

finally thin!

INCLUDES
OVER 70
RECIPES

How I Lost Over **200** Pounds
and Kept Them Off—and
How You Can Too



Kim Bensen



The Must-Have Companion to Any Weight-loss Program

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introduction

A friend once told me a joke about two elderly ladies sitting on a bench. One says to the other, “Did you hear that Helen died last week?” The other one sighs and says, “Yes, and only two pounds from her goal.”

I chuckle every time I remember this story, but at the same time, don’t you just wonder, “Will that be me? Will my weight loss goal always elude me?”

Losing weight isn’t the whole problem though, is it? We’ve all lost dozens, perhaps hundreds, of pounds in our lifetimes. The first problem is losing *all* of it, and the second problem is *keeping* it off. Over the years, that’s something I had never been able to do, until now.

I finally did it and it’s still hard to believe. After a lifetime of being overweight, I’m FINALLY THIN. Did I say I was thin? Wow! It’s still a rush. I’ve only been *chubby*, *overweight*, or *morbidly obese* my entire life. I have to tell you there’s nothing like hopping out of bed (yes, I did say *hopping*), slipping into jeans, and tucking in a T-shirt. Not wondering if it will fit. Not looking for a larger shirt that comes down over my butt. It’s quick and easy and just feels so darn good that I really wanted to share that feeling with others.

For years I was the one glued to the television set every time another success story was about to come on. I grabbed the newest weight loss planners, tried all the fad diets, and rejoined Weight Watchers so many times I felt more like an investor than a member. So what was different this time? What did it take to stay motivated?

Before I go any further, I want you to understand something important: I am no different from you when it comes to losing weight. I don’t

have more willpower than you do. I don't lose weight more easily than you do. I'm a wife, a mom of four, a businesswoman who faces the very same kinds of stresses and challenges that you do every day. I don't care how many times you've tried before, what drastic measures you've taken, and how downtrodden and discouraged you are right now. What matters is *not* your past; it's what lies ahead. Whether you're older or younger, richer or poorer, heavier or thinner than I was when I began, and whether you've tried to lose weight a bajillion times before to no avail, I truly believe *you can do this*.

Wouldn't it be fantastic to stop pulling in your stomach or hiding behind your children every time someone wanted to take your picture?

Wouldn't it be terrific to slide into *any* chair without worrying about whether you'll fit?

Wouldn't it be something if you could finally enjoy looking at your reflection in a store window or full-length mirror?

I'm sure you've got your own list of frustrations, humiliations, and struggles that you'd like to put behind you. As you read my story in the following pages, you'll see that I had plenty of my own.

Finally Thin is *not* a weight loss program. There are enough of those out there. Some really good ones as a matter of fact! *Finally Thin* is a book of motivation. And you can *never* have enough of that! It's a *concept* of how to find the program that best fits *you*, whether counting calories or carbs or Points or exchanges, and tailoring it to fit your lifestyle.

The fact is, all weight loss programs are written for the masses. It's crucial to learn how to make yours enjoyable and satisfying for *you* and still get the results you desire, while discovering how to weave your chosen program throughout your daily life so that it becomes who you are and how you live. *That's* how to get all the way to your goal. *That's* how to keep the weight off forever. You end up living it and loving it so you want to keep on doing it. Not living on a diet—but learning how to tailor your diet to how you want to live. Only then can it become your lifestyle.

Today, I serve as a group leader for Weight Watchers and I have more than 100 people in my meetings at one time. But the way I do Weight Watchers is completely different from how Tammy does it and how Jack and Carole do it and how Emily does it. We're different people with different needs, taste buds, and schedules. There's no one diet, and no one way to "do" a diet that's right for everyone.

If you are reading this book, you are most likely one of the people

who *have* to watch their weight. That stinks. Plain and simple. I know. Me, too. The fact is, if you choke down three small, tasteless meals in a 1,200-calorie day you will lose weight, but you probably won't want to eat that way for long and you'll give up *again*, eventually gaining the weight back. If, however, you eat delicious, satisfying meals that *you really like* in a 1,200-calorie day, you will lose weight, and you will be much more inclined to continue it long-term. The only thing is, no one knows exactly what appeals to *you* but *you*.

This book is broken down into three sections:

- First, my personal weight loss story. It's a brutally honest recounting of my ups and downs (so to speak). The abandoned diets, the binges, the broken chairs and broken dreams. My all-consuming desire to be thin and healthy more than anything in the world, yet my continuing behavior of self-destruction over and over again. *But it's also a story of victory.* Of living a miraculous transformation, both inside and out, from a size 6X to a size 6. It's how I went from silently begging for help—to break free from the bondage of food—to finding myself in the position to be able to offer hope to others.
- The second section starts with a clear discussion of the basics of weight loss, so that whatever diet you follow, you'll know what is happening with your body. My Diet Shoppe then walks you through a straightforward description of all the major diets out there, with a thought-provoking quiz to help you choose which diets might best fit you. This brings you to the *ten steps to a finally thin life*—ten steps to help weave your diet into the enjoyable, healthy lifestyle you've always wanted. It closes with tips and suggestions for making maintenance a reality.
- In the third section, you'll find dozens of my own delicious, family-tested recipes that don't taste like diet food—but will make your weight loss journey a truly luscious one. I'm not a gourmet cook. In fact, my husband says, "Are you sure you don't want to call it the *I Can't Cookbook?*" (So much for spousal support.) But honestly, if it's too time consuming, too difficult, or too hard to pronounce, most people won't make it. My recipes are all about yummy, everyday dishes that you can serve to the whole family and they won't even know they're eating light.

