

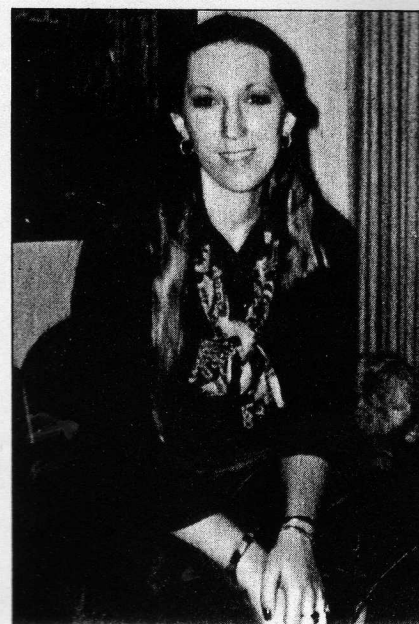
Finding a Balance

Anorexic as a teen and a compulsive overeater in her 20's, Janet finally made peace with food when she learned to eat well.

BY JANET HERRING-SHERMAN



Janet (above) headed toward a too-thin 96 pounds, but a decade later, skyrocketed to 174 (right). Today, she's happy and healthy in-between (left).



ing band, the pep band and the scholarship club. However, the "right" group of girls, who were thin and popular, didn't pay any attention to me. Gradually it dawned on me: I was too fat! Even though I was 5'7" and 125 pounds, I felt larger than the other girls, and I was sure that being heavy was what was keeping me from being popular. The solution seemed obvious: In order to be liked by the thinner, more popular girls, I simply had to lose weight.

I was still struggling with my desire to be thin during my sophomore year in high school, since I had tried countless unsuccessful fad diets to lose weight and gain recognition. In addition to my anxieties about being liked, I felt overwhelmed by all the extracurricular activities I had taken on and was panic-stricken I would not be able to maintain my 4.0 grade-point average. Life seemed out of control, and I felt helpless to do anything about it. So, instead of adjusting the expectations I had of myself, I waged war on food.

WASTING AWAY

For all intents and purposes, I quit eating. In the school cafeteria, I would nibble at my carrot sticks and piece of dry bread, close my eyes and pretend they tasted like the pizza and cherry pie my girlfriends were enjoying. Soon I began to resent everyone within my sight for being able to eat what I couldn't. I felt angry and deprived, but I stuck to my guns, determined to be thin. As my appetite waned and the initial hunger pangs subsided, I was tempted less and not eating became easier. It wasn't long before I had lost 20 pounds—but I still felt fat.

My family began commenting that I was getting too thin, but the popular girls still didn't seem to notice, so I started exercising to speed up my weight loss. Then, during halftime at a football game one Saturday

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Lean, leggy Barbie dolls were my favorite toys the summer I was 10. My best friend and I spent long hours playing with them and snacking at the neighborhood drive-in. I would order a vanilla frosty and feel guilty; my friend—petite and slim—would indulge in a chocolate sundae or banana split. She didn't gain an ounce all summer, but my "baby fat" seemed to spread. Even at that age, I knew being chubby was taboo. I believed good girls were supposed to be polite, to do as they were told—and look like Barbie dolls.

Throughout my grammar-school days, I was called "fat" and "teacher's pet" by the other kids. The word "fat" was like an arrow through my heart, but I was proud of the

"teacher's pet" label; it meant I was smart and that the teachers, at least, approved of me. Still, I ached for the approval of my peers, and when I didn't get it, I withdrew, keeping company with books and cookies instead. When I shed tears about being chubby, my family would respond, "You're not fat. You're just tall, and you have big bones." But I still felt fat.

I was a freshman in high school when I first tried to lose weight in earnest. My parents had always been so generous with their love, I felt I should repay them by being the perfect daughter. In my mind, that meant associating with the "right" kids as well as being polite and getting straight A's. My grades were perfect, and I was in the march-

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whole new set of pressures confronted me. While I had a nice group of friends, went on dates, got good grades and still rode my horse, I nonetheless had that intense desire to earn approval. Again I took on more responsibilities than were reasonable: the maximum number of units allowed, a part-time job in the college public-affairs office, a position on the college magazine, plus the daily exercise and care of my horse and her colt. But this time, instead of denying myself food in order to gain control, I went in the opposite direction and simply let go, concentrating on my many activities and snacking on fast food and cookies between classes. And, instead of constantly surveying my body, I ignored it. As a result, I graduated *summa cum laude* weighing 140 pounds.

