



My Journey from Size 18 to Size 6

How I lost weight without giving it all up

By

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My Journey from Size 18 to Size 6: How I Lost Weight Without Giving it All Up
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I have **struggled with issues related to my weight** for many years. I have written this **manifesto** that details my experience and the changes that have taken place over time. This document is **an honest account of my weight loss journey** and the **changes I have undergone**. As I have travelled through this journey, I have discovered many things about myself; **some positive, and some negative** and I talk about it openly. As a result, some of the **information may be difficult to read** however, **self-disclosure has been cathartic**. Some of these experiences I wish I never had and other experiences I am glad I had. I talk about them all **openly and honestly** in the hopes that others can identify with my experiences and believe that they too can **achieve success in their weight loss** journey. It is my hope that you can read this story and **gain some insight** into what it has taken to become the person I am today. My greatest hope is that someone reading this will be **inspired to make their own changes** and begin their own journey towards weight loss.

As a result of the changes I have undergone it has become my **life mission to help** others lose weight, not only for personal appearances but for health reasons. There is a **huge obesity epidemic** in the United States and my goal is to make an impact particularly in the Black/African American community that will **reduce the rates of obesity**. Obesity has many **adverse effects both mentally and physically** hence I feel I have a personal responsibility to provide a service that will make an impact and change lives. After reading this story, I invite you to visit my website and **discover how I can help you make changes**. This is not a lose weight fast deal, nor is it a product that will do it all for you. This is a lifestyle change that will not only **give you results** but help you **maintain your weight loss**. In an effort to reach as many people as possible I encourage you to **share this document** with as many people as possible.

Thanks in advance for taking the time to read my story. I hope that you find **encouragement** to begin your weight loss journey and head **towards success**. I look forward to you visiting the website www.sheltersweightloss.com and its Facebook page Shelter's Weight Loss.

Shelter D. Bamu

In The Beginning

I have **struggled with issues related to my weight** all my life. As a child I was relatively skinny. However, that all changed when I turned 12 and puberty hit as I **developed quite rapidly**. I went from being a scrawny kid to what looked like a fully developed woman. People took notice and commented on **how huge I was** all the time. I had friends who enjoyed being around me because it made them look better. Adults gave me a harder time than other kids. I remember being especially **horrified at 16 years old** when a man told me that I **had shoulders most men would envy**. I am not really sure what the purpose of saying such a thing to a young person would be. All it did was reinforce the negative **feelings I had about my body**. It didn't help that I was relatively tall so **people referred to me as huge or the big one** and gave me nick names such as 'giant' and 'biggaz'.

All of this had a **negative impact** on **my self-esteem**, a reality I had to contend with many years later. Fortunately I was outgoing and made up for **my insecurities** by being the life of the party. There were however, times when **I wanted to lose weight** but was **never really sure how** I would go about it. As a child, I was **never really in control of the food** put in front of me, so going on a diet was not an option. And the more I think about it, it probably would be **unacceptable to restrict food intake** in a country where so many did not have enough to eat.

Weight Gain in College

My parents sent me to America to attend **college** and that **brought** with it **even more challenges**. Most people put on the freshman 15 pounds; but I **put on the freshman 50**. It was a combination of the change in food, the availability of **unhealthy food** options, working as a baker at a buffet restaurant and an extremely sedentary lifestyle. It was much more **difficult to put on a happy face** at this stage because I was in a new environment and going through social and cultural adjustments.

I lived on the second floor and had a **tough time going up the stairs** to the second floor. Whenever I climbed the stairs I would be out of breath and need several minutes to recover. I was extremely **unhappy with my appearance** and would spend hours looking at myself in the mirror and **fixating on different parts of my body**. The turning point in my life came when I went shopping with my friend at my favorite retailer. We were trying on clothes as usual and I **began to cry in the dressing room** because the **clothes did not fit**. I refused to come out to show her despite her best reassurances. At that time the retailer only carried clothes up to size 16. I was devastated as I realized that I needed to **move up to size 18** and that meant I could no longer shop there. That day I decided to do something about it. I decided that I would start running so that I could lose weight. I **started to run at night so that no one would see the fat girl running**. At first I mostly walked because my chest would start burning whenever I ran. When I did run, I **could barely run a few steps** and would have to challenge myself to run to the next tree or the next traffic light. By the end of the summer I had **shed a few pounds** and thus **began my weight loss** journey.