Finally thin . . . it *is* possible. Come on, it's YOUR turn now!

the down side of plus size

The more weight I gained, the harder life became. I had a range of clothing sizes in my wardrobe and was forever looking for something that fit me. I had to stop shopping in “normal” clothing stores and instead purchased all of my clothes at plus-size shops. I felt ashamed when I couldn’t fit into a size 14 or 16 anymore. At the time, there just weren’t many larger sizes in most department stores.

Fortunately for me, America was gaining weight as rapidly as I was. Before long, independent plus-size stores began opening in all the malls. Suddenly every department store had a “Women’s” shop, and many major designers started making clothes for the larger woman. But even though it became easier to find clothes in my larger size, I lived in what I called my “uniform”—a pair of stretch pants (with stirrups in the early years) and a coordinating top that was long enough to cover my stomach and most of my buttocks. Whenever I found something that fit me and was flattering, the first question I asked was, “How many colors does this come in?”



Mark and I in Paris. His arms didn't even go halfway around me.

Through it all, Mark never made a derogatory comment about my weight. He held me when I cried about how miserable I felt. He supported me whenever I began a new program and comforted me when I inevitably slipped off the wagon, but he also knew he couldn't lose the weight for me.

A year and a half after our marriage, our daughter, Aleeta, was born. Two years later, we had Adam. With each pregnancy, I was so sick with nausea for nine months that I couldn't hold anything down and actually lost weight each time. The only time in my life I didn't gain weight was when I was dieting or pregnant.

While I continued working with my mother in her graphics firm, Mark and I decided to start our own advertising agency and for twelve years we ran both businesses successfully out of a professional building in the downtown Shelton area. Aleeta and Adam practically grew up there. Most days after school, they would lie on the floor of the art department drawing, doing homework, and using up all our expensive art supplies to make superhero costumes. The three of us would head home for supper, often grabbing a delicious Shelton Pizza on the way. Mark would join us a little later.

Just when life seemed to have settled down, my dad's career required a move to Michigan. My parents sold the building. Mark and I merged the two businesses and moved the company into our home. Our house was built on a slightly sloping piece of property, which enabled us to build offices and separate parking in the lower walk-out level of our house.

About the same time, Mark took a position as office manager for a friend's growing firm. That income meant much more financial stability for our family, which we sorely needed. So, with Aleeta and Adam in school full time, I took over running the ad agency. Life was busy. The business was expanding, and so was I.

In order to fulfill my roles of wife, mother, and business owner, I would get up at four o'clock in the morning to finish up design projects and plan the busy day for my small staff. I didn't mind. I loved mornings. I sat doing what I enjoyed, with several pounds of M&Ms and Hershey's Assorted Minis to keep me company. It was a routine I looked forward to.

At least one day each week, I ordered a Subway delivery at my office and would, of course, treat the staff. Subway didn't normally deliver to home businesses, but I was such a good customer that they accommodated me. Besides the sandwiches for my staff, I always ordered three

foot-long sandwiches, on the pretense of getting the extras for my husband or kids when they got home.

I don't think I fooled anyone. No one in my family ever saw those extra subs. But everyone could see what they were doing to me. And increasingly there were humiliating moments when my weight became the focal point of my world.

We used to go to a family camp in New Hampshire called Camp Spofford with our friends Dan and Cathy Getz and their family. They had two boys near Adam's age, two girls near Aleeta's age, and an older son. Cathy and I were best friends, and we did everything together, including dieting. One vacation I tried hard to be more active despite my excessive size. The kids had taken out paddle boats with Mark. Dan and their oldest son, Danny, were in a rowboat, and Cathy and I decided to follow in a canoe. I had spent every summer growing up on the water in Maine. Boating and swimming were second nature to me. This would be fun.

We were told we had to wear life preservers. One thing I did know was that I did not need a life preserver. Ever since I had reached three hundred pounds, I could float a foot above water without even treading water. No kidding! I just sat there and didn't move and didn't sink. I couldn't even swim to the bottom of the pool anymore because I was too buoyant. Cathy was the only one I ever told. She couldn't believe her eyes when I showed her in her backyard pool one day. I always made sure I looked like I was treading water when others were around and kept moving my arms and legs. So I didn't need a life preserver. It was impossible for me to drown, but I wasn't about to share that with the teens running the boat launch.

