

## Chapter 5. "Normal."

Losing a great deal of weight, at least for me, changes the definition of normal. Of course, those who know me well know I'm not really "normal" in many ways or, should I say, in many of life's stanzas, I tend to walk to the beats of different drummers. I like being different in that sense. Normal, however, in everyday life is to me a goal or achievement.

As applied to day-to-day events, my normal changed when I lost weight and will, I suspect, change again when I reach what I consider to be "normal" weight. Normal is an individualized thing, I believe, not a clean black, white, or perhaps gray fit into a societal normal. Unfortunately, obesity pretty much defined my prior normal. I only speak for myself and don't pretend to know if this applies to others similarly situated. For me, I find it odd how losing weight has changed so many things in so many different areas of my life. Those realizations are continuous. Of course, as I live life, it all seems "normal" to me in my existence. Now that I live a different existence, I am discovering my whole concept of normal is new and changed. I'm living a whole new normal and loving this one.

My father and I don't always see eye to eye. When a short time ago he told me I "look normal now," that to me became the ultimate compliment he ever gave. At 500 pounds, I felt abnormal, a freak, like I stood out from the crowd. Of course, that feeling was solidified by society's viewpoint and people's shunning. Sometimes it made me think perhaps I had the plague or something. That feeling of abnormality bred a bunch of garbage, like depression, self-built rejection shields, and self-inflicted isolation. Anyway, when I shared how much what Dad said meant to me and others didn't seem to understand why his statement was a good thing, one of those surprising realizations happened. It occurred to me that folks who have never suffered from what is scientifically defined as morbid obesity have no clue how those who have suffered from it feel. Those who have always lived a normal life, in other words, couldn't understand how I felt abnormal or the changes in my feelings. So I find myself back at the writing table, really just for me, but maybe others who are morbidly obese have these feelings and will gain something from this as well. At 500, my goal wasn't to wear a bikini or run a marathon or share a rollercoaster ride with my daughter. My goal was to feel normal, to blend in, to not stand out. Sound simple? It wasn't. It was powerful & consuming.

While my normal at 500 created my frowns, my current normal causes my smiles. Walking into a Walmart and buying something off the rack and having it fit was a huge boost to my happiness. While winning a trophy might be a big deal to someone else, might be someone else's normal, that could not have topped a Walmart buy for me. Another realization – what others take for granted are at least perceived as hardships or impossibilities for at least this formerly morbidly obese person, such as buying off the rack in regular stores. I couldn't even buy off the rack in what I call fat stores, such as Lane Bryant. How, I wondered, did I ever buy clothes before the advent of the internet since that was the only place I could shop in my former existence. Clothes I ordered fit. I didn't have to try to get my legs to walk into a store and be able to breathe enough to try on something. I didn't have to worry about stares/rude comments or not fitting in a bathroom or breaking a chair in a fitting room or embarrassing my daughter the short time she worked in a fat store. The day I first walked out of Walmart with two rack items in my bag that fit I remember smiling from ear to ear all the way home.

For probably a year, Samantha has told me I need new running shoes. My brother, someone I perceive as a fitness expert, also told me the importance of the investment in good running shoes. So I added "buy new running shoes" to my "when I can afford it" list. Samantha took me to VA Runner store to buy my first pair a couple of months before my first 5K (June 2010). I've barely taken them off since.

The last probably ten trips on the treadmill, I've had an unusual sensation of an impending fall. To no avail, I kept trying to determine its cause. Finally, during my most recent treadmill experience a light bulb moment occurred because it then dawned on me my feet were swimming in my shoes. Aha. The shoes! That must be the cause. My shoes still worked great for road running, but my theory became they were wreaking havoc with my treadmill time. Unfortunately, given my erratic work schedule, it's often either treadmill or nothing. Days I don't run are not very pleasant days for me or anyone around me.

Today, storm aftereffects be damned, I went to VA Runner store for running shoes #2. I walked up to the counter and announced, "It's time to replace my shoes." The salesman looked down over the counter and asked, "Triumphs?" Well, hmm. If you're talking about shoes, I don't have any idea what they are, but if you're talking about triumphs, yes, I've had a few! 😊 Apparently my shoes were Saucony Progrid Triumph 8. Though I told him I wasn't wedded to the brand and actually would prefer he found me a \$20 pair of whatever brand, he basically told me if it ain't broke, don't fix it, that if the shoes I had worked for me, I should stick with them. Since I confessed they were great until recently, he started to pull up my size on his computer. Because I said, "Oh, wait. I've lost weight since I bought this pair," he pulled out the measuring mechanism. When I took off my old shoes, he saw that they were 9W (wide width). So we measured. Seeming surprised, he checked the measurement a second time. After he brought shoes, I tried them on my feet. Perfect fit. I asked the size. I can't even type this without crying. I cry a lot now: happy tears. He said, "8 and a half **NORMAL** width." I heard just "normal." Normal. I'm normal now. Well, not really but really! Normal. Much like a hambone is a good soup starter, hearing "normal" is a good smile starter for me.

