

Diet book turns into a big gain for ex-paperboy

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BY MIKE KERWICK

WHO: James Hester and Roni DeLuz.

WHAT: Book signing for "21 Pounds in 21 Days: The Martha's Vineyard Diet Detox."

WHEN: 7 p.m. Thursday.

WHERE: Barnes & Noble, The Shops at Riverside, Hackensack Avenue at Route 4, Hackensack; 201-488-8037.

His aunt still lives on Columbus Avenue, the Little Ferry road where 9-year-old James Hester delivered copies of The Record to earn spending money. Company policy, according to Hester, required each paperboy to be at least 11 years old.

"Are you 11?" his boss asked.

Hester fibbed, a white lie that allowed him to sling papers at porches and collect money.

"The winter was hard," Hester said during a recent phone interview. "The winter Sunday mornings. ... Sunday you had to do the insert."

All these years later, that paperboy from Little Ferry has a best-selling book on his hands. Hester teamed with Roni DeLuz to write "21 Pounds in 21 Days: The Martha's Vineyard Diet Detox." The book became a bestseller last year after Howard Stern sidekick Robin Quivers tried the diet and began discussing it on the air. Not long after that, Hester found his book chasing the latest Harry Potter tale.

"It really heals you," Hester said. "It really gets all the dirt out of your body. It's not only for weight loss, it's for health reasons."

The seeds for the book took root in 2003. Hester had ballooned to 213 pounds. A friend's kids began ribbing Hester for the extra weight he was carrying. He decided to enroll in DeLuz's program on Martha's Vineyard.

"On the third day, I truly heard God speak to me," Hester said. "He said, 'I'm going to heal you, and I'm going to change your life. You're going to be in a different direction, but you have to share my healing that I'm going to give to you with other people.'

"So I turn to [DeLuz] and I say, 'Do you want to do a book?' " Hester said. "You could just see her eyes lit up, like she was dying to do a book."

Thirty-nine publishers turned down the proposal, according to Hester. He networked his way to a meeting with Judith Regan while she was still at HarperCollins. He was able to sell his pitch the same way he used to sell subscriptions to his neighbors who hadn't been getting the paper.

"He became friends with everybody on his paper route," said Ann Darata, Hester's aunt. "It probably took him twice as long because he stopped to talk to everybody."

Not everyone offered a positive review. On CBS News' Web site, dietitian Keri Glassman used the book as an example of a fad diet. She said it uses the laxative method -- more trips to the bathroom -- to achieve its results.

"This is not a lasting form of weight loss," Glassman wrote. "You lose nutrients, and when you've finally decided you've had enough of this diet, you'll want to overeat to make up for the deprivation you have caused yourself."

But Hester vehemently defends DeLuz's program and lashed out at his critics.

"Seriously, their stomachs are over their belts. And they use their expense accounts to go to expensive French restaurants with thick, creamy sauces," Hester said. "And these are the people that are giving other people who want to change their life advice."

He points to his own body -- the 180-pound version of himself -- as an example.

"I lost 21 pounds in 21 days," Hester said. "I look like a million bucks. My hair stopped falling out. My triple chin is now back to normal. It's like I had a face-lift. My stuffing that was hanging over my pants is almost flat ... My thinking is clear. My mind is sharp."

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