Things I Tried to Lose Weight

That same summer I **joined the gym** on campus and **attended kickboxing classes**. I ran on the track and used the **weight machines**. It was not on a very well structured or well thought out plan but all I knew was that I **needed to keep moving**. I was **not familiar with any of the equipment** but I would go to each machine and read the instructions and try it. I am not even sure how I chose the number of reps or sets and most times I **felt silly doing the exercises**. However, I found that I enjoyed exercising and that I found it easy. I **went to the gym regularly** and by the end of that summer was **down a few dress sizes**.

I have done many different things as it relates to **my exercise regimen** over the years including running, kickboxing, aerobics, swimming, yoga, tennis, zumba, pilates, home exercise DVDs and weight training. At one point I even asked my husband to show me how to work out properly and that didn't go well. He walked around with his headphones on and pointed at machines from afar. In spite of my lack of knowledge I **continued to go to the gym** and try different things and because I have a short attention span I needed to mix it up to stay motivated. Of all the activities I did, **running was my favorite**. I purchased a book about running and began to **train for a half marathon**. Over the years I became better at running longer and longer distances every day however **I remained relatively large**. Now that I think back I think my body must have been like, 'oh no, she has gone crazy, who knows how long she is going to keep this up, let's go into preservation mode and hold onto all the fat. Better still; lets' make her hungrier so she eats more and more food'. As a result **I was a fat runner**. I just **never** really **learnt the proper ways to eat** while training and **never learnt which were the best ways to fuel my body** and replenish depleted supplies. In some ways I **felt like I could eat anything because I ran** so much not realizing that what I ate was even more important than how much I exercised. I spent **five years in this pointless cycle**, never really making any significant changes in my body, or my mental and emotional health. I was **still** emotionally vulnerable and **used food for comfort**.

Over the years **my eating habits have been haphazard** and inconsistent. I have **tried this and that diet** in an attempt to lose weight. I have attempted several fad diets or some variation of one. Below are **some of the fad diets that I have tried**. I am sure that some of you reading this have tried some of them as well.

Cabbage Soup Diet

One of the first fad diets that I tried was the cabbage soup diet. This diet required that you **eat insane amounts of cabbage soup** and as much of it as you want.

The funny thing is that the soup **was so gross** you didn't want to eat that much of it. And when you did eat the soup it **made you go to the bathroom** with the chance that the contents will come out of

either end. I **lost a significant amount of weight** in two weeks but after the diet was over **the weight came right back**. I was just so glad to be able to eat normal food that I **ate extra to make up for what I missed** and gained even more weight than I had lost.

Diet Pills

I have tried a fair share of pills and **had really bad experiences**. I tried a pill that was marketed as a ***fat blocker***. It was supposed to stop your body from absorbing fat from food. Unfortunately it **brought a whole lot of other problems**. I was **constipated for days** and ended up having to take drastic measures just to be able to go. I took pills that were supposedly ***carb blockers*** and mentally felt like I had a free pass on carbs. I **ate more carbs than I did before** and discovered the hard way that the pills **did not actually block carbs**. I tried ***Conjugated Linoleic Acid***, commonly known as CLA, which was really expensive. While I was taking it I found that I **would sweat a whole lot** and as soon as I stopped taking it the **weight came right back**. It wasn't really fat I was losing, it was just water and it took me **several hundred dollars** to discover that. I also tried different pills that contained hoodia, acai berry and green tea each time they were touted as the secret to fast weight loss.

Atkins Diet

The Atkins diet was another interesting diet. It relied on **limiting your carbs** to 20 grams per day which is less than 7% of the recommended 300 grams you are supposed to eat. That is a **very difficult thing to do** if you like fruits and vegetables, let alone bread, pasta, grains and other foods. Most times all I could **eat** was **chicken, beef and fish** and even then only certain kinds. You would think for a meat lover like me this diet would have been great but it actually **got to a point where I felt disgusted** eating that much meat. Honestly speaking I **missed my vegetables**, my breath was awful and again I **became super constipated**.

