

By Chris Steinbach
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TWIN FALLS – If you were to only read this paragraph, you should know I have lost 28 pounds since first meeting with Jill Sherman Skeem. And I feel a lot better.

I began meeting on May 10 with Skeem, a certified macrobiotic health counselor in Twin Falls and a graduate of the Strengthening Health Institute in Philadelphia. My goal: Following her advice the best I could and writing about it for the *Times-News*. The worst thing that could happen, I reasoned, would be failing at yet another attempt to lose some weight and sharing the experience with all of you.

Over the past 20 years, I have lost weight and gained it back – and then some. I’ve tried different exercise routines and diets, worked with trainers, taken supplements and read all kinds of magazine articles and books. In March I read “Living Large: A Big Man’s Ideas on Weight, Success and Acceptance,” a book by Michael S. Berman. It rang all too true with me.

Berman is an attorney, lobbyist and political activist who served as counsel and deputy chief of staff to Vice President Walter Mondale. He is the president of a political consulting firm in Washington, D.C. – a successful professional, by any standard. In his late 60s, Berman says he is 5-feet 9-inches tall, and that he weighs 235 pounds, after weighing as much as 332 pounds and as little as 217 pounds.

In his book, Berman writes that he views his weight as a disease, but that he does not see himself as a victim. He writes at length about the emotions he has wrestled with throughout his life and how he coped with food.

I was struck by how he ties his weight at the time to the memories of his life. He writes about weighing 235 pounds when he started college and being a 250-pound football cheerleader who made himself the butt of his jokes. When he graduated from law school at 25, he weighed 290. He can remember in vivid detail what -- and how much -- he ate. He writes about hitting bottom in 1984 after working on Mondale’s losing presidential campaign.

“I weighed 330 pounds – a new high and then some,” he writes. “Standing on my feet for any length of time was enough to make my back ache. I was wearing a size-58 suit by then. I was regularly consuming four or five pounds of red meat, along with a dozen or 18 eggs. It was not unusual for me to wolf down two pounds of chocolate almond bark at a sitting. As for the ice cream, I can’t even give an honest estimate of how much I was eating.”

All of this may sound unusual to most folks, but it’s doubtful that it only sounds familiar to me. In March, when I read “Living Large,” I was a none-too-small 310 pounds or so. Reading it made me remember eating habits I developed as a child and young adult that strike me now as sad.

Like Berman, I can tell you that I weighed about 265 when I graduated from college in 1989. I weighed about 290 when I got married in 1993. Since then, I have typically weighed more than 300 pounds, peaking in 2003 at 355 pounds or so. For most of the past three years, I kept journals in which I meticulously tracked what -- and how much -- I ate.

So, after 11 weeks of meeting with Skeem and following her advice, I'm pleased to say I recently weighed 278 pounds -- the lightest I have been in the past 15 years. Maybe even more important is that I'm getting better at not automatically putting something in my mouth when I'm angry, depressed or stressed out. It hasn't been easy. But by changing what -- and how I eat -- and increasing the amount of exercise I get to eight to 10 hours per week, I'm becoming more optimistic that I can lose more weight and then maintain that loss.

If, like Michael Berman, I were to write a book about what I've learned in the past three months, it would boil down to this: What you eat and how well you eat it are both more important than how much you eat. If you eat the right foods and eat them slowly, you will not overeat.

It just takes determination.

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