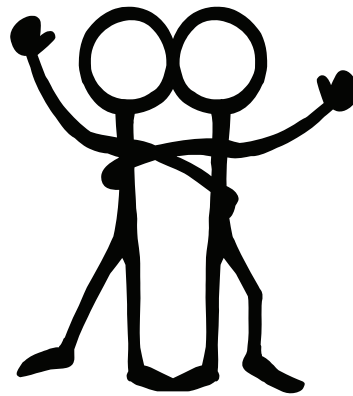


Journey Into Daylight

Escaping the Fist of Food



Pending Conference Approval

**Here are five true stories about people caught
in the vise of miserable overeating.**

**None of them knew they were out of control
with food and could not stop.**

**Each person describes how he or she escaped by
following a simple food plan and drawing support
from others who had eaten the same way.**

1. RICH, BEAUTIFUL AND FAT

One day, just before I turned fourteen, I was sitting in a restaurant with my mother and her friends. When one woman suddenly turned to me and said, “Why don’t you skip dessert, dear”, I ran out humiliated. I could no longer deny my two year fifty-pound weight gain had gone unnoticed. I wasn’t a thin child anymore but a plump adolescent. Hard to take.

In the affluent California beach community where I grew up most people were beautiful and thin. Being overweight terrified me. On the day my mother patted me on the rear and said, “Watch it”, that day I started my first diet, at eleven. I diligently wrote down what I ate, studied calories and set strict limits. Six months later I had grown so thin my parents were worried. But it was getting much harder to keep my calorie count down.

Each time I tried and failed to diet perfectly, I’d start again ‘tomorrow’. And I’d eat everything I had planned to give up. Stuffing on sweets, I figured, would satisfy my desire. But the more sugar I ate the more the cravings grew. My first binges, between eleven and fourteen, were really bad. Later on I would learn that I ate because of many awful feelings I wanted to push away. But at the time I didn’t know why I could not stick to a diet.

During high school and college I tried everything to stop compulsive eating: alcohol, cigarettes, diet pills. My two goals were to have thin thighs and a boyfriend – I thought these would bring me happiness. I isolated and fantasized about “when I got thin” while I kept bingeing heavily. Life became a pattern of dieting, fasting and massive, all-I-could-eat binges. Each day a diet or a binge – weight

going up weight or going down. Nothing helped me stop: neither shots, hypnosis, nor a clinic. At 23 I found a group of people who understood and seemed to have an answer.

They were using three moderate meals a day to control themselves. With some resistance I joined them and discovered the ‘power’ in connecting with other sufferers. I stopped overeating and lost weight, temporarily. But preoccupation with food and body image continued to rule me.

Later, when I found the Greysheet plan I was reluctant to try it because of the public weighing and measuring of food. But I was desperate so I listened to a woman who urged, “Just give it a try”. It was pretty difficult at first, but they said it would get easier. And it did. I stopped counting calories and started preparing delicious meals. I learned new ways to cope with life between meals. I learned how to date boys and travel, while continuing to weigh and measure my meals. I lost the self-hatred from being out of control.

There is a suggested spiritual aspect of Greysheet I had trouble accepting. Fortunately, people told me that “GOD” could simply mean “Good Orderly Direction”. That worked. My definition of God has changed, but I strongly believe in the power that exists when people come together to solve their common problem.

Now I am married with two beautiful children and follow Greysheet. My relationships are healthy. I keep growing. I have heard it said: Abstaining may not get you into heaven but will open up the gates to let you out of hell.

2. NO MATTER WHAT!

When I was two my mother fed me lots of sugary foods. It was her way of providing nurturing, and I grew to live only to eat. I learned to manage chronic fear, constant pain and anxiety through lots of eating. I had found a substitute for real nurturing. In the elite private school in my community I felt like a pariah, gross and unwanted. I was fat.

By frequently thinking of food and consuming large quantities I succeeded to numb my inner pain. My best friend food provided comfort, and I developed a “love-relationship” with it. At eight, when I wasn’t eating, my time was spent covering up how much I ate. It led to shame, guilt and a sense of utter helplessness.

During early adolescent and teen years I had no awareness of any serious or harmful food issues. Yet I was wholly in the grip of food and out of control. Blindness to my eating habits continued until the age of 21 when I was first led into recovery.