Special K Diet

The Special K diet was the hardest. This diet required you **to eat three meals a day**, two of which were **bowls of special K cereal** and nothing else. If you can imagine what that third meal contained, you know right away that it defeated the entire purpose of reducing calories and watching what I ate. I made up for **not eating much** all day by eating extra at dinner. My **biggest binges** probably **occurred during this period** in my life. To this day I can't stand Special K cereal. I understand it has somewhat changed since I did it several years ago and **now sounds a lot like the slim fast diet**, which I tried as well. I would still be **reluctant to try it again** because of the challenges I had with the slim fast diet.

Slim Fast

The slim fast diet required that you **eat three snacks, two shakes or meal bars** and one balanced meal each day. It might have been bearable if the shakes and bars didn't **taste so bad**. It was especially challenging because mentally I did not feel satisfied

with having a shake as a meal. I still **felt deprived and craved regular food** more and more. It would have been nice if they had specified what exactly a balanced meal is. I thought they meant I needed to balance out all the meals I missed and make up for them in one meal. Again, this **totally defeated the purpose**. They say the plan can be sustained long term which I suppose would be true for a person who hates food. And quite frankly I am not a fan of meal replacement shakes and bars with all their **processed ingredients and artificial flavors and preservatives**.

Other Types of Fad Diets

All of these diets had two things in common, one was the fact that they were diets and two, **each time I lost the weight, I would gain it right back and more**. I think I had developed a mentality of just toughing it out for a month or so and then I could go back to 'normal eating'. Well, whenever I went back to normal eating, my body went back to its 'normal weight'. I have **tried some weight loss systems** from some pretty reputable companies and once again the weight always came back with a vengeance. I have also **tried to restrict certain food groups** and went for long periods without eating certain foods as I attempted to do **low fat diets, low carb diets and meatless diets**. And true to form, as soon as the diet was over, the weight came back.

My Counting Calories Phase

I encountered a **very challenging period in my life** where I became desperate to lose weight. Many things in my life were out of control and so I sought to gain control over my body. I **began to count calories to an extreme**. At first I was eating **1600 calories**, then I reduced it to **1400 calories** and then to **1200 calories** while

exercising twice a day. Unfortunately it was very little food and 1200 calories of the wrong food. I **became thin and sickly looking.** My skin became dry, my hair was sparse and my breath was terrible. I was so undernourished that I was often disoriented and confused. When people tried to point out how bad I looked and tried to get me to stop I **became secretive.** I would eat with everyone else and then I would **make myself throw up and use laxatives.** When I was alone I didn't eat at all. I devoted everything to becoming thin and even though I became extremely thin I was **still unhappy with how I looked.** I was searching for an ideal that I could not reach by restricting calories or **making myself vomit.** Being a student of psychology I knew that this was unhealthy and I **needed to change my behaviors** and come to terms with my self-image and my relationship with food.

The Turning Point

One day, quite by chance I was told about a magazine that led me to several different books. I **began to educate myself about healthy food** and making a lifestyle change. My focus **shifted from wanting to be thinner** to wanting to be healthier. My exercise habits changed as well. I changed from running 50 miles per week to **running less and lifting more weights.** I started eating more food and my body responded well. It was amazing. I was **eating more food** and sometimes couldn't even finish it. I was having **balanced meals** and more of the food I had restricted for many months. I was so happy to have the option of **eating a variety of real delicious food.** The changes did not come overnight as I sometimes struggled with my self-perception and my goals. However the most important thing is that I stopped the cycle of trying this and that and **began to learn about food and how to use food** to fuel my body and become healthier.

Many other changes took place when I started eating well. The most important being that I was **no longer feeling restricted** and so I no longer experienced cravings.

When my friends wanted to go out to eat I no longer experienced anxiety about the type of restaurant and what I would eat; I now knew how to make good food choices at restaurants. I also **confronted my feelings of inadequacy**; many of which were centered on my childhood experiences, my perception about how I looked and being a perfectionist. I **started to focus on the things I liked about myself** and the things I was good at rather than fixating on the things I thought were wrong with me. Reducing negative **feelings about myself improved** my mood and I no longer needed to use food for comfort.

Things I Have Learnt

Over the years I have learnt **lessons that have been valuable** in one form or another. I feel that if I had not had the experiences I may not have grown to become the person I am today with the knowledge I have about food and good nutrition. I have learnt a tremendous amount of **things that you should not do to lose weight**. Below I have highlighted a few of the more important ones.