So I happily walked around Wegman's (For those who don't know Wegman's, it's a big and awesome grocery store.) to break in my new running shoes for an hour. Frozen groceries in tow in a town with a heat index this afternoon of about 115, I left Wegman's and I called Samantha to verify she was at her house so I could stop by on my way home (for only 30 seconds so I could get my frozen food home and safely tucked away before it had a meltdown). During the drive to her house, I meticulously planned out how I'd say it. I wanted to tell the whole story and then show her the shoes, without her realizing they were there. To hide the shoes, I pulled my pant legs down, covering the tongues and laces, revealing only the toe portions. Even though I thoroughly planned out this surprise, I feared "You're not going to be able to surprise her. She's a cop. She'll notice." So she comes to the door, "Hey, skinny. Are those shoes new?" I couldn't even blurt a half a sentence of my perfectly planned surprise! Of course, I started crying when I relayed the story and hit the "normal" part.

In planning that foiled surprise, it hit me how I now have a whole new normal. My normal at 500 was Velcro sneakers. My normal at 500 was sitting on the bed with a leg up to put on a shoe, and then switching to face the other side, pulling up the other leg, putting on my other shoe. My normal at 500 was having one shoe take the other shoe off (using my feet to take them off). My normal at 500 was never trying them on but knowing what size, having someone buy whatever Velcro sneakers they have in that size, and putting them on on my bed. My current normal is shoelaces! My current normal is sitting or standing and reaching to tie or remove my shoes! My current normal is walking into multiple stores, finding a pair of shoes I LIKE, trying on multiple pairs, buying whichever I choose, and smiling as I leave the stores!

One of the definitions of "normal" Merriam-Webster lists as "conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern." In my prior world as a morbidly obese person, every aspect of my normal in that sense was defined to the minutest of details by my obesity. If you care to read, here are some examples of how it was, is, and will be. As I said, I write these for me. If the need ever arises, I can look back and remember "That's why I don't want to go backwards."

**Old normal:** Automatic because the car I fit came in only that style.

**Current normal:** The car I have is an automatic.

**Future normal:** Clutch.

**Old normal:** Getting a Dodge Ram pickup because it's the only vehicle in which I could fit in the driver's seat

**Current normal:** Can't afford another vehicle, but I'm sure I could fit in others now. I've ridden in small cars as a passenger now.

**Future normal:** The world is my (fat-free) oyster.

**Old normal:** Wearing baggy shirts, pants, and tent dresses to cover all the rolls

**Current normal:** Wear fitted clothes, even though it shows rolls.

**Future normal:** Have the excess skin surgically extracted and continue to wear fitted clothes.

**Old normal:** Wearing size 8X elastic waistbanded pants.

**Current normal:** Wearing size 24-26 zippered pants.

**Future normal:** Wearing whatever I want in a much smaller size.

**Old normal:** Wearing size 8X Big Shirts from Making it Big in various different colors.

**Current normal:** Wearing size 18-20 tops in a variety of styles.

**Future normal:** Wearing whatever I want in a much smaller size.

**Old normal:** no bra

**Current normal:** sports bra

**Future normal:** Who knows?

**Old normal:** Grease, mozzarella, pizza, ice cream.

**Current normal:** Olive oil cooking spray, fat-free Parmesan, polenta & artichoke heart mini pizzas, Greek yogurt and fruit.

**Future normal:** Who knows?

**Old normal:** Mountain Dew.

**Current normal:** Diet Dr. Pepper Cherry and water.

**Future normal:** Water.

**Old normal:** Buying prepared holiday dinners from Boston Market or at a restaurant with seating I could fit

**Current normal:** Cook my own holiday dinners for many guests.

**Future normal:** Same as now.

**Old normal:** Hating spicy food.

**Current normal:** Purposely buy spicy food, take capsaicin pills, and put cayenne pepper on everything. (I find this change surprising.)

**Future normal:** Who knows?

**Old normal:** Asking if booth seating is stationary or how close together the pews are or if the theatre seats are individual chairs or bench-type seating

**Current normal:** Some booths are still too small, but many fit. Haven't found a pew I can't get into/out of lately and haven't been to a theatre in ages.

