

After The Before & After is about what happens after achieving "weight loss success." After losing 55 pounds, the author thought she'd finally beat obesity and would live happily ever after. Then, like the vast majority of people who lose weight, she regained. This book chronicles her journey to discover that happiness has nothing to do with food or weight. Cultivating self acceptance did more for her emotional and physical shape than dieting ever could.

**AFTER The Before & After: A Real-Life Story of Weight Loss, Weight Gain and Weightlessness Through Total Acceptance**

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# *After* **The Before & After**

A real-life story of weight loss,  
weight gain  
and weightlessness  
through total acceptance

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## **About the Author**

Karen C.L. Anderson is a writer, speaker, blogger, communicator, right-brainer, ah-ha moment creator, and lover of what is.

She lives in Southeastern Connecticut with her husband Tim and their two cats, Bella and Starla.

For more information about her work, please visit [www.kclanderson.com](http://www.kclanderson.com)

## The Back Story

*"We nurture and care for the things  
we love and feel connected to.  
We neglect and destroy the things we do not." ~ Unknown*

My story is both unique and universal.

I have been overweight or obese most of my adult life, and I have played at losing weight many times over the past 35 years. There were times when it really bothered me, and other times when it really didn't. I had a pretty good career. I traveled extensively. I had friends and boyfriends, and eventually, I married a wonderful man. I considered myself to be happy, smart, pretty, successful, loving, and lovable. Sometimes.

Deep down inside, however, my weight was an intensely emotional subject. It could bring me to tears in the doctor's office. If my mother brought it up, I'd get angry. Despite "happy, smart, pretty, successful, loving, and lovable," self-doubt and fear seemed to permeate my life.

For a long time, I stuffed those feelings down with food. Every once in a while, I would think about trying to lose weight, and perhaps, I'd make some sort of effort. I read books, tried various programs, and even took weight-loss drugs. I'd lose some weight, then gain it back...and more. In my head, I went back and forth between wanting to just accept and love myself the way I was, and wanting to just lose the damn weight already.

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Then one day (in 2004), I noticed that a good friend had lost some weight. I asked what she was doing and she said she had joined a popular diet web site. I decided to join too.

But it didn't work.

I resisted following the food and exercise plans that were provided. That resistance combined with anger. I didn't want to follow a plan or count calories, I didn't want it to be hard, and I didn't want to try.

I could hear my mother's voice in my head: "You must not really want it. If you did, you'd go ahead and do it." She said that about everything. And she was right: I guess I didn't REALLY want to lose weight because if I did, then I'd just do it, right? I certainly knew how: eat right and exercise, calories in/calories out.

Obviously, I wasn't ready. So once again, I pushed those feelings away - the fear, the self-doubt, the resistance, the anger - and I quit.

But the realization that I didn't want to lose weight stayed with me. As 2004 came to a close, I took a deep breath and decided to try once again. In addition to the diet, however, I wanted to figure out the whys: Why don't I want to lose weight? Why do I want the easy way out? Why is it so hard? Why do I resist?

Instead of traditional counseling, I went to a hypnotherapist named Lynn Gaffin who specializes in Emotional Freedom Technique, or EFT. EFT combines two well-established sciences: mind-body medicine and acupuncture - without needles. It involves stimulating certain meridian points on the

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body. EFT practitioners tap on them with their fingertips as the patient recites a phrase or script that resonates with what the patient wants to achieve.

During the first session, it became clear what my problem was. Lynn asked me why I was there, and I poured out my whole sad, fat history. She started tapping with this phrase, which I was to repeat as she tapped: "Even though I am overweight, I love and accept myself."

The words stuck in my throat. I couldn't say it because I didn't believe it. I didn't love and accept myself. Instead, I sobbed. Almost uncontrollably. But I kept at the sessions, going once a week for several months.

A turning point came when Lynn asked me if I thought my husband would be happier if I lost weight. This was a dangerous question. I really didn't want to go there with him. My biggest fear was not that he'd say "yes," but that he'd say "yes" and I couldn't lose weight. And what if he said "no"? Then what?

I choked up. I didn't know what to say. All indications were that he loved me the way I was, but I was determined to do the work.

That night, with tears streaming down my face, I asked him, "Would you be happier if I lost weight?" Poor guy.

Without hesitation, he replied, "I think *you'd* be happier if you lost weight, and if you were happier, then *I'd* be happier."

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BIG light bulb moment! I didn't want to admit that I'd be happier if I lost weight because that would make my mother right. In my family, fat is bad. Fat people are unhappy, lazy, stupid, ugly, insert the negative adjective of your choice here.

