

# the comeback kid

A horrific assault left Jared fearful for years. But gaining control of his health helped him discover just how strong and brave he really is.

AS TOLD TO KATERINA SAVVIDES

JARED FOX

AGE 30 | HEIGHT 5'9"

LOST 33.6 LB\*



"I've never been a sports person, but now I'm so active. To be able to say that I'm athletic is weird and empowering at the same time."



## "THE ATTACK FELT LIKE

it lasted three or four minutes," I told the judge. It was 2013 and I'd been visiting my family in Cleveland when I was attacked outside a gay bar by 20 teenagers. It was a terrifying experience that had felt like it would never end. "It lasted 45 seconds," he said. Those 45 seconds ruined the next three years of my life.

After spending a few days in the hospital, and more recovery time in Cleveland, I returned home to New York City. The attackers had ruptured my eardrums; I couldn't hear properly for a few months. I didn't want to leave my apartment or cook, so I ordered takeout every night. My dream had always been to live in NYC—and now I was afraid to go anywhere. When I walked outside, I'd stay in the middle of the street because I didn't want to risk walking past a doorway or a dark alley.

Over the next two years, I ate for comfort; I ate out of sadness; I ate as a way to

## JARED'S NON-SCALE VICTORIES

■ **I walk my dogs.** Before I lost weight, I'd take my two dogs right outside my apartment to do their business. Now, my partner, Johannes, and I take them for long walks, or we'll bring them along when we go to the grocery store to grab some Halo Top ice cream.

■ **I play tennis.** Johannes convinced me to learn to play tennis with him, and I actually enjoy it. It's fun to be athletic. Sometimes friends will join us, and we'll all play and then have a picnic with healthy snacks.

■ **I can have a milk shake and not get derailed.** If I'm at a restaurant, I like to enjoy my "indulgences" whether that's a doughnut or a milk shake, and then I get right back on track.

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\*People following the Weight Watchers plan can expect to lose 1-2 lbs/wk.



numb the pain. I ate because I felt like the attack was my fault. If I had been a fit, muscular guy walking into that gay bar, would those teens have assaulted me?

In January 2016, I started a new job with the Department of Education: I became the LGBT liaison for the New York City public schools. June is Pride Month, and that June, I started thinking about what I

**"I had to accept my own innocence in the attack. Once I did that, and once I forgave myself, I could move forward."**

was proud of. I was very happy with my new position, but I wasn't proud of my health. I realized that if I continued gaining weight, I would be slowly killing myself. And that it would be *me* causing it, not my attackers. I wanted to take control of my life, so I joined Weight Watchers.

Before I could make any major changes, though, I had to learn how to forgive. I had to forgive myself for not respecting myself, for the damage I had done to my body through overeating and inactivity. And, I had to forgive those teenagers for what they did to me. Only two of the 20 suspects received probation—the others weren't punished—but I realized it wasn't about them anymore. Forgiveness is about you and your soul.

I started to listen: I listened to the Members in my Weight Watchers meeting; I listened to my body. I started making lifestyle changes; I started to improve. When I had a thought, I'd record it in a little black book that I still carry with me today. I saved a quote that I wanted to remember: "Was it a bad day or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day?" We all have bad moments, but will we let them dictate our lives?

Today, I wake up each morning and appreciate all that I have: I get to go to work and do a job that I love. I'm lucky to be able to help people change their lives, and help create a society where I can be proud of who I am. I'm grateful to have a supportive partner who inspires me to be a better person each day. I'm happy that I have two dogs—Dorothy and Blanche—and we can walk around my neighborhood. Most importantly, I love who I am today. Those teens tried to steal that feeling from me, but I've grabbed it back and I'm not letting go. I've created this life, and I'm going to keep moving forward.



## THE POWER OF GLOVES

When I took my first boxing class, I felt overwhelmed. We started shadowboxing and it felt so violent. The moves reminded me of my attack, the flashbacks took over, and I had a horrible meltdown. But I went back because I knew the activity would help me get through my emotional issues. After I returned, I realized that boxing isn't about hitting people. It's about moving my body and feeling its energy flow from one point to another. I started feeling the power in my body. And for the first time, I stopped feeling like a victim.



## LEAN GREEN MACHINE

When I was in college, I had stomach issues. I realized that the more greens and vegetables I ate, the less I felt sick. That helped me notice a correlation between what I put in my body and how I felt. And I've been a vegetarian ever since. When I joined the Program, I found delicious recipes that suit my lifestyle. I'll cook meatless crumbles with green beans, and when they're ready, I'll sprinkle feta on top. And I love making maple-balsamic Brussels sprouts or fresh, steamed broccoli. Maybe the best part: In NYC, it's cheaper not to eat meat!

