

TRANSFORMING YOUR BODY IMAGE

by Leah Carey

One night in 7th grade my father told me that I was getting fat. I'd been on my junior high school cheerleading team, but I quit almost immediately because I was too ashamed to be seen in the short little skirt and form-fitting top. A friend asked me to join the basketball team, but those shorts were even skimpier than the cheerleading skirt, so I didn't try out – even though I really wanted to.

My father started making “helpful” comments about my body more and more often, including the one that haunts me to this day: “You won't get a date if you don't have pretty legs.”

If someone told me I looked pretty, I thought they were making fun and laughing at me behind my back. When someone said to me, “You have such a great smile,” I imagined that inside their heads they were finishing the sentence “...but your thighs are HUGE!”

--Excerpted from *Transforming Your Body Image* by Leah Carey

Was I really fat in 7th grade? Not by a long shot. But it wasn't what my body looked like that was the problem—it was what I thought it looked like and how I felt about it that caused me distress.

Adult or child, man or woman, in this celebrity-obsessed, media-saturated environment, we tend to hold ourselves to unrealistic ideals, especially if those attitudes are reinforced by the people we trust. It can be hard to remember that our self-worth doesn't begin and end with how we look and what size jeans we wear.

I was lucky. After twenty years of believing that I was unacceptable and unlovable because of my body, I found a spiritual teacher who said exactly the words that I needed to hear to begin healing my body image. She reminded me that I am more than my physical body, and I cheat myself and the world if I stifle my personality and my creativity because I'm afraid of how I look. Her words helped me to adjust my focus from my weight to my health, from my fears of inadequacy to acknowledgment of my good. She helped me realize that it wasn't my body that needed to change, it was my mind (and the dirty little secret is that once your mind is healthier, it's much easier to make your body healthier).

But it wasn't my teacher's words that healed me, because reversing twenty years of habitual thinking takes more than a single conversation. It takes time to learn something new.

However, her words set me on a path where I could do my own healing. Each day, I did something to reinforce a new thought pattern and a healthier body image.

For me, the difficulty was that there were plenty of books that told me I should feel better about my body, but there wasn't anyone showing me how to do it. There were a thousand products on the internet that promised a quick fix, but they left me feeling like a failure because they didn't address the old beliefs and behaviors that got me to where I was. I learned that change takes time and determination, but that doesn't mean it has to be hard or overwhelming. A series of small, gentle, and non-disruptive steps brought me along my path toward healing. Having traveled that path, I'm now excited to chart a roadmap for others to develop a healthy body image.

As you set out on your journey of healing, remember this: there will be good days, and there will be bad days. There will be times when you fall back into old habits, and that is nothing to be ashamed of; in fact, it's natural. The key is remembering that you are more than the effects of any single day; you are more than any single meal; you are NOT a failure. You are human, and your job is to be the best human you can be on any given day.

You can do it. And in the immortal words of L'Oreal, “You're worth it.”