

BIG

Stories about Life in Plus-Sized Bodies

Edited by Christina Myers

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*To the writers in this book, who are brave
and bold and full of magic*

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THE FAT GIRL'S GUIDE TO EATING AND DRINKING

Christina Myers

“See how the fullness of your breasts is like the heavy weight of fruit that’s ready to be picked, solid and lovely in the hand, delicious.”

Tip 1: Salad, salad, salad

ALWAYS ORDER THE SALAD. IT’S THE LEAST LIKELY TO PROMPT DIRECT questions like “I thought you were on a diet—can you have that?” or indirect and passive-aggressive observations like “Oh, gosh, I wish I could eat pasta, but I just feel so guilty about it after. Good for you for not worrying about such silly things,” or worst of all, long meaningful glances at your plate and your mouth.

Salad is safe. Salad is virtuous. Just monitor the toppings and dressings; otherwise someone will point out they saw an article in a magazine last month about how salads nowadays are way, way, way worse than a cheeseburger and fries, all loaded up with ranch dressing and eggs and bacon bits and stuff. Then you’ve just wasted your order, opting for the virtue of a salad but still getting heat for a cheeseburger.

Go simple. House salad. No creamy dressings. Do they have a smaller version, a half order? Even if you know they don’t, ask anyway. You’re trying. Never forget this: if you can’t be beautiful, at least try to be.

No one can say you’re not trying.

Tip 2: Set the stage for validating your right to eat

NOTE HOW LITTLE YOU'VE EATEN, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER SITTING down, but only in a casual tone. "Oh my goodness, what a day! I've been so busy I haven't had a chance to stop since I got up this morning. I just worked right through lunch since I knew I was coming to meet you for dinner."

See? You deserve a decent dinner. You work hard. You've been going all day. You even gently implied that you possibly skipped breakfast, and you clearly noted the skipped lunch. Now pray that the co-workers you went for lunch with don't happen to pass by and stop to talk. It could happen. Having lunch *and* dinner would seem a tad extravagant, wouldn't it, for a girl like you? Don't open the door to criticism by suggesting you eat. Or that you enjoy eating. Now open your menu and order the salad (see Tip 1).

Tip 3: Monitor your consumption

EAT AS SLOWLY AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN. TALK A LOT, AS THOUGH YOU aren't starving from pretending food doesn't exist all day, as though eating is not your primary motivation to be here.

When your plate is half-empty, comment on how full you are, as though a regular serving of salad (see Tip 1) is just too much for you. They need to know: you're not just trying to be thinner; you clearly have the constitution of a thin person, don't you? It's like a quirk of nature, the Bermuda Triangle of Bodies, that somehow you don't even enjoy eating and you consume hardly anything and yet here you are, still plus-sized. Sympathy for your sad plight is only a fraction better than judgment, but it's better all the same.

Don't be the first one to finish (even if you ordered the smallest item). Leave something on your plate. Leave something carb-y on

your plate. If you leave the cherry tomatoes but you eat the bread, no one will be fooled.

Tip 4: Enjoy the party, just not too much

AT A PARTY, CARRY A GLASS OF SODA WATER WITH LEMON AND stand at the opposite end of the room from the food. If you find yourself within a dozen feet of the buffet, everyone will assume you're hovering. They're watching, of course. All those foods are there for people who aren't fat; everyone knows queso and tortilla chips are a reward for being thin. You fat girls are welcome to approach the crudités platter, and you may swipe the tip of the raw asparagus into the bowl of herb-and-garlic veggie dip.

Don't double-dip: that's just a disservice to all the other large ladies out there who are trying so hard to ensure that people don't think we're all a bit messy and slovenly and crude. Dip once. Enjoy. Eat the rest of the asparagus plain. Go back for a carrot stick (just one—remember your roommate told you that carrots are super-duper high in sugar, so you may as well eat a doughnut as have a bowl of carrots). After the carrot, switch to celery. If absolutely necessary, have a few mushrooms. They're mostly water. Do you drink enough water? Looks like you might be retaining; drink more.

Tip 5: Consider your audience, always

WHEN YOU ASK FOR A MONTEREY JACK CHICKEN TAQUITO AT 7-Eleven, don't make eye contact with the guy behind the counter. Put your Perrier and sugar-free gum up on the counter first, like an apology. "See, Mr. Cashier, it's just Perrier. No calories. And the gum too. I'm trying, right?"

