

She set her mind on losing weight

By SUSAN TAUBER

"I feel like I've conquered the Himalayas," said Cammi Scolnick of Avon Township after she returned from a one-week vacation. She didn't conquer the mountains, however. What she did was "survive," one week at what Vogue Magazine once called "the toughest health spa in America."

Her adventure at The Ashram near Santa Monica, Calif., started when Mrs. Scolnick, 31, found herself 70 pounds heavier than she was three years ago.

She gained weight after the birth of her two children, who were born over a three-year period.

"I was 21 when I married. I always do a lot of entertaining and after having the two children, my weight went up 70 pounds. When I was married I

weighed 129 pounds," said the five-foot eleven-inch tall woman.

Having spent most of her adult life in a health-oriented environment, Mrs. Scolnick became concerned about her health after she gained weight.

"I lived in California for seven years. There, everyone is health conscious. I worked at La Costa (a health and vacation spa in California) for two years in the program. I took a job cleaning windows in order to work at the spa. I spent one year working with Jack LaLanne Studio in California. I had to do an intense internship of 177 hours of training in health and exercise," said the Avon Township native.

AFTER GRADUATING from San Diego State where she studied speech pathology, Mrs. Scolnick returned to Michigan and enrolled at Wayne State

University to do graduate work.

She and her husband, they married and her weight problems began.

After both children were born, Mrs. Scolnick was able to start a diet and exercise program on her own.

"I lost weight but I was unhappy with the way my body looked," she said.

So she went to a health spa in Florida.

"The instructors weren't hard enough on me," she said. "I wanted to find a place that made my body feel pounds into shape."

She found that place — The Ashram.

"It's a place where they make your mind and body one. While you're there, you have no contact with the outside world. You live in a spartan ranch house with the other visitors and instructors. The house is on the side of the mountain and everyone walks around the house barefoot, speaking softly," she said.

"There are ponds, streams and wildflowers all over. The natural smells make you feel high," Mrs. Scolnick said.

Though the place may sound heavenly, it was a difficult physical as well as spiritual experience for Mrs. Scolnick.

HER MEALS there added up to only 300-500 calories a day. For breakfast she dined on orange juice and calcium and potassium pills. Lunch consisted of romaine leaves with lowfat cottage cheese, yogurt with cinnamon and fresh fruit. For dinner, she ate a cucumber seed, cut in half, and stuffed with the pulp mixed with mushrooms, radishes and onions. Also on her dinner dish were nuts and one cherry.

"We were encouraged to drink as much water with lemon as we wanted," Mrs. Scolnick said. "For those who got up in the middle of the night to eat food from the refrigerator, their attempts were foiled. There were bells on the refrigerator door."

In addition to the spartan living

quarters and meals, Mrs. Scolnick lived the one week without coffee or cigarettes and with extensive amounts of sometimes painful exercise.

"By Wednesday I had had it," she said. "I wanted my coffee and I wanted to go home. About 4:30 a.m. I got out of bed and made some herbal tea and was sobbing. I told an instructor who came down to see what was wrong that I couldn't take it anymore. She told me they would take it easy on me that day. Of course, they didn't and by the end of the day I felt better."

Those days were spent, starting at 6 a.m. waking up and 15 minutes for breakfast, with yoga in a geodesic dome.

"We did this for one hour every morning while watching the fog roll over the mountains and the sun rising," Mrs. Scolnick said.

THEN CAME THE six mile, two-and-a-half hour hike through the mountains, so grueling that women tell stories of falling and crawling over rocks with spurs.

There were water exercises, jogging, walks, more yoga. Evenings consisted of discussions on how to maintain a healthy diet and exercise routine when they return home.

"You can't go to The Ashram just because you want to," Mrs. Scolnick said. "You have to call and they ask you questions about your health, weight and physical condition. If they don't think you can make it through the week, they won't accept you. There were eight of us there, and no one was overweight."

Visitors are only allowed to stay one week. The Ashram accepts women only.

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After her week's visit to the spa, the Ashram, yoga has become a part of Cammi Scolnick's life. Here she is doing a stretch that's part of a morning routine.

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