

Joanna Berry: Aiming to Inspire

Joanna Berry

NPC Fit Model Competitor, Wife, Mom of 2

Age: 40

Occupation: Entrepreneur, Fitness Model

Joanna Berry, originally from Poland but currently residing in Atlanta, shared her transformative journey into bodybuilding. She competed in her first show in 2013 and later gained significant weight, reaching 235 pounds post-children. After a personal wake-up call at 38, she focused on health, losing 110 pounds, and undergoing a preventative mastectomy due to a family history of breast cancer. Joanna emphasized the importance of mindset, community, and self-care. She also discussed her entrepreneurial ventures, including real estate, business consulting, and hosting wellness retreats. Joanna aims to inspire others, particularly moms, to prioritize their health and well-being.

BACKGROUND AND INITIAL HEALTH JOURNEY

I grew up in California, but I'm actually from Poland. My husband and I moved to Atlanta during COVID. I have two children, six and eight, a boy and a girl. My journey reflects the resilience and adaptability of the human spirit. What began as a conversation on New Year's Eve led me to an incredible personal challenge, demonstrating the importance of setting goals and pushing boundaries. Competing in a bodybuilding show, at the age of 27, with minimal preparation was a bold step, and the experience clearly taught me valuable lessons about discipline, determination, and the complexities of fitness. The subsequent weight gain after the show and with the birth of my children is a testament to the shifting priorities and realities of life. In fact, I gained a total of 105lbs literally doubling my weight! Yet, this phase too holds its own lessons, emphasizing that life is a continuous journey of transformation and growth. Embracing these changes with grace and understanding that each chapter adds to the richness of your story is invaluable. I strive to encourage others to pursue their passions, embrace life's unpredictability, and recognize that every experience contributes to a greater understanding of oneself.

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INITIAL HEALTH GOALS AND CHALLENGES

I had reached a pivotal moment of self-realization and was ready to make positive changes. Leaving corporate America at 38, especially with such poignant family history, truly marked a significant turning point in my life. The loss of my sister and mother to breast cancer is a profound reminder of the preciousness of health and time and I chose to honor their memories by prioritizing my well-being. This journey toward better health—both physical and mental—can be transformative, offering a renewed sense of purpose and fulfillment. As I embarked on this path, I always kept in mind, two key points; 1) small, consistent steps can lead to significant improvement, and 2) surrounding myself with supportive people and resources will reinforce my commitment to living a healthier, more balanced life.

TURNING POINT AND HEALTH TRANSFORMATION

I joined a gym and committed to regular workouts. I also made a conscious decision to make healthier dietary choices and significantly reduce alcohol consumption taking a proactive approach to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I chose to undergo a preventative mastectomy after discovering a BRCA2 genetic mutation, which heightened my risk for breast cancer. Facing the presence of fibroadenoma and PASH added complexity, but I was determined to prioritize my long-term health and mitigate anxiety about potential cancer. Having learned from experience, I understood the importance of being proactive and informed about our health choices..

Shifting focus from seeking external approval to nurturing self-worth can be incredibly empowering. As I approach 40, I aim to feel better than I did in my 20s. With the right team and resources supporting you, you can set yourself up for success. Remember, it's not just about physical strength but also mental and emotional well-being. As I keep pushing forward, I feel this milestone year may be my best yet!

CURRENT HEALTH AND FITNESS JOURNEY

Competing in the NPC Cydney Gillon Peach Classic earlier this year, in the Fit Model Division showcased my physique, with more muscle mass compared to my first show. I had a total weight loss of 110 pounds from my heaviest weight, while regularly tracking my muscle mass and bone density to ensure that my body remained strong and robust. My results reflect a physical transformation as well as demonstrates the mental tenacity required to excel in competitive fitness.



