

work in PROGRESS

Valerie MacWilliam defies the odds to become fit and fabulous. by Simon Watson

To say that Valerie MacWilliam overcame many obstacles to lose weight would be an understatement. At 5-foot-6, she weighed 182 pounds in 1991. Today, at the age of 33, she weighs 123 pounds. So, what was the driving force behind both her gain and loss?

"People," she answers. "People are the strongest influence on people. None of my family ever exercised a day in their lives. Most of them are overweight." As well, she had friends who, even in their 30s, were still into the party and bar scene; people who didn't understand her interest and goals in fitness. "They were dragging me down, so I don't associate with them as much anymore." Instead, she surrounds herself with people who support her healthy lifestyle and work in her industry.

The now svelte Valerie has been an actress and model for the last three years and is in demand. "I'm a very busy woman," she says with a laugh. Living on Vancouver Island, she's starred in the television series *Stargate SG-1*, the feature film *Slap Shot 2* and has appeared in a Bud Light commercial, which aired during this year's NHL playoffs. She's proud of what she's accomplished because she's come such a long way.



BEFORE



AFTER

“YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO – I DID.”

valerie's stats

	BEFORE	AFTER
	1991	2002
Height	5'6"	5'6"
Weight	182 lb	123 lb
Dress size	12	3

Valerie's family lived in a trailer and traveled through rural Canada and Alaska, moving from job to job, settling in small towns where there was often no school and frequently no children. "I've always struggled with weight, since I was a child," says the woman who was raised on a diet of meat, potatoes and pasta. "I never had time to make friends, so that was very depressing. I think that's a lot of what got me into eating and just, you know, a very depressed life."

Abandoned by her father at six and by her mother at 14, Valerie married at 17 and divorced seven and a half years later, soon after her daughter was born prematurely. "She was a pound and a half at birth. I also gained severe amounts of weight from toxemia – over forty pounds in three weeks – and became violently ill. My metabolism was never the same." After several operations, she fell into a deep depression. Life seemed hopeless. "I became a junk food addict. I ate at McDonald's and Dairy Queen on a regular basis. Nothing was going right."

Actually, it's a miracle she's alive. Valerie's had cervical cancer, a hysterectomy, four car accidents (which weren't her fault), 22 operations and a series of abusive relationships. But in 1995, when she weighed 179 pounds, she decided to take control and make a change for the better. "I was in a relationship with a man who beat

valerie's workout

Valerie follows a split routine three to five days a week. She'll work on her chest one day, arms another and calves the next. "It's different each time I go, but [I do] mostly free weights rather than cardio." Each session lasts about an hour and she begins with a few minutes of treadmill walking, followed by some stretching. "I do three sets of exercises, then I go back and do two minutes of cardio. Do another three sets. Two minutes of cardio – back and forth. I can't use a treadmill for more than five minutes because my tendons are weak from past operations. My knees give out." The workout ends with 5 to 15 minutes of stretching.

me severely, hospitalized me in front of my daughter. That was a turning point where I realized that my self-esteem was so low I was allowing people to hurt me. So I started to lift weights to get out of the house and to get my strength up to be able to get away."

In the beginning, Valerie used a chin-up bar in a doorway. "When I first tried, I couldn't even do one chin-up," she explains. "But after three weeks I was able to do one, then two, and finally ten. It became routine because every time I walked under it and didn't do a couple chin-ups, I felt guilty."

Eventually she left her abusive boyfriend, only to be in a car accident that put her back in the hospital. She had to have two shoulder operations, and so it wasn't until 3 years later that Valerie was able to work out regularly again, and she was determined. "After 2000, I changed my diet drastically and learned about fitness by reading magazines. I lost eighteen pounds in one month. It was the first year in my life where I never set foot in a hospital. I stopped going to fast food places and started eating fruit and salads. I stopped eating red meat. I changed to chicken and started enjoying fish and sushi. I ate five small meals a day versus three larger ones."

Valerie discovered her new lifestyle improved more than her physical health. "I can't emphasize how much clean living has done," she says. "It's lifted my spirits, my courage and my self-esteem. I'm treated differently."

What keeps Valerie motivated? It's her 11-year-old daughter,

valerie's diet

Example diet plan as prescribed by Valerie's trainer.

BREAKFAST: English muffin, 1 tablespoon of natural peanut butter, 1 ½ scoops of whey protein and ¼ cup of juice or ½ cup of strawberries

SNACK: 8 ounces of yogurt, low-fat cheddar cheese and ½ bagel

LUNCH: 1 can of tuna, flour tortilla and a slice of watermelon

DINNER: 1 chicken breast and ¾ cup of corn

SNACK: 1 nectarine, 1 scoop of whey protein and 1 slice of unbuttered, toasted whole-wheat bread

Chelsea. "She's my inspiration to turn my life around. I'd go to eat something and she'd say, 'Mom, you're going to get fat,' or 'Mom, if you eat that burger you can't eat anything else 'cause you've got all your calories for the day.' She's even stopped eating candy and asks for more fruit to help me along. She's a great encouragement."

Valerie is further inspired by the success stories of others and hopes that she can be an inspiration herself. "I've been through so many trials and tribulations that I feel I can help that other person sitting in front of her TV, eating a hamburger and depressed because her life is crappy and she weighs three hundred pounds. I don't believe in the word 'can't.' Go to someone and ask for help. You can do anything you put your mind to – I did." ■