

Winning the Struggle to Be Thin

by Casey Conrad

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Chapter 1

Understanding The Struggle

Confession #1

Are you letting life pass you by because, being as heavy as you are, you think you have nothing to look forward to? Well – that is what I have thought during many phases of my life – especially as it relates to my struggle with weight loss over the years. I am not much of a writer, but here’s the story I would like to share.

My Mom told me I was a ten-pound baby at birth, so I guess it all began there. She said she ate two rows of Oreos each night before going to bed, so was that the beginning for me? Must have been all her fault that I became so heavy, right? I have to blame someone. I was chubby all through grade school and middle school, and I can remember having a mad crush on a guy named Alan, but he told my friend that he thought I was too “chubby”, so that ended that love affair very quickly. But what about my terrific personality? Who gives a hoot about that!

By the time I got to high school, I was no longer titled “chubby” – now I was just plain “fat.” So I began to do some mini-dieting on my own while playing the dating game through high school and college to keep up with the other girls. It was very difficult for me as I did spend a lot of time and energy thinking about food and what was going to be my next meal, so it was a real effort for me to put these thoughts aside. I used to love it when my parents would go out and leave my sister and me alone, so I could raid the refrigerator and eat junk food. I often did this because I felt depressed that my mother did not put what I thought was enough food on my plate

during meals. So, I became a sneak eater and didn't eat too much in front of anyone. Who was I kidding? So, I would binge, then not eat much for a couple of days, and this seemed to keep my weight somewhat under control for those few years.

I slimmed down long enough to catch my husband, but by the time my wedding day arrived, I was already on the upswing with my weight. When I marched down the aisle, I was no slim, trim bride in my size 16 wedding dress. I blamed the fact that the dress was white rather than black for the reason I looked so heavy. It is amazing what you can talk yourself into when you are desperate and trying to look attractive. My hair looked good though! My poor husband, boy—love is blind!

The first year of marriage things were terribly comfortable, and things got progressively worse as my weight escalated. Not having much income, as my husband was still in college, our meals consisted of spaghetti and macaroni and cheese. Carbohydrates were cheap, and I didn't know how to cook much else, so the pounds began to pile on. Bread was also a staple in our household. What else could we possibly use to soak up the sauces?

So, my "real" weight loss journey began in 1972, after one year of blissful marriage. Now a full-figured 210 pounds, I decided that it was time to lose some of my excess poundage. Of course, my husband, God bless his skinny little rear (still the same weight today as 31 years ago), coaxed me along, and this gave me the hint that perhaps I was not looking too terrific to him anymore. He didn't have a clue as to how hard it was for me to give up food because he never had to. I think he was pretty disgusted with me, not so vocal, but the look in his eyes told the story. I was worried sick that I couldn't survive without ½ pound of pasta every day, but I decided to give my first real "diet" a try.

My first weight loss was a huge success Eight months of nothing but meat, eggs and water and almost 100 pounds vanished. Wow, I was gorgeous. Who needed exercise? So what that I was up all night with leg cramps. I looked so damn good, it didn't matter. I remember

having size 8 shorts on and life was grand again. We were living in Florida at the time, and we decided to go home to Connecticut to visit our family and friends, and they had not seen me in a year. Were they ever shocked!

I remember on the airplane a guy sitting next to me was flirting, and even my husband was grinning. Of course, I didn't tell him how good it felt to have another man show me some attention after feeling so undesirable for so long. Good thing my husband was with me. Truthfully, I only flirted back for a moment because I felt so good that my husband was proud of the way I looked. That memory is so powerful for me that I hung onto that green, size 10, fitted dress for years.

So home to Connecticut we went. I had lots of new clothes and was getting tons of compliments, all of which was very exciting for me. Moments after arriving at my Mom's house, though, I began to take a nosedive. I came face to face with a pan of homemade brownies and all the old feelings for my love of food washed over me, almost consuming me. I felt myself losing control that first night. I had been so very deprived, but I looked so good. "I'll do better tomorrow," I said as I started to dive into the food. Sure, for an instant I thought to myself, "You look so good, don't blow it now," but all the food looked so delicious. I dove into the brownies, then the chips and then the beer to the point where I actually made myself sick that night. Of course, I justified it by telling myself, "You deserved it, you have been good for so many months. Just one night isn't going to kill you." But one night led to two, then three, and then a week and by the time we left Connecticut to go back to Florida I had gained 15 pounds in just two weeks. When I stepped on the scale to discover this, I was so disgusted with myself that I got depressed, which only led me to more eating, more "weight" pain. It disgusts me just sitting here writing about it!

Of course, back in Florida the next week turned into the next and so did the next whole year. It was a happy time for me to eat what I wanted to, and what the heck, I still had all my fat clothes, and the pressure was off. I didn't have to look good for anyone as we weren't

going anywhere. I got great comfort from the food I ate, and I just didn't care how I looked or felt. My leg cramps were gone now because I was getting plenty of dairy (ice cream is a dairy, right?). But now new problems were developing. Of course, my husband's evil eye was hovering over me, but now my knees and back were giving me problems. I kept saying it will get better, but it didn't, and after about three years, I was over 200 pounds again. The time had come to get serious about another diet.

How depressing for me to even think about it. Food was my best friend. I used food when I was happy or sad or depressed and it gave me much comfort. My cooking skills had improved dramatically, and I enjoyed entertaining and having dinner parties. Nobody seemed to care that I was getting fat because everyone loved my cooking and the parties were great. Of course, no one but I was packing on the weight. I had my own private parties, too, just me and food, and this had to come to an end soon, at least this is what I kept telling myself.

I had failed at keeping my weight off from the last program, but no big deal because I knew I could do it again, and there were plenty to choose from. I must have gained my weight back because I picked the wrong diet, right? Well, that sounded about right. So, I heard about this prepackaged food program and it sounded pretty good. I decided to go for the consultation and see what it was all about. Only \$60 per week to buy your prepackaged food; "I can do this," I thought to myself. I figured it was probably what the astronauts ate, so it must be good. And I felt very in control knowing that was all that I could eat, and there were no decisions to be made. It was all boxed up in portion control. Of course, nothing tasted that great, so I wasn't so anxious for my next meal.

