1 | From Fat and Awkward to Skinny and Confident

Forget where you've been.
Ignore where you are.
Focus on where you want to be.

This chapter is the short version of the story of how I lost the weight. For some reason, it has changed lives. Of everything I've ever written, it is the one thing which has produced the greatest number of joyful and tearful responses. I figured I'd better share it with you right up front. It has six parts.

1. Life, trapped in fat
2. The day it all changed
3. New eating strategies
4. Putting feet to plans
5. The requisite change
6. Picking up the pieces
7. (There's actually a seventh, hidden at the end of the book)

HISTORY (BEFORE FREEDOM, BEFORE SUCCESS)

I have been fat all my life. It's part of my identity. Even when I was little (if that's the word), I was roly-poly, and the other kids were faithful to remind me about it. My highest weight was 171 pounds (not insanely heavy, but it was *very* noticeable on my slight 5' 7" frame). That was several years ago. I lost a lot of that weight and got down to a respectable weight (but still flabby at 132 pounds) over the course of about two years of regular exercise and avoidance of large meals. Then my situation changed, and for some reason, I stopped losing weight, then slowly began gaining it back. I didn't notice much of a change in my habits (other than starting to drive more often, rather than walking), but I did notice a change in the fit of my

clothes. Somewhere along the line, I slowly lost control of my eating.

Over a period of three years, my weight crept back up, and up, and up, all the way to 167. I simply had no idea how it was happening! I didn't think I was eating very much. I kept thinking that my weight was going to go down any day now. It didn't. I just got fatter and fatter. I felt completely helpless. I didn't know what to do. I tried to eat better and to exercise, but I failed at both. I took a class in behavior modification and as my term project created a detailed plan of how I was going to lose weight. I got an "A" in the class. I also kept getting fatter.

Then, one day, everything changed. That was the day I discovered thinspo.

CHANGES (OMG, I CAN DO THIS?!?)

Well do I remember the moment I first found thinspo. I felt like I had stuck my finger into the electric socket of inspiration. Searching online for "before & after" weight loss pictures, hoping that I would be spurred on by seeing how much better others looked after they got in shape, I stumbled upon the world of thinspiration.[2] Girls would post page after page of pictures of beautiful bodies. There were flat tummies everywhere. Collarbones. Hipbones. Elegant necks sloping into delicate shoulders. Even tons of girls looking simply amazing in nothing more exotic than jeans and a sweater, because their clothes just looked so perfect hanging from their slender bodies. It made me want that kind of beauty.

But wanting wasn't enough; I'd wanted that all my life. What gave the strength to change, oddly, was seeing how often these skinny girls were complaining about how hungry they were, how disgusted they were with themselves after they ate too much, and how little they felt like exercising. Of course, some took it too far. Many obviously had EDs.[3] I cried inside when I saw one write, "This isn't working rapidly enough. Starting today, I'm going to fast for as long as I can." She never posted anything again. However, for some reason, seeing all

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[2] Thinspiration, also known as thinspo, is pictures of slender women (for example, the cover of this book) and stories of weight loss. The pictures inspire you to achieve slender beauty. The stories remind you that it's possible.

[3] Eating disorders.

this pain in her and others flicked a switch in me. I saw what I had been lacking all my life.

I had always assumed skinny people were skinny because, for them, it was easy to stay slim. I blamed my fatness on my slow metabolism and my lack of willpower. I figured that other people could lose weight, but I never would. I was just not strong enough. When I saw instead that tons of girls were making it happen by losing the weight, and that it was *HARD* for them, *it was a gigantic revelation!* Just HUGE! When I saw that it was hard for others, but they still struggled through it until they found victory, I thought, "Hey, it's HARD for me, too! But hard isn't the same as IMPOSSIBLE, is it? *And if it's hard for others, but they still succeed, maybe I can succeed!*" This marked the beginning of a new era.

Newly armed with the knowledge that this was going to be tough, and ready to do battle, I decided to go to war. I drastically reduced my portions from over 2000 calories per day (they just added up so fast!) to well under 1000.

For the first couple of weeks, I can't lie, it was a real bitch. But since I knew to expect it to be HARD, instead of *whining*, I *REJOICED!* I felt a euphoric sense of *accomplishment*. When I felt hungry, instead of freaking out and dropping everything until I located food, I just smiled to myself—because I knew my hunger was making me skinny. *I was finally, for the first time in my life, really in control.* I was making good choices and reaping the rewards. I instantly started shedding weight and feeling on top of the world. Hungry like a beast at times, but on top of the world nevertheless.