I don't remember exactly when I became overweight, but I remember the first time I felt that there must be something wrong with my body. I was about eight or nine years old and had been to a pediatrician visit with my mother. When we got home, she said to my stepfather, "The doctor said she's chunky." I heard amusement, fear, and disgust all at the same time.

At twelve, I began dieting. Photos of myself from that time don't indicate that I was overweight. Yet, when I read the diary I kept during my high school years, it's filled with pages where I write about feeling like a pig, about hating myself because I ate too much. Then, when I went to college, I really packed on the pounds.

And my mother would say, "You must be unhappy."

So I spent all these years unconsciously trying to prove her wrong. I don't blame my mother; this is just how I rebelled. I could be fat AND happy. I could also be smart, successful, active and lovable. And I was. But then I realized what I was doing - staying fat to prove her wrong - and I thought *how silly is that?*

Of course I knew the health risks associated with being overweight. My mother often told me she was concerned about my health and so that became another thing I had to prove - that I could be overweight AND healthy. For the most part, I

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was. Yes, my cholesterol was high, but under control with medication; and yes, I had my gall bladder removed; and yes, my back ached, but I rationalized that those things also happen to “skinny” people.

Another thing I quickly realized, along with the need to prove my mother wrong, was that I didn’t trust myself. I didn’t have much self-confidence and was always looking for approval and validation from others. And even when I got it, it didn’t help much. I was an insecure, defensive woman who felt she just wasn’t good enough. And that was exactly how I treated myself.

All of these realizations occurred through EFT, and over the course of 18 months, I lost 55 pounds. Along with the weight loss came the confidence to pursue a freelance writing career. In October 2006, I wrote an essay called “Why Weight,” which was published in a local women’s magazine.

In that essay, I wrote:

*I began this quest nearly two years ago. Since then I have lost 55 pounds and have moved from the “obese” category on the Body Mass Index (BMI) chart to the “overweight” category. My goal is to have a “healthy” BMI and that means losing another 20 pounds. I count calories, weigh and measure my food, and exercise, gladly. I can wear “normal sized” clothes and cute shoes. Getting dressed in the morning is a stress-free activity. My body moves more easily and I enjoy challenging myself physically. I have taken up running and participated in a 5K race in May. I enjoy kayaking and hiking, and even household chores are easier.*

*And my already great marriage is even better. Not because my body is different, but because I am a happier, more confident partner. In*

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*fact, I have noticed that my husband is more affectionate with me. I recently told him that I noticed. He agreed but reassured me that it doesn't mean that he didn't love me before, but that I am now more receptive to being loved. He's not more affectionate with me because I am thinner; he's more affectionate with me because I am more affectionate with myself.*

*I don't lose weight as fast now as I did a year ago and that's okay. Sometimes I need a break from counting calories, sometimes I hit a plateau and sometimes I struggle with that inner rebel. But I don't gain weight. I know that I will reach my goal and maintain my loss forever. And that's because I have made a lifestyle change and because I have done it slowly. Each baby step along the way has become a habit. I have no desire to eat the way I used to, and at the same time I never feel deprived. I am glad there isn't a magic pill or effortless solution because I have learned so much! The process, the experience, and the knowledge I have gained are almost more valuable to me than the pounds I have lost. And yes, I AM happier. (Reprinted with permission from The Day Publishing Company)*

I bet you can guess what's coming.

Fast-forward to mid-2008 and I regained 23 of the 55 pounds. Obviously it didn't happen overnight. For a while I maintained my weight loss, give or take five pounds. Then, it was give or take ten pounds. Then my clothes didn't fit, and so on.

How the heck did this happen? I had done it the right way. I had lost weight slowly, I hadn't relied on a fad diet, and I had done the work, damn it! I thought I had it all figured out. I thought I had resolved all my issues around weight. I continued to exercise and my eating habits were certainly not as bad as they used to be...or were they? I had stopped logging my food and exercise, so how could I know for sure? Was I

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being honest with myself? I wasn't perfect but I also didn't expect myself to be...or did I?

Along with the pounds came panic, shame, frustration, and anger. I wallowed in self-pity a bit, I punished myself a lot, and I was desperate, searching for the magic pill I once never thought I'd want.

Had I stopped caring about myself? Had I stopped nurturing myself? In hindsight, I can now see that I had definitely stopped accepting myself. I think the shift occurred when I went from being happy about having lost 55 pounds to being disappointed that I hadn't lost 76 pounds, which was my original goal. I lost sight of what I had accomplished, and focused only on what I hadn't.