GOING OVERBOARD

Armed with my journalism degree and glowing letters of recommendation from my professors, I soon had a job with a San Francisco advertising agency. That environment proved too stressful for a novice like me, and I came home to the country despondent. My self-esteem had plummeted, but my weight hadn't. I went to work for my hometown newspaper and lived in fear I'd make a mistake for the whole world—especially my parents and their peers—to see. I never felt the articles I wrote were good enough, so I continued to “medicate” my fears with bagfuls of corn chips and chocolate candies. My self-image was at a new low, so I hibernated at home, rarely venturing out on dates. I tried dieting periodically, but never with much success and never with the fervor I had in high school.

When I was 28, though, I met and began dating a man who was handsome and well-liked—and who drank heavily. Instead of being wary of his problem, I felt overjoyed that such a good-looking man was interested in someone as fat as me. Not willing to risk my new relationship, I made light of his drinking. I wanted only to please him, so that he would continue to “approve” of me. For a while I tried to keep pace with him at the bar. Then I switched to eating pretzels and peanuts while he drank. Most nights we ate dinner out after we finished drinking. In one-and-a-half years, I gained 35 pounds.

Driving home one night, after yet another heavy meal, I felt as if I couldn't breathe: My pantyhose and skirt were so tight around my waist that I felt constricted. With alarming clarity, I realized being overweight—like being underweight—wasn't healthy for my body or mind. I felt fat and dumpy, and I wanted nothing more than to run away and hide. I worried and complained about my weight for the next month and tried various diets. But those instant fixes didn't work any better than those I'd tried as a teen.

In April 1982, I made the decision to join
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afternoon, I passed out while performing with the marching band. I told everyone I'd fainted because of the heat, but it was only January in the northern California town of Sebastopol, where I lived. In fact, I didn't have the strength to march another step or play another note. Soon after that incident, I stopped menstruating. That's when my mother insisted I see the family doctor. I didn't protest, since I was frequently doubled over with pains in my side.

The doctor was convinced my anemia, drastic weight loss and cessation of menses were all due to “growing pains” and “female problems” (not the eating disorder we now know as anorexia), and he sent me to a gynecologist. A week later, I was in the hospital for tests. The results showed that I didn't have cancer or any other life-threatening illness; I was simply malnourished.

The gynecologist's treatment focused not on the root of the problem—my poor self-image—but on reactivating my menstrual cycles with all kinds of drugs. When I started treatment, I was a bone-thin 96 pounds; yet when I looked in the mirror, I despaired over my “enormous” hips. And, to my horror, the medications caused me to

gain weight: In under two months, I was up to 110 pounds. Petrified of growing even fatter, I became more obsessed with my food intake. I feared that an orange slice or a single raisin would add inches to my hips. Luckily, my despondency over gaining weight eased somewhat when I was asked out on a date for the first time—proof, in my distorted perception, that being thin made me pretty. The popular girls noticed me now, too, and even seemed in awe of the weight I'd lost.

STRIKING A BARGAIN

That summer, my concerned parents struck a bargain with me—they finally agreed to let me have a horse. This lifelong dream could come true under one condition: I had to start eating normally again, since they said they couldn't afford to pay for both a horse's feed and my doctor's bills. I agreed to their terms, and the horse seemed to do the trick, at least temporarily. Maybe it was the fresh air and the serenity that came from riding through the apple orchards; maybe it was having something besides myself to focus on; maybe it was the fact that, when astride my horse, I felt regal instead of fat. Whatever the reason, my eating habits balanced out over the next few years. My weight stabilized at 125 pounds and my menstrual cycles resumed.

But when I moved away to college, a

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MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

THE WEIGHT WATCHERS Quick Success® Food Plan is designed to provide a faster initial weight loss; a simple, flexible exchange system; and the development of life-long weight-maintenance skills.

The Quick Success® Food Plan Weeks 1-4 includes a wide variety of foods, which, when eaten in the specified quantities, will provide you with interesting and varied meals while you lose weight. In Week 5, more flexibility is available to tailor the Food Plan to lifestyle preferences. Then, booklets on Dining Out (Week 6) and Celebrations (Week 8) offer even more variety, enabling you to individualize the food plan.