Here's what my journey looked like:
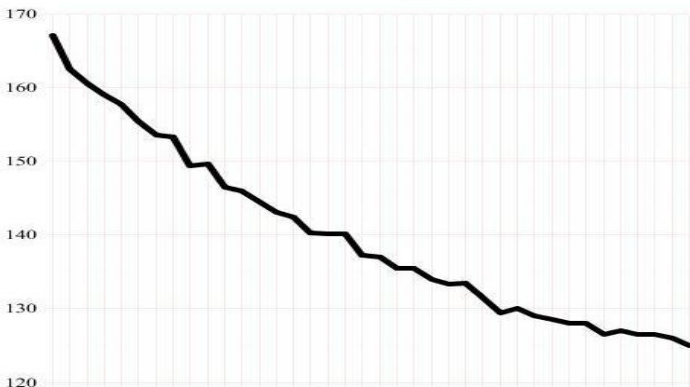
Major weight came off straight from the beginning, including four pounds my first week. I quickly lost some puffiness in my face, and I immediately felt extra room in my jeans. Within a couple of weeks, even friends started to notice, which was such a high! It was all extremely hard at first, but after a matter of only a few weeks, it ceased to totally suck. From there, I simply never stopped.

As you can see from the graph, the weight loss slowed considerably as I neared my goal, and there were several places where I hit plateaus for weeks at a time. But I made it. I actually made it! And, although the graph ends at 125 pounds, which was my goal, I didn't stop there.

EATING: HOW MUCH, HOW OFTEN?

The key to my success has been for me to keep my mouth shut. This is the most unnatural-feeling thing in the world. What do you do when you're hungry? You eat, right? Yes, you do, and that's why you're fat. Once I learned that *hunger is not always a sign that you need to eat, but it's sometimes a sign that your body is a whiney bitch*, I finally found freedom.[4]

I don't mean to say that I starved myself. Starving yourself is crap. It does more harm than good. What I did was simply WAIT before feeding myself, and when I did eat, I ate only a little, just enough to make the hunger go away. It totally worked. This was my first big lesson in thin: hunger can actually be a GOOD thing! It means you're not eating more than you need.

When I first started, I began by eating fairly tiny meals. Hunger would come pounding on my door like it was some kind of heinous emergency. It wasn't. I would ignore my hunger. In fact, I would even mock it. "*Oh, you're hungry are you? Well stuff it, fat body! You deserve to be hungry!*" The best thing was, *the hunger would always go away*. I was so elated! I realized that *hunger isn't always real!* Or at least hunger isn't nearly as serious as it would have you believe. It can be put on hold.

Of course, hunger will always return. At that time, you have the choice to ignore it again or deal with it. I tried to ignore it, and it still usually went away. However, if I was starting

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[4] If you find yourself thinking this book encourages EDs, please reconsider. Soon, I will address all your concerns.

to really feel hungry, I didn't want to be foolish about things and develop an ED, so I would eat—only NOT a full meal! I would eat only a little, perhaps 100 – 200 calories. *Guess what? The hunger would subside every time!* When the hunger later returned, I would repeat the cycle. In this manner I managed to come into CONTROL of what I ate. And the pounds just fell off of me.

It gets even better. After a few weeks of eating like this (believe me, it was a huge battle—this crap was, as I stated previously, *HARD*—but I was just so *OVER* being fat that I chose to not give up nor give in, as I *had* to see if I could really make it work this time), *I noticed something wonderful. I wasn't hungry anymore!* I mean, seriously, even eating tiny portions, I ceased to be hungry! *I actually trained my body to get by on less food.* I "shrank my stomach"! I was a gigantic step closer to being a new person.

I don't want you to miss this, so I'm going to say it again: *it became EASY to eat well!* After a few months, it even came to feel *natural*. Again, let me remind you that I have gone my whole life without any kind of willpower, but it still became EASY for me to eat tiny portions! If I can do it—and I was a lifelong failure—anybody can do it.

Here's the best part. After I made it through this "Boot Camp" season (if I may so liken it), and healthy eating became a *habit*, I no longer needed to be so severe. That whole "no eating when hungry but waiting until REALLY hungry" attitude was important when first starting out, because I needed to teach my stomach that I was no longer its slave. But when I got to the place where I stopped being hungry all the time (remember, this took weeks!), I was able to ease up on myself. This is because after I got used to getting by on little, I tended to not become hungry until I actually *did* need to eat something. *Isn't this awesome?* I resumed being able to eat *whenever I felt hungry* (BUT, of course, only a little at a time)! This was a huge improvement from having to forcibly beat my hunger into submission all day long.