My roommate introduced me to a Twelve-Step fellowship called Greysheeters Anonymous. She advised me to go to live meetings where I’d learn how to fix and enjoy three weighed and measured meals from the food plan, and how not to eat in between meals no matter what. I went. The folks at the meeting suggested I read the Big Book of AA to learn new ideas about addiction, including how to help another sufferer.

Although I remember attending my first Greysheet meeting, I did not understand much. I had been awake the whole night with severe abdominal pains from my last binge. But as I sat in the meeting that freezing December morning with severe abdominal pain, I grew smitten by the mysterious energy in the room.

I followed their directions for forty days and then went on another huge binge. Forty days after that an even larger binge crashed my life. This one almost killed me. When I realized I could actually lose my life, in that instant I surrendered admitting I was beaten. I had become a powerless food addict, driven to the point where life was entirely unmanageable. I began to follow the Greysheet program earnestly, with an honest heart. Everything that was suggested to do I did. I did not want to go back to the ways I had been eating before.

Days turned into weeks, then into months, then a year. Now fifteen years later I can gratefully claim continuous sane Greysheet abstinence.

This is a “24-hour program”, meaning we have to focus on today, because we only live one day at a time. My life was saved by recovering people in this fellowship. They extended to me the same generosity, support and love that they had received from others. They passed it on to me, and I hope in some measure, now, I am passing it on to you, reader of my story, who may be suffering from compulsive overeating.

The most important coping technique I’ve learned in Greysheet is, We don’t eat compulsively no matter what! Today, I’ve got choices – tools and support. Today I am committed to weigh and measure what I eat from the food plan and to give myself the greatest gift: a daily reprieve from this killer disease.

3. TRAPPED IN THE VISE

I think I was born with an obsession for food. At two years old I was eating man-sized portions of dinner, while my mother and grandmother watched and nodded approvingly.

Sure, I was a chunky baby but who wasn't? My family life seemed normal: two loving parents and three brothers and sisters. School was normal too. I had a few friends and played with Barbie dolls. All was well until I turned eight. I had always liked to eat and knew I was bigger than my friends but wasn't ashamed of my size.

Then one evening my father, a city bus driver and no weakling, told me I was too big to pick up and lift in the air; he couldn't lift me up any more! On that day shame started. That day also began an addiction that would rule and ruin my life for many years to come.

As I got older I ate with more abandon. The mixed messages were: "Eat, you need to grow." "Don't eat, you're getting big." "You're big boned." "You are fat and sloppy." "You'll look like a brick house." – confusing to an adolescent. When I got to middle school I started attracting the eager boys. Not knowing how to cope with the attention I ate even more. It was a difficult time.

An enterprising girl, I kept a part time job after school. From thirteen to eighteen most of my earnings went into the pockets of diet-pill doctors. By eighteen I was a full-blown diet-pill addict but not a skinny one. The diet pills just did not curb my appetite. When I entered college I was 178 pounds, down from 196. A neighborhood doctor said I was obese. I didn't know what he meant but knew it wasn't good. He explained that I was too heavy for my age, height, and bone structure. Right then I decided it's the last time anyone would call me fat, whatever word they used.

I went on a diet of eating vegetables and exercising for hours. Spending four hours a day

in the college gym, I went from 178 to 150 in three months. When my mother and aunt came to visit, they were shocked at my weight loss.

In sophomore year I changed to a new university. It offered a different food plan. U#1 gave meal tickets for food venues that were open at various times. Students purchased a food plan based on an estimated number of meals for that semester. If students underestimated their need, they had to pay cash for their food or go to the local supermarket. At U#2 the buffet system operated at all food venues, and there was a campus convenience store open 24 hours a day.

I had formed a network of friends at U#1 and felt camaraderie and acceptance. I was not able to find that at U#2 and in my first month got totally ensnared in the food system. I stayed trapped in it for the remaining three years. Daily, I binged, purged, lived in my dorm room as a hermit, reverted to diet pills, and stole food (from anyone and everyone).

During this time I was introduced to a food organization that used three moderate meals as one of their food plans. I went to meetings sporadically and never got fully honest. I continued to take diet pills and binged heavily, every day. Yet I remained a good student. I did internships, studied, and graduated with honors. One internship turned into a job. Although my coworkers warned me not to eat anything of theirs, I did the opposite and was eventually fired. I next tried a helping profession. In that job I stole food from the people I was supposed to be helping. It's not that I didn't care. I was trapped – in a food vise. Bingeing every day left me tired, mean, depressed, apathetic and suicidal. (I attempted

4. THIN AND ALONE

several times, always after a major binge.) I was 24, seeing one nutritionist after another, exercising maniacally and bingeing my head off.