If you have been careful in selecting when to line up, there will be no high-risk individuals in line behind you to see what you're buying. It's unlikely anyone will say anything (though we all know they do from time to time, don't they?), but a long meaningful glance at your food purchase, or an eye roll and smirk, will definitely be unpleasant even without a verbal remark.

High-risk individuals include older men, younger men, thin men, fat men, men in suits, men in construction boots, very good-looking men, very unattractive men, teenaged boys and—more often than not—thin teenaged girls, thin middle-aged women and thin old women. Basically, try to make sure you line up in front of kids or other fat women. Or better yet, go at 2:00 a.m., when you won't bother anyone with your eating. Who needs to see you doing that, anyway?

Tip 6: “On the go” doesn't mean invisible

IF EATING IN YOUR CAR, ENSURE YOU DO ALL CHEWING AND SWALLOWING while the car is in motion. Eating while stopped at a red light is an invitation for the person in the car next to you to shout “fat bitch” from his open window. Can you blame him? It's like walking down a dark alley in a short skirt after drinking: you're just getting what you asked for at that point. You'll already get “fat bitch” in response to almost every perceived vehicular wrongdoing, so why invite more trouble?

Related: make sure any and all food garbage is cleaned out of your car daily. From time to time, a co-worker will walk out of the building with you, or another mom will ask for a lift after morning drop-off, and what will you have to say for yourself when they spot that chocolate-covered-granola-bar wrapper on the passenger seat? After all, your friend posted an article on Facebook just last week

about granola bars having more sugar and fat than a Dairy Queen Peanut Buster Parfait. It said people who eat them are fools duped by the marketing machine. You don't want people to think you're a fool, do you? Just throw out the garbage.

Tip 7: Reconsider your thighs

WHEN LYING IN BED ON A RANDOM SATURDAY MORNING (BEFORE you are awake enough to have felt your hunger and then berated yourself for being hungry at all), notice unexpectedly, as you roll onto your side and the light from the window glows warm over your skin, that the shape of your hip is like the curve of a long, golden sand dune. Run the palm of your hand over it from your waist to your thigh. It's so strong. And soft. The smoothest skin anywhere on your body.

Then catch your reflection randomly in the bathroom mirror, the window at Starbucks, the rear-view mirror of your car, and suddenly, without intention, notice how the roundness of your cheeks makes your face electric and excited when you smile. See how the fullness of your breasts is like the heavy weight of fruit that's ready to be picked, solid and lovely in the hand, delicious. Discover how the slope of your shoulder is dusty with freckles, like constellations. Notice that your legs, your strong legs (so strong from carrying you so well all these years), are neither girly nor mannish but, simply, yours.

Go to a restaurant with friends and order a salad. Because actually you happen to love the salad and it's what you wanted, not because you wanted to apologize for eating. Order the salad and eat the whole thing, because you were hungry enough; or eat half of it, because you weren't. Then realize you didn't tell anyone when you last ate, and you didn't spend half the meal talking so it would look like your food wasn't important. Your food is important. It fills

your golden sand-dune hips and your electric, excited smile and your starry-constellation shoulders and your strong, strong legs.

Reconsider your thighs. Reconsider everything.

Tip 8: Feed yourself

BREATHE. CLOSE YOUR EYES. SINK INTO YOUR BODY, RATHER THAN letting it float away from you, detached like a balloon on a string, separate and foreign. Hear what it's saying to you. Feel what it needs. Trust yourself. Trust yourself again, for the first time in a long time. For the first time that you can remember, maybe.

Feed yourself like your hunger is not a sin, like your body is not a crime, like you do not need to explain. Feed yourself like a celebration: fill up on good food and the kindness and forgiveness it implies. Feed yourself like you have not spent a lifetime crafting rules to make yourself belong, to make your existence permissible, to make yourself beautiful even a little bit.

Discover, at last, that you already belong—to yourself. Discover, finally, that you did not need permission to exist—you exist regardless of approval. Discover, at the end (which is now the beginning) that you are already beautiful—not just a little bit but in ways that are magic and endless and cannot ever be measured.

Eat. When you need to. What you want to.

Drink. When you need to. What you want to.

Listen, trust, hear, feel.

Repeat.