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“THE
COURAGE
TO BE”

By Sheila Reesor

Step inside Crystal Andrus's century home in Greenbank, Ontario and, right away, you feel a refreshing sense of calm. Bright and open, each room is a unique reflection of her spirit that feeds her soul and supports what she values most – balance.

Life hasn't always been so tranquil for Crystal. A tough journey has led her to where she is today as one of North America's most dynamic health and fitness experts and a leading authority on balancing a woman's work, family and personal well-being. Having shared the stage with Dr. Phil, Dr. Wayne Dyer and others, she is lauded as a passionate and powerful speaker, writer, radio host and women's advocate. She is also the bestselling author of *Simply... Woman! The 12 Week BODY-MIND-SOUL Total Transformation Program* and *Transcendent Beauty: It begins with a Single Choice... to Be!*

Crystal's firsthand experience with fitness and health began early. As a Junior Ontario Body Building Champion, she went on to manage health clubs, teach aerobics, compete in international fitness shows and appear in muscle magazines. "By most standards I had a great life," she says. "I appeared to be successful and happy, but I always felt like something was missing."

After years of exploitation and constant pressure to sustain her looks, Crystal wanted more. Convinced that a husband and babies were the answer, she soon married, quit her job and stopped exercising to become the perfect homemaker. Pregnancy gave her a guilt-free excuse to eat and by the time her first daughter was born, this 125 pound fitness model weighed almost 200 pounds. Within a year she was pregnant again and caught in a whirlwind of nursing, diapers, and laundry.

Crystal's breaking point came one night as she was nursing. Flooded in exhaustion, winter blues and depression, she realized that she didn't know who she was or what she wanted. Sobbing, she felt she was cheating her girls by always making life-altering decisions to please others. "I was no longer that dynamic, positive woman I had once been," she says. "It was time I treated myself with more respect and showed them [my girls] that life was all about choices."

The next morning, Crystal dragged herself out of bed and headed out into the cold. Gasping for breath, she remembers being shocked at how out of shape she was.

Halfway down the road, she turned back home to write. "Many things were revealed to me that day," she says. "I had spent nearly thirty years searching for love, validation, and worth, never realizing until that moment I was the only one that could give it to me." Now determined to change, potato chips soon lost their comfort and her four kilometer run became ten. In time, she dropped from 200 to 121 pounds, her lightest weight since her teens.

More than just eating right and exercising regularly, Crystal learned to pay attention to her thoughts and listen to her body. Now rather than using her weight as a protective shield, she could recognize and open up to



CRYSTAL ANDRUS

those who supported her life force, and set boundaries and distance from those who drained it. "One of the biggest messages I give to women now is to feel," she says.

What started as a profound moment of desperation for Crystal, led to a complete transformation. She has since helped thousands of women to transform their own bodies and lives, helping them to see beyond counting calories or doing leg lifts. Looking and feeling great is about

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taking care of yourself, being comfortable in your own skin and demanding more from life. "Living with passion and following your life path are the most effective weight-loss and happiness aids available to mankind," she says. "Thin thighs are just the by-product!"

Seldom does reward come without struggle, and Crystal admits to falling flat on her face. There was a time when she believed she was "Wonder Girl", but a particular speaking engagement shook her confidence and rattled her self-esteem. "Why couldn't I lead a five-day retreat and then be my exuberant, beautiful, magnificent, empowered self the next morning?" she asks, smiling.

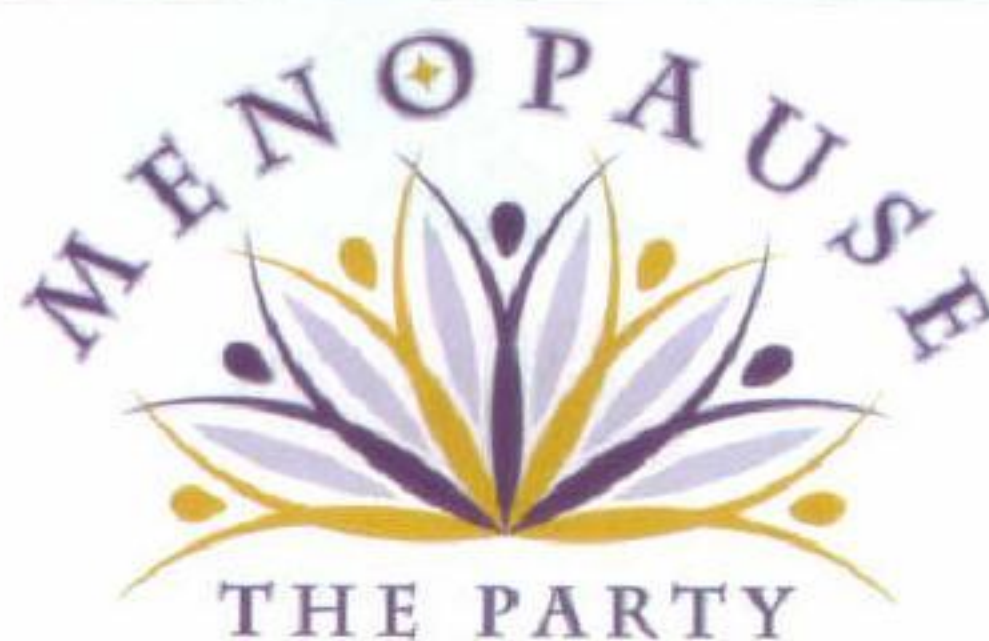
Scheduled to speak at a PowerWithin event with Dr. Phil and a live audience of 5,000 people, Crystal hadn't had time to check her email all week and didn't know her time slot had been bumped up. She arrived late and was ill-prepared. She now remembers this 'opportunity of a lifetime' as her worst performance ever. "When you mess up, you just want to run and hide," she admits.

Crystal feels there was a tremendous positive that came from this experience – it humbled her. Although difficult at the time, she found the courage to apologize for her mistake and has since realigned her priorities. She now has an excellent relationship with Dr. Phil's team and her career has continued to flourish. With a thriving second marriage and two busy girls, in addition to speaking engagements, a radio show, a third book in the works, TV interviews, coaching support groups, and doing a Masters in Holistic Nutrition, Crystal's days start at 5:30 a.m. and end at 11 p.m.

As a chaos-driven super-mom, she once felt overwhelmed before her day even started. Now, by the time her kids get up, she's grounded, and after a workout, she's energized and ready to tackle her day. "It's non-stop busy, but somehow I still light my candles and incense, have my waterfalls and keep the music going to keep me grounded," Crystal says. "And it's not an option to start my day or check email until I've meditated and journaled."

What if we could all function at optimum levels, plus look and feel our absolute best? According to Crystal, we can. All it takes is courage. "Courage is where massive shift happens in your life," she says. "I work with too many women who are afraid to be their most magnificent selves. They still struggle to be able to say, 'I am magnificent, beautiful and brilliant.' It takes great courage for women to do that. How can you even begin to be those things if you don't feel them? If you can feel it, you can be it."

Sheila Reesor is a freelance writer and can be reached at sreesor@rogers.com



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