One day, after I had tried and failed at a number of various diets I was reading yet another book about food problems. I figured this book would suggest one more plan that I would try and fail. I blamed myself for weakness, sure I was doomed to failure. But in this book the author mentioned a group called Greysheet. She said most of the members were highly successful in losing weight. *That* caught my attention. I did a search and found the website.

Immediately I got a sponsor and started to weigh and measure my meals. I cannot say my Greysheet ride has been smooth. I can report that their defined abstinence has made a radical shift in my life. After three years of abstinence I've completed a graduate degree and now work in a profession. I travel, go on dates and have good friends. Greysheet got me out of my hell with food. I could not have done it alone. I don't think anyone can.

I can't remember not constantly thinking about food and my body image. It started very early. It was how I responded to the chaos surrounding my parents' divorce when I was a baby. It was how I tried to gain a sense of control. I needed social approval and love, and thought that being "perfect" (i.e., being thin) was the solution.

I had always been sensitive to "carbs" – refined sugars and starches – but things did not take a dramatic downturn until I was fourteen years old. Looking back, I can see that my eating habits had been deteriorating for years. I couldn't see it then.

When I was twelve I switched from public school to an elite private school. A shy kid, I wanted so much to fit into this new, sophisticated world, where all the kids seemed to come from Park Avenue families and wore fashionable clothes. But most of the time, coming from a single-parent household where money was tight, I felt out-of-place in this high-pressure environment.

Most of the girls and boys in school were weight conscious and dieted. I took it to an extreme. Although I had been at a normal weight, each day I challenged myself to eat less at lunch until I was only spending about a dollar a day on lunch. Combined with strenuous exercise, I began to lose weight very fast.

One day something clearly shifted in my psyche. I was babysitting two little girls, and I thought, "I want to look like they do and have thin thighs." The next day I severely restricted my food intake even more. From the malnourishment that followed I began to experience a "high". But I also developed brain fogginess. This grew into a sense of superiority over others who lacked the discipline to control their eating. I thought I looked really good.

I went down to eighty pounds! At five foot four inches this drew lots of attention, especially from strangers. Their stares really bothered me. Now that I was so thin I could no longer join in swim team practice because the water was too cold. Under much pressure, I agreed to gain weight and see a nutritionist.

My family had a history of high cholesterol, so the nutritionist put me on a high-sugar, low-fat, high caloric diet. Soon I discovered I could get a different kind of “high” from large amounts of sugar. Except that sugar also made me sleepy and I’d pass out. The more sugar I ate the more my body craved it. The more I craved the more I consumed. Sugar and other carbs became my drug of choice. I was caught in the vise of compulsive eating.

Because of the abrupt switch from restrictive dieting to all-out bingeing, I went from eighty pounds to 145 in less than a year. I became completely weight-obsessed and it felt like I had a death sentence. I spiraled down into suicidal depression. I declined all social invitations from friends. My date life shrank to zero. I’d spend hours eating in front of the TV. I hid wrappers under my bed, then walked around feeling ashamed and fearful.

I took the SAT’s twice. The second time I actually scored more than 100 points higher on the test. This was because I had fasted the day before instead of bingeing, as I had done for the first one. It was not easy to explain during college interviews.

All through final exams I went on thirty- and forty-day juice fasts. Otherwise I would have had to repeatedly get up from the desk for my sugar fix, which included rummaging through trash-cans. The only social life I had left occurred during brief periods when I was able to diet. But after a while it became impossible to diet at all.

When I first came into Greysheet at 27 I was wearing the same elastic skirt all the time and basically wanted to die. I didn’t think this program would work for me because I had

failed badly at several other Twelve Step programs. They had informed me that even though I was miserable, I wasn’t ready to surrender. But somehow, happily, Greysheet worked! And continues to work seven years later. I am completely convinced that I’m able to stay abstinent because of weighing and measuring without exception.

I have maintained a forty-pound weight loss these seven years and continue to feel clear-headed. I daily enjoy delicious Greysheet food *without guilt*. I do occasionally have an unhappy day of course, but life is a thousand times better without the terrible self-hatred that trails after a binge. Greysheet has given me back *me*. I have a future, free from my prior unhappy eating behaviors.