My husband couldn't understand why I would spend so much on that type of food when I could buy healthy food for both of us from the grocery store. What did he know about diets? Nothing. That "buy healthy food" comment just didn't work for me because it gave me too many decisions and too much room to make mistakes. To me, eating 5 pounds of Bing cherries at one sitting sounded like healthy

eating! Better for me to be in control and buy the prepackaged food. So, another success headed my way. The pounds were dropping very easily to the tune of 80 pounds lost in about 6 months. I even packed all my food for a week long vacation to the Bahamas. Wasn't that normal to eat my meal in my room before we went to the restaurant and then watch everyone else eat while I drank water? That was until the last night, when I decided to "reward" myself for having been so disciplined during the entire vacation; I ate and drank what I wanted to the point where I made myself sick and could barely get on the plane the next day.

Even after having fallen off the wagon, though, I looked "hot." The new me blossomed; the compliments streamed in and all those wonderful feelings returned. The feeling of accomplishment was overwhelming, and back to the thin clothes I went. Who cares that they were outdated. So what if bell bottoms were passé? I felt great, like I could conquer the world. I kept thinking to myself, "Thin tastes so good. I will never eat badly again. This is the final straw for me—I am forever thin."

I was feeling cocky as the weeks passed, and I decided to drop out of my program and go onto regular food. Surely I could do this on my own just by eating healthy. I also thought perhaps I should try some exercise seeing as I had done none. So off to the store I went with a million questions. "Isn't pasta healthy as long as I exercise? Can I eat all the fruit I want? I mean, it's healthy, right?" Quickly my feelings of being out of control returned. I thought to myself, "But I'm a success. I just lost over 80 pounds, I can't possibly fail again. I won't fail again!"

WRONG. One by one the pounds started finding their way back on me. At first I felt sad but then relaxation set in. What the heck – no pressure if you are not worried about what you eat. Who cares anyways – people like me for who I am, not my weight, right? Oh sure, I cared; but I just buried those feelings of failure once again. I knew I was still a nice person; people have to accept me the way I am. Fat people are always more jovial anyways – I guess because we eat what

we want and don't worry about the consequences. Certainly I was always the life of the party, and nobody cared that I was overweight, but deep down, I did. I covered it up with lots of laughter and jokes. Nobody saw the inner turmoil that was going on within me and the disappointment in me. Not to mention the aggravation of finding something that fits for an event. Two or more hours to get ready—practically everything from the closet strewn all over the bed.

So, I was back up to 200 pounds again, and the biggest excuse ever for not dieting came and was welcomed; I was pregnant and eating for two, right? All three of my pregnancies were close, and I only gained a few pounds with each one because my own body weight was so high to begin with and I really was trying to eat healthy for the baby. I wasn't worried about my health, but felt a need to take care of myself for the unborn children. I ended up not gaining much weight from the pregnancies and actually lost some of my own body fat during these times. Needless to say, all three of my deliveries were most difficult due to my weight, but I managed to produce two healthy sons. Maybe it would have been three if I had taken better care of myself, but I try not to look back and beat myself up.

So the years fly by, no time for me – soccer games, school, laundry, owned a business—excuses, excuses, excuses. The kids loved pasta, so mom was right in there with them chowing down. Lots of fruits and vegetables in the house for the kids because I trained them from the beginning to eat properly and develop good eating habits—so they wouldn't end up like me. I would wait to tuck them in at night before I would pull out all the hidden junk food for me. I didn't let them eat it as I was worried about their teeth and their weight, so there was plenty for me. You see, I never wanted them to go through what I had dealt with my entire life; why would I ever want them to end up like me? No parent would wish the weight loss struggle on their child! Sure, I cared about them; I just didn't care enough about me. I would finish what was on their plates, too. Dad works hard, so let's not be wasteful. All the kid's friend's moms looked so good, and I felt terrible alongside of them, but not bad enough to do something. I was always so tired and decided maybe Monday I would do

something. Reminds me of a line from a popular song; “Monday, Monday, can’t trust that day.”

Next, I decided to try weekly meetings, as one night a week wasn’t going to kill me. I wasn’t sure where the meeting was, but they told me I would know which room to go to when I got to the building. Sure enough, I knew. A bunch of wide glides, waddling and breathing heavy as we all climbed the stairs to get to the meeting. But when I had to stand up in front of everyone and introduce myself as a “compulsive overeater,” I was horrified, embarrassed and talked myself into the fact that I did not belong there, and this was not me. I am not a compulsive overeater, am I? What was I? If you have never lived inside a fat body, you cannot understand what was going on in my mind. You might call it weak, but if you do, you do NOT understand what it is like to be overweight.

My next plan was another weekly meeting. This program has been around for years and was definitely going to work for me. Weigh and measure food – that seemed pretty good so far as long as I stayed within so many points per day. Hey – French fries are only 15 points, and I would still have 10 more to go. That will work. It did – about ½ to 1 pound a week and soon enough I had lost 50 pounds—again. I often wondered, “Where does all the lost weight go?” But no need to ponder on that question too long because I was a winner—again.

Now hubby buys me a treadmill for Mother’s Day. Isn’t that romantic, telling me to get off my fat butt and exercise. Guess what, my treadmill made a great clothes hanger in our bedroom. It was just too much work to do it, so back to the couch. But the weekly meetings were okay. On weigh-in day, after I had lost a pound, everyone clapped, and I felt I needed a reward, as I didn’t have to weigh-in for another seven days, so off I went to McDonald’s for a treat. I always rewarded myself with food by saying, “After I lose so many pounds, I will treat myself to my favorite restaurant and eat what I want.” Of course, I was setting myself up for failure by doing this. There are tons of other things in life besides food to reward

yourself with – why not sex or something else, right? But no, I chose the food.

Next thing I knew, the kids were in their mid-teens. I can't get over how quickly life goes by, but I still wasn't going anywhere with my weight, but up. Where did all those years go? Time flies when you are having fun and out of control. I decided now I needed something for me as the kids didn't need so much of my time now. I knew I should try and get healthy, but I took a different route and was doomed. A local candy store went out of business and I decided that would be fun, so I reopened it. I had great success – Godiva Chocolates were the ultimate but acne at 44 was the pits. My husband could not figure out why the profits were so low. Hello!!! After a short time, and about 20 more pounds onto my body, I decided to sell and get out before it was too late. It was a fun adventure, but it certainly was not the direction I wanted to go.

