

As I ran up the steps to the gym I was already puffing. What a rotten day to be late. This was the day I had promised myself I would begin my exercise program. It had taken me a year just to get motivated enough to phone the gym. I had come up with all kinds of excuses -- I was too fat, I couldn't keep up, I didn't have anything to wear. But I was determined. Today was the day.

The first thing I saw when I entered gym was large room full various types of weight equipment, looking to me like medieval instruments of torture. From the grunts and groans coming from the people using the equipment, it sounded like torture, too. In my self-conscious state of mind, I imagined everyone was staring at me and thinking "What is she doing here? Only us jocks are allowed in here." I hurried through the weight equipment to the aerobics area. A couple of ceiling fans whirred silently over the exercisers who were beginning their warm-up on the black and white tiled floor. *Oh no*, I thought. *I'm too late*. I was debating whether to stay or make a run for it when a kind lady came to my rescue. She took my money and got me a place on the floor, right in front of the large windows facing the street. Not only would everyone in the gym see what rotten shape I was in, so would everyone else in town. I made a mental note to arrive early enough next time so I could hide in the back.

Huge mirrors covered the walls in front of us. I knew the purpose of these mirrors was to allow us to check the position of our bodies and ensure we were doing the exercises correctly. But I hated those mirrors. I had a front row seat as my hair grew damp with sweat, my face turned red with exertion and my feet tripped over each other. Not a pretty sight.

Our instructor, Sherilyn, was a beautiful blond with the kind of figure I had given up hope of having years ago. She wore a body-hugging spandex outfit consisting of a midriff length tank top and matching bicycle shorts. I looked around and noticed that most of the other exercisers wore fashionable little outfits as well. My baggy sweat pants, ancient T-shirt and \$10 running shoes were a definite fashion *faux pas*.

The class tonight was step aerobics, which hadn't been invented the last time I'd gone to an exercise class. For the uninitiated, the purpose of step aerobics is to simulate stair climbing by stepping up and down a six inch platform. This stepping motion continues throughout the length of the class or until you drop dead, whichever comes first. I was hoping for the former.

Sherilyn gave us instructions as she energetically hopped up and down her step. "Put your entire foot on the middle of the step so you don't fall off." *Good advice*. She kept up a steady stream of conversation. "Up, up, down, down. Left, right, right, left. Tummies tight. Keep breathing!" I marvelled at her ability to step and talk at the same time. I couldn't utter much more than the occasional groan.

I managed to keep up with the basic step, but then Sherilyn threw in a new wrinkle. "Add your arms, ladies." She did a neat little bicep curl. The change threw me off completely. Doing the foot motion and the arm movement at the same time is something like patting your head and rubbing your tummy simultaneously. I eventually mastered that move, only to get mixed up a few moments later when Sherilyn changed the pattern again. Consequently, I wasn't always doing the same thing as the rest of the class but least I was still moving.

Finally, mercifully, the aerobic section was over. "Okay ladies, take your heart rate!" Sherilyn commanded. I put two fingers on the pulse point at my neck. My heart raced like a thoroughbred at the Kentucky Derby. "Stop!" she said after ten seconds. "Refer to the chart to make sure your pulse rate is in the target zone." She looked at me and asked how my heart rate was. If I could have stopped panting long enough to speak I would have told her I was just glad my heart was still beating. Instead I smiled and nodded.

A good aerobics workout must end with a cool-down period. We slowed our steps and then began to stretch out. As I bent forward in a stretch, I watched in fascination as a bead of sweat ran down the end of my nose and onto the floor. I'd never actually sweated that much before. I half expected a towel boy to race out to mop up the floor like in the basketball games on TV. Maybe all this exercise was making me delusional.

After several more stretches and some deep breathing exercises, the class was over. I had survived! I had made it through the whole class without keeling over! I was feeling proud as I walked from the gym on rubbery legs. Maybe I wasn't ready for the Iron Man Triathlon, but at least I hadn't totally embarrassed myself. And think of all the calories I'd just burned. I figured that must be worth at least an extra dessert tonight.