So, as 2008 came to a close, I was in a pretty bad place. Deep down inside I knew that more than anything, more than a diet or a magic pill, what I needed was to love and accept myself.

What I see, in hindsight, is a woman who identified herself as her weight. "I've lost 55 pounds!" That's who I was. I was a "weight loss success story," complete with before and after photos. I was invited to New York City for a professional photo shoot and interview and ended up on the cover of *Quick & Simple*, a weekly women's magazine published by *Good Housekeeping*. Then came a commercial that aired nationally. Those were heady times.

Don't get me wrong. I loved it when someone asked, "How did you do it?" and I'd confidently respond, "Eating right and exercise." I'd watch for the inevitable disappointed reaction - the reaction that said they'd hoped I'd discovered some new

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and easy solution for weight loss. Then, I'd explain that I'd also done a lot of headwork...you know, the emotional component. I'd explain EFT and how I'd had some "ah-ha" moments, let go of some negative energy, and got down to the business of losing weight.

I also loved the reaction I got from people who knew me "before" - especially because it wasn't just a physical transformation. I felt like my whole being had been transformed. My best friend from childhood, who lives in Arizona and doesn't see me often, put it this way: "My Karen is back. I didn't realize that you'd been gone...that you were hiding yourself." She told me I had a sparkle in my eyes, a spring in my step, and an aura of confidence she hadn't seen in a very long while.

But...

And isn't there always a "but?" ...

I never reached my goal.

Yes, I had lost more than 50 pounds, but my original goal was to lose 76 pounds. I was still overweight, according to the BMI chart, and so, deep down inside, I didn't feel worthy of all the attention.

I was also intently comparing myself to my "dieting" friends. Some of them had lost more than I had, some had reached their goal weights, some were going even further and sculpting their bodies, running marathons, and becoming body builders! At the same time, I felt cocky...I had figured it all out and, as I

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wrote in my essay, "...I don't gain weight. I know that I will reach my goal and maintain my loss forever."

Did that work against me? Do I have more work to do? Am I just fated to be fat? Am I lazy? Do I just not want it bad enough? What's wrong with me?

The thought of re-losing weight feels like a much greater burden than the original 55 pounds. And at the very same time, I know that I can't and *don't* want to view this as a struggle - as a fight to be fought, a battle to be won - because if I do, that's exactly what I'll get. A fight. A battle. A struggle.

In the time since I reached that new low on the scale, I have become aware that I am on a quest for the sweet spot - that balance between healthy body weight and image, and self-acceptance *right now*. But it feels like the harder I look for it, the harder it becomes to find. It's elusive. Kind of like love.

Actually, it's not "kind of like love." It IS love.

Then I came across this quote from author and mythologist Joseph Campbell and I knew it was time to do some more work:

*"It is by going down into the abyss that we  
recover the treasures of life.*

*Where you stumble, there lies your treasure."*

The first step was signing up for a twelve-week class - "Living Lighter: a Holistic Approach to Weigh Loss" - offered by Amy Martin, a local registered nurse and holistic counselor. The class was described as a way to "get motivated and find inspiration to keep you on track; leave with tools to help you

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through your week, including menus, logs, and reminders; learn how to keep your metabolism on all day; let go of the emotional blocks that stand in your way; learn self-hypnosis techniques to get your subconscious mind in line with, and supportive of, what you really want; and get started on some physical movement, including isotonic exercises, tai chi, hula-hooping, and more.”

My first reaction was, “But I know all of this already! I know how to count calories. I know what healthy food is. I don’t need menus, and I exercise at least five times a week.”

My second reaction was, “Yeah, I know all of that, but I don’t want to do it.”

But the idea of being able to let go of emotional blocks and getting my subconscious mind in line with what I really want attracted me. And finally, I realized that taking the class would be my “abyss” – it would be a place to stumble and recover my treasure.

What came out of that class is the basis for this book. It got me started on the next leg of what I now know to be my never-ending journey.

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stay in a comfortable place, but doesn't let me stretch and grow either.

Amy specializes in RoHun Therapy, which includes imagery exercises. You visualize embracing your Evil Twins, telling them they are okay, and letting them go while telling them you don't need them anymore.

I'm looking forward to letting my Evil Twins go, but I'm not ready. I've invested too much time and effort with them. And they seem pretty invested in me as well.