I then took a bookkeeping job at a town recreation department which gave me a free membership to their pool. I was doing some self-dieting at that time and some swimming, but the coffee and donuts on my desk were getting the best of me. I once again reached a comfort level, and my weight reached an all-time high. Four years later, life was really passing me by, at 50 years of age my husband and I moved back to our hometown. We bought a boat, but being in a size 20 bathing suit was not so much fun. What a terrific co-captain I was. My husband asked me to hop up on the bow and tie the line, and I couldn't even get my leg over the side of the boat to get up to the bow! I felt like such a burden and was absolutely no help to my husband. How could he possibly have fun with his new toy with a "slug" like me? He should have just used me as the anchor because I felt like one around his neck. To say the least, I was mortified and knew that something had to give. I better do something soon so I can at least be more agile to help on the boat. The kids were gone now, so what excuses could I possibly have.

On a visit home from Arizona, my younger son who was a personal trainer at the time, told me that when I got up out of the chair after

sitting for awhile I reminded him of his grandmother hobbling around. She has osteoporosis and is in a walker. Boy – was that like a knife going through my heart thinking my good looking son saw me as an old, unhealthy lady. But it was true, my knees hurt so bad; especially after sitting for awhile. That happens when you weight 200+ pounds again. This could not have possibly happened again, could it?

So, where does it stop? How the heck do you get off this nightmare ride? How much pain—physically, financially, spiritually and emotionally—will I allow myself to be subjected to before I find a solution, before it's too late? Can anyone help me? 57 years later and I sit here writing, planning, and hoping, but STILL overweight. Talk about feeling like time is slipping away. Have I spent too much time and energy on this—like 47 years too many; there has to be more to life than dwelling on my weight. Is there still time to do something or is it too late?

*Anonymous
Stonington, CT*

Can we even begin to understand the magnitude of this woman's struggle? Maybe you have a similar story? Even if your weight loss struggles haven't been as dramatic, if you have gained and lost weight more than once in your life, you can empathize with this woman and relate to the numerous and complex issues surrounding the struggle to be thin that are present before, during and after the weight loss process. Certainly every person faces a unique struggle, but you are not alone. Many stories of women who have lost weight have amazing similarities.

The most obvious is a pattern of weight gain and loss called "Yo-Yo dieting" or the "Oprah Syndrome" (after the famous talk show host Oprah Winfrey who has had a lifelong—and very public—struggle with her weight). Typically, this syndrome involves following the latest fad diet, some of which are sensible and some of

which are not. Regardless of the choice of diet, many of them result in weight loss—in some cases incredible weight loss—but it’s usually only temporary. Whether it was the diet that failed the dieter or the dieter that failed the diet, the end result is the same—more weight gain—and so the cycle starts all over again.

Whether it is bad knees, swollen feet, poor sleep, an aching back or shortness of breath with the slightest activity, the weight struggle is often accompanied by a struggle with physical pain or deteriorating health caused by excess weight. Unfortunately, many women admit that the physical pains caused from being overweight are often less painful than the thought of not eating their favorite foods. Many women confess that this illogical thinking contributes to the psychological conflict about losing weight.

The gain and loss of yo-yo dieting is often accompanied by a torrent of emotions surrounding weight and body image. On one hand these women want to be thinner and healthier, but find themselves battling emotional issues surrounding food, such as “when I eat I feel comforted, gratified, loved, or secure.” Certainly, women who eat for emotional reasons logically know they shouldn’t be reaching for ice cream simply because they have had a bad day, but for some unknown reason they can’t seem to say no to certain temptations. This is particularly true during stressful times, during menstrual cycles, or any other times of feeling out of control, overwhelmed, or needing the instant gratification that food can provide. Of course, women admit to feeling disappointed in themselves when they fall off their diets. Unfortunately this disappointment, in turn, leads to an attitude of “What the heck, I’ve blown it now so I might as well just enjoy myself,” which only exacerbates the problem physically and emotionally, recreating the same vicious cycle: overeat, gain weight, get depressed, eat because you’re depressed, gain more weight, get more depressed, etc.

Hear how Gretchen Williams overcame the cycle of yo-yo dieting and lost over 48 pounds.

Confession #2 on p. 103



Learn how Frances Leiter lost 44 pounds and “ditched her cane” after winning her weight struggle.

Confession #3 on p. 105



Another often cited psychological aspect of being overweight is the amount of time each day spent thinking about ones' weight in some way or another. Taking extra time each morning trying to find something to wear that either creates a slimmer look or at least hides the excess weight; thinking about what to eat for lunch or dinner; ordering at a restaurant and being concerned about what the waiter will think if you order something fattening; being invited to a function and having to be concerned about if the seats will be comfortable, large enough—or even collapse; worrying about having to navigate too many stairs with bad knees.

Many overweight women report feeling as though entire portions of their day can be consumed with thoughts of food, dieting, and body image, which they know is a waste of their valuable time, causing more emotional conflict.

Vanessa Morris knew the vicious cycle of weight loss all too well, but won the battle with a weight loss of 60 pounds.

Confession #4 on p. 108



Being overweight affects so many areas of a woman's day to day life: her confidence level at home and work; her sex life; her desire to go places, to attend functions with family and friends, the types of activities and social engagements she attends, how she interacts with her kids—even how she shops for clothes. Add to that the social conflict that being overweight is unacceptable in today's society where women are very much judged by their body and beauty. America spotlights on beauty pageant contestants. The skinny, good-looking girls always seem to be captain of the cheerleading team and president of the sorority at college. Even with increased awareness and acceptance of "large sized" models, the majority of advertising and marketing campaigns feature beautiful, stick-thin women that make Marilyn Monroe look fat. Large women's clothes are unstylish and frumpy. Moreover, if you feel like the "overweight duckling" who didn't get invited to the high school prom, it's hard to maintain self-confidence. Whether it is the prom, a bad dating experience, a nasty look, a comment by a stranger, seemingly discriminatory hiring, or failure to get a promotion, such experiences affect how a woman feels about herself and can overflow into all areas of her life—throughout her

life! Lack of confidence often leads to a sedentary lifestyle, embarrassment, guilt, more hurt—and—“comfort eating.”