Now, before getting into how much daily food intake was involved here, I need to make sure you understand one important *caveat*: I'm convinced that the *only reason* any of this became easy for me is because I *never* binged. Bingeing stretches your stomach (or at least your appetite) back to its former (way too

huge) size, and you have to start all over again. It doesn't make things impossible, but it does increase the length of time you have to keep putting yourself through this crap. Just like nobody would sign up for the army if their entire career was to be one long Boot Camp, you don't want your entire weight loss experience to be as tough as it is in the beginning, or you will soon want to give up. Please, trust me: just tough it out, DO NOT let yourself binge, and you WILL shrink your stomach, after which time it will become EASY for you to get by with less food. After that, the pounds will take care of themselves. This isn't just my opinion; scientific research agrees. Hang in there, and you *will* succeed!

Okay now, let's talk food. You might want to know *how much* I ate. I aimed for below 1000 calories per day. Calm down, I didn't say I *ate* that little, I said I *aimed* for it. However, like most people do, I pretty much always exceeded my goal. Had I actually aimed for, say, 1200 calories, I don't even want to think about how much I would have eaten, nor how fat I would still be. But by aiming for less, I wound up eating closer to 800 or 900 calories, and I almost never exceeded 1200 in a day. Let me tell you, 1200 calories came to feel like a *lot* of food. Seriously, I virtually re-wired my brain so I simply no longer *need* to eat nearly as much! Forgive the cliché, but this isn't a *diet*, it's a *lifestyle*. A healthy, livable lifestyle.

Let's step back for a moment. I know what you might be thinking. Because the "official" medical professionals' recommendation is 1200 calories per day for women trying to lose weight, many people feel it is a grave sin to dip below that number. Well guess what? Medical professionals also created the special "VLCD" (Very Low-Calorie Diet) which feeds an 800-calorie-per-day diet to MEN(!) who need to lose a lot of weight, and the men don't keel over dead.

Naturally, this isn't 800 calories of french fries washed down with sodas; what makes the above-mentioned program special is that it's supervised by doctors in order to make sure patients get all their vital nutrients. The point is, if *men* can be fine at 800 calories, there seems to be no reason why *women* who meet all our nutritional needs with natural, nutrient-dense foods can't be fine with the same number of calories.[5]

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[5] For more on this, including proof that eating this little can actually be better for you, skip to Appendix D, "The 1200-Calorie Myth".

Anyway, that's enough talk about food for now. We'll talk way more about intake goals and food ideas in later chapters. For now, let's discuss that other thing that goes hand in hand with weight loss: sweat loss.

EXERCISE (EVEN THOUGH IT KINDA SUCKS)

I hate exercise. Well, that's not 100% true anymore. I hated exercise all my life until I recently realized it's my friend. I still don't ever *crave* exercise, but I have actually come to be able to look forward to it. Exercise makes me skinny, it makes me healthy, and it makes me feel good. Sure, it's hard at times, but it's so much easier than life as a fatso was.

When I started losing weight, I chose to exercise only about twice a week, usually two short runs. Since I didn't like exercise, this was more than enough for me. But things changed; when I recognized how beneficial exercise is, and when I saw the results on the scale after almost every time I worked out, exercise became much more desirable. I eventually came to exercise about three or four times a week. I would usually swim twice (for about 40 minutes) and run twice (one short run, about 15 – 20 minutes, and one longer run, 30 – 60 minutes). Sometimes I would substitute a session on an elliptical machine for one of my runs or swims. Exercise can get boring, so mixing it up helps a lot.

Running has always been the most effective weight loss exercise for me, but I've never been good at it, nor did I ever enjoy it. Running is just plain hard—but *gosh* does it ever work! It burns mega calories and it keeps you burning them: you not only burn calories during your run, you have an "afterburn" effect where your body burns fat for hours later. Yeah, it's hard, but it rocks. And it gets easier the more you do it. I no longer feel like I'm going to die when I run—but I sure did at first.

I also started swimming. Swimming actually burns as many calories as running does, but it is easier on your body. The main reason I enjoy swimming is because there's a hot tub to dip in afterward as a reward. It feels like dessert for the body. Swimming also does something running doesn't: it tones muscles all over your body. After swimming, my posture is better. I also feel little compact (and sexy) muscles in my back, shoul-

ders, and arms. Not bulging muscles, just nice little muscles. It really is a serious workout. And just so you know, I am a total crap swimmer. Someday, I will get good at it and quit looking like a dork. In the meantime, I am just happy to be getting healthier. Besides, I'd rather be dorky and skinny than cool and fat.