About 4:30 in the afternoon, on a day after the first Living Lighter class, I began to feel restless...wanting to eat something and feeling slightly annoyed and guilty about it. I wanted a glass of wine but there wasn't any in the house. Tim (my husband) won't be home for dinner because he's going to a meeting. Maybe the orange I had for a snack wasn't enough. Should I track my calories?

*I don't want to.*

Hello, Evil Twin.

When Tim is away, or won't be home at the regular time, I tend to get restless and feel that time is standing still. I hate the endless *blah-blah-blah* in my head. So I sit, feeling paralyzed. I don't want to get up and do anything. I just keep cycling through my email, Facebook, and the message boards I post on. I could get up and exercise. I could do some cleaning. I could do some writing.

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*But I don't want to.*

Hello, Resistant Karen.

## **Up. Down. Up. Down...Up.**

I was nervous going into class at the start of Week Six. The scale was up at home. Sure enough, Amy's scale showed I'd gained as well - 2.75 pounds. Sadness, frustration, and a sense that nothing will work and "I can't do this" overwhelmed me. I couldn't stop crying...crying like a distraught little girl.

Then, I was off to my annual physical. I held it together as I refused to be weighed by the assistant. When my doctor came in, I couldn't hold it back, and I cried some more. She was great, though, and supportive of Living Lighter.

Afterward, I went grocery shopping, feeling fragile and drained. Crushed, even. The number on the scale has so much power over me. When I got home, I cried some more.

I was hungry, but felt chastised. Like a good girl, I ate a tangerine. I didn't feel like bingeing. In fact, I felt the opposite. I made some tea and noted that the kitchen was a mess. And I still hadn't unpacked the groceries. I had that "I'm a bad girl" feeling, and it compelled me to clean the kitchen. As I thought about it, an old feeling or fragment of memory came to the surface: I should be punished, either by myself or someone else. I felt like I should be ashamed and send myself to my room, as if I am still a little girl.

Part of it is this: Tim isn't home, so I don't have to clean up after myself. I can do it when I want to. When Tim is home, I clean up. If I don't, he'll automatically clean up after me. I hate it. It makes me feel like I have to do it so he won't. He has

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enough to do. He never complains or says anything negative; it's just who he is. He just does it naturally.

And then I feel guilty. It's almost like I'd rather he complain!

It's almost like I can't take care of myself unless someone is nagging me to do it!

Is that where my motivation comes from? From shame and guilt? Was I brought up that way?

When I was a kid, there was always a sense of freedom and "I can do whatever I want" when my parents weren't home. Let the dishes pile up. Eat what and when I want. Was I so tightly controlled that this was the inevitable outcome? Or am I just a lazy, selfish adult child?

When I supposedly grew up and lived on my own, that was how I lived! I mean, I certainly did clean up after myself, and my apartments weren't dirty or even that messy. But there was no one telling me what to do or when to do it, and I liked it. Sometimes I didn't do the dishes right away. I especially hated washing utensils, since I didn't have a dishwasher, and sometimes I'd let them sit for too long. Ick.

It wasn't responsible of me to be that way, but who cared? It was just me.

This comes back to that whole conversation with Amy about structure, and what does my structure look like? And how it's not so easy to shed the old and don the new, even when you're aware!

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So, I felt that cycle of shame, and the shame motivating me to do the right thing, which, in this case, was cleaning up the kitchen. Then I felt a bit self-righteous. Then I felt a lot better. And with that feeling came the desire to eat - to dig in with delight and glee and distraction.

I know for a lot of people stress, anger, and sadness can make them turn to food. For me, it comes afterward...when I start to feel better, when the feelings of guilt and shame subside.

## **Tending Towards Fat**

You know when you set your mind to something, or you have an “ah-ha” moment, and then all of a sudden you start noticing things you wouldn’t have noticed before? Like the Universe is trying to tell you something?

After pouring that bottle of wine down the drain, I noticed all kinds of things. First was this quote by Dr. Christiane Northrup:

*“If you don’t heed the messages from your body the first time they’re delivered, you’ll get hit with a bigger hammer the next time. A delay or denial requires you body to speak louder and louder to get your attention. The purpose of emotions, regardless of what they are, is to help you feel and participate fully in your own life. Stop and experience them! Then change your behavior accordingly.”*

Wine was the hammer. And my body was speaking louder.

Then Tim and I spent a week in Nova Scotia to celebrate our 12th anniversary. Although we both brought our laptop computers with us, I vowed that I wouldn’t spend needless time distracting myself on the Internet. I wanted to get into the habit of doing one thing at a time...focusing on one thing at a time...without feeling the need to check email, check Facebook, listen to voicemail, or whatever else seemed attractive at the time.

