

I have struggled with my weight since as far back as I can remember. The last “diet” I conquered, I dropped 100 lbs. only to gain them back and more. Nothing feels more humiliating, discouraging and hopeless. **How could I be successful in so many other areas of my life and such a failure when it comes to my weight?**

After my final defeat, I vowed never to diet again. I kind of accepted my 5’4” 265 pound body. I had a loving husband, 2 great kids and my life was “o.k.” Or was it? How many times did I see a picture of myself and feel shame and desperation? How many times were my children subjected to unhealthy meals and eating habits? How about planning a family trip so I’d be out of town and miss my 20th high school reunion?

In 2002 I start exercising – for my mind and body. Maybe this would help. Health was my goal – not weight. I felt comfortable at Longfellow so I began with swimming, the sport I used to love. **In the past, exercise was synonymous with weight loss -- something that I only did if I was on a diet. After 4 years of exercising regularly, I now realize how vital it is not just for weight control but also the benefits of mind, body and spirit.** On most days, I love to exercise and even on days when I say to myself “I’m not feeling up to it” I know that **getting to the gym is even more critical for my mood and energy level.**

January 2003 was when I went to my group meeting. I remember going to the first meeting and thinking, “why are all these thin people here?” Some had already lost their weight and others were only minimally overweight compared with me. **I liked the tone of the meeting. It was educational, gentle and positive. I already knew about nutrition, calories, points, etc. After Weight Watchers and the numerous other programs I had done I was the pro. But this was different.**

Over numerous sessions I learned so many new things that were practical & useful; combining food groups, not eliminating categories of food, blood sugar levels, mini-meals, eating on a regular schedule, eliminating addictive foods, the relationship between food and mood, recipe ideas, healthy fats, sitting to eat, great books to read; positive self-talk, cancer prevention and so much more! **I embraced the idea that no food was off limits but that we need to know our bodies and our triggers. I also really liked the opportunity to learn and share daily life challenges with other group members.** Having a supportive, knowledgeable and experienced group leader like Jane allowed me to shift my thinking and to develop strategies that actually work. **I now have the attitude that I “want to” do this for myself rather than I “have to” do this. I use my knowledge (and less emotion) to make smart decisions.** If I have a setback, I don’t continue eating poorly and go into that, “I blew it” mode. I just get back on track.

I have lost 97 and made changes in my food habits and my thinking that have provided me the greatest freedom from food I have ever experienced. As I continue to be asked what diet I am doing to lose all my weight I have to pinch myself each time I reply, “I’m not on a diet”. **If I can experience this freedom with food, I am 100% certain anyone can do the same thing. You can’t be in a rush. It’s not a quick fix. It takes energy but ignoring my weight was so much harder.**

I accept that I have to be very protective in order to maintain all that I have accomplished. **It is never easy to walk out on my family to squeeze in a workout, but they get a much happier, healthier and productive mom and wife.**

There are times when my old thoughts and habits creep back in. I've learned (by success and failure) when to know that my old devious mind is trying to mess me up. I now insert a new message. For example, "you can't just eat one hot chocolate chip cookie. One means 6 so just don't do it. You'll feel horrible if you do." **With practice, new ways of thinking and behaving gets easier and easier.**

I forgot to mention, during these 4 years, I became pregnant and was blessed with a daughter. Now I have 3 wonderful children. **I told you anything is possible.** Practice, patience and persistence have paid off.