5. ATHLETE LOSES FOOD CONTEST

I was always a good athlete. One of the best in second grade. Second grade is when I remember first feeling different from other kids. Although I was a very good player, I always got picked last because I was fat. Over and over I'd have to prove myself because I didn't look like an athlete. Around girls I felt especially awkward. Most kids would eat lunch together at school. I went home every day because I was ashamed of how much I ate.

In fifth grade they started a Little League in my upstate New York town. I was very good at baseball and loved the game. At the tryouts I hit two home runs. But because of my size the only position I could get was catcher. I had a great arm for it and got into the Little League but was not picked for the majors or even promoted – even though I had the best batting average in the minors. Many nights I'd cry myself to sleep, feeling frustrated and trapped in a large body. It seemed no one wanted me because of it.

At twelve I stopped getting invited to parties. Hurt and frustrated, I turned again to my favorite junk foods for solace. I wanted badly to be popular and thought my biggest obstacle was weight (and shyness). I had a few friends; none were fat.

I also played football pretty well. In my town football was everything, and I dreamed of being a running back, but they made me a lineman (weight!).

In ninth grade at the prodding of my football coach I went out for wrestling. At first the kids I had to wrestle were in the heavy-weight class. They were much bigger than me, so I was not very successful. To get into the middleweight class I needed to lose five pounds. That didn't seem like too much. For weeks I tried to diet with every ounce of self-control, but could not lose those five pounds. I

remained in the heavyweight category.

I kept working hard at sports, applying my natural abilities and over time some results started to show. I became more accepted and made a few new friends. But underneath I still felt I didn't belong and didn't deserve to be liked. Some kids recognized my situation and started pushing me to “grow up and meet girls”. An older boy ordered me to go to a dance with a girl. He helped me set it up, and that was my first date. I did it, terrified.

In my senior year I became co-captain of the wrestling team and first-string varsity football. Our football team was undefeated. Our team pictures appeared in Newsweek magazine and we were picked as one of the top high school teams in the country. All the while I believed I got there by accident. All the other guys meanwhile had gotten girlfriends while I remained alone. Since girls didn't seem to want to go out with me, I made food my long-term companion.

That same year I also had my only bout with anorexia. At the end of football season I weighed 185 pounds. I had promised the wrestling coach I would wrestle in the 154-pound weight class. I promised that in two weeks I'd lose the weight and make the class. In the next two weeks I lost 31 pounds by exercising insanely for hours and going five days without food or liquid. I got deliberately dehydrated. I knew it was dangerous but didn't care. All that mattered was the ten seconds when I would weigh in at 154 pounds.

The day came and at noon I weighed in at exactly 154. By 3:00 pm I was up to 165 pounds (although it was mostly water to rehydrate). However, this foolishness convinced me I could control my weight. It took many more years of insane overeating before I could finally give in, kicking and screaming. I knew all about the

famous diets and fads. Each would work for a while and then totally not. I'd regain all the weight and a few extra pounds to boot.

Once I discovered Greysheet it wasn't too long before I came to realize how beaten down I actually was. After I got desperate enough to stop eating enormous amounts of junk-food, I practically crawled into my first meeting on hands and knees.

That is where I learned about weighing and measuring from a food plan, and what a powerful tool it is! I was given other effective tools as well, which I continue to use in my life.

Once I committed, the weight came off quickly. But my attitudes took a lot longer to adjust. I now view myself as a "work in progress". And hope I always will.

That first meeting in September many years ago led to an abstinent dinner and then to my first full day of abstaining. I have remained free from food addiction for many years now. It hasn't always been easy. One slogan has helped much: "No matter what". It's how I try to live.

Over the years life has taken many turns: I have gotten divorced, almost lost a child, did lose a parent and several close friends. I have remarried, seen both my sons married and now have four wonderful grandchildren. I have weighed and measured food on birthdays and holidays, during business lunches, dinners and other social occasions.

Any one of these events could have been a trigger to overeat. They weren't. I never want to return to the horror of my old overeating days. As I continue to remain free a day at a time, I look forward to one more day of abstinence.

There Is A Solution



GreySheeters Anonymous (GSA) is a large group of people who have solved their eating problems. GSA has helped people who have tried to gain lasting freedom from being controlled by food, but failed. This is not another diet! It is a program of abstinence from compulsive eating, with a specific food plan that takes away cravings.

GSA offers clearly defined parameters for abstinence, proven tools and support from a worldwide community. In GSA people share personal experience, strength and hope to help each other recover from compulsive behavior around food. There are no dues or fees.

Come and join us at a meeting.

For more information visit

www.greysheet.org