

INTRODUCTION

Who is this book for?

Maybe it's easier to tell you whom it's NOT for.

If you are looking for a good diet, consider these suggestions:

- If you have a few pounds to lose, try a balanced diet with meal plans or suggestions that suit your lifestyle - join a gym, go for a walk, stop drinking soda, drink tea, find a diet buddy or online support group, practice relaxation.
- If you have a significant amount of weight to lose, go to your doctor, a nutritionist and start moving, even a little. Learn how to lose weight the healthy way, and try it. Make sure you do not have a medical condition that is causing the extra weight.

The rest of you, read on.

- Read on if you are morbidly obese by medical standards and you have not successfully managed your weight.
- Read on if you feel hopeless, helpless and defeated by your weight and your attempts to lose it.
- Read on if your appearance does not reflect the way you feel inside.
- Read on if others have reacted to your appearance before you even said one word to them.
- Read on if you feel alone because of your weight or if your weight is a response to feeling alone.
- Read on if the pounds you gain reflect the pain and emptiness you feel in life.
- Read on if you have put your life on hold because of your weight or you have resigned yourself to living a better life in some other year or in some other universe.
- Read on if you believe you are going to die because of your weight and you have not been able to change your ways.
- Read on if you feel that there is an inner you clamoring to emerge; the you that accurately reflects your soul, the you that looks the way you feel.

This book is as much my story as your story. They are not different. We may have been born in different cities or countries; we may eat different foods or work in different

vocations. We may worship with different languages and customs. We may be different ages and different sizes.

Underneath our exteriors, we are all the same. We love, we hate, we celebrate, we grieve. We play, we learn, we create. We have relationships that sustain us throughout our physical lives – relationships with people, with ourselves, with food, with our spiritual selves.

In the end, all we have are our relationships.

If I believe that my body serves to keep me separate from you, then I can never be connected to you, even in intimacy. We are connected by our emotions, by our energy, not by our bodies. Anyone who has ever felt another person's joy or suffering, whether in person or in the media, feels that connection. Why else would we weep over illnesses, or wars, or disasters, or crimes that affect those we have never met, in places we have never been?

We are all connected. My health reflects your energy. My love is an expression of your loyalty. My blessing is the song of your heart. And so it goes. When you are tired, I am in pain. When you are alone, I weep. When I am isolated from the flow of the universe, I cannot fill up, no matter how much I eat.

SECTION ONE

THE CURSE OF OBESITY

WHEN I GROW UP I WANT TO BE A CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE

*IT RUNS IN MY FAMILY –
I WAS DOOMED BEFORE I WAS EVEN BORN*

STRESS – RUNNING ON EMPTY

DEPRESSION – VITAL EXHAUSTION

ANXIETY – I CAN'T MAKE IT STOP

ANGER – FEEDING THE FIRE INSIDE AND OUT

THE BLACK HOLE OF TRAUMA

ON DYING, GRIEF AND EATING: THE ABYSS OF EMPTINESS

THE CURSE OF OBESITY

*"And I saw Sisyphus at his endless task,
raising his prodigious stone with both his hands.
With hands and feet he tried to roll it up to the top of the hill,
but always, just before he could roll it over on to the other side,
its weight would be too much for him, and the pitiless stone would come thundering
down again on to the plain. Then he would begin trying to push it uphill again,
and the sweat ran off him, and the steam rose after him."
- "The Odyssey", translated by Samuel Butler*

The first thing you notice when you come into my office is me. All of me. At times, there has been more of me; other times less, but you always absorbed the same impression. The psychiatrist is fat. I am the psychiatrist. My body is fat. At times in my life, I tried to pretend it was not the truth; other times I chose to simply ignore it. I would do my utmost to disregard the *"surprise in your eyes when you saw my size"*. A nursery rhyme of consternation on your part, sometimes disdain.

For a while my size was my best tool, my humanness on display for all to see, my imperfection, my failure, my mistakes. You tell me about your inability to quit some habit. "Yes", I say, motioning toward my body, "I understand." I tell you right then-and-there, "Do I look like I know all the answers?" I am not a doctor who dictates how you should live, I told myself. But really it was just an excuse for my inability to manage my own struggle with weight. I wanted to tell you how to live. I just had to learn how myself.

What an extraordinary shock that must have been for you. If the doctor doesn't have the answer, then who does? How can the doctor help me if she cannot even help herself? I wondered the same thing. I accepted the responsibility and ethical commitment as a healer, and yet, *I could not help myself even when it was the only right thing to do.*

In the chubby women's section of the store, the surprise works the other way – my size is a presumption of failure in life. "You're a doctor?" the same-size sales clerks would ask incredulously, as they rang up my size 26 pants. I heard their unspoken words "How

can that be? Look at you!! You're fat!" And their implied thoughts, "There's hope for me, yet. If she can do it, I can, too." We are our own, and each other's, worst enemies.

I tried. I dieted. I exercised. I led an active normal life -the fat girl swimming, skiing, and dancing. I lost weight. I gained weight. I quit dieting. I quit exercising. I went to diet camp. I went to psychiatrists. I took medication. I stopped medication. I craved and withstood. I craved and indulged. I denied my size. I accepted my size. I read a thousand books and took a hundred different supplements. My body only got bigger and sicker; my spirit withered. I developed diabetes, edema, hypothyroid, psoriasis, liver problems, sleep apnea, sinus congestion, chronic pain, depression, brain fog and attention deficit. Every step hurt. I drove around looking for parking spaces close to the entrance, praying for working elevators and short hallways. I snored like a freight train and was always exhausted.

I had a wonderful doctor who tolerated my resistance and offered me help every time I saw him. When I went.

Like Sisyphus, I pushed the rock uphill, but it always came tumbling back down upon me.

It culminated one night when I thought I had a small stroke. One night, I felt a little pop deep inside my brain. No sensation, no sound, just a pop. It awoke me suddenly and painlessly. I knew. The next day one hand didn't grasp quite as strongly as the other. One eyelid seemed weaker. And with all of the powers of faith and denial inside me, I made two decisions:

1. I decided I did not want to die.
2. I decided I did not want to go to the doctor yet. I knew what I had to do. There was nothing wrong with my medication. The problem was me. I wasn't taking it. I wasn't doing what I needed to do.

In my heart, I knew that I could recover. I just did not know how. At the core of my very being, I believe that our bodies are healing machines. My machine was in serious disrepair, and I needed to get it running again. Or I would die from my weight.

This was my test of faith.

I knew the illness inside of me was my own creation. The sum of years and years of harming myself with my lifestyle. This purposeful not listening to my body, not caring, intending to do harm was not simply my internal organs aging and ailing. I knew what was inside of me was a reflection of something larger than physical. I just didn't know what it was.

I didn't know how to change what I was doing. Up to this point, my life experience seemed to be a series of what had not worked. This is the story of how I arrived in this tragic place and how I regained my life, and my spirit and my health. Inch by inch, ounce by ounce, pound by pound, one moment at a time.

My life is a weave of mind and body and spirit.

I had to learn how to love.

I had to learn how to give and forgive.

I had to learn how to thank.

I had to learn what to eat so I was satisfied, learn how to move my body in a way that was energizing, and learn how to rest so that I am replenished.

There is no right way to become healthy and whole. There is no one way to live. But if you have an ounce of wish left inside you, I invite you to come along with me for the rest of this journey.