

IT HIT ME WHEN I SAW THE PHOTOS. I WAS AT A client's newly opened restaurant in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York in 2010, and we had arranged for *Westchester Magazine* to do a photo shoot for promotional purposes. There were a number of people at the bar, and I sat in as a "patron" to help out. It was a fun evening. As the marketing person, I always felt as if I was the "brand ambassador" of bars, lounges, clubs, or restaurants that I worked with. It was my job to exude an image of fun, a sense of mischief, and be a bit of a bad ass. We drank wine, sat at the bar, and had fun talking and listening to loud music while the photographer snapped pictures. The ride home was a little choppy, but I made it. *Mission accomplished*, I thought.

When the article came out in the magazine, I was happy for my client, but I was depressed about how I looked in the photographs. I looked bloated and fat as a house. There were a couple of pictures taken of me from the front, from the side, etc. All of them were made available to me as we were the marketing consultants for the restaurant. No matter which picture I looked at, my feelings were the same — **look at me; look at what I had become**. I was approaching 50, significantly overweight (morbidly obese, actually), and I was on the wrong path in life. I knew that this had been the case for some time, but had never really cared about it, until it was right there in front of my face. I had heard the comments from people over the years, from both those I disliked and those I loved. Everyone had an opinion, and I was not happy that many people felt comfortable sharing it with me in what I felt was a very direct, insulting fashion. *Who are these people, far less than perfect, to criticize me?* Some were not attractive. Others were losing their hair (Something that I have not had to deal with so far, thank God). Others were fat too, or alcoholics or drug addicts. Frankly, I thought that I was smarter than them, and that was enough for me. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "fat" as "the soft flesh on the bodies of people and animals that helps keep the body warm and is used to store energy." America defines fat in a number of interesting ways — when it's not us, we comment a lot about "this person being fat" or "that person getting fatter." When it's ourselves however, it takes a seminal event or moment to force us to accept our imperfections or shortcomings.

I had battled Type 1 Diabetes (or, to be honest, ignored the fact that I had the disease) since I was 10 years old. I partied like a maniac in college and well into my 20s. I have consumed alcohol since I was 14 years old, and have done all sorts of drugs, both illegal as well as prescribed. I was able to lose about 20–22 pounds in the late 1990s when my weight had reached the upper 180s; I was about 38 at the time. But I never gave up drinking, and as I got older, and moved out of New

York City, my drinking and drug use increased and exercising decreased. I didn't work out, ate whatever I wanted to, drank alcohol steadily, and did many other unhealthy things.

Eventually, I would be hospitalized with various problems in my 40s including pericarditis — fluid in my heart sac — and then a few years later, a blood clot in the femoral artery of my right leg. I had protein in my urine (an early warning of kidney problems down the road), a high count for a liver enzyme in my blood work, and a fatty liver from drinking. My A1C (a test for how a diabetic's blood sugar levels have been managed over a six-month period) were consistently too high, ranging from 8.5–8.8. To put that number in perspective, a normal person would have an A1C score below 5.7. Anything above 6.4 is an indicator of diabetes.

I was taking at least three shots of insulin a day, and I was taking some pretty hefty doses. I had sleep apnea, couldn't get more than 5–6 hours a night without waking up, and was hung over every morning. In fact, I was a functional alcoholic/problem drinker, and since I ran my own business (albeit not very well), I would sleep until almost noon every day, and could not go past 5:30pm without planning out my first drink of the day. I drank at bars and restaurants, and then drank more when I came home. I was buying half gallons or two-liter bottles of cheap vodka by the case.

I would have at least 6–7 liberally poured pint glasses of vodka and diet cream soda during the evening until I went to bed around 2am or later. I also took sleeping pills, first over the counter, and then via prescription. One night, I slipped on a set of stairs in my house, and landed on my back, injuring myself. Another night, I fell down steep wooden stairs in my garage, and wound up upside down, having missed cracking my head open on the cement floor of the garage by inches. On a completely separate occasion, I tripped on the garage stairs and banged the back of my head on the front fender of one of my cars in the garage, denting it (the fender, not my head). When I woke up in the morning, there was blood all over my pillow.

I was on a roller coaster going downhill at 150 miles per hour. I didn't care about life, what happened to me, or really anyone else, regardless of how much they loved me or worried about me. I was angry and depressed, regretful about mistakes that I had made in my professional and personal life, flew into rages, hurt my loved ones, and made them worry about me.

When I went to my doctor's office one day, and he told me that I weighed 258 pounds, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. I am 5'10", so this is way too much weight on my frame. I knew that I was going to put myself into a position of declining health, headed towards blindness, amputation, being wheelchair-bound, kidney dialysis, and eventually, an early grave. I had plenty to lose — a nice family, two great kids, a wife who loved me, and a lot of people who were either relying on me and/or cared about me. I was letting myself and all of them down. The

next thing that was going to happen to me might be something from which I couldn't recover or bounce back. I decided that something had to be done, and that I was the one who had to try to do it.

This is the story of how I went from the lowest, darkest place in my life, and slowly climbed back up into the sunlight. This book is my accounting of what I did to safely bring myself back from the edge of misery and extreme unhealthiness over a 5-year period, and make myself as happy and healthy as possible. I am not a doctor, a physical therapist, an endocrinologist, or a health nut. I still love food, especially a number of foods that are really bad for you. I am still on a number of medications for cholesterol, kidney functions, heart health, etc. They are preventive in nature, with the exception of the insulin that I have to take every day to stay alive. However, I discovered something that I feel is not usually talked about in diet and exercise books and videos. It's my #1 Life Lesson:

SHUT THE FUCK UP

That's right. I said it. And please understand, this is not meant to be an insult. It's really a rallying cry, and the title of my "new life philosophy." It's something that I have to tell myself throughout the day, every day. In this book, I will tell you about my life (so far), what led to my personal and physical low point, and how I convinced myself to start the long process of fixing myself.