

Chapter 4, "Defects."

Folks who weigh 500 pounds don't get there eating to satisfy hunger. All those I know who weigh or weighed 500 or thereabouts got there by finding solace in food. I suppose I should speak only for myself, but if you know a 500-pound person who has reached the self-actualization level of Maslow's hierarchy, get his autograph because I think that's a rare find. As for me, I have what I call defects.

Since to be able to tell this story I have to reveal some deep, dark secrets, I really didn't want to write this. However, my mission is to help others. My hope is someone who shares a parallel universe will find that help in these pages. So tonight when I was crying in a restaurant parking lot, I realized I must write this now. Since I am dead-smack in the midst of a crisis with one of my most agonizing defects, it's time to tell the story. I'm telling it to those folks, supersized people, diehard food addicts, whether you are, like me, recovering from that state or currently living in it. If you are helped by this story, please let me know. If anyone out there shares any of my secrets or defects, please let me know that, too!

Everywhere I go people tell me I inspire them. I've done nothing special. I've done nothing that others can't do. Many people have done far greater things than I have done and much earlier in their lives. So that I could be an inspiration is sometimes a tough pill to swallow. Maybe once you read this chapter, you will find me the opposite of inspiring.

An alcoholic escapes into a bottle. A drug addict escapes into his or her drug of choice. I escape into food. "Recovering" means to me that I will always fight this battle against the edible enemy.

Okay. So I mentioned secrets and defects. Sigh. Here we go. My food addiction carries baggage. Inside those suitcases are feelings of low self-esteem, worthlessness, self-loathing, and self-destruction. It's only been since January 2010 that I've **started** to open these suitcases and deal with the contents. The process is far from over. Avoidance is a powerful tool. Sometimes others jump in front and open the suitcases for you. Then you react. At least for me, my reactions shock others.

What happens when someone doesn't like him or her self? Speaking for myself, I give. I have difficulty receiving. When I say "difficulty," I really mean "DIFFICULTY." I'll give you a smattering of examples. I once went to a rehab facility for food addicts in Florida, one of my many radical attempts to lose weight. When anyone tried to hug me, I started hyperventilating. Why? I felt I didn't deserve hugs.

Another example, when one of my sisters-in-law insisted on giving me a Christmas gift, I stopped participating in family Christmas events. Why? I felt unworthy of receiving gifts.

Yet another example, one of the kindest, most caring people who has ever walked the face of the Earth mailed me a box of her old shirts once. I didn't have the money to return them and felt sick about it. I pretty much ended the friendship over that. Fortunately, I found her on Facebook after many, many years, but we will never be able to go back where we were. I felt I was not worthy of the gift and lost a loving friend because of it.

Christmas gifts have sat on my desk over two Christmases unopened. Some people learned not to wrap them. Then they would sit on the table unwrapped forever. Brandi yelled at me about a gift Carl got me one Christmas that I left on the table and told me if I didn't take it, she would. So I put it in my room. I've never used it. Why? Same as before, I didn't deserve to receive.

When Pet Harbor had its tenth anniversary celebration, standing in front of the crowd, the board members presented me with a gift commemorating my service to the rescue. They wanted me to

talk. All I wanted to do was run. Wouldn't you think I would appreciate a gift like that? Who wouldn't? It was an awesome gift. I couldn't accept it. Alas, I was in front of a crowd of people. I had no choice but to accept it – at least at that moment.

Same thing happens when folks try to help me in other ways. I am a giver. I can't receive. After all, Acts 20:35 says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Corollary to the feelings of worthlessness, I have a defect where I have to portray strength and not portray vulnerability. Many times when others cry, I suppress tears. Subconsciously I tell myself the mighty oak must not bend. To have to come face to face with these defects shoves me into shutdown mode, in which my first task is to look for an escape route.

I try to hide this part of me. I try to not let people see these defects. Well, I guess I should say I "tried" because after this chapter, the cat's out of the bag. Other than these secrets, my life primarily tends to be an open book.

Okay. If anybody else out there has these irrational defects I have, guess what. You're okay. It's okay to be who you are. It's okay to be the way you are. For me, it's something I want to change, but wherever you are in your life is just fine. We all are at different places at different times, and there's nothing wrong with where you are at any given time in your journey. Come as you are. For me the part I find wrong is if I am stagnant, if I stay at a place I don't like and don't try to move forward. For others, they are where they are for whatever reason, and that should not be viewed as a bad thing.

Quick synopsis of July-August 2011 - I got pretty sick with infections playing dominoes with a kidney stone as the springboard, was hospitalized, and am fine now. Discovered through this process, I have other medical needs in other areas that require up-front co-pays, for which I have no insurance to cover. So I have to pay cash I cannot afford.

