

No Time to Weight A Personal Journey – Part I

By Stephanie Worrell

If there is one thing Americans know for sure these days, it's that many of us are too fat and it's super-sizably unhealthy. And, that losing weight successfully is based on eating less and moving more—calories in and calories out. I'm the last to want to admit this is the truth. When you've spent most of your life in a needy relationship with food, you don't want to hear about something so simple that just can't seem to work right on your body. This diary is about my journey to finally be healthy by trying to beat the truth and undergoing gastric surgery. Don't gasp. I'm only telling my story (with a bit of humor), and not promoting the surgery because I'm still deciding for myself.

Somewhere in my "large" 30's, while sitting on the couch sucking down M&M's one night, I happened upon my first episode of HBO's Sex in the City. If you're not familiar with the show's infamous sexcapades (now in re-runs), it was about a New York newspaper columnist who intimately shared her ups and downs with the opposite sex. My story is about the same, but instead of carnal relationships, I'm sharing carnal gastronomies (i.e. engaging in a lot of extra-curricular eating activity). If by chance you get bored reading this column, just replace any mention of food with the word, "sex" instead. Enjoy.

The Repressed Foodie: Breaking up is hard to do, but being "dead" is even harder!

I still remember my first KISS – sweet, delicious – marking the beginning of a tumultuous relationship with chocolate (and food in general), that would last for almost 30 years. Sadly, while teenage girls my age were transferring love lip to lip—I was sucking down silver-wrapped "plops." By age 13, I was a plop; and by 30, my body-shape had evolved from plop into one of those Mexican potbellied fireplaces you find in backyards and patios.

Just months away from turning 39 and two years post-partum (child #2), I hit the bottom – or rather should I say the top at 245 lbs.? Along the way, I'd also topped off my blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar levels, suffered from sleep apnea and practically snored my husband into the next state. And all of this in the midst of my DAILY attempts to lose the weight. I was spiraling down fast both physically and emotionally.

No person or program could help me find the secret to weight-loss success, so I turned to the holy grail of information – the internet. I had faith that Google would save my life.

Click, click and I was lost in cyberspace...it was like an "Around the Diet World with Stephanie Worrell" tour. Weight Watchers, E-diets, Atkins, Trim Spa, Dextrim, Hoodia, etc., etc., etc. Each stop on the tour reminded me of past weight loss failures and got me thinking about how important my relationship with food was . . .did I seriously want to breakup?

Let's get real. I was a kid obsessed for years with the movie Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. And, I was not fantasizing about being Willie; I wanted to be the chunky boy who fell into the river of chocolate never to be seen again. All I could think about was how heavenly it would be to momentarily gulp down unlimited amounts of chocolate.

Doubt filled my mind until I finally clicked on a link that would lead me to gastric surgery. After endless hours of research, many sleepless nights and several visits to my family doctor, I made the decision to have Laparoscopic Gastric Banding (Lap-Band) surgery. Break-up was on my mind.

For the first few weeks after making the decision to go forward with the surgery, I kept daydreaming that my tummy skin would no longer fold a million times like a men's XXXL shirt or maybe I'd be recruited by the state of Hawaii to become an official Hula girl greeter. The pounds would not only fall off, but I'd be gorgeously skinny overnight, right?

My doctors quickly set me straight. The Lap-Band would be an "aid", but I'd still need to do a lot of work. And, most people don't get down to goal weight for a couple of years. 'A couple of years'. I could handle that. And, so the journey began. On May 27, 2006 (my 39th birthday), I broke up with food.

Like most breakups, there was a host of emotions to experience. First, hope and freedom—and then the rest flooded in. . . sorrow, depression, regret, relapse, loneliness.

It was bad, bad, bad. I'd not only broken up with my true love, I'd decided to walk away from an addiction. And a legal addiction at that – the worst kind when you think of it because of the accessibility; we're all surrounded by food! For support, I made the rounds between my family

doctor, a therapist and the surgeon. Each of these individuals is important in the process of breaking up with food and preparing for a safe and successful surgery.

Anyone who considers having Lap-Band surgery should make sure their surgeon insists on some painful pre-surgery requirements. Anyone out there who is thinking gastric surgery is a slam-dunk-you're-done needs to know that's not the case. You might get the surgery, but the odds start stacking up against you with regard to getting expected weight-loss results (not to mention a safe surgery).

The pre-surgical requirements for success include seeing a therapist and beginning to deal with your food addiction, following a ruthless diet (most likely liquid, by way of a vomity-tasting protein powder) and last but not least, losing ten percent of your body weight – yes, before the procedure. All I could think of was, "how in the heck am I going to lose ten percent of my body weight now when I hadn't been able to lose squat in ten years?" I quickly found out that if you really want the surgery, you WILL lose the weight.

I was also required to attend a pre-surgery seminar hosted by my surgeon. This is where I learned about the risks, likelihood of success, the price tag, and had a chance to meet other people considering gastric surgery. I soon realized that my health insurance company would most likely pay for my surgery because I "qualified" as a medical

disaster. I was the envy of all around me, most of who were prepared to take out second and third mortgages on their homes to pay for the procedure. How lucky was I to let my weight get so out of control that I could have a heart attack or stroke at any moment, not to mention cancer or diabetes?

Immediately following the meeting, I drove straight to Dairy Queen and ordered a large chocolate-marshmallow-cookie dough shake. I'd made the decision to have the surgery, but needed some good, old-fashioned break-up food. (Did you insert "sex" into the last sentence?) Can anybody really be that out of control when it comes to food? The answer is definitely a big "yes." Is surgery the answer? I'm giving you one big super-sized "maybe."

In the next issue, I'll share why I wouldn't consider the other type of gastric surgery – called Rouen-Y, the process I used to choose my surgeon, how I almost blew it all (and the extreme price I had to pay), my second painful round of pre-surgery preparation and whether or not I had a successful procedure.

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