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Chapter 1

Introduction

PICTURES DON'T LIE. I LOOKED at a photo of myself and was stunned by what I saw. When had I allowed myself to gain so much weight? Quite frankly, I had become accustomed to the number staring up at me from the dreaded platform of uncertainty, better known as a scale, that sits in the corner of my bathroom floor. But somehow, I had convinced myself that a woman of “my age” should expect her weight to steadily increase.

After all, I had already tried, unsuccessfully, to lose weight on two separate occasions earlier that fall. Both times I had started out with drive and determination only to give up when the scale did not reward my Herculean efforts like I thought it should. Despite those failed attempts, that photograph brought on mental plans of the new diet I would launch yet again when the new year came around.

It was November. It would be inconceivable to consider cutting back on food when the holiday season was just around the

corner. In fact, I had told myself that dozens of times. After all, no one can resist the draw of rich holiday foods, right? That's when it hit me! I was not in charge of my body or my choices about food. Somewhere along the way I had surrendered control of my eating to the pleasure of food and the taste of food.

That day was November 16, 2014. I decided then and there that something had to change. I did not make an elaborate plan, nor did I go on a swan song binge before I hit the all-too-familiar diet road. I just made a decision that from that day on, I was making the choices, and conscious choices, at that about the food I ate. It was time to find out what was behind my life-long rollercoaster ride with food. But this time, I wasn't just going to treat the symptomatic weight like I had always done in the past. I was going to explore my thinking about food and try to get a handle on it once and for all.

My Background

Prior to that November day, I had lost the same 25 to 40 pounds at least ten times in my life. In fact, I grew accustomed to having two different-sized wardrobes in my closet; one for the smaller me and another, for that inevitable time when the weight came back. Despite my efforts, there was always something in the

back of my mind that just assumed I would eventually gain the weight back when my self-control took another nosedive.

My journey with food started when I was still in middle school. At a time when most of my friends gave little thought to food because of their quick pubescent metabolisms, I was short and pudgy. Eventually, I did reach my full height in high school and the excess weight finally came off. Actually, in retrospect, I realize that growing out before growing up is a typical growth pattern in my family. My son actually matured in the same way.

However, the insecurity of being the “fat girl” in those early years undoubtedly affected how I viewed food. As a young teen, I really had little control over my weight, which was largely the result of a delayed growth spurt. In fact, I would often secretly resent my friends who could eat anything they wanted and still maintain their slim be-jeaned figures while I was stuck shopping in the husky section.

That early insecurity I felt about my weight eventually permeated my whole mindset and relationship with food. In my youth, I had watched my peers eat whatever they wanted with seemingly no effect on their weight. They were all thin at a time in development when one’s outward appearance was so highly valued, while I seemed powerless to do anything to change my

weight. Somewhere along the line I convinced myself that I was powerless against the draw of food.

I developed an attitude of helplessness with food, convincing myself that I could not resist its lure or the constant cycle of weight gain and weight loss. Consequently, I have ridden the rollercoaster of weight loss and gain most of my life. While the insecurity of being an overweight teenager consistently motivated me to keep my weight within a specific range, I was never able to keep it in check for good. Despite my best intentions, food always seemed to win and I regularly felt the guilt of my lack of self-control.

How Did This Book Come to Be?

I need to stop here to explain something foundational to this book. I didn't just suddenly figure out this link between my adolescent helplessness and my inability to resist food. It was a process and that's what *Find Your Weigh* is all about.

This is not just another diet book. Instead, it's a shared journey of self-discovery. I am not a professional medical specialist, a nutritionist, or a trained fitness professional. Instead, I'm a middle-aged woman who finally stepped off of the weight roller coaster after going up and down my whole adult life.

Over the years I've watched countless talk shows where medical professionals would explain how overeating typically

has emotional roots, but I never internalized their message. I've watched fitness trainers with chiseled bodies tout the benefits of healthy eating, but I just figured they had genetically stronger constitutions than I did.

It wasn't until I finally decided to explore my own thoughts and expectations that I finally uncovered what was behind my behavior with food. What's more, I had to figure out, once and for all, that food is not my enemy, nor can food do anything to me that I don't allow.

Food is a Vital Part of Life and Living.

So, why is food such a big deal? For a person who struggles with weight, food can be an all-consuming proposition. Either you want it, you are upset that you ate too much of it (again), or you are making a plan to stay away from it.