A much loved friend, Lehnanne, wanted to set up some kind of fund to help me. I quickly shot that down. I told her absolutely I could never accept that and have ended friendships for less. Three other friends wanted to come and do things around the house for me that I could not do while sick. I kept explaining I cannot accept that. Eventually they realized I was serious.

So, unbeknownst to me, friends – I'm not sure who exactly – erected a website and gathered a lot of money to help me. Upon opening the envelope, I started hyperventilating and shaking and went into shutdown and escape mode. I withdrew. I tore it all up and drove the torn pieces back to the person who admitted playing a part. I was so ashamed at the thought of being a charity case I could not even look at the person, left the envelope on the stoop, knocked, and left.

Though I could not read the website because the thought of it made me sick to my stomach, I scanned down the page enough to know it was about me and my recent medical crises. Broadcasting their personal information would have bothered ordinary folk. Surely you know by now I'm far from ordinary. Having my personal info on that website without my permission didn't bother me in the least. As I said, my life is an open book. What bothered me was trifold: a) betrayal – they knew I had issues with receiving gifts, knew how it would affect me, yet did it anyway; b) humiliation – they asked people to give me money; and c) devastation – knowing how my life would be affected going forward from that point.

Honestly, I hope none of you supersized folks like me out there have this defect, but whatever your most concealed flaw(s) are, if you're like me, you probably feel like you walk that part of your walk alone. You don't. Hopefully you will learn here that everybody has defects. They make us human. Does it make us less wonderful? No. Does it mean we should hate ourselves? No. No matter what

anyone wants you to believe, no one is perfect. I don't know if those folks who have never suffered from addiction are born loving themselves or if they have to learn it. I can tell you it's been a lifelong process for me. It's only been 1.5 years since I've begun to like myself. Unfortunately, that is the key that unlocks the door to recovery. Weight loss and its maintenance begin and end with liking yourself and accepting yourself for the person you are: blemishes and all.

Others may not understand your defects. I find nobody understands mine. That makes no difference. You are not obligated to tell anyone why you have defects. It's your own personal battle, not theirs. As your friends, they may feel they have to deal with it in a fashion different from the way in which you want them to deal with it. Understand that the same as it's okay for you to be at the place you are in your life course, it's okay for them to be where they are, too.

After I gave the torn pieces of the money to the one person I knew led the drive, I was visited by someone very dear to me. When she knocked on my bedroom door and I did not answer, she came in anyway. I felt violated. I felt disrespected. I felt betrayed. I felt caged. I started hyperventilating yet again. I just wanted to be left alone. Shutdown mode. Withdrawal. This is when the questions started, "Why are you this way?" Why do I have defects? I'm human. Why do I have this defect? I have feelings of worthlessness. Why do I have feelings of worthlessness? Those secrets are deep-rooted. Do I know why? Yep. Do I care to share that? Nope. Do I have to share that? No, I do not. They're my feelings. I'm aware of them. I own them. And nobody needs to know why I am the way I am to love me. They can understand that I am this way, period. Now, as I said earlier, one of my issues was that my friends knew how I was and still did this to me. Everybody knows how much my friends mean to me, how much I love them, how much I am loved by them. Now, a week after this volcano has erupted and the lava has cooled, retrospect taps me on the shoulder and says perhaps this particular friend who came to my house, who was doing everything she in her mind could think to do for me, didn't have a clue how the gesture would affect me. After all, didn't I do my job and hide this part of me well? So we start with the first clue to the realization of how unfair my reactions were to those who did this to me or for me, whichever way one perceives it.

So I found myself in a place where I shut down. I pushed everyone away and could only think of how and where to run. I'm not talking about run as in another 5k. I'm talking about run as in moving somewhere no one knows me or my defects, I won't be humiliated or betrayed, and I don't have to deal with my worthlessness issues, a self-created witness protection program, so to speak. Escape. Maybe this is why I like the Siberian Husky so much. Like Siberians, I am stubborn, rebellious, and want to escape.

