

FROM A F.L.O.P TO A T.H.I.N.

I would like to share my personal fitness story with you, in the hope that it may encourage someone to start, persevere, and win the "battle of the bulge". It's fairly long so it makes for bedtime reading if you print it out.

There's something magical about sliding into size four and six clothes, in being told "you look fantastic, you're so tiny!" and weighing in at 120 pounds, a weight I only achieved once when I blinked and missed it during my teenage years. But there's no magic to achieving this goal. Hard work, sweat, (and commitment to your new wardrobe) is the "magic formula".



Fat Franny, summer of 2000. Work, tendonitis and not putting me FIRST made me a real mess. **NEVER AGAIN!**



Feeling Fran-tastic! Summer 2002 and keeping on track with a long-term fitness and healthier lifestyle plan

The day of reckoning

In desperation on September 8, 2000, I started working with Roxanne, a personal trainer, who informed me that one-third of my flabby bod was pure fat! Now thirty pounds may not sound like much to you or even seem that incredible, but the photos will show you that on a small-framed, petite person who is unfit, 30 pounds looks more like 60.

I have lost 20 pounds so many times during my life that I've lost about two of me - and gained it all back. I have Weight Watched, Diet Centered and Cabbage Souped. You name it, I dieted it. The incredible thing however is finally committing to a total lifestyle change at 50, building muscles and being physically strong and fit for the first time in my life, keeping it off, having it become a key part of my life, and having it change my whole perspective on life, therefore allowing me to reach for and achieve my dreams and goals.

It usually takes a severe shock for us to change our lives, and mine was my husband telling me that our bathroom scales were at least five pounds light. The drugstore scale confirmed my biggest dread. I was Fat Franny, soon to be a granny. And I hated myself.

I had been deeply depressed and concerned that I wouldn't see my grandchild or preteen daughter grow up. I was turning 50 in seven weeks and my first granddaughter due in six. My acute tendonitis in my right arm from writing had stopped me riding my horse - my only real exercise - for nearly two years. I was bursting out of my clothes and couldn't look at that ugly creature in the mirror. The drugstore scales finally made me pick up the phone and call for help. I knew I couldn't do it alone.

What is success?

You see, people were always telling me how successful I was. I'd self-published *Business for Beginners*, which had then sold more than 50,000 copies and McGraw-Hill was publishing its sequel in two month's time. I was well-respected in our community and province, was a willing volunteer that championed many causes, had won prestigious business awards, and we were debt-free owning a property with acreage. So big deal! I still hated myself and didn't feel at all successful. I was a **F.L.O.P.** - Frumpy, Lethargic, Overweight and a Procrastinator. And I want to be a **T.H.I.N.** - Thin, Healthy, Invigorated and Neat! I was going to turn fifty next month and I was a Fat Franny Granny to-be.

Traumatic childhood = food

I had every excuse in the world for turning to food, and used them all. Often, during my rather traumatic life, food was the only comfort. Childhood traumas resulted in a major nervous break down at sixteen and then having to leave home. I married an abusive man, and realized that I had slowly developed an obsessive personality. "Hey world, look at me, I'm really a nice person." Food played a large part in comforting me.

Apart from growing up on an old English starch-riddled diet, my comfort food habit started when we moved from England to Australia and after the start of my childhood traumas. We lived across the road from a bakery, where for a cent, you could buy a bag of the ends cut from the cake trays. I visited the bakery every day, sometime working there making boxes (and eating cakes). In high school, I'd save my bus fare to buy fries and potato cakes from the fish and chip shop on the way home. The fried, hot food was warm and comforting, something that we got little of at home with an overly strict and abusive father reigning the roost. I was quite the loner, spending my time with neighbouring horses, practising my acrobatics (I wanted to join a circus), writing books and drawing horses. I was not popular, but I was pudgy.

For 50 years, I also believed the myths that my mom and 220-pound dad fed to me. "You come from a big-boned family you know dear," and "You got good wide childbearing hips!" (So why did it take 24 hours to deliver my son? My trainer later told me that I am very small boned and have some of the narrowest hips she'd ever seen).