No Magic Weight Loss Pill

I learnt that there is no 'magic pill' or special foods **that will make you lose weight**. It all comes down to making the right food choices and becoming disciplined. There are **no shortcuts** and if anyone promises you a shortcut, trust and believe it will also be a **short trip right back where you started**. Sure certain combinations of food will satisfy your hunger and fuel your body well but ultimately you have to eliminate certain foods, expend more energy than you consume and be consistent.

Exercise Alone is Not Enough

I learnt that working out alone is not enough to lose weight. Think about it; you **work out for one hour each day and then spend the rest of the day eating** in an uncontrolled manner, it won't balance out. What you eat is the most important thing, **working out merely compliments your efforts** with your food. With that being said what you eat after each workout is extremely important. After burning energy doing a certain activity you **need to replenish nutrients** and give your body the right food to repair itself and become stronger. The best gains in a beautiful body are made right after you work out and you eat the right food to replenish your body. I get very hungry after working out and planning the **meal after my workout ensures that I eat properly** and don't go crazy eating everything in sight afterwards.

Avoid Processed Foods

The day that I **eliminated processed foods** was the day it all turned around for me. Understanding that processed foods **such as white flour, white sugar and white rice** have all the goodness stripped from them therefore: (1) you can never get enough because your body is yearning for the **nutrients that have been taken away**; and (2) you eat those processed foods and they **go right through you** leaving you wanting more. How many times have you purchased those 100 calorie bags of something and eaten 6 of them? Processed food **does nothing to satisfy hunger** and to fuel and strengthen your body whereas natural and whole food leaves you satisfied and you subsequently eat less.

Food and Emotions

For many years I used **food as a source of comfort**. Oh those dreaded comfort foods. Ironically I ate because I was **depressed about my weight** and gained weight because I ate and the cycle continued itself for many years. I **ate to satisfy feelings of sadness, anger and boredom**. I discovered that when I used food as comfort, the food choices were very bad and my guard was down which meant I could not resist the feeling or think through a situation rationally. Many times this **occurred at night** which added to the problem because of the high number of calories consumed **before going to bed**. I learnt that I needed to deal with my negative feelings and think through them rather than try to cover up the feelings and **make myself feel better with food**.

Healthy Food Can Be Delicious

I learnt that **healthy food was not boring**. In fact, when you strip the sauces, the cheeses and the sugar, **food in its natural form is delicious**. I started trying out new recipes and can't really say I have ever been disappointed. I find that when I order what used to be **my old favorite food I find it too sweet, too salty or too fatty**. I choose to prepare all my meals and most days I eat something different such that there is no chance of getting overwhelmed or bored from eating the same food. And if there is something I like, **I make plenty of it and eat it often**. There are an endless number of combinations of healthy food to create a **party for your mouth and stomach** every day.

Preparing Healthy Food is Not Time Consuming

Preparing nutritious and healthy meals **need not be time consuming** and difficult. There are many **simple and delicious recipes** available that are not demanding or complicated. If I have to stand in the kitchen to cook breakfast, lunch and dinner every single day then chances are I am going to take shortcuts and make unwise food decisions. I have found **creative ways to organize my life** such that I am able to successfully **eat healthy home cooked food while juggling a crazy schedule**. I am a full time graduate student, I have two small children, and I work as a behavioral therapist, all while my husband is away in the navy. **If I can do it so can you**.

Counting Calories

I now have a **new found appreciation for calories**. We gain weight when we eat more than we burn and we lose weight when we burn more than we eat. It's that simple. I also learnt that **counting calories** and being overly obsessed with them is not the best way to lose weight either. In an effort to restrict calories, one **can do more harm than good** and deprive the body of enough food and limit certain foods. The **quality of the food** you eat and how your body makes use of it **is more important**. When I began to focus on getting a **good balance of all the nutrients** I began to nourish my body well and found it was **easier to eat less food** without feeling like I was starving.

Weight Loss is a Journey

The most important lesson I have learnt is that weight loss is a journey, **not a destination**. I had to learn about food and make a mental shift about how I viewed food

in order to **make lasting changes**. Even after reaching my weight loss goal, I have managed to keep the weight off because the lessons I have learnt have carried over and helped me maintain my present weight. I **prepare meals that are delicious and healthy** for my family and spend time being active with my family. I **exercise regularly** and feel good all around. I no longer have uncontrollable cravings and do not feel the need to binge on any unhealthy food items. Now and again I challenge myself and set new fitness goals and **try new fitness activities** and that keeps me motivated to live a healthy lifestyle.