So in withdrawal mode this week, I avoided talking to anyone I thought was associated with the gift. Did I cry? No. Mighty oaks do not bend. I did talk to people on the computer. After all, they could not force me to be vulnerable! As I said, I did not know for sure who was behind this. One said she acted alone. Another admitted her participation. I did talk to a couple of people I knew were not connected to this. I did cry a little when I talked to my sister-in-law (not the sister-in-law mentioned above). She knows how I am. She's gotten me gifts I wouldn't take. She loves me anyway. So when I finished telling her all of this, she simply and lovingly said, "You have to apologize to all those people." Of course, at that point I didn't think that was right. Again, I must emphasize that wherever you are is okay. Food addicts – at least this food addict – get to debilitating weight levels because we think we are not okay and we shovel in our drug (food) to numb the pain. So please if you get nothing else from this, get that wherever you are is okay! You are not a bad person, no matter where you are. Hopefully you are or will get to a point where you strive to improve and learn that there is no bad place from which you cannot emerge and you can love yourself. I thought at one point this week I would not be able to fix this, but that's not the case. I may not be able to fix all of the problems it begat, but I fixed my thinking. And that's the important part. Okay. So back to the point. In my mind where I was at that point, I believed that these people did not do this for me, did not do this out of

love. I believed they did it for self-gratification. In fact, I was actually told that. The person who told me she led the effort told me “They all said you'd be mad,” “I hate when I can't do anything, and this is the one thing that I know how to do,” and “[S]he said you would have a strong reaction to this.” In my head, I was unable to wrap my brain cells around that. Again, I don't know but do have my suspicions who instituted the whole thing. These were my friends, my cherished, trusted, beloved friends, people for whom I would do anything, the most thoughtful people in the world, people I loved immensely, and they knew I would be angry and did it anyway??? Why? They did it because, despite knowing my reaction, to feel good about themselves, they had to react. My feelings didn't matter.

Or so I thought.

An awesome, very intelligent, loving, and remarkably intuitive lifelong friend – well, we got separated for 20 years, but isn't Facebook wonderful? – and I had a discussion about some things from our childhood, teenage years, and college life. She has a super fantastic memory. She wrote, in part, “You went through some crazy 'figuring yourself out' times once we got to Shepherd [college] and I always attributed that to [the genesis of your worthless feelings] “and knew in my heart that until you came to terms with [that], there was nothing any of the rest of us could do to pull you back. Learning to love ourselves is one of life's hardest lessons and I'm so glad you found a wonderful group of people to show you what it is to be loved for who you are. You are a survivor - always have been. As for gifts from friends - you need to learn to accept the positive - it doesn't always come with a string attached, or with a 'now if you would only....' - it comes from their heart. Really - you are so blessed to have a wonderful loving daughter, brothers, and extended family - I can see it in your pictures. More often than not - accepting someone's gift is the best way to say thank you - it makes them feel good and loved too.”

No matter how I saw it, I knew the collection was not done with malicious intent. I believed they thought they had good intent, but the underlying intent I thought, unbeknownst to them, was not good.

My daughter was affected by this. She's the one who handed me the card and showed me the website. So she was in the epicenter or eye of the hurricane, so to speak, to borrow concepts that are fresh in our minds this week. If you read chapter 3, you know after many years of not believing so, I finally believe I'm a good mom. So I knew I had to try to fix this with her first. Several friends called this week and spoke to my voice mail because I could not answer. Besides needing to fix it with my daughter first, I really wasn't ready to fix it with anyone else yet. I was still bruised and wilting. For my daughter, who knew exactly how I would react, I expected she would have quashed their idea and stopped it from happening. Early on this week I realized how unfair that was. My daughter has spent many years being my protector and caretaker and doing things for me I was too fat to do. She should never have been my protector and caretaker. I should be hers. I should have always been, but food addiction, like all addictions, affects not only the addict but those who love her. Anyway, I could not think of others until I fixed this with my daughter. I tried all week to no avail to talk to her. I thought I would go to her anyway, but if I expected people to respect me by not violating my boundaries, how could I do that to her?

Thursday night, yet another close and dear friend called and said she wanted to talk to me about this. As I said, I had to talk to my daughter first. I'm a mom. That's priority one. So I could not talk to this friend. It broke my heart to tell her “Can't talk. Sorry.” I don't know if she will understand or forgive, but, as I said, where I am, things I've done, where I go from here, it's all okay. I'm not a bad person, and I don't hate myself anymore. C'est la vie, and I'll keep going forward regardless.

Tonight I wrote a six-page story for my daughter, revealing more secrets than I probably should have, and read it to her. Hopefully one day she will forgive me, and we'll move forward.

Yesterday I had another visit at what has become my summer home, the Gateway Building at MCV Hospitals, for part one of yet another test. On my way home, I stopped at a restaurant. I was either going to revert to my food addiction and pig out or sit in the parking lot and have a discussion with myself. After some agonizing internal battles, I chose the latter. These battles will happen the rest of our lives, recovering food addicts, but as time passes, they are fewer & far between & easier to manage. Even when we fall, what we do after falling is what is important. At least that is how I see things.