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Embracing vitality and a mindset geared towards continuous improvement are transformative forces that can redefine life at any age. I feel younger and more vital than ever. Since the show, I have had multiple people reach out to me for fitness modeling. If you told me, at 40 I would be starting my career in fitness modeling, I probably would have laughed but you know, why not? Why not me! Breaking barriers and pursuing new ventures, highlights the power of self-belief and the importance of showing up for oneself. Age should never be a barrier to pursuing dreams or maintaining health. I believe, everyone, regardless of age, has the capacity to enhance their quality of life through positive choices. By prioritizing our well-being, we not only look and feel better but also inspire others to embrace their own potential. So why not seize the opportunity to live vibrantly and with purpose?

After the show I was offered a photo shoot and I chose to wear some clothes from an apparel company I love called, Live Evolutionary. A friend sent those pictures to the owner of the company on my behalf, and they invited me to do some fitness modeling for them. You just never know what opportunities might be out there!

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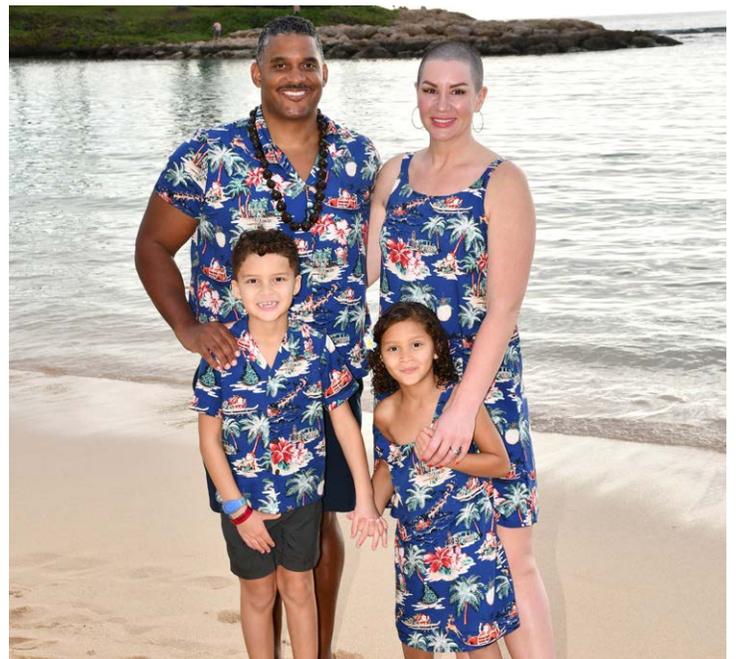


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IMPACT ON FAMILY AND BUSINESS

In the beginning, getting my husband and family on board with living healthier was incredibly tough. Not gonna lie, it was a real challenge. My kids were confused about the changes, and my husband outright declared, “I’d rather be fat than eat ground turkey like you.” Despite this, I pursued my passion for hosting retreats that blend business with wellness because I truly believe that wealth means nothing without health. At a recent retreat in Miami, which my husband attended, the fit and energetic crowd really inspired him. By the end, he said, “I’m ready to eat ground turkey and do whatever it takes. I want to feel better.” Although he’s always been strong and active, nutrition was his biggest hurdle. The retreat helped him see that he didn’t have to choose between work, family, and health; in fact, combining them could boost his performance in all areas. Witnessing this shift was incredibly gratifying. My kids, too, were influenced by my example and the women they saw at the bodybuilding show, especially those over 60. They’ve started to adopt healthier habits, like reading food labels. Seeing them embrace good nutrition and exercise at such a young age has been deeply rewarding. But, trust me, the journey wasn’t easy at the start. As an entrepreneur, I find myself wearing multiple hats, each one allowing me to explore different facets of the business world. My journey began as a real estate investor, where I own and manage rental properties, navigating the dynamic market and ensuring my investments yield fruitful returns. Alongside this, I serve as a business consultant for small businesses, helping them implement revenue-driving strategies and optimize their back-end processes for efficiency and growth. My passion for business intersects with wellness through the retreats I organize, alternating between co-ed and women-only formats. These retreats are designed to focus on strategic business planning while fostering wealth and health, with the ultimate aim of creating a supportive community for fellow entrepreneurs. It’s a fulfilling path that allows me to blend my love for business with my commitment to personal well-being and community building.