But all this is just me. The most important thing is that you find the exercise that works for you and, more importantly, that you *like*.

ATTITUDE (THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING SKINNY AND WISHING YOU WERE)

- *Diets suck. I am not on a diet. Rather, I have completely changed how I think about food.*
- *Food is a tool. It's something your body needs. Fine then: fuel your body. Just don't use food for entertainment or comfort.*
- *Eat what you need, not what you want.*
- *Treat food like you would a prescription drug: if you get in the habit of using more than you need, you're in trouble.*
- *Food can be like an abusive boyfriend: it swears it wants only to make you happy, but in reality it just drags you down.*

The above are just some of the many thoughts I've come up with as I've readjusted to life as a skinny person. I don't know how many will apply to you, but I suspect all of them will.

A weight-loss mindset (or a weight-maintenance mindset, which is the same thing with differing goals—more on that toward the end of the book) is something you're going to have to keep up for the rest of your life if you're going to be successful. That means two things:

1. You cannot think of it as "*A Diet*" that you're going to abandon once you hit a goal. It is going to have to be "*Your Diet.*" That is, not a temporary change in eating, but a lifelong system of maintaining your weight, something you live with and stick with.
2. *Have patience.* Losing weight takes time when done properly. Besides, what's the rush? You're not going to relinquish your new, healthy way of life once you

reach your goal, so don't put yourself through misery on the way there. Make solid changes you can manage, not drastic changes which will burn you out.

Let me say this again. You need to get the following into your head: THERE IS NO QUICK, EASY FIX. You must choose skinny, it doesn't just happen. AND THERE CAN BE NO GOING BACK. If you think you're going to eat right "for a while" until you reach your goal, and then go back to your old ways, YOU WILL FAIL.

Once more, because you MUST grasp this:

> This is the secret to your success, and that which will put the mockers in their place. When you wrap your head around the idea that this is something you're going to do for life, that getting thin is not like buying a new outfit or signing up for a class, it's not a pill you take until the bottle is empty, it's not a surgery you go in for, but it's a change not just in what you do but in *who you are* … once you know that, my friend, there's no going back. You will be skinny forever.

I invite you—no, I *urge* you—to take a good hard look at yourself. Do you really *want* to be skinny or do you just *wish* you were skinny? I wished I was skinny all my life and it never got me anywhere, unless you count "depressed and loathing myself daily" as somewhere. *If you want it, you will make it happen.* If you're not making it happen … are you sure you want it?

FAILURE: HOW TO DEAL WITH IT & GET BACK ON TRACK

You're human. That means you're going to screw up. I don't know how to help you get past that, but I can share how I have gotten past my own mistakes. Maybe something will make sense.

In the past, when I would screw up (meaning: overeat, fail to exercise, see a higher number on the scale, or most often all of the above), I would just implode into a black hole of self-loathing. Gosh, but have I ever hated myself over and over and

over! Now, thanks to the wonderful girls online, I realize that it's not that I'm a BIG F**KING LOSER (sorry to be so dramatic, but that truly is how I have felt time after time), it's just that this stuff is hard, really HARD, and we're all going to stumble now and then. Even the most successful people do.

The truly important question after you screw up is, "*Now what?*" You can go on a big destructive tantrum and beat yourself up, or you can just face the reality that the damage is already done and you're not going to be able to go back in time to undo it. Once you confess that you can't change the past, you can move on and instead change your future.

Ask yourself this question: "*What can I do to reverse the effects of my mistake?*" I guarantee the answer will be, every time, "Just keep on running this race."

Screwed up? *Keep on running this race.*

Making progress but it's taking a million times too long? *Keep on running this race.*

Been trying for days and have seen no results and feel like eating a whole tub of ice cream since nothing seems to make a difference no matter how hard you try? *Keep on running this race.*

Wound up eating the ice cream, purged it all into the toilet, and now hate yourself more than ever? *Keep on running this race.*

Life crumbling around you? *Keep on running this race.*

Because, really, *what will happen if you stop? It won't be success.* The only direction you can successfully coast … is downhill.

Time won't stand still. One year from now, no matter what happens, it will still be a year from now. You can do nothing about that. All you can do is change where you wind up when Today's next anniversary comes around. The only thing that can change where you wind up *then* … is the choice you make *now.* And tomorrow. And the next day. And the day after. It's simple. It's not easy, but it's simple.

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