Life happens when you're busy

So I wasn't exactly skinny as I grew up. Getting pregnant at 19 and then married - in that order - I worked three jobs to support our son. The fat started to pile on. After divorcing my husband after five years of hell and taking him to court for assault, I chose a variety of bad partners and spent a few years in turmoil that I won't mention here. Sometimes, alcohol was the only way I could get to sleep at night. Weight Watchers and I finally whittled off twenty pounds or so and I dropped to 127 pounds - for a short while. I met and married a handsome Canadian who was travelling around Australia. When I came to Canada in 1981 with my ten-year-old son to tie the knot, my husband got cold feet. Just as I was due to be deported, he decided that we should marry. It was most unromantic ceremony in January in the Vancouver court house, with a frozen waterfall as a backdrop and cheered on by half a native lacrosse team.

My new husband, Michael, was nearly six years younger than I and a keen soccer and lacrosse player. I discovered that all-night parties, alcohol and pizza were the team's staple sports diet for many years. The Weight Loss Clinic came to my aid, along with fad diets and fierce recriminations. In 1983, after continual job losses due to the recession, I started my own tax and accounting business, dabbled in oil painting, started teaching accounting at adult evening education and continued to live and eat unhealthily. Life was difficult. My husband was depressed and sometimes out of work, and I had a son to raise and a business to run. So that's what I did, because women do what they must to survive.

I'm What?

At age 39, after a two-day second honeymoon in Olympia, Washington, I knew I was pregnant. Well, my daughter wasn't in my Day Timer. Determined not to work and drag her up, I sold the accounting business. Now I was ready to become a real mom for the first time. Developing gestational diabetes during the pregnancy, I knew I would have to watch my weight for the rest of my life. To make things worse, I had to have a caesarian to deliver my beautiful daughter, Katrina, who preferred to remain breach. None of this upside down stuff for her.

After six months, it was obvious that money was short, so back to working for myself part-time as a business consultant. Besides, diapers and I had little in common. The weight wouldn't magically disappear, so of course, it was back to the Diet Center. The weight went on, the weight came off, it went on, it came off, year in and year out. I was always so busy trying to please everyone else - except myself.

Juanita, the miracle worker

In 1996, a miraculous moment happened in my life. I met Juanita, a hypnotherapist, at a women's network meeting. I had been trying to cleanse the past anger and resentment by reading and attending groups, but couldn't let it go. I knew I was obsessive and had to do something or I would kill myself from over-achieving and trying to prove to the world that "I'm okay".

Four sessions of neuro-linguistic programming with Juanita changed my life. She was able to reach into my subconscious where I could forgive, forget and get back in touch with my writing, which had been my love and salvation since childhood. She unblocked my creativity and unleashed the writing tiger. I finally felt at peace with whom I was and what I was. I started on my first book, *Business for Beginners*. (Juanita died at age 48 of a brain aneurism four years ago, so I owe it to her to be the best that I can be.)

But life was now hectic! We had brought my mom over from Australia in 1987 and she lives with us (she's 93 and doing great). I had a busy, accounting, tax, speaking and writing business/s to run, a daughter, chamber of commerce, community and women's network duties, horses, dogs, cats, and a sometimes demanding husband. I ran from one chore to another, caring for others, but not for myself. I developed tendonitis so severely in my right arm from writing, coupled with other old injuries, that I was keeping the chiropractor and massage therapist in business. And of course, the fat piled on.

Day one of the rest of my life

Finally, I was desperate enough to reach out for help. I'd had Roxanne's phone number for six months. After jumping on the drugstore scales and reaching the depths of depression, I called her. On September 8, my salvation arrived, armed with body-fat meter, nutrition plans, exercise sheets, and a little later, my own copy of Oprah's *Journal of Daily Renewal*.

Roxanne analyzed in detail what I ate for three days, pointing out many deficiencies (and over-indulgences). I knew I had slow metabolism and low blood pressure, needing little food to sustain my weight. We discussed healthier eating habits and she gave me sample menus. We set short, mid-and long-term goals.

Here are some excerpts from my diary:

Day 4: I hurt all over from last exercise session.

Day 6: Very tired, a little depressed, got hungry tonight, guess I didn't eat enough.

Day 11: WOW! Lost 2 inches all over. Katrina sick. Chores, chores! When is there time for me?

Day 12: Will do weights tonight but very tired, seems to be no time for myself. A good day though, many positives.

Day 22: I think the scales are wrong, you don't drop 1.5 pounds overnight (137.5).

Day 24: Scales up, scales down, too many little nibbles. We'll fix that!

Day 26: (A milestone). Went for a power walk to Zero Avenue (42 minutes, 2.5 miles).