RETREATS AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

At the last retreat, our focus was primarily on investors, but for the upcoming one in November, we're aiming to invite a more diverse group of entrepreneurs from various industries. This retreat will be held in the Dominican Republic, and I'm excited about the change in dynamic that a broader range of perspectives will bring. I have a fantastic marketing person who manages my website and advertising, ensuring that everything runs smoothly. Typically, our retreats last between three to five days, depending on whether we're hosting domestically or internationally. We're committed to keeping the attendee list between 20 and 30 people to maintain an intimate, exclusive, and carefully curated experience. It's important to us that the event feels personal and not overwhelming.

My own need and necessity for community inspired the retreats. As an entrepreneur, I quickly realized that people in the traditional W2 job space often don't understand the unique challenges and experiences that come with running your own business. Community can truly make or break our journey. I've attended numerous conferences across various fields—finance, real estate, personal growth—and while they were informative, their massive scale left me feeling drained and disconnected. I rarely had the chance to form meaningful connections. The intention behind the enriched retreats I promote is to create a space where we can truly get to know one another. What makes you tick? What are your limiting beliefs? How can we support one another? What challenges do you face in your business, your health, and other areas of your life? What truly matters to you? If we're going to have it all, we need to be able to discuss what "it all" means to each of us. Large conferences lack this granular, personal experience. Our philosophy is to outsource areas of weakness and provide guidance, which is crucial for success. The support offered through these retreats is vital for fostering genuine community and growth.

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From a more balanced perspective, I've realized that prioritizing my health has significantly boosted my productivity and success. Moreover, I've found that my confidence has made me feel much more attractive, and a lot of that confidence stems from learning how to present myself effectively, especially on stage. I've mastered the art of showcasing my strengths while downplaying my weaknesses. Ultimately, every job can be seen as a sales job, with us acting as our own sales representatives. When we present the best version of ourselves, people are naturally more inclined to engage with us. I believe this is reflected in our attire, posture, and the confidence we project. The way we care for ourselves often serves as a barometer for how others will treat us. If I'm neglecting my health, it's not an environment I want to be in, and whether we like it or not, this truth is closely linked to our business success.





FUTURE PLANS AND GOALS

I'm gearing up for the Southern Muscle Showdown this October, and I'm thrilled to have inspired two incredible moms from my gym to join me in this journey. I refuse to buy into the narrative that life ends once you have kids or that turning 40 means you're past your prime. In my 20s, I was devastated when I didn't win a medal, constantly criticizing myself. Now, even after coming in last at a recent major competition, I find pride in the experience itself. The internal validation I feel far outweighs any external recognition like a trophy or medal. I want all women, especially moms, to experience this empowerment, to break free from damaging societal expectations. We have the power to feel good about ourselves, but it requires tapping into our potential. The journey is transformative, as it taught me to cherish daily progress over perfection and to show myself grace. Consistency is key, even when my best feels like only 5%. This lesson is universal, extending beyond fitness into our marriages, parenting, and careers—any area where discipline and perseverance are essential.

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Many of the attendees find the retreats truly transformative. One attendee shared that it was among the top five experiences of her life, and another described it as completely life-changing. Before the retreat, we asked the attendees about their expectations, which set the tone for a personalized journey. Afterward, the feedback form gave us a chance to reflect, and the responses frequently highlight themes of transformation, community, and connection. We all left with a strong sense of camaraderie and support, empowered to face challenges in both our business and personal lives. It was an experience that not only facilitated deep connections but also fostered personal growth and mutual support.

MARKETING AND COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

I'm very open to collaboration and see several opportunities for enhancing my retreats. I'm already working with a private chef who specializes in nutrition tailored to different life stages, from postpartum to perimenopause. I value creating intimate, curated experiences that provide deep connections and transformative insights for participants, so I'm always looking for professionals who can add unique value to my events.