Many things raced through my mind. I preach to my daughter "You can't change other people, only yourself." I can't change what other people do. Whether they think they are doing it for me or I believe they are doing it to me, I can't change them. In this whole ordeal, all I can change is me and how I deal with things. Obviously I didn't like how I dealt with it. So that meant I had to change how I handled this and future incidents like this. Not accepting the money didn't mean I had to react the way I did. I could have chosen to be nice, return it, and say, "While I appreciate that you love me enough to do something like this for me, I can't accept it." My grandmother drilled into me "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything." Though as I've recovered the last year and a half and have tried to remember that, I'm human. I forget sometimes.

So in that parking lot, I reread the email I got from a friend who is a minister. I shared the chip in this mighty oak with him. He taught me that, even though Acts 20:35 says what it says, I am missing the other half, that to not receive, I am robbing the givers of being blessed. In that parking lot, I cried. The thought of robbing those I love was unbearable. The whole idea that I have a defect on display now was unbearable. Recalling the events of this past week was unbearable. I finally had the good cry I needed. I then turned to God. I told Him I want to fix this whole thing, that I know they didn't mean it malevolently and I didn't want to lose these people, but I didn't think it could be fixed. My minister friend had told me, talking about something else, to "bring the broken pieces and lay them down at the foot of the cross. Jesus will make you whole again." It was then that Jesus said to me, "Take my hand." I knew no matter what, even if nobody forgives me, I am not alone. I don't have to be strong all the time. I can allow Him to carry me. He carried me up I-95 because I sure don't know how I drove home through the tears.

I am convinced everything happens for a reason. My guess is the reason for this whole thing happening is so I can help at least one person who is suffering from a defect similar to mine. If that's you, you can love yourself, no matter where you are or what character malfunctions you have because you are a beautiful person, imperfect like the rest of us, and drug (food) consumption doesn't help you or anything else. No matter where you are in your journey, you can improve, you can go forward, and you can love yourself. I am proof. I have unique flaws. See? I shared my flaws with the world, and it won't stop me from my weight loss journey. I've lost 236 pounds. I'm not going to let this stop me.

One of my friends told me "I tried to think if I have something I feel so strongly about, how I would react if someone went against my wishes in that regard, and I can't put myself in your place because I can't think of anything." To those I've hurt through this ordeal, I don't expect you to understand why I am the way I am. It is my hope, though, you will listen and understand that where I am in my life, I cannot receive, but I am working on it. Years ago I could not accept old clothes from people. I've been able to in the last year accept old clothes from three people. So I'm getting better, but it's a process. I'm sorry I hurt you. I hope you forgive me and we move forward.

The one said it was all her doing. I don't believe for a second that is true. While I know she is one of the sweetest, most caring people in the world and successfully solicits millions of dollars from organizations in her job, I am sure she did not act alone in this. Because she cares so deeply about

others, though, she wanted to take the blame to protect them. She is a really good friend. Immediately before this all happened, she was one of two friends who helped me edit a submission to a TV show for a makeover. I hope she forgives me, and we can go forward.

The one who came to see me the day after this happened is someone very important to me who has never and would never do anything to me she thought would cause me harm. Like me, she is a mighty oak. So she wouldn't show that this hurt her, but I know it did, and I know she was confused because she was showing me so much love and thought I was rejecting it. She's used to fixing things. Not being able to fix me I know was a problem for her. She's used to trying to protect me. The fact that I was pushing her away I know was hard for her. I hope she forgives me, and we can go forward.

The one who tried to call me when I said "No. Sorry" is another one of the sweetest people in the world. She's a very giving person. She would and does do anything in the world for those she loves, even getting a pedicure for the first time in her life. ☺ She's always the first one there when a loved one needs her. The fact that I wouldn't even talk to her I'm sure hurt her. All I can do is apologize. I hope she forgives me, and we can go forward.

The one who cried when she presented me with the award at the 10th anniversary celebration I'm sure was a part of this. Even though she knew how I would react to this, I'm sure she felt like she had to do something for me because she loves me and she is a very giving Christian person. I'm sure my rejection of all of this hit her pretty hard, and she's pretty upset with how I hurt others with my reactions. I hope she and others who got hurt by this forgive me, and we can go forward.

To my food addict friends, you see, you can be humble and have flaws and keep going forward in your journey. I'm nobody special. I don't have superpowers. I am human with some pretty significant defects and put myself in a place from which it is difficult to recover, but it is not impossible. With the compassion of those who love you, you can improve. And wherever you are in your journey, you CAN love yourself, all of you, your F moments as well as your A moments. Even if humans don't forgive you, you have done what you can to remedy your mistakes, and you have God and me. ☺

Keep it moving forward.

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