Probably the most commonly cited challenge of all is that there is a shortage of time. Today’s busy woman has a schedule that doesn’t stop. Kids, a career, a husband, family obligations, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, washing and paying bills—all consume lots of time. Many women have the additional responsibility of a job. With so many commitments vying for their time, women often put themselves last on the list of people and things to take care of. As a result, many women wake up at 40, take one look at themselves and wonder how and when they let themselves fall apart? Yet most women admit they struggle with the guilt of doing something for themselves when it will take time away from the family. Ironically, the same women who question the cost of joining a weight loss or fitness center think nothing about spending \$80 a month for ballet lessons and another \$125 for recital outfits!

These physical, psychological, social and time challenges are very real. All of these things make losing weight and keeping it off hard for a woman and she finds herself on the emotional roller coaster that comes along with the ups and downs of the weight loss process. The feeling of helplessness one day is followed by a glimmer of hope after meeting someone who has successfully lost weight. The feeling of excitement when starting a new diet that is quickly replaced with a sense of being overwhelmed after just a short period of time. The sense of pride and confidence when weight is lost that is replaced by shame and embarrassment when the weight goes back on again. These polarities pull at the very core of a woman who struggles with her weight.

As one woman who has successfully overcome the struggle said, “I once felt as though I was in a jail but then realized that I was the jailer. I was the one holding the key but I didn’t know it. Once I woke up to this reality it was empowering and I simply needed to use those

Renee Gahagan exemplifies how the social aspects of being overweight can cause one to feel depressed and alone
Confession #5, p. 110



keys to unlock the door and set myself free.” It is never too late; you are never too old, never too fat to win the struggle to be thin. This book is going to help you identify the obstacles to successful weight loss and provide you with both the information AND inspiration you need to overcome those obstacles. It will help you unlock your self-inflicted prison and set free the person hiding inside you: the one that has been afraid to come out for years, afraid to dress the way she wants, to express herself the way she wants and should.

So, ladies, settle in to a comfortable chair with a glass of sparkling water and a box of tissues; you’re about to get inspired, you’re about to learn how to change your life. . . you’re about to start your journey to Winning the Struggle to Be Thin.

Do You Struggle to Be Thin?

1. Have you ever kept clothes that once fit you, hoping someday you will get back into them?
2. Have you ever worn a blouse over a blouse or extra-large blouses to hide your excess weight?
3. Have you ever cut the tags off of your clothes so no one could see the actual size?
4. Have you ever bought clothes that are too small with the hope that it will motivate you to reach that size?
5. Do you ever feel as if nothing fits or as if nothing looks good?
6. Have you ever “played sick” for a function or fabricated an excuse just because it was too much effort to find something that would fit or you were just too embarrassed to be with the others?
7. Have you ever tried to hide from someone you haven’t seen in a long time before they see you because you don’t want them to see how heavy you have become or because you can’t remember the weight you were the last time you saw them?
8. Have you avoided eating out with friends or eaten something before going out so others won’t see how much you eat?
9. Have you ever told people you were cold just so you could wear more clothing to cover your weight up or said you didn’t like the water, so you wouldn’t have to wear a bathing suit?

10. Do you ever get a craving for a piece of cake, buy the whole cake, eat some and throw away the rest to get rid of the evidence? Or worse, eat the whole cake?
11. Have you ever postponed a vacation because you believe you will look better in a bathing suit in several months time?
12. Do you resort to food when a personal crisis hits because it is comforting, only to feel guilty after you have overeaten?
13. Have you ever hidden fattening foods or treats from family members so you can eat them when no one is looking?
14. Do you ever think you're overweight because your family has a history of being overweight?"
15. Do you read every "miracle diet" in the hope that it really is?

If you said "Yes" to any of these questions, you are acknowledging behaviors that indicate a struggle within—a struggle to be thin. This awareness is the first step out of denial and your first steps towards change.



Chapter 2

Denial – Hope

Denial: “Refusal to admit the truth or reality.”¹

Hope: “To long for with expectation of attainment.”²



Before



After

Confession #6

Rebel Whale, Tamworth, Australia

77 lbs. lost

I come from a family where my 72-year-old grandmother was still taking laxatives and fluid tablets Sunday night so she could weigh in on Monday at Weight Watchers. She was a life member who lost

^{1,2} Webster's Dictionary

all her weight and put it all back on. Her entire life she battled to get control of her weight but never won the battle. Unfortunately, 5 years ago she died of a heart attack; no doubt her weight contributed to the condition.

Because of my grandmother's weight problem, I grew up thinking, "Our family just has a weight problem," and that it was my lot in life to end up fat one day.

As a child, anything and everything that happened in my life involved and revolved around food. If I got hurt I got lollies (candies); if we were celebrating we did it with food. My grandfather used to hide lollies in his jackets just for us. Not just one, but four or five bars. And, as my luck would have it, I always had a tendency to put on weight. For example, if I went away on holidays with my grandparents, I could come back kilos (pounds) heavier than when I left.

As a teenager my Mum (who was always very, very slim) would ask me, "What is going on in your life?" When I would respond, "Why do you ask?" she would say, "Because you are standing at the cupboard eating!" Eating was my way of coping, and if I felt stressed, I ate. One time, I can remember standing at my grandmother's fridge aimlessly eating cold apricot chicken and rice with my fingers; I never even tasted what I was eating. I know it sounds disgusting but that is how I was with food.

Prior to having children, I kept this in control through on and off dieting, playing sports and going to the gym. When I became pregnant with my first child, I was 65 kilos (143 lbs.). By the time my third child was 8 months old I was 105 kilos (231 lbs.). I had put on 40 kilos (88 lbs.) over the course of five years while having my children! Although I had always watched what I ate and how much exercise I did, when I fell pregnant I just ate what I wanted when I wanted and did no exercise at all over this time.

