



**PAULA ZAHN NOW**

**JULY 15, 2005**

ZAHN: I think this next set of numbers are going to shock you. I know they -- a recent study in "The New England Journal of Medicine" says that today's young people may actually be the first generation in 200 years to have a shorter life expectancy than their parent. And this is why. One out of every six boys and girls in the U.S. is over weight. And starting tonight, medical correspondent, Elizabeth Cohen is going to follow some young people who are trying to turn their lives around. They're going to a summer camp to lose weight. **And you'll see their progress in our series "Four Weeks to Lose"**. We begin by meeting them at home. (START VIDEOTAPE)

ELIZABETH COHEN, CNN MEDICAL CORRESPONDENT (voice over): It's not that she hasn't tried to lose weight. Early in the morning when her friends are usually fast asleep, Shawna Rubeck works out. She's not crazy about exercising this early, but Shawna will do anything to lose weight because she's scared, scared of getting diabetes. Scared that since she's been heavy all of her 14 years, she'll be heavy the rest of her life. And scared that the teasing will never end.

SHAWNA RUBECK: People have called me cupcake as a joke. And I would just sort of laugh about it because, you know, I knew I couldn't do anything about it.

COHEN (on camera): Is it sort of one kid calling you this, or do they sometimes team up on you?

RUBECK: They team up. Like one will start it and then others will hear about it and they'll be like hey flubber, hey cupcake. Stuff like that.

COHEN (voice over): That's when she started working out. And she thought she was losing weight, but she wasn't. (on camera) What was it like when you were at the doctors? You saw that you gained 30 pounds in one year. What resolution did you make?

RUBECK: Well, my heart kind of sank, you know, if I can gain that in a year, I can be 30 pounds 40 pounds heavier the next.

COHEN (on camera): When Shawna reached 250 pounds, she realized she needed help.

RUBECK: I'm trying to get some of the brownie, but it's not coming off. There we go. I went online and I was looking up weight loss camp for kids, summer weight loss camps.

COHEN: She found them, plenty of them. But the price tag, around \$4,000 a month, was way more than her family could afford. Then, her mother heard about a scholarship program. Twenty-two kids competing for just eight spaces. Shawna poured her heart out in her application letter.

RUBECK: Often when I'm out in public, people stare at me and sometimes make comments that really hurt my feelings. I am at a point in my life that I realize that I can't continue to live like this. I'm ready to do whatever it will take to change.

COHEN: After weeks of waiting, her mother gave her the good news.

RUBECK: She told me that I had been one of the first chosen and I was -- had gotten a scholarship., and I was almost in tears. I can't believe I'm leaving this Sunday.

COHEN: Shawna's week at weight-loss camp begins this weekend. It's her dream, a team of nutritionists, psychologists and exercise specialists will be at her service. It's also a test, will she be able to meet her goal of losing 40 pounds. This one month may be her best shot ever.

Unlike Shawna, Nathan Ruffin was thin throughout childhood. In fact, he started out life a two pound preemie. Then in sixth grade, bullies started to tease him mercilessly, just because he was close to his mother and made nearly perfect grades.

NATHAN RUFFIN: Ok. Girl, gay, fat, momma's boy, teacher's pet. To be in a classroom and someone's talking about you, you feel like you're kind of an outcast. And no one really likes you or knows you basically.

SHARON RUFFIN, NATHAN'S MOTHER: I ended up getting off work early one day, and I came home and he just cried in my arms for a long time. He said, Mom, they're just so mean to me. And he's like, they don't even know me. And -- I'm getting ready to cry -- just as a mom, it was heartbreaking. You know. This is my son telling me, you know, that he just can't take it.

N. RUFFIN: Bless our family, keep them happy and healthy, amen.

COHEN: On one particularly bad day, Nathan found a new refuge.

N. RUFFIN: I think I ate two packs of noodles, hot dogs and chips and dinner. So that was a lot it eat that day.

COHEN (on camera): Why do you think you ate so much?

N. RUFFIN: I think I was really stressed out maybe.

COHEN (voice over): Nathan gained 70 pounds in two years. Now, 13, he weighs 200 pounds. Like Shawna, he started going to the gym, but it wasn't enough.

N. RUFFIN: Definitely starting to hurt.

COHEN: His mother heard about weight-loss camp, but since she supports five children on her own, she couldn't afford it. Then Nathan heard about the scholarship program.

N. RUFFIN: I was like speechless.

S. RUFFIN: Our whole family just jumped in on it and we just all just started working on it. Like we got to get him in here, we got to get him in here. Two to three non-cotton T-shirts.

COHEN: The family effort paid off. Nathan won one of the coveted spots. And now his grandparents, aunts and uncles are helping him get everything he needs for camp. A lot is riding on these next four weeks, not just the 30 pounds Nathan intends to lose, but his pride in making his mom happy.

N. RUFFIN: I want her to be proud that I accomplished something.

COHEN (on camera): You've really got an important mission this month.

N. RUFFIN: I do. But I'm excited, so. I want to stay happy. I want to stay excited, and I want it to hurry up and come.

COHEN (voice over): And so does Shawna. (on camera) What would be the best thing about being the same size as your friends?

RUBECK: My confidence. It would go sky high.

COHEN: Where is it now?

RUBECK: About in the middle, because I'm getting really excited about this camp. So I think that if I can get this far, get myself this far, I think, you know, I just need a little bit of a push going to this camp. And then I'll be off. That's all I need.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: I don't know, from watching both of them, Elizabeth, it seems like they have an awful lot of motivation, and what great families they both come from. So can you give us a sense of what happens to these kids over the next couple of weeks once they get to camp?

**COHEN: Right. When they arrive at camp on Sunday, Paula, what's going to happen the staff will give them a pedometer, and give them a calorie counter and give them a journal. And they tell the kids you have to keep this journal with you at all times. And you have to write down everything that you eat. So that's sort of one step. Another step is to give them counseling to help figure out why they have over eaten in the past. Why did they tend to do this? And as you saw with each kid, the reasons were slightly different with each child.**

**And that's true for all of the children at this camp, this camp by the way is called Wellspring camp and it's in North Carolina. So that's some of what they do. They also take them on trips, kayaking and white-water rafting and they also take them mountain biking. And so it's a whole program. And in the past, they found that it worked. And of course, we're hoping that it works for Nathan and for Shawna.**

ZAHN: I'm just curious really quickly in closing, what the chances are that they actually will lose weight and keep it off, even with all of that exercise you're talking about that they'll be doing.

**COHEN: At this camp, this is one of the few camps where they actually follow the kids, and they keep track of how they do and they tend to lose about four pounds a week. In this camp, they keep track of them for six months, after they leave camp most of the time they do actually keep it off for six months. The big question is, do they keep is off for longer than that? And that's sort of an unresolved question it's not very clear.**

ZAHN: Well we're rooting for Shawna and Nathan. They seem like really, really good kids.

COHEN: Wonderful, sweet kids. And a lot of family support.

ZAHN: Yes, that was really nice to see. Elizabeth Cohen, thanks so much. Have a good weekend.

COHEN: You too.