

I Finally Had to Diet!

For years, fans, doctors, and friends urged her to lose weight, but it took near-tragedy to make her listen—and then, characteristically, it was for somebody else's sake

By **KATE SMITH**

as told to Gladys Hall



IN THE PAST four years, I have slowly but steadily lost 85 pounds. Slowly but steadily I intend to continue to lose weight until I tip the scales at 155 or, at most, 160 pounds. In terms of health and appearance, that's approximately what a woman of my age (49) and height (5 feet, 10½ inches) should weigh.

I was 17 when I began to put on weight. At 18, I weighed 165 pounds. As years went by, I didn't get any thinner. To begin with, I've always had a sweet tooth. I come from a sweet-toothed family, and plenty of rich desserts were daily fare back home in Greenville, Va. And as I bake very well, rich desserts continued to be part of every meal after I left home. Though I ate only two meals a day, I had frequent rich "snacks."

Why, as the years went by and the weight went on, didn't I take myself in hand and diet as I am doing now?

Once in a while I did diet in a halfhearted sort of way, but after a couple of chocolate-less weeks and the loss of five or six pounds, I'd say: "The heck with it!" I'd gain back the lost pounds and let it go at that.

I didn't make any sustained effort to lose weight for the simple reason that overweight never hindered me from doing anything I wanted to do. I've always been agile, active, and athletic. I play tennis. I play golf. I sail. I swim. I water ski. I dance. I was never short of friends. Or of dates. Or of engagements in radio or some other entertainment medium. My health has always been robust. I didn't know then, as I do now, that stout people tend to fall into one of two categories: either they are lethargic or they are supercharged with energy due to high blood pressure. I belonged in the second category.

Nor did vanity prod me into counting my calories. I never looked at a stem-slim young woman enviously. I have never been a vain person. When I look in a mirror, I see only two things that please me—my complexion and my teeth.

My eyes are weak. I'm terribly nearsighted. I've worn glasses since I was four. On TV, I use contact lenses. If I didn't, my guest stars would ap-

pear to me as shapeless blurs. And always, when I look in a mirror, I see the double chin and think: why do I have to be stuck with that?

Aware as I am of my shortcomings, overweight was one that I simply chose—subconsciously, perhaps—to overlook. I went right on with my compulsive eating—so compulsive that even when my blood pressure was so high that I had to give up my daily TV program I didn't give up calorie-laden sweets. Nor did I abstain after I had a bad gall-bladder attack and faced possible surgery. "Too much weight," I was warned, "makes you a poor operative risk." The warning fell on deaf ears.

And then, four years ago, I had a terrifying scare—and that did it.

As those familiar with my career know, Ted Collins has been my manager and producer, my "alter ego," ever since he launched me in radio on May 1, 1931—which was, coincidentally, my 20th birthday. Last May 1, we joyfully celebrated my 49th birthday and our 29th anniversary as a successful manager-star team.

During all these years, Ted has guided me so successfully that I am now incapable of facing an



Kate Smith reviews a script with her long-time friend and manager, Ted Collins. The setting is Lake Placid.

audience or a microphone unless he is there—in the theater, in the TV studio, or wherever I am singing—to give me confidence. Nor would Ted, in spite of many opportunities, produce any show of which I am not a part. In addition to being in complete control of my career, down to the last detail, Ted is also my confidant. I go to him with all my personal problems.

There had been 25 years of this close-knit association when, four years ago, Ted had a heart attack so serious his doctors said: "Three days survival time is the most we can hope for."

"Three days survival time."

WITH THESE WORDS haunting me, I went straight from the hospital to church and there, on my knees, I asked God to spare Ted's life. "What can I do?" I asked Him. "What can I sacrifice?" Unbidden then, came the memory of the one and only time Ted had ever referred to my overweight. After my gall-bladder attack, he said: "For your health's sake, Kathryn, please diet as your doctors advise you to do."

I hadn't done what he asked. But now . . . "If You will make him well again," I prayed, "I will do what is the hardest thing in the world for me to do—give up everything I like to eat."

For 38 days Ted was in an oxygen tent and I was on my knees. I cancelled all engagements. I couldn't, for the life of me, have raised my voice in song.

On the 39th day, his doctors announced: "He's going to make it."

When Ted learned why I was at last dieting in earnest, he said: "God traded me for a frosted chocolate!"

Perhaps He did. I only know that Ted's life was spared and that I was given the strength to do something I had never before been able to do. And from that time, I have kept on doing it.

For the past four years, I have limited myself to 1,000 calories a day. Since I never go to bed before 1:30 or 2 a.m., I continue to have two meals a day—breakfast at 11 or 11:30, dinner at 6 or 6:30—as I've been doing for so long. But now there are

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