

This is a very long story, but my journey of how I became so overweight took almost 20 years, so it can't be told in a few paragraphs. Although the story may seem about me, it's not really, it's a collective story, so please read on. The first 20kg was gained having a good time, then another 20kg was gained on top of that coping with bad times. I hope it inspires others who have almost lost hope. If I can do it, anybody can, and I don't say this lightly.

I had never been overweight in my life until I discovered gourmet food! Not junk food, not processed food, not fast food, but pure indulgent hand made gourmet food. Delicious! Prior to this I had danced since the age of 5, was in scouts, did lots of bushwalking and hiking, and rode my bike everywhere, as I didn't drive. When I was in my early 20's I did a bit of modelling and weighed around 50kg, but most of my younger years and after that it was always at 54kg, which was dead on 8 stone. That was my benchmark.

I first started putting on weight when I moved in with a previous partner who was a chef. Something horrible happened to me, but I hadn't registered its significance. I got a part time job in hospitality as a hostess in those days, so I was surrounded by FOOD! Beautiful, fresh, top quality food, locally produced, meticulously prepared, cooked in a myriad of exquisite ways. Unfortunately I worked in an award winning fine dining room and gourmet food was everywhere. They told me after seeing so much food all the time the last thing I will want to do was eat it. WELL, THEY WERE WRONG! I gained 6 kg over a few years, but it wasn't just the food, there were drinks after work also.

Then the real problem began when I moved in with my current partner who had (still has) a very hedonistic lifestyle. He also had the income to afford it. Again too much food and wine, no exercise other than gardening and a dip in the pool. That was in 1992 and I was 30 years old and weighed 60kg. I had a very stressful desk job, and ironically, worked in the area of health. I put on more weight due to the lifestyle, or really to be accurate, due to every excuse under the sun for eating. Soon I weighed 70kg. However, hardly anybody said a thing. Just a few comments. My partner said he didn't mind.

I have never told this part of my story other than to a few close friends...

I was depressed when I got to weigh 80kg and thought I was huge, but in reality I was only a size 12-14. Then during Christmas drinks that year at someone's house, I was sexually assaulted. It wasn't rape, but that wasn't the point. The perpetrator was a patient who was also a local businessman. I got my partner into the car as he was totally incapable of driving, as I was alert due to the adrenaline and in the process of driving home and while on my L plates, our car was rear ended while stationary at the lights. I didn't cause the accident. The driver who did was sober. I was breath tested, and then subjected to the scrutiny of the 'booze bus'. I was totally mortified, but said nothing. I had no idea of what had happened. I felt I was in a nightmare. (I eventually reported the incident to police but only after a few days as I was too confused, but I was sure he had spiked our drinks with something). To make matters worse, the next morning I had a blood and urine test for drugs that may have been put in my drink the night before. The lab did not run the blood test for some unknown reason, and the urine sample only showed the sedative I took the very next morning, as I was a nervous wreck by then. My solicitor said I should just plead guilty and lose my licence for 6 months, but on principal I wanted to say why I was driving, which was escaping the scene, and wanted to press charges against my assailant. The advice was not to go there, as victims of sexual assault rarely come out the winners in court. On top of all that the law saw this as two totally separate events, but that was not the case. One was a direct consequence of the other.

I had to face the indignity of going to court and pleading guilty. The police then came over to our house and questioned us about what we thought happened, they also photographed me naked. They questioned my attacker. He denied anything happened. I was sent off to counselling and retold my story again for the umpteenth time. Later detectives came back and basically told me it was his word against mine, and I got the gut feeling they didn't believe me, as I had taken a few days to report the crime. I think they thought my partner had done this, and I was lying as was common in cases of domestic violence. I was not a victim of domestic violence. I was the victim of a short, fat, insecure man who had confessed to me later he had fancied me. He told me this while I worked out a way of how to escape from his gated apartment complex. I had learned that by talking and not showing fear, my attacker had no power. In the aftermath I lost my L plates and was not allowed to reapply for 6 months, but at least my conviction would not be recorded due to exceptional circumstances.

Due to the injustice of it all, I put on another 10kg that year, as I just couldn't stop eating. Nobody wanted to discuss this. They didn't know what to say, so I just got over it myself. Just like the time before. A year later due to work, we were living in a remote area, and there was hardly any healthy food to be seen. The serves were gigantic and calorie laden, and socialising was part of what was expected when living in a small community. Most of the year it was just too hot to do much outside. My hours were very long. We drove to Adelaide regularly and it took 9 or 10 hours. It went on and on and on.

At the time of the millennium in 2000, I weighed in at 105kg!

A friend who knew me from my younger and slimmer days in hospitality, and who just happened to also be living up there, suggested I should lose weight for my 40th. I decided I didn't want any fat photos as mementos, so I knew I had to do something. I lost 20kg by myself, by just walking and cutting out rich foods. My partner bought me a dog, then another for company, so that kept me busy trying to walk them both.