What is interesting is that never once in those five years did I weigh myself, nor did I think to myself, "You've gone up a dress size (4 or 5!)." And, because I had access to my grandmothers' wardrobe, I never shopped for clothes. Because I was a woman in her 20's,

dressing in 70-year old woman's clothes, my Mum used to say things like, "I wish you would find your style again." (Before I had children, I was a flight attendant and had a great wardrobe.) I may have had a very "trendy" grandmother, but never the less she was 70. Of course, I had no interest in shopping for clothes.

I was in total denial. I really never thought about how much weight I had put on.

The turning point for me was when I went to the park with my children and could not fit in the swing seat. I made a decision then and there that I was going to do something about this. So, the next day I joined the gym. I did it on my own for a while until one day a personal trainer, Mark Frankel, (who is now one of my business partners) came up to me as I was walking on a treadmill reading a magazine and asked me if I had considered personal training. This was the start of my new life. He changed my life that day. I started training three days a week and watched a little more what I was eating. I also started having a fortnightly (every other week) massage.

There were lots of tears and "I can't's," but I soon started seeing results. Even with those results I found myself ringing Mark and saying I couldn't make it to my training session because my children were sick. Fortunately Mark saw through all that and would say, "No they aren't, I'll see you in 10 minutes," and would hang up the phone. So, teary-eyed, I would get in the car and drive to the gym. And, although I felt fantastic after working out, I literally felt sick before going and some days would use every excuse not to stick with it.

Over the time I trained with Mark, I lost about 20 kilos (44 lbs.) However, the lighter I got, the harder the weight was to lose because my diet still left a lot to be desired. I remember one day whining that I had hit a plateau and Mark said to me, "What did you have for breakfast today?" and I said, "Toast with jam, cereal and a cup of tea." As you can see, I needed some help with what to eat.

Of course, I had tried various diets (probably every single one out there) and would lose weight but I could not keep it off. Once I went off the "diet" I went crazy with my eating again. I was like a shark

on an eating frenzy. As a result of this yo-yo dieting, my metabolism was all over the place.

Healthy Inspirations was the answer for me. The food Plan is the only Plan that has worked long term for me. It is not a quick fix; it requires a life style change. It is not a diet, it is a healthy eating plan that you can maintain for life. It has helped me to lose the final 15 kilos (33 lbs.) I really wanted to lose. The exercise circuit is simple to use but gets great results. The massage chair is also huge for me as I was already getting massages.

I am excited to know that this is now my life. I still have tendencies to want to eat when I'm stressed, but have learned and trained myself to go for a walk or do something until the urge passes. I have also learned to live with food; this is an amazing feeling—to know that you can still eat great food and cook great recipes that are good for you.

Now my children have a really healthy attitude toward food and always ask if things are healthy before making choices. In addition, I am now exercising with my kids; I run and the kids ride their bikes alongside. I am so proud to be a fit and healthy Mum and a positive role model to my children.

For me, nothing tastes as good as feeling slim feels.

The Healthy Inspirations Plan has given me back control and that is a great feeling. In fact, it is such a good feeling that I am now the co-owner of two Healthy Inspirations in Australia. It feels great knowing that I am helping other women win the weight loss battle too.

Denial is so hard to admit

Denial is the first obstacle to be overcome if one is to win the struggle to be thin. Consider Rebel's story; she was completely and totally in denial about her considerable weight gain until the day that she tried to get into the swing seat and her rear end didn't fit. Until that very moment though, she said she "didn't notice." Hard to believe that someone couldn't notice that she'd gained 80 pounds but guess what? She's not alone. This book has dozens more stories of women who rationalized their weight problems to the point of complete denial. "I'm big boned to begin with," "I look pretty good for my age," "My husband likes me the way I am," "I don't have any medical problems so I can't be that bad," or "It's my medical problems and medications that are causing my weight gain, not what I eat, drink and the fact that I'm in-active." Family-first rationalizations contribute to denial as well. "At the end of the day I'm too tired to exercise," "I don't have the time; the kids come first" or "If I'm not home for dinner my husband will get angry." These rationalizations provide women with great reasons not to take care of themselves. The reality, though, is that "I'm this weight because . . ." rationalizations are just excuses to avoid taking personal responsibility. The longer one avoids taking personal responsibility for being too fat, the greater their emotional and physical struggles will be—until the "wake up call."

People who have struggled with their weight report going through some period of denial. But, EVERY person who overcomes denial and successfully takes control of their weight reports having a "wake up call." A wake up call refers to an event or happening that moves one out of denial. For Rebel, the wake up call was not fitting into the swing seat. For others it may be a diagnosis of diabetes, high blood pressure, or something much worse. Others will cite the inability to fit into summer clothes, an upcoming event like a wedding, class reunion, or a vacation involving bathing suits, short sleeves and shorts. Still others will share very personal wake up calls like a spouse's

vanishing sexual desire, an affair, a divorce or a grandchild saying, “Grammy, you have no more lap for me to sit on!” Whatever the event or experience, it is the thing that sparks wanting to change. Of course, a wake up call for one person may have no effect upon another. The individual must be so emotionally affected by the happening that change becomes a necessity.

Tara DeFranco's wake-up call came from her father prior to his passing and helped her to finally begin her weight loss journey.

Confession #7, p. 112



The Power of Hope

Regardless of what caused it, the wake up call provides desire to change and, therefore, the beginning of hope that things can be different. That four letter word, H-O-P-E, is perhaps the single most influential motivator for losing weight. The reason hope is so important to the weight loss process (or any behavioral change for that matter) is that human beings don't like change; change is difficult. However, change is necessary to win the struggle to be thin. Losing weight and keeping it off is all about creating new behaviors: new eating behaviors, new activity behaviors and new social behaviors. Behavioral scientists have nicely broken the change process down into six stages, stages which very much mirror the struggle to be thin process; stages which you must be able to recognize on your journey. These then are the six stages of change.³

Six Stages of Change

Pre-Contemplation → Contemplation ← → Preparation ← →

Action ← → Maintenance → Termination

³ Changing For Good, 1994, Prochaska, Norcross, Diclemente

1. Pre-Contemplation

In this phase, there is no recognition that change is needed. Pre-contemplation is denial. “I don’t need to lose weight,” “I look pretty good,” etc.

