

Introduction

I sat down at my desk before sunrise on a crisp fall morning in 2012 and began writing. At the time, I was newly married, had moved to a different state for the first time in more than two decades, had quit a job I'd been in for more than ten years, and was desperately trying to squelch a growing waistline and a downhill slide into despair as a result of gaining weight. I was also trying to write that book that everyone had been telling me to write since losing 230 pounds without surgery between 2007 and 2009. But I was trapped in an oxymoron, trying to figure out how to inspire while once again fearing that I might expire if I did not do something about my weight. The slow creep upward had already begun...again.

Fast forward to the present, and here I am sitting at my desk, still happily married, living in another different state, having recently quit my job, and still desperately trying to squelch that waistline that grew exponentially in the past seven years and has once again put my life in danger.

I've written this book for two primary reasons. First, I love to make people laugh, and my hope is that many of the stories you find within will do exactly that. Being the funny guy in the room makes people like and accept you when you fear they will reject you because of your size. Laughter is also cathartic. There's a reason many psychologists place emphasis on the importance of being able to laugh at yourself. Laughter heals, both physically and emotionally. Making people laugh is still one of my more common coping mechanisms, but with time, I've come to realize that I enjoy making people laugh because I enjoy seeing people happy.

Second, my goal is to help you – regardless of your physical size – understand the life and emotional pain of those who struggle with weight. Being 100 pounds or more overweight hurts. There is physical pain, but the emotional hurt is more devastating. Hopefully, you will come to understand from my own journey and the stories of many people who've had similar life experiences, that our weight problem is not just about eating too much. It's more about WHY we eat so much, and much of that has to do with what's going on in our heads more than in our bodies.

Welcome to the world of the morbidly obese – the ever-increasing portion of the population in the U.S. who are more than 100 pounds overweight and have been this way most of their lives. I wrote this book, in part, to tell our stories through my story. I've been privileged to talk with hundreds of people who have struggled with being morbidly obese, and universal themes have emerged out of those discussions. My story is likely very similar to your story or the story of someone you love and care about.

So, while this book had auspicious beginnings as an attempt to inspire others that they could lose weight and have the healthy life they had always wanted also, it's now morphed into a quasi-memoir peppered with stories from a unique life, along with a healthy dose of inspiration. I grew up in a pastor's home, which meant living in many places and interacting with many people. Our family lived in a fishbowl of scrutiny, but with my enjoyment of observing the world around me and people-watching, I was a fish that stared right back. You will see my weight as an oft-present actor in these vignettes and stories from my life. Like the proverbial elephant in the room (literally, for once), it's always with me.

Some final words before we begin. The stories you are about to read are based on real people and real events but may not be completely accurate. Consider this your warning for when my book makes it to Oprah! Some of the stories took place a long time ago, so I'm relying on distant memories. Others may

have been embellished or changed due to my nature as a storyteller; some of the parties involved may have a different take on the actual events. I've changed names to protect the innocent... and the guilty.

Also, I've made it a bit of a personal mission to redeem the word "fat." You'll see that I use it frequently and descriptively throughout. Please don't be offended. Fat is not a dirty word, but it's been made out to be that way because of people who choose to use it hurtfully. I try to avoid silly, overly-politically correct adjectives like "pleasingly plump" or "big boned." I'm fat. Maybe you are, too. It's OK to say so.

Last, please note that this book is not set up chronologically and there is not one, singular cohesive plot. Each chapter is a story unto itself, and some things may be repeated in more than one spot.

There are many stories to tell from my life; stories to make you laugh, cry, and perhaps inspire a change in your life. Through it all, I hope you will be motivated to consider your own story and your preferred future. In the grand scheme of things, life is pretty brief. Live it to the fullest.