

GREAT ESCAPE

My Exodus From Obesity

Paula Peck, RN

I have experienced a weight loss of more than 175 pounds.... TWICE in my life: once unsuccessfully from "white-knuckle" dieting, and once successfully from weight loss surgery.

I can never remember a time when weight issues were not a part of my family life. My sister, obese throughout her life, died at age 39 from the disease. Obesity for me started in earnest in my early adulthood. Although my quest had always been for robust health and to have a more active, cosmetically pleasing body, the pain and isolation of the disease grew progressively worse in my early forties.

As a Registered Nurse, I had read volumes of information about health and disease. When all my other choices were exhausted, I decided to have weight loss surgery. I lost 185 pounds, and my 5-year anniversary has just passed. More importantly, my health, which had been steadily deteriorating before surgery, is sound now.

Pre-operatively, my perspective was that surgery would be my saving grace, my panacea. Since then, I discovered it is not an end in itself. The psychological and behavioral work still remained. My exodus from obesity entailed lifestyle changes including

dispelling long-held beliefs, overcoming self-defeat, navigating food landmines, restructuring relationships, adapting to my changed image, dealing with fat prejudice, changing certain attitudes, finding pleasurable alternatives to recreational eating, dealing with sexuality, exercising and celebrating my new life.

There are two important questions I ask myself now. The first is: How do I look at life and the world around me?

If I were to place an object in the center of a circle, I would see that by changing my position, even one degree, I would be looking at that object from a different perspective. Thus, it is with all events in life. Many people can view the same event and recount it differently. I decided it is important to look at things from as positive a perspective as rational. Instead of saying, "I can't have that cake," for instance, I say, "I prefer to have such and such," making the choice mine. I resist placing myself into the attitude of deprivation, which is a set-up for later bingeing. I also try to weed out having negative thinkers around me. I want to find creative solutions to make

something work, not to have my spirit doused by the naysayers of the world. Anyone who doesn't help me to believe in myself doesn't belong around me. I feel that keenly. Today, I am teaching bariatric patients, leading support groups, and conducting regional seminars, and I have published a book on gastric bypass surgery.

The second question important to me is: How do I create a community around me? It has been a part of the disease of obesity to isolate myself with food. Too embarrassed to venture out in the world, too uncomfortable to move much in my expanding body, too easily soothed with food that became my Saturday night date, I let opportunities go by and the people with them. I propose the creation of "obesity communities" that exercise together,

take some meals together and provide mutual support, and a change from sedentary activities to active and exploratory ones, that are essential in the successful fight against a lonely, obese life.

Paula Peck, R.N. Ms. Peck has authored a book: "Exodus From Obesity-The Guide to Long-Term Success After Weight Loss Surgery." Please visit her web site at www.paulapeck.com