2. Contemplation

When moving from pre-contemplation to contemplation the thinking moves to considering change. “Maybe I should consider starting an exercise program” “Maybe I need to lose weight,” or “Maybe I could lose weight.” This person is no longer in denial, but their language patterns shows a lack of readiness; everything is a “should,” “could” or “maybe.” There is no real conviction and certainly no plan of action. Everything is in the distant future.

3. Preparation

Entering preparation represents a significant psychological step. This is when one moves from thinking I “should” change to saying, “I will,” or “I am going to.” For instance, “I am going to start a weight loss program,” or “I am going to join a facility.” The difference here is the belief of following through with the intention.

In the spectrum of the stages of change, preparation has a very long range. This means that two different people could say, “I am going to lose weight,” but one person intends on starting this coming Monday and the other intends on starting at New Years, which is 4 months away. Both are in preparation but are at very different ends of the spectrum.

4. Action

Action means exactly what it says; a new behavior begins. Perhaps one joins a fitness facility, a weight loss program or center, purchases a weight loss book or commits with friends to “start a diet.” In our earlier example, Rebel moved very quickly from pre-contemplation through contemplation and preparation and into the action stage—all in one day. This happens for some people depending upon how emotionally stirring their wake up call is.

For others, however, moving from pre-contemplation into action could take months, in some cases years, or may never happen.

5. Maintenance

Immediately upon taking action, one enters the fifth stage of change, which is maintenance. Maintenance is the stage when one has to work consciously at sticking to the new behavior. In this stage, one has to make meticulous plans as to what to eat, strategize about where to go and with whom, and consciously make a commitment to an exercise schedule, possibly even to the point of involving a friend to add a level of accountability. All of these behaviors during the maintenance stage are a normal and necessary part of the change process.

Perhaps what is most interesting is the fact that many people will never leave the maintenance stage; rather they will always have to think about and work hard at eating right and exercising. Individuals who struggle with their weight are actually circling through the stages of change on a regular basis; they fall off the diet or exercise program completely and find themselves back in the contemplation stage (“I should get back on the diet”). Then, they have to move through preparation (I’m going to start on Monday), and take action again, only to find them back at struggling with maintenance. Relapse, although frustrating, is common during the behavioral change process. How many times one relapses before winning the struggle to be thin isn’t important but rather, it is how quickly one gets back to the action stage; the quicker the return to action, the greater likelihood of success.

6. Termination

When a new behavior is as natural and routine as brushing ones teeth, one has reached the final stage of change called termination. At this point, reverting back to old behaviors is highly unlikely. People who reach the termination stage are often like the religiously converted; they are so passionate about their revised lifestyle that they try to motivate others to change as well. Another

example of reaching termination with the struggle to be thin is the planning of vacations around food and exercise options, ensuring one remains in environments where self-control is possible. When termination is truly reached, an individual simply will not allow themselves to re-gain weight. Many women reading this book, though, whose life has revolved around food and dieting, may never reach termination but are happy to keep their weight under control in the maintenance stage.

After losing 60 pounds, Shelley Branconnier knows that each day will be a challenge because “cheesecake happens.”

Confession #8, p. 114

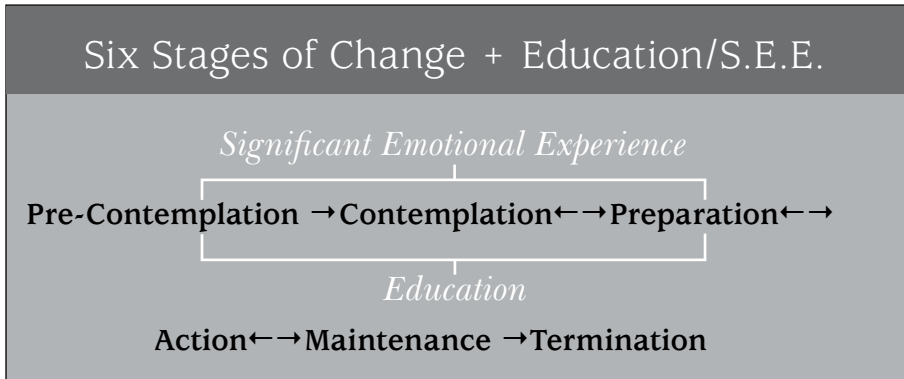


Moving through the Stages

Earlier we mentioned that the “wake up call” startles one out of denial and into hope, but exactly how does change occur and what is it that moves someone from one stage to another? There are only two things that move someone from one stage to another. The first is referred to as a significant emotional experience (S.E.E.), where something recently happened that moved them—in fact scared them is probably more appropriate—into the action stage. Non-scientifically we referred to this earlier as the wake up call.

The second thing that moves a person from one stage to another is education. Perhaps an individual reads an article or pamphlet discussing the risks of being overweight or watches a documentary like “Super Size Me,” where a slim, fit vegetarian eats nothing but McDonalds for 30 days, gains a considerable amount of weight while simultaneously increasing medical risk factors. Education is not as big of a motivator as an S.E.E. With daily articles and newscasts on obesity and national television shows like *The Biggest Loser*, most people know they should be eating better, exercising more and weighing less. With 66% of the US population either overweight or obese⁴ it is obvious that most Americans aren’t motivated by information. The lack of motivation has to do with the balance of power between the emotions that drive human behavior.

⁴ “2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES),” 30 June 2006, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/obese03_04/overwght_adult_03.htm>.



Whether the call to action comes through an S.E.E. or through education, human behavior is driven by emotions—both positive and negative. The S.E.E. or education evokes an emotional response to elicit action. Neuro-Linguistic Programming, which is the study of human communication and behavior, states that everything people do is driven by two emotional forces, the desire to gain pleasure and the need to avoid pain. The need to avoid pain, however, is believed to be a greater emotional force than the desire to gain pleasure. With weight loss, the benefits of looking better and feeling better are always present. However, most people don't begin a weight loss program until they experience some level of pain, i.e. bad medical news or prognosis, the potential for feeling embarrassed at an upcoming event, or perhaps finding themselves single again and looking for companionship. This is not to say that people don't start a weight loss program for pleasurable reasons because they do, but more people start to avoid a physical or emotional pain.