Basically, the diet industry runs and thrives on this conundrum. It is banking on the fact you will eventually come to steps two and three. Then, they can swoop in to offer you the "solution" to your

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problem. Often these solutions involve staying completely away from all those “bad” foods that are the source of all your frustrations and pain.

What these diet solutions do not seem to address is how to extricate food from your memory, emotional framework, and cultural experience. Diets don’t take into consideration the fact that food is a vital part of the human experience.

Food Deprivation Does Not Work.

Each year, Americans shell out around \$40 billion dollars on weight loss plans and products.¹ However, even after all the shakes are consumed and the calories are counted, The New England Journal of Medicine estimates that most people regain one-third of their weight back within the first year and return to their baseline within 3 to 5 years.² This is not ground-breaking news. We all know how hard it is to maintain weight loss after a diet. In fact, I bet a lot of you, like me, have experienced this firsthand.

The \$40 billion Americans spend on diet plans each year is a weighty amount, for sure. But those billions represent aspirations rather than effort. Dieters who want to fit into thinner jeans for more than a few months or years need to find a diet plan that will fit into their lifestyle for just as long. If we’re

wasting billions of dollars on fruitless diets, it's likely the fault lies not with Jenny but with ourselves. ³

Food is an Integral Part of Our Memories and Cultural Identity.

I think the biggest reason for our multiple diet failures is the fact that food and our cultural formation are two tightly bound concepts. Think back to some of your fondest childhood memories. Likely, you picture holidays or vacations you took with your family. Does food enter the equation? Of course it does: returning home on a college visit to see your mom's legendary chocolate cake awaiting you on the table; chatting on the back patio as steaks sizzled on the grill; or joining hands around a Thanksgiving table filled with your favorite foods.

I can't even count the times my family sat around the table reminiscing about our favorite family vacation only for the conversation to turn to some food that we all enjoyed. Food is linked with virtually all celebrations and milestones. Food is a vital part of our life experiences. We love nothing better than to sit around the table with those we love.

So, why do we think that we can just cut certain foods out of our lives, presumably for good, and then continue on as if they never existed? The statistics and research say we can't, so it's time

to figure out a new way of thinking about food that actually includes eating all forms of it in a thoughtful, considered way. A new food mindset is the only way to actually have your cake and eat it too!

What Can You Expect?

Over the course of my weight journey I have concluded that weight loss is attainable at any age. I know there is a lot of expert advice out there. I have read countless websites and blogs written by dietitians, doctors, and ripped personal trainers. Undoubtedly, their advice and insights are extremely helpful. But sometimes, it just helps to talk to a normal, everyday person who has walked the same path.

Typically, my diet attempts were always preceded by excessive thought and self-chastisement. Then, I would embark on yet another diet to punish myself for past indiscretions. Each and every time, I would diet to get myself back on the “right” track and inevitably the right track would involve self-denial and self-deprivation. Does this sound familiar?

Thankfully, I finally found a way to stop the lose/gain cycle and put myself in the driver’s seat when it

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comes to food. Your journey will not be just like mine, but this book will walk you through my process and set you on a course of self-discovery.

I can honestly say the more out-of-control my weight would become at different points in my life, the more I would think about it and the more weight issues would consume my thoughts and existence. This time I am asking you to channel your thoughts about food into positive change and to focus action toward developing food habits for a lifetime of success with food.

In the process of finding my weigh, I have developed a series of tips and strategies for approaching food and establishing a healthy food mindset. This book is not a diet plan; however, it does contain a lot of practical tips and suggestions for healthy habit formation.

Still, I realize that each person's process is going to be a little different. Some of you will find success just by mirroring my experience, while others will want to use this book as a companion to another proven long-term weight program, like Weight Watchers. Regardless of how you choose to proceed, I encourage you to think past the traditional diet routine.

Each and every time, I would diet to get myself back on the "right" track and inevitably the right track would involve self-denial and self-deprivation.

We can't predict what tomorrow holds, but I can promise you your tomorrow is fashioned by today's choices.

Today can be your day to start a new journey to recapture control over your body and your life. But remember, lasting success will only come with lasting change. Instead of looking for another diet or another workout plan, it's time to alter your relationship with food for good. The only way to do this is to establish mindful eating habits that you can carry on for the rest of your life.

I did it and, for the first time in my life, I've taken weight off its pedestal in my head and replaced it with living!

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