The weight loss didn't last after my birthday, and by 45 most of the weight had come back, only because I reverted back to my old habits. When stressed I ate. I ate with "wild abandon" to quote somebody. It was too mentally taxing to even contemplate being that disciplined. It was accountable to no one. Then my partner, who was already unwell with lifestyle diseases was diagnosed with a terminal illness. We moved back to Adelaide for his treatment, and I lost a bit of weight, again. However I had injured my shoulder while packing and unpacking as there was a lot of stuff, and then my father passed away while in hospital. He died because he was given the wrong medication, and I had given the hospital his medical history, but nobody read it until after the fact. So the weight came back on. My shoulder was frozen, I was in pain and I couldn't get a decent nights sleep. By this stage I just didn't care any more, as it was just all too hard.

There didn't appear to be any light at the end of my tunnel. I had trialed a few gyms and trainers before I found Recon Fitness. They all had either a hard sell approach, and no real personal interest, or I was just punished and humiliated for being obese by young, fit, or naïve trainers. Some were just plain sadistic and seemed to get a kick out of watching me try and do what I just couldn't physically do. Not good, but somewhere underneath all the fat there was a driven individual, and I just had to find her! Then by sheer coincidence I stumbled upon the Recon website via a link.

From my first good look at the website in early 2009, I decided it may be for me. I studied the site carefully reading every word over and over, was it for real? I had been fooled before. Was it all façade and no substance? So I decided to send an email enquiry as my first tentative step. As I had to have shoulder surgery and then lots of physio, I decided to combine this with private PT sessions. There was no way I could have joined a group.

My brief to Di was I wanted to be fit, 50 and fabulous in 3 ½ years time! To her credit she said it was a realistic goal. I was lucky as I didn't have any chronic health issues, just way too much FAT! I mentioned to Di I got bored very easily with repetition and needed lots of variety, and I also hated being hot which was one major reason I didn't exercise, other than walking the dog and gardening in winter, plus fluctuating female hormones only added to the problem. I was amazed Di remembered this, but she has heard it all before, that is, the excuses!

The fitness assessment wasn't good, but I already knew that. I weighed 101kg and had about 45% body fat! The one good thing I discovered via the magical scales was that I had a high muscle mass, and this would help burn fat faster. Di explained there was a way and she could help, we could achieve some quick results but the rest would take time. I had time. I was lucky enough not to be working anymore. Although my partner complained a lot about my new direction, we both knew if I didn't do this now, I would never lose this weight. A short time into training my best friend was the big fan in the gym, but then Di said she had a few other clients who hated exercising in the heat, and air conditioning was installed!

So a big thanks Di!

I have always been interested in accumulating knowledge and I absorbed everything Di told me like a sponge. I even bought a set of segmental scales just like the ones she used. I was hooked. There was more light at the end of my tunnel. I just had to change my eating habits. I had been reading magazines like Good Health for a while as positive reinforcement for myself to keep me on track.

Disaster struck just a few weeks into my training. Having spent 25 years deskbound, my flexibility was not what it used to be, and I tore a tendon. I dreaded I needed surgery, but the specialist said no, I was very lucky, a bit more and the answer would have been yes. However he said I should not run, forget it he said. So began my challenge for Di...there was always a way around an injury. I was amazed that she found so many solutions, and pleased that she was so accommodating. There were more small injuries, all related to my weak and ageing tendons. Di's enthusiasm was infectious and I kept going, and the air conditioner was an added bonus. Such luxury!

Twice a week I did PT with Di and started to feel better and fitter. I had always had enough energy to do what I had to do, but now I had more to do what I actually wanted to do. Having said that, it was not easy, this new regime of diet and exercise, as I didn't have much support, as almost all of the people around me didn't really want me to change. They were all obese also. Too confronting for them. I am convinced to this day they never thought I would get this far. Only one friend was thin, and she didn't want me competing with her. Some friend she turned out to be!

My journey with Di into all of this stuff with food was frustrating for her I'm sure, but interesting for me. I was resisting giving up my one luxury, food. We talked a lot about food, or more accurately, I talked a lot about food, even while I was lifting weights, did core exercises, and sat on that dreaded bike, as I couldn't run. It was a huge challenge and I enjoyed it all, even if I ached occasionally. I did things I had never seen before, and some I had seen and dreaded. It was fun, but I did it. Di decided to put me on her segmental scales every fortnight, as they kept me honest, well most of the time. I never lied if I ate the wrong things, or had too much. Portion control was my main problem. Again Di helped me with that too. Over and over we talked food, stress and all sorts of stuff. We both liked gardening and I enjoy looking out the window of the gym into the garden. Much, much nicer than a regular gym that has no view. At the end of 6 months my step test results went from very poor at the initial assessment, to well above average (from memory). I was excited and very pleased with myself and grateful to Di. After a year I had lost 12kg of pure fat and was very excited with my results so far.

So thanks again Di!