Gotta make 135 pounds by October 19 (birthday).

Day 29: Boobs 38, waist 32, tummy 38.5, weight 136. YES. Going down.

Day 53: Weight on, weight off, walked horse up hill, Roxanne came, I lost 5% body fat in 2 months, weight 134, lean weight down to 97.2 (too low), body mass 22.3. I'm getting stronger every day!

My commitment

Roxanne designed an in-home (no time to drive to the gym), all-over body strengthening program, incorporating every body part from calves to back and shoulders. I started pushing two-pound weights as I suffered chronic right shoulder problems from a separated shoulder (horse fall) and constant back pain from horse injuries and my accounting work. By sticking to the program, which Roxanne changed every few months, my back and shoulder problems have gone as the muscles built up. I now push ten to 15-pound weights and can throw 50-pound bales of hay around. I am strong for the first time in my life. It feels so good!

We started walking together to the end of the street. You must understand that I hated walking, that's why I had a horse (which I couldn't ride due to various injuries). One day I looked up the hill to the border, six blocks away, and thought, "One day, I'll walk up that hill." I now I interval train up it. Starting small, I walked 30 paces and jogged 30. Now I have increased it to 150 of each and until recently, jogged three blocks down, only to discover that you don't jog *down* hills. I injured my right-leg I.T. band. Now I know that I have ugly, bad feet, and last week was fitted with orthotics to adjust the problem. I hope to start jogging back up (not down) the hill in a couple of weeks. Meanwhile, I carefully treadmill.

Speaking of which, I bought a used treadmill through the classifieds and use it religiously. It becomes my space for reading, practicing speeches, or just thinking. It's hard work. No one loves treadmills, so I found a way to put a positive spin on being up there. I get to catch up on reading my self-help, inspirational or business books and magazines.

Eat and stay thin

The cupboards and fridge are filled with healthy foods, (and a little chocolate because...). I cook lots of healthy soups, stir-frys and stews to retain the goodness. I say "no" to fried food, and if I overindulge a little, it's an extra session on the treadmill or "up the hill".

When travelling, I take healthy snacks and sneakers, ensuring that the hotel has a fitness centre. Without exercise, I get snaky and stressed. When walking/jogging, I have some wonderful and creative ideas, so I take a tape recorder with me. If I feel stressed, I just put on the voice-mail and take off, always taking the dog, and sometimes, both the dog and a speech to practise (I must look pretty stupid, jogging up the hill with a dog, talking to myself). But I don't care, because I feel *FRANTASTIC*.

A new lease on life

This is a long-term lifestyle commitment. I am finally happy with who I am. It gave me the courage to sell my accounting practice (again - I lost my passion for figures) sixteen months ago and to aggressively pursue my passions - professional speaking, writing and community work. Last year I travelled across Canada speaking and to New Orleans to deliver workshops for a large international company, and have been invited to speak in Bermuda in the spring. It is so exciting! Because I am one-quarter French-Arabic- Hungarian gypsy, travel is in our genes. I am finally getting to see some of the world.

Being a super-mom caring for many generations, assorted animals plus running two businesses is hard work, requiring a focused mind, multi-tasking abilities, split-second time-management, and a constant positive attitude. Losing weight and getting strong - both physically and mentally - has been the key. I plan each day so that I know when I am going to exercise. This is usually my first priority.

The inner rewards

Although I am just a small business, I was awarded one of Vancouver's 2002 five **Most Influential Women in Business** awards for my work in helping women and small businesses in our province. I would not have had the energy nor the confidence to do half of what I have done in the last two years if I'd stayed the way I was - fat, frumpy Franny the F.L.O.P.

The most rewarding thing is to be able to write, travel and speak and thus help others. Now I have the energy and focus, I can share my story with others, even during keynotes and workshops (entrepreneurs are the worst for not making time for themselves). Hopefully I inspire some people to be motivated enough to make this positive lifestyle change. I designed a keynote, entitled *Go For Your Goals - But Take Your Body Too*, as a way further carry this important message. So far, I **have** inspired some to finally "do something." I am happy because for the first time in 52 years, I like who I am. I have a wonderful family - both my husband and I made major lifestyle changes. I have my health and the ability to share with and to help others in so many ways. What else could one ask for? When I am asked, "What do you want for Christmas?", I truthfully answer, "Nothing. I have it all."