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## FEATURES

BUFFALO 60 STRONG

### JILL GONZALEZ

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Images created by Elliott Cramer of Jill Gonzalez for Agilon Health's 60Strong calendar. The 60 Strong exclusive calendar showcases inspirational "60 somethings" who are living healthy lives, overcome health obstacles and are an inspiration to others. Images of Jill Gonzalez created at Niagara Falls State Park, New York.

ELLIOTT CRAMER

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**While helping a young man overcome a drug addiction, Jill Gonzalez realized she had her own addiction to battle with food.**

According to WebMD, when a person has a food addiction the brain releases dopamine, which is the same chemical response activated when using addictive drugs, such as heroin or cocaine. Dopamine triggers the urge to eat more, continuously chasing the feel-good feelings, and creating a hard-to-break cycle that ties into the brain's reward system.

Gonzalez knew she needed to make a change, and fast. Weighing 308 pounds, she set herself up with rehabilitation, Zumba classes, Weight Watchers meetings, and began to hike and bike regularly.



“The first time I went [to Zumba], I barely made it. I could hardly survive the hour class,” she says. Now attending five to six classes weekly, the former teacher explains, “My job since retirement has been to wake up and go crazy.”

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gonzalez held herself accountable. She has been utilizing the option for virtual classes to stay active. She also took advantage of the Buddies walking program, where participants can meet with other locals for activities, such as walks or hikes, to inspire motivation. With nearly everything closed, this was a great way to stay in shape and meet new people, all while socially distancing.

“I can do things I never used to be able to do,” Gonzalez says.

To maintain her new lifestyle changes, she continues to use the Weight Watchers application on her phone, or as she calls it, her “personal sponsor,” and attends weekly virtual meetings.

“I’m accountable to the scale,” she explains, while discussing her now 150-pound weight loss over the past two years.

Gonzalez also took time to stress the importance of regular medical check-ups and healthy eating choices, all balanced with a workout regimen. She continues to spread a positive message through all of her actions, including volunteering for Meals on Wheels, and sending congratulatory cards out to her former students when they make the honor roll.

“My advice for 60 plus is to just go and do it,” she says.

***Buffalo 60 Strong is sponsored by Buffalo Medical Group, in conjunction with the launch of Senior Care Advantage ONE.***

*Ashley Ziomek is a freelance writer living in WNY.*

