

# Lights and Shadows

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Volume 23 *Lights and Shadows* Volume 23

Article 9

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1979

## How to Lose Eighty-Four Pounds

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### Recommended Citation

Gorham, M. E. (1979). How to Lose Eighty-Four Pounds. *Lights and Shadows*, 23 (1). Retrieved from <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol23/iss1/9>

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**How to Lose  
Eighty-Four Pounds  
Melinda E. Gorham  
First Place Essay**

At first it was easy being fat; no one likes a skinny baby. Cooing adults obviously took great pleasure in tweaking my chubby cheeks and inducing me to waddle toward them for the reward only a cookie or cracker could afford.

As I grew, horizontally, so grew my appetite. I readily forfeited the "healthful and recreational activities" each grade school recess offered to huddle in an isolated corner of the playground. Stickball and hopscotch could not compare with Nancy Drew mysteries and Ding Dongs.

In my quest for fiction and food I ultimately discovered a means to satisfy both. McCall's, Redbook, and Ladies Home Journal were virtual gold mines. They provided enough reading to fill an empty afternoon and enough recipes to inspire an evening of culinary orgy.

Unfortunately, these magazines also cruelly brandished photos of reed-thin models in size eight clothes. Only fashion rivaled reading and eating in my list of favorites. As I miserably realized Lane Bryant could never make me look like Lauren Hutton, I emphatically declared matters had gone far enough.

Mustering all my courage, I laboriously opened one eye to discover the bathroom scale tipping one-hundred and eighty-two pounds. The secret I had hidden for seventeen years was screaming at me, and I intended to silence it once and for all.

I set my first goal at one-hundred and forty pounds. As soon as I reached that glorious weight, I would permit myself to eat all the goodies I was now sacrificing.

Launching my project with determination, I shoved Pringles cans, Almond Joys, and Cracker Jacks to the back of the cabinet and replaced them with Roman Meal Bread, Dezerta, and Special K. I rejected halfway measures; losing weight meant going "cold turkey."

After two weeks my rumbling stomach became a kind of Venus flytrap grabbing each morsel of food I consumed with glee. Each morning I raced to breakfast to admire the aesthetically pleasing quality of my bald boiled egg and to marvel at the delicate texture of whole-wheat toast. As I drained the last drop of juice from my mutilated grapefruit half, I would remind myself that it was only five hours until lunch.

I spent my senior year in high school tugging at droopy skirts and slacks and refusing to partake of the teenage favorites, hamburgers and French fries. My tattered brown lunch bag held half a boiled chicken sandwich and an apple, and I clasped it to my heart as if it contained the Hope diamond.

I quickly memorized the caloric content of every conceivable food and prided myself on knowing just how many calories my unsuspecting friends were ingesting. As they begged me to eat "just one" potato chip or cookie, I steadfastly refused. Boys complained that I was simply no fun as I sipped unsweetened tea and nibbled salad as they crunched heartily on deluxe pizza.

My obsession with being the campus martyr enveloped me. When I reached one-hundred and forty pounds, it simply was not good enough. I munched my celery sticks and dieted on.

When my resistance lowered and my craving for a Keebler Pecan Sandie became tearfully overwhelming, I employed clever psychological tactics. I envisioned myself slowly devouring the food of my choice until my stomach was "full." I observed others enjoying their reckless indulgences and gained satisfaction from their careless escapades. I cherished food magazines more than ever. They offered enough full-page spreads of French pastry and Italian pasta to fill a between-meal gap. I became classically conditioned to salivate like Pavlov's dog when I spotted one at the grocery store check-out counter.

My distraught parents watched their once "pleasingly plump" daughter dwindle into oblivion. I smiled placidly at their distress, peeled another stick of sugarless gum, and snapped it with smug satisfaction. My obsession with thinness put dampers on all family gatherings. I demanded broiled fish for my Thanksgiving dinner, and apples and oranges became my Christmas confections.

My shopping sprees for beloved smaller clothes became frequent. Every two months I

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would inevitably shrink to a yet smaller size. My alarmed family hauled me to our stunned doctor. Remembering my chubby stature, he ordered me to eat more.

I obediently followed his instructions by adding another broccoli spear or tablespoon of English peas to dinner, which consisted of only lean meat and vegetables. I continued to measure bird-sized scoops of cottage cheese and experience masochistic highs when people told me, "You are so thin; you look perfectly awful!"

I maintained enough sanity to realize my weight reduction would have to end somewhere. I decided that weighing ninety-nine pounds would be utter ecstasy. My weight had not been measured in two-digit numbers since third grade, and I could imagine nothing more glorious. I popped another can of Tab and posted on the refrigerator door a repugnant picture of five pounds of fat which I had salvaged from a physical fitness advertisement.

After another month of rigid dieting, I awoke one Monday morning and stumbled to the bathroom for my weekly weigh-in. As I stepped gingerly on the faithful scales, I held my breath. I clenched my bony fists, contracted my twitching muscles, and painfully opened my hollow eyes. The quivering needle read ninety-eight pounds. I had faced the enemy head-on and I had won.