I am sure there were times when Di wished I didn't talk quite so much, but as she said, it gave her a good gauge of my fitness level if I could run on the treadmill and talk at the same time! I had started as a size 18-20 and was now a temporary size 14. I mean temporary, as my goal is size 10 again, whatever that weight may be, and I also want to look like the women in fitness magazines, toned and not air brushed. Along the way I did something I never thought I could do, and it was a fun run, the Mother's Day Classic. Di thought I should try it, so I said OK let's give it a go. Under Di's guidance I ran short intervals on the treadmill, and after just 3 weeks, I did it! I ran, walked and shuffled the 7 or so kilometre course. It was a modest effort with running being only about 25%, but a start. I have just done a 3km run in the City to Bay and managed to run 50% of the way in intervals. Not bad for someone who was told she couldn't and shouldn't run.

Again thanks to Di!

The fact that all of my obese friends were finally truly supportive and not paying lip service made it easier. My thin friend can no longer call me fat. One other friend decided on a Lap Band at the same time I started my journey. She says she has only lost a few kilos in a year. Her problem isn't just food, but they still passed her through the screening process. My partner finally applauds my persistent efforts, but at the same time it still annoys him. He knows it was his illness that inspired my wellness journey. This is important, as the journey was about fitness and wellness, not just weight loss. Of course, one follows the other.

If it wasn't for Di's support during that very difficult first year, I don't know how well I would have done. However I had no intention of giving up. My PT appointments were in my diary and I told everybody in no uncertain terms that nothing would get in my way this time. NOTHING. I MEAN IT! The most important thing I learned was to make your own health a priority, and make small but consistent

changes that are sustainable in the long run. I had known this a long time ago, but had somehow forgotten this very important principal. We talked about food a lot, and at one point I had to keep a food diary as I had hit a plateau. It was a nuisance for me but a revelation to Di, and again more adjusting of my food choices. I nearly lost it then, as I had made so many changes that she wasn't even aware of, but I wasn't giving up. Di supported me yet again, with positive reinforcement, and suggesting more eating changes along the way. They worked of course. We did some outdoor sessions then, as I was interested in more variety and the weather was great. Di obliged yet again and we trained down the beach once, and a few sessions down at the oval on grass. As a qualified fitness trainer Di had good psychology tactics, and she enjoyed getting out into the fresh air also. I know there will be more outdoor sessions soon, as we recently discussed barefoot running, on grass and sand. That will be fun.

I have only ever missed a scheduled session once, but then made up for it with a double session the next week. Di said it was the first time a client had ever booked a double session so it was a new challenge for her. I survived. To "be consistent in our efforts" is what it says on the Recon Fitness website, and I know precisely how true that is! By now all of my small injuries were starting to compound and annoy me, and it was by chance at this time that I had a session with Nik. I was aware he was into rehabilitation, and thought maybe this would be of benefit to me. It was. Nik has a different style, which compliments Di's, and I enjoyed the challenge very much also. I couldn't help but discuss food with Nik, as I knew he enjoyed it too. After only a few sessions (and less talking about food), I noticed a difference, and recently fine-tuned my PT once more, by having a session with both Di and Nik once a week. The tracking sessions with Nik are helping with my alignment, and much to my pleasant surprise I had no pain after the City to Bay run recently.

So thanks Nik!

I can not speak highly enough of people like Di and Nik. They are compassionate, knowledgeable and understanding. I have now trained with Di for 15 months and she has helped me above and beyond the call of duty, so to speak. I have trained with Nik for almost 2 months now, and I know he holds the other key to my eventual long term success. They are real and genuine people who are there because they believe in what they do. They show us how to lead a simple, healthy, no frills lifestyle (well, maybe just a few frills!) Life does not need to be complicated, nor does fitness. It's about being consistent, persistent, more incidental exercise and wiser food choices.

For those of you who are overweight, or obese, or have friends who are unhealthy and carry too much fat, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. My message is this...

In my previous life out in the remote area where I worked, I dispensed prescription medication for people just like this, with lifestyle diseases, while they were supposed to get lifestyle education. Most didn't attend, and the rest didn't listen, they just kept swallowing handfuls of tablets. Many had psychological problems, but didn't attend counselling. They preferred to drink, smoke, and eat way, way too much. They all thought exercise was for others. Each year, they accumulated more and more diseases and more and more tablets.

I became exasperated myself after doing this job for 10 years, as I couldn't cope with the absurdity of what they and too many others were doing. Some were only in their mid 30's. The philosophy of cutting back on their lifestyle and taking less tablets didn't seem to interest them. It was magical thinking, a silver bullet if you like, but prescription drugs like the diseases they were supposed to treat, had side effects also. They were happy to complain about those! I was so busy taking their bloods, and seeing the awful test results, and then ordering more tablets for the dispensary, that I didn't have time for myself. The merry-go-round had to stop. I consciously chose to protest my philosophy on chronic illness by quitting my job in the dispensary. A year later I was back in the city, as I had decided to embrace wellness a year prior, and I haven't looked back since!

The sad fact is, as I get fitter, my partner is going to die from his self-induced lifestyle diseases sooner than he should. According to the specialist, they will probably kill him before the terminal illness does. So just think about this, is it all really worth it?

NEVER!