Jennene Kirby lost over 100 pounds after a doctor told her that if she did not lose weight, she would be in a wheelchair before she turned 50 years of age.

Confession #9, p. 117



Until and unless you find compelling reasons that drive you to want to change your behavior, you won't win your struggle to be thin. You may start a program but most likely will drop out soon after. Identifying specific, compelling reasons as to why you must succeed provides you with an emotional driver, which will help you deal with the inner fears that accompany the weight loss struggle.



Chapter 3

Fear - Courage

Fear: An unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger⁵. . .

Courage: Mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty.⁶



Confession #10

Gherri Mort, Winchester, VA
107 lbs. lost

^{5,6} Webster's Dictionary

“Morbid Obesity” was written in my chart by my doctor at my appointment in 2004. Having high blood pressure was another issue that kept haunting me. It was not until I saw those two words together “Morbid Obesity” that made me know I had to do something or I was going to send myself to an early grave. I felt all alone even though I had a tremendously loving family. I just kept beating myself up, saying “How could you let yourself go and get like this?”

In the early 1990’s, I had lost weight on a liquid diet, but the weight I lost plus some came right back after I went back to eating solid foods. I had been following different stories on how gastric bypass looked like a way to go for me. But still I hesitated because my insurance would not pay for it. Then I heard news stories of people that were having major problems including death. It was at this point that I knew I had to try to lose weight one more time with a program that used regular store-bought food. I knew deep in my heart that there had to be a program that taught you how to eat right and lose weight.

During the week between Christmas 2004 and New Year’s, I was reading the paper and noticed an ad for Healthy Inspirations in Winchester, Virginia. Immediately I checked out the Healthy Inspirations website and became encouraged. Could I actually see the light at the end of the tunnel or was this too good to be true? I called right away and made an appointment for Monday, January 3rd at 1 pm.

As I went through the program orientation, I just knew there had to be some catch. How could eating more frequently throughout the day help me lose weight? Then after Laura finished we went through the cost of the program. I knew that it was going to have a price to pay but I actually sat there and thought “is it worth it?” I could not believe that I still did not feel that I was worth it. Finally, I said to Laura, “I don’t know what my problem is, I know that I have to lose weight. I weigh 293 pounds and if there is a guarantee that the weight will come off then I’ll sign up.”

Healthy Inspirations has changed my life. In just five months after starting the program, I was taken off of my high blood pressure medication. I exercised consistently, followed the eating plan, and met with my consultant three times a week.

Now just over a year later, I am so thrilled to have lost over 107 pounds. Better yet, I have found myself again and also a new perspective on life. I truly feel that the encouragement and guidance of the staff has helped me get to this point. In addition, the friendships with other clients have made a lasting impression on me as well. I realized that I was not alone on my journey. There were more women out there who felt as I did.

Lately I have run into past acquaintances and they don't know who I am right away. I am most eager to let them know that I did it by eating healthy and exercising regularly. I can now see myself continuing on this journey of healthy eating and living. Healthy Inspirations has made it possible for me to take ownership of my life back and pride in myself once again.

Shelli Janoff was considering gastric bypass surgery because she was convinced she was going to die. Her final weight loss effort was, however, a success, resulting in 122 pounds lost.

Confession #11, p. 119



Fear—Motivator or Obstacle?

Pain, both physical and emotional, is a powerful motivator for change. Fear is painful, and for both Gherri Mort and Shelli Janoff, the fear of morbid obesity, deteriorating health and high blood pressure provided compelling wake up calls that motivated them to give weight loss one last attempt before resorting to gastric bypass surgery. Many of the women featured in this book note the presence of fear in their wake up call.

Fear, however, often becomes an obstacle for women trying to lose weight. More specifically, the fear of failing again becomes a greater

fear than that which provided the wake up call; the fear of telling friends, family or a spouse that you are on another weight loss program. This self-doubt creates a “why even bother if I’m just going to fail” mentality. Two other common fears are the fear of the unknown and the fear of feeling alone in the struggle. Fears often result in one procrastinating change or giving up all together. However, when an individual can get past the fear and generate enough courage the rewards of taking action are waiting.

After getting past her fears, Ann Marie Koohy lost 49.8 pounds.

Confession #12, p. 121



Overcoming ones fears is absolutely necessary to succeed at weight loss, so let’s take another example. A woman who has yo-yoed with her weight many times, and is fearful of trying again CAN turn that fear around in her mind to believe, “I may fail again but I want to teach my children to keep trying or I will have failed as a role model; therefore, I must try again.” The fear of being a poor role model becomes greater than the fear of failure itself, ultimately providing the courage to try.

For Tara Faro, the pain of not doing things with her family won out over her fears of failure, resulting in a weight loss of 30 pounds.

Confession #13, p. 123



Blame & Responsibility

Having the **courage** to begin the behavioral change process is necessary but courage without taking personal responsibility will result in failure. If you believe you are not in control of your environment, it is too easy to blame external factors for failure. The excuses for the lack of control seem to justify staying fat. For example, buying food for the kids and eating it because it’s there. Also, making two meals to accommodate a demanding spouse is too difficult. Perhaps the most common excuse and the one most easily understood is that of the working mother who comes home, cleans the house and shuttles the kids and then feels there

isn't any time or energy for exercising. Such mindsets blame other people and events for the inability to do what must be done to lose weight. **To win the struggle to be thin one must shift their mindset** to one of being in complete control of their environment. When the shift in mindset from blame to responsibility is made one realizes things like: A) Junk food and processed non-fresh foods and drinks don't need to be bought for the kids—they get plenty of it at school and with friends; B) Having junk food in the house doesn't mean one has to eat it—it's a choice; C) Gravies, pastas and potatoes don't have to be fattening. If they are, they can be served in side dishes, giving everyone a choice as to whether to indulge or not; D) If one chooses to watch television or visit with friends in the course of a week, time for two short walks every day can easily be made, one before breakfast and one at sundown. Mindsets such as these will lead to success.

Renee St. Clair took control of her environment and her health and reached her weight loss goal.

