neurological connections need to be restrung so that we can see ourselves the way we are meant to be!" Your Weight Doesn't Tell Half the Story–Live Fit and Sore blog post (4/10/13)

Afterword: Stephanie and her family's most recent involvement with cancer has been of a charitable nature. They have run the "Scope It Out 5K," starred in a video for www.loveyourbutt.org and participated in the "Cure by Design" fashion show. They have never forgotten where they've been and are incredibly grateful that this summer will mark Scott's 5th anniversary of being cancer-free which – for colon cancer – is considered "cured."



GWEN HOPKINS-SADOWSKI is the Founder and Executive Director of Grow, Learn & Thrive, an organization helping at-risk children in their crucial early years. She loves to read, write, run, drink wine, garden, and spoil her kids and husband.