We each grabbed a life preserver, and Cathy put hers on. I found the largest one available and still couldn't buckle it up. No one was watching, so I tucked the straps in so they wouldn't dangle and hoped no one would say anything. I looked ridiculous with this orange ring around my twenty-two-inch neck.

Cathy got in the canoe, but I couldn't see much with the life preserver riding up so high on my weighty shoulders and upper body. I looked like a pimple about to pop. I couldn't see where I was going. I stepped gently into what I thought was the middle of the canoe and promptly tipped us over into the murky shallow waters. We both had on our beautiful new coverups and looked like a muddy mess.

The overly concerned teens came running to help the two fat ladies flailing in the shallow waters of the lake. We got up as quickly as we

could, and good-naturedly Cathy agreed to try it again. I'd get it right this time. Sure enough, I flipped us a second time! I think even Cathy's calm, gentle demeanor was slightly ruffled.

Dan and Danny compassionately paddled over and offered to take us in the rowboat. It was much more stable. I looked at it and wondered if it was possible to flip that as well. I didn't think so. Everyone held their breath as I stepped in. The boat rode low in the water, but stayed stable.

We made it out to the "sunken island" where the snorkeling was best. I eased myself out of the boat, along with everyone else, without too much difficulty. The one thing I didn't foresee was having to get back in.

After thirty minutes of snorkeling it was time to head back. We were half a mile out. Dan and Danny and Cathy all pulled themselves into the boat. With my first attempt I knew I was in for trouble. The first to try to help me was Cathy while the guys busied themselves with the oars, pretending to be consumed with their tasks and not notice. Before long, all four of us were pulling and pushing. We all tried to hoist my body into that stupid rowboat. It just wasn't going to happen.

After about fifteen minutes we had only one option. Dan rowed back to shore and I held on to a line in the back of the boat as they towed me home. I'm not going to tell you how I felt or how it looked. It's enough that I've told you that it happened.

hot artichoke dip

A high-fat version of this is served at the delightful Inn on Peaks Island off the coast of Portland, Maine. On Wednesday nights in the wintertime, they offer suppers for less than \$8. Mark ordered hot artichoke dip once and I tasted it. I wanted to drown myself in it! This light version tastes just as delicious . . . but you don't get the ambiance!

- One 14-ounce can artichoke hearts in water, drained and chopped
- ½ cup fat-free mayonnaise
- 1 medium Vidalia onion, minced
- 4 ounces light Jarlsberg cheese, cut into small pieces
- 8 ounces shredded fat-free mozzarella cheese

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Mix all of the ingredients in a small casserole or stoneware crock. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until the cheese melts and bubbles. Serve with celery, light crackers, or homemade pita or bagel chips.

Makes 12 servings

PER SERVING:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Calories: 57.1 | Total Carbs: 4.0 g |
| Total Fat: 1.5 g | Dietary Fiber: 0.9 g |
| Cholesterol: 4.4 mg | Protein: 6.1 g |
| Sodium: 374.8 mg | |

italian escarole soup

I had never cooked with escarole before making this soup. It's light and lovely.

1 head escarole
6 cups 98 percent fat-free chicken broth
2 large links chicken sausage, sliced
2 chicken bouillon cubes
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon dried basil
3 garlic cloves, chopped
Salt

Wash the escarole well and cut into salad-size bites. Put the escarole, broth, sausage, bouillon, oregano, basil, and garlic in a large pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 30 minutes. Add salt to taste. You can top this with fat-free Parmesan, if desired (not included in nutritional info).

Makes 6 servings

PER SERVING:

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Calories: 62.9 | Total Carbs: 2.1 g |
| Total Fat: 2.3 g | Dietary Fiber: 0.7 g |
| Cholesterol: 23.3 mg | Protein: 8.0 g |
| Sodium: 1,298.6 mg | |

apple crumb

Crumbled phyllo dough gives this topping the crunch that satisfies. Great for the fall or any time of the year.

5 apples, peeled and chopped
2 tablespoons sugar substitute
2 tablespoons Splenda brown sugar blend
1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
2 teaspoons lemon juice
4 ounces phyllo dough, dried and crumbled
Butter-flavored cooking spray

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Combine the apples, 1 tablespoon sugar substitute, brown sugar blend, 1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice, and lemon juice in a large bowl. Mix well. Fill a 9-inch pie plate or a 9-inch square baking dish.

In a frying pan, mix the phyllo, 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice, and 1 tablespoon sugar substitute. Cook over medium heat for 5 to 7 minutes. Spray the phyllo with 40 pumps of spray butter and mix well. Just as it is crumbling more, remove from the heat and cover the apples evenly. Bake for 6 minutes. Decrease the oven temperature to 350°F and bake for 35 minutes.

Makes 8 servings

PER SERVING:

| | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Calories: 70.1 | Total Carbs: 17.1 g |
| Total Fat: 0.4 g | Dietary Fiber: 2.5 g |
| Cholesterol: 0.0 mg | Protein: 0.2 g |
| Sodium: 0.7 mg | |