The Obesity Epidemic

As most of you are aware, there is an obesity epidemic in America and the statistics are staggering. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(www.cdc.gov):

- ❖ **More than one-third of U.S. adults** (35.7%) are obese
- ❖ In the U.S. approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of **children and adolescents** aged 2—19 years are obese
- ❖ Obesity-related conditions including **heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes** and certain types of **cancer** are some of the leading causes of death in the U. S.
- ❖ **Blacks/African Americans** have the **highest rates of obesity** (44.1%) compared with Mexican Americans (39.3%), all Hispanics (37.9%) and non-Hispanic whites (32.6%)
- ❖ **Behavior and environment** play a large role in causing people to be overweight and obese. These are the greatest areas for prevention and treatment actions

- ❖ As weight increases to reach the levels referred to as "**overweight**" and "**obese**," there is an **increased risk** of the following conditions:
 - Coronary heart disease
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)
 - Hypertension (high blood pressure)
 - Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
 - Stroke
 - Liver and Gallbladder disease
 - Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
 - Osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint)
 - Gynecological problems (abnormal menses, infertility)

Among **Blacks/African Americans**, the reasons for the growing rates of obesity are mainly related to behavioral and **ethnic/cultural factors**. The food we eat is sometimes unhealthy and the manner in which it is prepared is also sometimes unhealthy. Many times **we eat certain foods** because that is what we grew up eating and those habits are difficult to change. I know as a Zimbabwean I love **oxtail**, chicken livers, sadza, **white rice**, creamy salads, **fried foods** and baked goods but eating that food regularly is **detrimental to my health** and so I have had to learn how to manage the cultural dynamics related to food.

My Mission Today

As a result of the challenges and obstacles I went through I decided that I wanted to make it a life mission **to share with others all the things that I have learnt**. Many times in my journey I felt alone and wished there was someone I could ask questions,

someone who could simplify the process for me and someone who could motivate me and inspire me to make changes and stick to them. **I truly believe that a good number of people** who are currently overweight are in that predicament because of a **lack of knowledge and support**.

At this phase of my weight loss journey, I have decided that **I would like to create a community** of people who are also on a weight loss journey. My new found mission has led me to create the website www.sheltersweightloss.com and the Facebook page Shelter's Weight Loss. A key feature of my new website is my nutritional coaching service. This service offers individuals the option to purchase various levels of support along with **delicious meal plans** that can help them lose weight. I work with people to **identify their goals** and create a personalized meal plan that will help them reach those goals. I provide **personal support, give tips and hints, and answer questions** to ensure success. While I would like to provide this service for free so as to reach as many people as possible, I have found that it is not possible for me to do that as it requires that I spend more and more time away from my job therefore I must supplement my income. I allocate a significant amount of time to each individual as **I design special meal plans tailor-made to suit their needs and spend time answering questions** and making modifications based on preferences and success. I have done my best to **keep the cost low** so as to make it easier for people to access the service.

On my website you will also find my blog where I share my experiences and what I have learnt over the years. I write on various topics related to weight loss, health and nutrition based on my own experiences. The website also a section where you will find **recommendations for vitamins, supplements and other products** that I have found to be beneficial in my weight loss journey. I will be offering **webinars every so often** that will cover important topics on weight loss, health and nutrition.

I **welcome people with various backgrounds** and who are at various stages of their weight loss journey. However, I would like to extend a **sincere invitation to those are just beginning their journey** and don't know what they need to do. I would also like to especially invite **those who have tried EVERYTHING and failed**. This is a place where you can get reliable, helpful information. I would like to **save people the turmoil and agony** I endured over the years by simplifying the process and providing the help and support you need.

My Facebook page is also a wonderful resource. Shelter's Weight Loss on Facebook is a positive page, **a place where people can be supportive of one another** and encourage each other on their journey. This is a community of people who have decided to **get off the roller coaster ride of losing weight** and gaining weight endlessly. I am on Facebook regularly and so people can have the greatest access to me and can ask questions and get answers to questions.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I hope that you find **encouragement** to begin your weight loss journey and head **towards success**. I look forward to you visiting my [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page.