

The Journey

By Gerri S.

“Gerri....120 pounds.”

The dreaded voice of the school nurse rang out through the halls of P.S. 253 in Brooklyn, New York. It was a yearly ritual. Ritual torture for me. The yearly weigh-in of all the kids in school. They might as well have rolled my fat, roly-poly body right out the door.... All 120 pounds of me. I was eleven years old. I wanted to die.

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I sat on a park bench watching people stroll by. I noticed a tall, good looking guy walking with a large, overweight woman. They were having a fight. My stomach muscles tightened as I began hearing strains of their argument. “Watch it lady,” I thought. “You’re lucky this guy is willing to be seen with you. If you push your luck, he might leave you for some thin young thing.”

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Keep silent

Don’t make waves

Be a good girl.

You have no rights.

I am your body.

I am your prison.

I chain you like shackles.

I choke off your breath.

I keep you silent.

Food is poison.

Food is the enemy.

Food is your drug.

Food lures you in then spites you out.

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“Come on in. It’s nice and cool in here. I’m filled with wondrous things to tempt you. Chocolate cakes. Ben & Jerry’s ice cream. Leftover lasagna and Spago’s spinach quiche. They’re all delicious. You’ll love them. They will love you too. You can eat chocolate cake for breakfast if you want. No one is here to see you. Everyone is gone. If you cut a small piece off at the end of the pie, no one will notice. Open my door and crawl in. I’m all yours.

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Gerri... it’s so nice to see you. Glad you could come. We’ve got a terrific buffet. Pasta salad, sourdough bread, lasagna and my very own homemade cheesecake. My mother’s recipe. You’ll love it. Here... try a piece.”

“Gee thanks Joan, but I don’t eat sugar.”

“Well, just take a small piece. It’s really good.”

“It looks wonderful... really it does. But you see, I can’t handle sugar. It throws my whole body off.”

“But surely a tiny sliver can’t hurt. I baked it myself!!!!”

“Joan... give me your arm. I have a hypodermic needle in my hand. It’s filled with heroin. Now, I’m going to stick it in your arm and depress the plunger. Just a tiny bit. It’s such a little bit of heroin. You’ll love it. It surely can’t hurt you. Such a little bit...”

Joan never really got it. Most “normal” people don’t. They think being overweight is a joke. “Just eat less,” they say. Meanwhile we are bombarded with ads for fat farms and liquid diets, testimonials from Oprah or from people who have had their mouths wired shut or their stomachs stapled.

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I was late for my sailing class and didn't have time for breakfast. I reached the docks a bit early so I ran into the only place that was open at that hour, a tiny shop that served coffees, teas and baked goods. Oh God, I was in trouble. What could I choose that would be the least devastating? Ahhh... I know... a bran muffin. That should do it.

I hadn't touched sugar in six years. My system was clean. Virgin territory. Ripe for the enemy invader. I braced myself for the shock. I drank my coffee and ate the muffin and dashed off for the boat. So far so good.

Five hours later, driving home, it hit me. The pangs. The knawings. The cravings. The whispering voices of the dreaded "committee" in my head. Visions of fig bars, chocolate cakes and ice cream. Voices I hadn't heard for years. Soothing voices. Seductive voices. I started to shake. By the time I got home I was frantic. I tried to still the voices. I grabbed a cantaloupe, leftover salad, anything to shut them up. The whispers became shouts. The shouts became screams. I ran out of the house and slammed the door. I refused to go back to prison.

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It was a quiet, beautiful day. I was sitting by a waterfall listening to the rush of water crashing into the pool below. A small white light began to form at the back of my neck. Its warmth flowed through my entire body. I was at peace. And I knew. I knew it was the first day of my journey. I didn't know and I didn't care how long the journey would take. I just knew it was the beginning.

It was to be a quiet journey. No more struggling. No more recriminations. No more beating myself up for being a failure. Just a quiet knowingness. A private knowing. I knew where I was headed. I didn't tell anyone I was going.

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"Hey babe! You look terrific. What did you use? Weight Watchers? Jenny Craig? Nutri-Systems?"

"You don't want to know."

"No, really. Tell me. You look great. What did you do?"

"You don't want to hear my answer."

"Yes I do. Tell me."

“Well, it wasn’t a diet. It was like a meditation. It was a change of lifestyle. And it was slow. And it took a lot of hard work.”

“Yeah? How long did it take you?”

“Six years.”

“Oh.”

I knew he didn’t want to hear it. He didn’t want to hear that it still takes a lot of work. That every day I wake up and make decisions. I make choices. I will be making choices every day for the rest of my life. It is not something that will go away one day. People want a quick fix. Give me a pill. Tell me the secret.

The 120 pound chubby kid and the 170 pound overweight adult are still locked up inside me. They are still who I think I am. I have yet to let them out of prison. I clutch them to me because they are familiar. We grew up together. They were with me through all the hard times. They are my family. I’ll let them go some day. I know I will.

But what’s the secret, you ask me?

***The secret is there is no secret.
It does not matter what the journey is about,
it only matters that you stay on the road.***