**Future normal:** No concerns with any seating.

**Old normal:** staying home

**Current normal:** on the go

**Future normal:** run and go

**Old normal:** Viewing Easter sunrise service from the car because I can't stand for long periods.

**Current normal:** Haven't gone to Easter service at all in years.

**Future normal:** Blending in with the crowd at Easter sunrise service.

**Old normal:** split keyboard.

**Current normal:** any keyboard.

**Future normal:** same as current

**Old normal:** Spending six months looking for a house that didn't have too many steps and where the toilets had space on the left so I could properly situate to wipe and one where I fit in the kitchen & doorways.

**Current normal:** Not in the market for a house, but none of that criteria would apply

**Future normal:** Who knows?

**Old normal:** Waiting in line for the handicapped stall because no other was big enough.

**Current normal:** All stalls work.

**Future normal:** Same as current.

**Old normal:** Being weighed on freight scales in the basement of hospitals.

**Current normal:** Use regular scales.

**Future normal:** Same as now.

**Old normal:** Not being able to get in and out of a bathtub.

**Current normal:** Use my soaking tub whenever I want .

**Future normal:** Same as now.

**Old normal:** sedentary

**Current normal:** active

**Future normal:** super active

**Old normal:** Placing concrete blocks and a rope in the pool at the old house to be able to get in and out and at public pools making sure there was walk-in access.

**Current normal:** Can climb in/out on ladders if that's the sole access.

**Future normal:** Climbing in/out on ladders with ease.

**Old normal:** The furthest thing from an athlete one can imagine.

**Current normal:** Triathlete.

**Future normal:** We'll see ☺

**Old normal:** Being breathless walking any further than the distance from my desk to the bathroom.

**Current normal:** Walk/Run over five miles.

**Future normal:** We'll see ☺

**Old normal:** No exercise classes.

**Current normal:** Aquatic exercise classes.

**Future normal:** Real (non-aquatic) exercise classes.

**Old normal:** No equipment.

**Current normal:** Treadmill, some machines, some exercises.

**Future normal:** No limits. Looking forward to elliptical, stairmaster, pushups, etc.

**Old normal:** bike-like machine.

**Current normal:** bike-like machine.

**Future normal:** spin bike.

**Future future normal:** real bike

**Old normal:** Jumping Jack = stepping from side to side raising & lowering arms.

**Current normal:** Jumping Jack = jumping a little straight up, raising & lowering arms.

**Future normal:** Jumping Jack = jumping legs left to right, raising & lowering arms.

**Old normal:** Last person picked for teams and wishing I didn't have to be picked or play at all.

**Current normal:** Voluntarily join in and want to do many more things.

**Future normal:** Play racquetball, skydive, scuba dive one time, ride horses, no limitations. Like I said, I surprise myself with my new definitions of normal and future normal.

**Old normal:** Having Brandi bring the ingredients for meatloaf downstairs to my bedroom in the old house because I couldn't climb the stairs ("Couldn't" is really a fallacy. I'm convinced "I can't" is 99 percent not reality, but that's a subject for another chapter.) when a neighborhood family suffered a death.

**Current normal:** Even though my arthritis means at least going down one step at a time, I look for stairs to climb!

**Future normal:** Running up and down stairs.

**Old normal:** Because of fear I won't fit the swivel chairs, not going to hairdressers

**Current normal:** Go to hairdresser and even get my hair colored.

**Future normal:** Be and feel beautiful.

**Old normal:** No shower, no hairbrush, and the same clothes for a week. No nail polish.

**Current normal:** Shower more regularly, use hairbrush, change clothes, care about self. Get regular pedicures and manicures. Actually own bottles of nail polish now.

**Future normal:** Figure out how to use makeup and all that girlie stuff.

**Old normal:** Sideline or no participation.

**Current normal:** Dead smack in the middle.

**Future normal:** Starter.

When I had the realization that I have a whole new normal, I figured it was time to write the next chapter. Interestingly, Samantha could tell the impact extent made on me by "8 and a half normal width" because as I was leaving her house, she said, "So I want to read another chapter tonight." Here you go, Sam.

My chapters are yet another new normal for me. I like this new normal with all its happiness and changes and look forward with great expectation to the future normal. Mostly, though, I'm just glad the old normal is dead and buried. Here's to my current normal:



And, also true to my current normal, I cursed the unwelcomed storm that swooped down upon us just as I got home tonight and am champing at the bit to be able to hit the pavement with my NORMAL width shoes tomorrow.

This chapter obviously isn't complete yet. See you back here after the future normal becomes my current normal.