

Fit Friends

You've heard it before, but it really is never too late to get healthy. A shining example.



Gunnar Peterson.

I HAVE AN EXCEPTIONAL FRIEND WHO ISN'T DOING THAT WELL. He's 68 years old and has lived 10 lifetimes in those years. When I met this crazy old bastard he had been training for about two months at a gym where I just started working. He worked out early in the morning with another trainer, but we early risers got to know each other and developed a kind of camaraderie. Eventually, his trainer took one too many vacations, and the next thing I knew, my soon-to-be good friend was training with me exclusively.

He was 54 and a good 25 pounds overweight, but never apologized for it. He was a product of his workplace—behind the scenes in Hollywood—and he knew the town like the back of a dessert cart. Where to get the best bear claws, the freshest frosting, the greatest doughnuts—all without fighting the crowds. But he worked as hard in the gym as anyone I had worked with before. He insisted on paying for the month in advance and raised my rates more than once because I “didn’t charge what I was worth.” He would force himself to keep the pace I set and loved when I upped the weights to challenge him. He laughed at me and with me. He even joined me on Sundays, the only

day I did not see clients, to drive to Gold’s Gym in Venice for a workout. We did this for years and he never missed a session.

He lost 28 pounds in less than a year with exercise and a few dietary considerations, and he kept it off for the seven years he trained with me. We had a ritual of drinking margaritas and eating spicy tuna rolls and Hershey’s Kisses (you can’t give up *everything*—I told you it was about balance, not deprivation), and although clearly not in everyone’s diet, we managed to budget it into our caloric intakes and counter it with training. I’ll never forget the time he looked into pro bodybuilder Chris Cormier’s face, struck a double-biceps pose (you know the one), and shouted, “Fifty-five and fit!” That’s still how I see him. But now he isn’t doing that well.

He moved to Florida about eight years ago to be with his sister and her family, but continued with his training. He told me that no trainer was anywhere near as good as I was, but they were young and trying to learn so that made them OK. I was thrilled that he was sticking with it. He has visited LA regularly since moving. He always stays with me and we always make time for our workouts, as well as our margaritas, sushi, and Hershey’s Kisses. He was a groomsman in my wedding, and is my youngest son Jack’s godfather. He is as much family as he is friend, and now he isn’t doing that well.

When his health began failing, his balance deteriorated and he started using a cane. I think it was more embarrassing than anything because he had become the “fit guy” among his peers. More important, he had become the “used-to-be-fat fit guy,” so his word carried a lot of weight even if he didn’t anymore. I suggested that he have the handle of the cane made to look like a dumbbell. He laughed. But now he isn’t doing that well.

You’re probably wondering what, besides a much-needed catharsis, I’m trying to get across here. My point is this: A man, who never had a good body, *got* a good body at 54 years old. With no athletic background or overly generous genetic predisposition, he decided it was time, put in the work, and would not be denied. His wardrobe changed, he developed a spring in his step, and he became the go-to fitness guy in many circles. He was sick less often and was able to participate in a number of activities that he shied away from in the past. He loves living his life. Much of this happened because of the kind of person he is (and has always been), but it was all enhanced by his commitment to fitness. Isn’t it time you committed as well? When he devoted himself to fitness he made his whole life better. He made my life better. And now he isn’t doing that well. Stay strong, Richard. ★