I noticed things in Nova Scotia. People drive more slowly and are much more aware of – and friendly to – pedestrians,

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especially in Halifax. There's also a relaxed pace to eating in restaurants. I was really struck by how food is prepared, portioned, and served. We easily spent two hours at dinner every evening, and not just in fancy restaurants. The servers and staff were attentive, but not overbearing and not in a rush to get us out. Serving sizes were appropriate. It was pleasant. It's something I've noticed in other countries. It's something I strive to do at home and when eating out, though I've never really been successful. Experiencing all this again in my new frame of mind made a big impact.

While there, Tim and I went on a three-hour hike along some of the most spectacular shoreline in the world. Afterward, we stopped for lunch at a local deli. Tim said he wasn't that hungry. I was ravenous. We got a couple of wrap sandwiches and Tim said, "Boy, these things are huge" and that he might not be able to eat all of his.

Inside, I was fuming. Not only did I think I could eat all of mine, I also knew I'd probably still be hungry afterward. In fact, I was angry that I was hungry in the first place and Tim wasn't. I was angry because our dinner reservations weren't until 7:30 p.m. and I didn't want to appear like a piggy after eating my "huge" sandwich. I was angry because I felt like eating out of control.

I know myself well enough to know that when I feel like this, it's usually hormonal, and that was certainly the case this time. I forgave myself a little, but still felt like I'd taken several steps backward.

What's interesting is that, in the end, I didn't finish the whole sandwich - mostly because I didn't want to eat more than Tim

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did - and I was able to wait for dinner without dying of hunger. But I was still angry about it.

After my anger subsided, I remembered reading an article about the habits of naturally thin people and those who tend towards fat.

My husband is a naturally thin person and I've often been amazed at his relationship with food. He chews slowly, can deal with being hungry, and would rather wait for a meal than snack (that's not to say that he doesn't have snacks, but not within an hour of a planned meal). Because he eats slowly, his brain cues him when he's had enough to eat. He rarely gets "stuffed." He doesn't eat mindlessly. For example, if he wants chips and salsa, he takes out a portion of chips and puts it in a bowl with a little salsa on the side. Or he can eat a small piece of chocolate and leave it at that.

There's a book titled *Act Thin, Be Thin* by Howard Richman. The book outlines 65 behaviors that people who struggle with their weight tend to have. It shows how our behavior patterns influence our eating habits. Among those patterns are:

- Pushing away compliments
- Skipping meals
- Eating while doing other activities
- Attempting to do more than one thing at a time
- Interrupting people
- Fidgeting
- Perfectionism

Richman says that thin people tend to be focused, inner directed, concentrated, linear thinkers/speakers, listeners,

*Karen C.L. Anderson*

patient, tenacious, all about process, planners for gratification, aware of themselves, calm, preferential to solitude, emotionally open, and methodical.

Those of us who tend to be fat are distracted, outer-directed, diffuse, attentive to many things, and have modular thought/speech. We are talkers, impatient, vacillating, all about the goal, in need of instant gratification, aware of others and prefer company, but are emotionally guarded, and spontaneous.

Thin...Fat  
Focused...Distracted  
Inner-directed...Outer directed  
Concentrated...Diffused  
Attention on one thing...Attention on many things  
Linear thought/speech...Modular thought/speech  
Listens...Talks  
Patient...Impatient  
Tenacious...Vacillating  
Sees the process...Sees the goal  
Planned gratification...Instant gratification  
Aware of self...Aware of others  
Calm...Frantic  
Prefers solitude...Prefers company  
Emotionally open...Emotionally guarded  
Methodical...Spontaneous

With few exceptions, my mind tends toward "fat" ...and Tim certainly tends toward "thin." I think I've always known on some level that this is part of my problem. I want to change the "fat tendencies," not because I think they make me a bad

*After* The Before & After

person, but because I don't feel good inside when my life trends in the "fat" direction. And my life had been trending that way for a couple of years.

I know the answer lies in setting a goal - something that, until now, I have not wanted to do.

After The Before & After is about what happens after achieving "weight loss success." After losing 55 pounds, the author thought she'd finally beat obesity and would live happily ever after. Then, like the vast majority of people who lose weight, she regained. This book chronicles her journey to discover that happiness has nothing to do with food or weight. Cultivating self acceptance did more for her emotional and physical shape than dieting ever could.

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