All recipes and food products in the editorial portion of the magazine fit the Quick Success® Plus Food Plan through Week 5 unless otherwise designated.

The appearance of an advertisement in *Weight Watchers Magazine* does not imply the endorsement or approval of the product and/or recipe. Neither does its appearance imply that the product and/or recipe fits the weight-loss food plan, with the exception of those products that bear the Weight Watchers trademark.

To learn about the extensive variety of foods and menus available to Weight Watchers members, we invite you to join the Weight Watchers meeting nearest you. There, under the guidance of a trained leader, you will receive the help necessary to lose weight and keep it off.

ABOUT OUR RECIPES

Of special interest to Weight Watchers Program members: In any recipe for more than one serving, it is important to mix the ingredients well and divide the mixture evenly so that every portion has an equal amount of each ingredient. Where liquid and solid parts have to be divided evenly, drain the liquid, set aside and follow procedure above for remaining ingredients; add equal amounts liquid to each portion. All meat, poultry and fish amounts refer to cooked, skinned and boned edible portions. Weigh each portion before eating.

When selecting fruits or juices other than fresh, choose those with no sugar added. Use low- or nonfat yogurt in plain or reduced-calorie flavors. Reduced-calorie jams, jellies and preserves contain 16 calories per 2 teaspoons, unless otherwise indicated. Low-calorie flavored gelatin contains 8 calories per half cup, unless otherwise indicated.

Food Exchange provided by each recipe are as follows: Pro Ex (Protein Exchange), Brd Ex (Bread Exchange), Veg Ex (Vegetable Exchange), Fat Ex, Fruit Ex, Milk Ex, cal Opt Ex (calories Optional Exchange).

Recipes also include nutritional data, which is approximate. We have abbreviated for convenience: cal (calorie[s]), pro (protein), car (carbohydrates), sod (sodium), chol (cholesterol), g (gram[s]), mg (milligram[s]).

Photographed recipes may vary as to number of servings shown. See recipes for exact serving information.

Some recipe ingredients or food items in menu plans may be selections from the Dining Out or Celebrations Booklets.

FINDING A BALANCE

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Weight Watchers. I weighed 174 pounds, more than I'd ever weighed before, and I wanted to get my eating habits in line once and for all. Even as I weighed in that first time, I felt a new and powerful sense of hope. I was struck by the fact that the individuals attending the meeting were enjoying themselves. They weren't skulking about feeling miserable because they were overweight. Nor were they apologetic about their extra pounds. They were confronting their problems and learning how to help themselves.

I saw right away that Weight Watchers was more than a diet: It was an eating plan that involved behavioral as well as good nutritional changes, which would help me get my erratic eating habits under control. As I learned to eat right and to keep an honest account of what I ate, I also learned how to confront my anxieties and insecurities instead of denying myself of or gorging myself on food. As the pounds came off, I began to feel better about myself, and consequently, I stopped looking for the approval of others to do so. Finally, I felt as if I was gaining a new, healthy perspective on my life and my eating habits.

I reached my goal weight, 147 pounds, in September of 1982. My newfound self-esteem—and figure—worked their magic: A month later I met the man who was to become my husband. I continued to attend the meetings, and I lost another five pounds. Then, I gradually stopped going.

Six months before the wedding, I realized that although my plans for bouquets and bridesmaids might be under control, my eating habits had once again become haphazard. Back to Weight Watchers I went, and I was back on track immediately. On my wedding day, in October 1983, I weighed 135 pounds.

Today, I can honestly say I'm happy at my present weight. Now when I gain a few pounds, I don't panic as I had done as a teen, because I know there's something sensible and more effective than starving myself or giving up and stuffing myself. And I don't punish myself. In the old days, I looked in the mirror and thought I was fat, even though in reality I was little more than a skeleton. Today when I look in the mirror, I don't see myself as fat or skinny, but as at a normal, healthy weight for me.

Weight Watchers has done far more than help me shed unwanted pounds. Ultimately, the program has given me the strength to end an unhealthy relationship, to leave the safe confines of a too-familiar job, to become marketing director for an international nonprofit organization and to marry. Weight Watchers has given me back myself. And even though I still don't look like a Barbie doll, I like myself just fine. □