



# THE LAST WORD

By Karen Phillips

**If you were like me** in thinking that gyms were just a playground for tandoori-tanned muscle heads and 'celery stick bimbets', then I have some rather startling news for you.

I have to concede - I was wrong with a capital 'W'.

I don't think anyone would disagree that there are usually a handful of super-sized oiled up lads in Everlast singlets and skimpily clad stick creatures prancing between the barbells but, in all, the gym phenomenon is back bigger than the '80s with the majority of members being regular 'Norms' just trying their best to get a bit fit.

While most of us lily white non-toned WWLTS types (women who love to snack) don't get over-enthused at the thought of popping on our oversize T-shirt and calf-length peddle pushers to head to the leg press, it seems that even gals like me are prepared to 'pump it up' in the name of feeling good!

It appears that fitness is once again big business both in the city and out in the 'burbs' where gyms are popping up like daises. Fitness gurus Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons would surely be proud!

From Friday night spin sessions in fluro lit disco rooms complete with hip hop DJ to body combat and pump classes, gyms are back in vogue. Companies like Nike have jumped on the training bandwagon with their own personal trainer revolution, the latest being a microchip in your running shoe that communicates with a Nike ipod featuring your very own PT (personal trainer) recording, providing minute by minute encouragement as you jog around the park.

So I wonder then with all this huffing and puffing going on around the nation, how did we recently earn the esteemed title of the western world's second largest obese nation?

Surely not the type of title we as a nation should be proud of. With this recent revelation wouldn't you think school tuckshops across our fair land would be destroying their high carb offerings while fruit and health food counters everywhere announce record sales? The sad answer is no!

While juice bars are big business, it isn't all for the sake

of health. It seems that what you eat and drink has become like so much else in our modern lives: a 'fashion fad'. With new fandango diets abundant and Hollywood starlets slipping in and out of eating disorders before our very eyes, this whole fitness and food issue has got me perplexed.

To top it all off, with the recent sad passing of blonde bombshell Anna-Nicole Smith, we have all been reminded that she too suffered from the bigger-smaller syndrome. Being famous for being big was cool one day then disdainfully out of fashion the next. While glossies and TV Specials spotlight the shrinkage of starlets like Nicole Ritchie and Posh Spice, upon a visit to a theme park recently I found an alarming number of the Australian culture making up for eating disorders with some teenagers so large they couldn't fit their bot bots in the seats on the rides!

As I stood in the queue waiting to test ride the latest heart-stopping attraction, teenagers around me were literally oozing out of their T-shirts and shorts! These were not your average muffin top, there were midribs of cellulite-pitted blubber everywhere to be seen and what I found even more alarming was their lack of interest in hiding it. Mind you their parents didn't seem too concerned with their children's image either.

As concerns grow that Australia is cultivating 'supersize' youngsters while shows like 'The Biggest Loser' are topping the ratings - what hope do we have?

So I asked former Mr Australia and body transformation specialist Rick Brennan what he thinks about this disastrous state of fitness and health affairs. This fitness expert who's achieved amazing results with thousands of Australians and as well as achieved international success with his own body shaping transformation, believes there's no doubt while there are growing numbers of people taking their fitness and health more seriously than ever before, a growing number are spiralling out of control.

"Whether you are a teenager or in your seventies you need to maintain some level of fitness to maintain your physical and mental state," he says.

"It may sound like a cliché, however as you get older your bone density decreases and you need to maintain strong bones to keep healthy, and there is only one proven way to do that - exercise and eat healthily.

"I'm not suggesting you should be striving to be an Olympian, but rather aim to do something for yourself every day to make yourself feel and look better. I'm appalled by the number of overweight children I see

with their parents, teaching them bad habits which they then in turn, will find hard to break.

"The saddest result for many of these kids is what this does to their confidence and mental state, as when you aren't feeling healthy and fit, it can have other disastrous consequences and that is the most concerning part for both them and society as a whole," he adds.

I once heard it spruced at a motivation conference, 'if we don't look after our body - where do we plan to live in the future?' Makes good sense but how many of us actually abide by this.

Let's face it, we have heard it all a hundred times before but acting on it seems near impossible for many, with Rick advising while the fitness industry may well be booming, the majority of Australians still aren't heeding the warnings.

Well I for one am not waiting until I get diagnosed with diabetes or low bone density for a wake up call, I'm putting my feet where my mouth once was and am taking action on both fronts. Exercising more regularly and eating better.

Ok, so it might have only been three months since my metamorphosis, but I'm feeling good, really good and I'm starting to like my greens and the thought of 'eating clean' actually excites me.

And the good news is the odd french fry and donut here and there isn't a death sentence, just a reason to put on the shoes and run a bit harder.

I have to admit that I've now become a bit of a gym junkie and while I'm not down to wearing a sports crop top yet, I have finally plucked up the courage to swap my oversize daggy t-shirt for stretch tight-waisted 'Everlast' Tee!

So like the fitness cartoon character 'Norm' once said, "Life be in it!" Let's face it, it's better than the alternative... of that you have my word!