

Weight Watchers



More than 100 followers met their leader, Jean Nidetch



Jean Nidetch, who started it all

'Tell them in our 11-year history, not one ever came out looking uglier'—Jean Nidetch, founder of Weight Watchers

5 million Weight Watchers heed her

By SHIRLEE IDEN

She's Jean Slutsky Nidetch from Brooklyn, New York. And she used to weigh 240 pounds.

She's also the 'guru' of thousands of Weight Watchers, customers and employees around the country.

Last week, in town for the grand opening of Weight Watchers new building on Twelve Mile Road in Southfield, Mrs. Nidetch spoke to more than 100 Weight Watcher employees and lecturers.

Impeccably dressed in a navy blue shirt-waist dress, her hair carefully coiffed, the founder of Weight Watchers—who hadn't intended to speak at all—held her audience spell-bound more than 30 minutes.



Florine Mark is local head of Weight Watchers

SHE RECOUNTED how, on a trip to Louisville, Ky., she was afforded a "spectacular" welcome with reporters and crowds waiting.

"There were signs reading 'Be lean with Jean' and a large gathering," she said.

"The airlines asked me to please get off last for the convenience of the other passengers."

One passenger asked her how it all started.

"I dunno," she said. "I ate cookies a lot and then this."

A FELLOW passenger gushed, "Oh, Mrs. Nidetch, I had a friend who flew with Mrs. Humphrey, and I'm with you."

This line drew a long, loud, laugh.

Mrs. Nidetch recalled that she began to wonder who she really was and it was then she said to herself:

"I'm Jean Slutsky Nidetch from Brooklyn, N.Y., and I used to weigh 240 pounds."

"Be Yourself," she told her audience, "Whoever you are, you're the best of whatever you are."

WITH A STRONG philosophical, almost religious belief that the growth of Weight Watchers was "somehow planned," she said she thinks everything that has happened to her followed a script.

"The secret to the book is: I found something, and the only way to make it worthwhile is to give it to someone else," she said.

"That's the gift," she said, "When someone says Thank you for giving me my life."

"My reward is their thanks," she said.

She recounted how a couple in Sydney, Australia

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brought their young baby in a basket and begged her to touch him.

"THIS IS the baby we were allowed to adopt after losing nearly 300 pounds altogether," the mother explained.

Before that the two both were considered medical risks. Weight watchers, begun 11 years ago by Mrs. Nidetch, is 5 million members strong and is an international concern, she said.

"I don't go by computers," the founder said, "I think we're more than 100 million strong."

She said her theory in terms of overeating is "to err is human, but to err twice is idiot and destructive."

IN A question-and-answer period she was asked how to respond to a client who asks why they can't eat or drink a certain food.

"Ask them why they need it," she said.

When clients ask what to do to combat flab or crepiness, she said to tell them:

"In our 11-year history, we never had anyone end up uglier than they started."

Mrs. Nidetch concluded with a promise to "Go anywhere they want me to speak as long as I've got the strength."

A regular figure, she's a gourmet on a diet

By LORAIN McCLISH

A woman once known as "Fat Flo" discovered Weight Watchers and replaced a size 18 wardrobe with a size 10 in a matter of weeks and is still cooking gourmet dinners.

"I was born into a fat family," said Florine Mark who founded Weight Watchers in Michigan.

"Food was plentiful and they set a good table. If any of us were ever unhappy they shoved something into our mouths."

Though she doesn't adhere to this kind of philosophy today with her own family, her love of food — "I can still eat a half gallon of ice cream in one sitting" — and her weight-watching diet does not deter her from collecting recipes or concocting a few on her own.

She spent "months in the kitchen" for a diet soda company to come up with recipes

using the one-calorie pop in meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

HER LATEST EFFORT is a collection of prize-winning recipes from all over the world that will be published into a cook book before the summer is out.

"Just because you're on a diet doesn't mean you have to stop cooking," she said.

"I've got a great collection for as simple or as embellished as you want to go. They are for anyone who can follow a recipe."

There's something of the evangelist in her when she speaks of nutrition and the benefits of adhering to the Weight Watchers legal foods list.

So it comes as no surprise that she wants to share her recipes or has converted her housekeeper to new eating habits.

"I about drove the Raleigh House chefs

crazy when we had 300 people there for a sit-down dinner at my son's Bar Mitzvah because I wouldn't have anything that wasn't legal," she said.

ANOTHER PROSPECT she's got on the horizon is a "Diet Bakery and Munching Co.," she's opening in the Southfield Road-Twelve Mile Road area.

"It will be filled with everything from books to gourmet spices. Everything the dieter needs or needs to know," she said.

She's adamantly anti-amphetamines for anyone who is trying to lose weight.

"I know. I tried everything," she said, "starvation diets, low-calorie diets, exercise diets, special food, appetite depressant pills, diet pills and hypnosis."

"NOTHING IS going to succeed as well as changing your eating habits."

Mrs. Mark said winning the title of one

of the ten top working women in Michigan was the biggest thrill of her life.

Since founding the Michigan Weight Watchers, she has since opened chapters in Toledo, Windsor, and Mexico.

She's a regular figure on television, banging the drums for Weight Watchers in advertisements or as a guest speaker.

She's a lecturer on a college circuit where her talk is entitled "You Can Do Anything You Want To Do If You Really Want To Do It."

She has been the Mothers' March Chairman for the March of Dimes for the past three years, and plays an active role in the United Foundation, and Michigan Cancer Foundation fund drives.

This week she is preparing to receive 200 Weight Watchers directors and trainers who will be in Southfield's Shawassee Hotel for workshops and seminars.