Confession #14, p. 125



Once you realize you're in control of your environment, the fear of taking action dissipates. The next step towards success, especially for women, is to **put your own health first** because you are the person on whom the others depend. Therefore, if you are not at your best, you probably won't be available emotionally or physically for anyone else. Making this shift is a difficult but necessary step towards winning your struggle to be thin.

Goal Setting

One of the first steps to making the mindset shift in priorities is to establish a goal. A goal is something specific to be attained; it can be something physical (like a new car, a house or a vacation) or it can be a state of being (20 lbs. lighter, 28% body fat, or becoming a size 10). When a woman walks into a Healthy Inspirations and says, "I want to fit into my favorite jeans, she has stated a goal. This is important because a goal represents the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. A

goal won't be reached, however, if it isn't a **S.M.A.R.T. goal**. S.M.A.R.T. outlines the components of successful goals.

“**S**” stands for “**specific**.” Wanting to lose weight is too general. Wanting to lose 20 lbs. is much more specific and, therefore, much more attainable.

“**M**” stands for “**measurable**.” The scale enables you to determine if you are getting closer to your goal or not.

“**A**” stands for “**attainable**.” Is the goal realistic? For instance, if someone has never weighed less than 150 lbs., currently weighs 200 lbs. and decides “I want to weigh 125 lbs.,” this would be unrealistic and, therefore, unattainable under healthy circumstances. Weight loss is challenging enough; setting oneself up for failure by setting unattainable goals is counter productive.

“**R**” stands for “**responsible for self**.” If you are not totally responsible for a goal, you may not be able to attain it. For example, saying “I want to do the program so my husband will lose weight,” would be setting a goal that you do not have control over; if the husband chooses not to follow the Program there is nothing you can do about it. Setting a weight loss goal just for yourself will avoid disappointment.

“**T**” stands for “**timely**,” whether or not the goal can be accomplished in a reasonable amount of time. In this super-busy world, there are many distractions that can easily pull one away from reaching their goal. Therefore, if the ultimate goal will take two years to reach, establishing something that can be accomplished in a shorter period of time will increase the chance for success. You can set a timelier goal, accomplish it and set another one immediately afterwards!

Setting a goal was the key to success for Rose Flitz, who even surpassed her original goal and lost a total of 50 pounds.

Confession #15, p. 127



Getting Clear on the “Why’s”

With S.M.A.R.T. goals set, it is necessary to take the goal setting process one step further by clarifying the reasons why it’s important to lose weight and keep it off. “Why’s” are the driving emotional reason(s) one wants to attain a goal. Therefore, the more “why’s” one has behind their weight loss goal, the greater the likelihood of starting and staying motivated. Not uncovering the specific reason/s for wanting to reach a goal makes falling off track easier, and failure is likely.

Clarifying emotional reasons is not a simple process because the human mind is more comfortable with logic than emotion. Women don’t walk into a weight loss center and say, “I want to lose weight because I’m lacking confidence with my sexuality” or “I’m totally afraid of failing health and not being around to watch my grandkids grow up.” They feel this way, but instead make very logical statements like, “I want to lose weight so I don’t have to buy new clothes” or “My doctor told me I needed to lose weight to bring my blood pressure down.” Unfortunately, when life gets busy and countless obligations begin vying for time, **logical reasons will NOT compel one towards success; emotional reasons will.** Questions like those below take the very broad goal of wanting to lose weight to the more important emotions behind it:

1. Why do you want to lose weight? (*I want to fit into my size 10 jeans.*)
2. Why do you want to fit into those jeans? (*Because when I fit into those jeans I really looked my best.*)
3. And what exactly is it about the feeling of “looking your best,” that you want to re-gain? (*I felt sexier and more confident about myself then. I could wear what I wanted and not be self-conscious about it or have to take a lot of time finding something that doesn’t make my butt look big. People took notice of how good I looked.*)

4. And why is getting back to that feeling important to you now?
(I'm not feeling very attractive right now and it is affecting my relationship with my husband.)
5. How exactly do you think it is affecting your relationship?
(I'm not as spontaneous and my wardrobe isn't as attractive as he would like.)
6. And what would it mean to you emotionally if you could get back into a more attractive wardrobe and be more spontaneous?
(I'd feel more confident that he was happy with our relationship and me as a partner.)

Although the woman in this example initially spoke of wanting to lose weight, what she really wants is to feel more confident. By identifying this very emotional and compelling reason to lose weight, she will be more apt to stay focused on the goal.

Often times when a woman falls off track and fails at her weight loss attempt people are quick with judgment, thinking that she was lazy or didn't have enough will power. **Failing at a weight loss attempt, however, rarely has to do with either laziness or willpower.** Rather, the individual didn't have a big enough "why" to succeed. Think about it—if one really believed gaining weight would result in aliens coming and taking their children, a healthy weight would be maintained. The example illustrates clearly the necessity for the "why" needing to be compelling. "Why's" need to be compelling for the long run as well. All too often one has a very compelling, short-term reason to lose the weight, like a wedding, vacation or some other special event. As soon as the reason for success passes, so too does the effort and the weight wins the struggle once again. Long-term weight loss is driven by long-term, compelling reasons "why" success is necessary.

Not only did Christina Escalona want to lose weight, she wanted to feel more confident about her relationship with her husband. Focusing on this goal motivated her to lose 100 pounds.

Confession #16, p. 129





Appendix F

Casey Conrad



Casey Conrad has been in the health and fitness industry since 1983. She has been a featured or keynote presenter in 15 countries providing programs for communities, working in-house for companies and speaking for a variety of organizations. She is a regular featured columnist in numerous industry publications and local newspapers, has been a guest on dozens of radio talk

shows and has made numerous television appearances, including the Today Tonight show in Australia.

In 1999 Ms. Conrad founded the international chain of weight loss centers called Healthy Inspirations, of which she is the President. To date there are over 70 licensed or franchised locations around the world. Ms. Conrad co-owns three Healthy Inspirations Centers that operate in Rhode Island.

She earned her BA at The American University and her JD at Roger Williams University School of Law. In addition, she is certified in Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Neuro-Associative Conditioning.

Ms. Conrad is available for speaking engagements and can be reached at 800-725-6147 or casey@healthyinspirations.us.