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Mind Over Fatter

Written by Anna Richardson

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MIND OVER FATTER

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ANNA RICHARDSON

MIND OVER FATTER

SEE Yourself Slim
THINK Yourself Slim
EAT Yourself Slim

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EATING MY WORDS

You'd think by now I'd know a thing or two about food and dieting. After all, I've presented seven series on TV about diets; written my own bestselling diet book *Body Blitz Diet;* and lost over two stone after following my own diet. Yup, like a London cabby doing The Knowledge, I'm a walking A–Z when it comes to weight loss. From Atkins to alkaline, fasting to foraging, and detox to Dukan – I've done the lot. A quick count of the books on my kitchen shelf shows that I've collected over 20 titles on weight loss. But they're nestled between hardback recipe books full of high-calorie cakes. They're all bibles to my belly in their different ways, and show the schizophrenic nature of weight control. I'm a diet guru alright, but I'm also still a normal girl in love with her food – and it's always, always been a battle.

The fact is, many of us struggle every day to overcome our overeating. Despite our best intentions, we fall off the diet wagon again and again, and end up losing control of ourselves as well as the scales. It's a sad fact that women spend up to 17 years of their lives on a diet… and yet 99 per cent of us fail within the first year of trying.

Buy *why*? Is it a lack of willpower? Or just a big fat plate of denial that's causing this diet derailment? And, more importantly, does this sound anything like you?

Well, I think I know the answer. And the chances are that if you've got this book in your hands then you want to know the answer too. So I'm going to ask you to come on a journey with me. It's a trip through my past, present and future. And listen carefully, because once we're done, we're both going to do it again. But this time, it'll be your journey. And believe me, it's going to be an adventure.

So strap yourself in because this book might just change your life… in more ways than you think.

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LOOK BACK IN HUNGER

How often have you heard someone say 'Leave the past behind you', 'There's no point looking back' or 'What's done is done'? I'm a big fan of not dwelling too deeply in the murky waters of what's gone before. After all, it's full of regrets isn't it? And yet… and yet… the past is also a great teacher. And you'd be amazed at what we've forgotten to learn. Wasn't it the great philosopher Kierkegaard who said life can only be understood backwards? I know, I get it, this is getting a bit heavy for a book on portion control, but let me explain what I mean.

A few years ago, I was presenting a TV series called *Supersize v Superskinny* and my job as an immersive journalist was to investigate extreme diets and then try them out for size – in order to reduce my size, if you see what I mean. Frankly, I thought it was a bit of a cheek. Because, in my head at least, I was a svelte size 10 supermodel with the looks of a panther and the body of an Olympian. The reality? Well, the reality was a different story.

I hadn't actually weighed myself for over seven years. So when I was asked to strip down to my pants and hop on the scales *on camera* time quite literally stood still. In slow motion I looked down at my toes, clocked the dial beneath me and sucked in a long, horrible gasp. A silent scream surged up from my overhanging belly. The scales read 11 stone and 7 pounds (73 kilograms). I was pretty sure Kate Moss didn't weigh 11 stone and 7 pounds. I'd put money on Angelina Jolie not weighing 11 stone and 7 pounds. Were the scales wrong? Should I put them on a hard surface and try again? And then the truth hit me as I stood in my support knickers, my size 16 (with the label cut out) leggings crumpled on the floor beside me. Could it be that I was actually… *overweight*?!

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One week later, I met an amazing woman called Marisa Peer. Marisa is a well-known hypnotherapist and a specialist in weight loss. As part of the show, I was asked to undergo one session of hypnotherapy with her and report back on whether it was effective for losing weight. I'll be honest with you. The crew and I stood outside the house, sceptical TV journalists, convinced that hypnotherapy was a load of old hokum and I'd end up believing I was Cleopatra in a past life. 'Still,' I thought, 'I suppose I'll go along with it just to humour her.'

Marisa put me into a trance, and asked me to imagine myself sitting in a cinema and seeing my life projected up on a screen in front of me like a film. I could scroll through the film, backwards and forwards, at will. Could I find a moment where food had been a problem? And then something fascinating happened. I was instantly transported back to when I was about nine years old. I was in the kitchen of our old house, stealing money from my mum's purse. Then I hopped onto my bike and cycled two miles away to a sweet shop outside the town – a sweet shop I knew nobody, least of all my parents, would see me in – and I bought a carrier bag full of sweets and chocolate. When I got home again, I went upstairs and hid the bag in my wardrobe – a secret place, where I could hide and eat in private. I remember feeling sad, guilty, ashamed and comforted all at the same time. 'Now find an earlier time,' Marisa said, 'a time when this problem first began. What's happening?' Whoosh. I rewound my film, going through years in just seconds, until I settled on a time when I was just four years old. I was distressed and confused, sitting at the dinner table and crying for my mother. I had woken up that morning to discover that she'd disappeared – rushed off to hospital in the middle of the night. I didn't know then that my mum, pregnant with my little brother, was suffering

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from placenta praevia. My childish mind could only process what was my reality at the time… that I had been abandoned. My mother was ill. Would she die? As it turned out she needed to be hospitalized for over two months. My poor Dad, an unreconstructed 1970s father with a full-time job, was now a single parent. He did the best thing he could think of – feed me up. And boy, did he feed me up! To ease my pain, he showed me love through food. Or more specifically, through adult-sized plates of deep-fried cod, chips, beans and jelly. My mum tells me now that every time we visited her in hospital I would march in, getting plumper by the week, and troop straight over to the washbasin without saying a word to her. Once there, and I remember this vividly, I would wash my hands for an hour and sing, 'Yummy yummy yummy, there's room in my tummy, for some more… for some MORE.' I refused to look at my mother, or speak to her for the whole two months. Freud would have had a field day, I'm sure. But inside, I was a frightened little girl who was disorientated and anxious. I'd learnt Life Lesson Number One to my great cost. When in doubt: EAT.

THE GIFT OF THE PRESENT

You may be wondering what happened after that. Did the hypnotherapy session work? Did I report back that it was a miracle cure for weight loss? Well, actually, yes I did. At the time, I wasn't aware that anything much had happened, other than a rather emotional trip down memory lane. But as the days and weeks passed, I started to behave differently around food precisely as Marisa had predicted I would. I noticed that I was making healthier choices when it came to cooking and eating.

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I did a spring clean of my kitchen cupboards and chucked out all the crisps, biscuits, pasta sauces and tins of custard. I replaced sweets with fruit; spaghetti with lentils; and baked beans with fresh veg. I made a note of what I ate, weighed myself regularly and took an interest in my health. People started to notice I was dropping weight. In a matter of weeks, I had lost over two stone. What's interesting to me is that Marisa had asked me during our hypnotherapy session what weight I would like to be. 'Nine stone seven pounds,' I replied. I hit that target to the very last ounce. I road tested eight different diets while I was presenting *Supersize v Superskinny*. The only one that worked for me was hypnotherapy. Not bad for just one session, is it?

Renewed, refreshed, rewired, I was starting to take food more seriously in all aspects of my life. My career as a TV presenter was taking off and I was making a name for myself as the host of popular, prime-time shows about weight loss. I wrote my own diet book, collaborated with experts and became interested in helping other people to change their lives. I was no saint, mind. I still enjoyed a binge on curry or a bottle of red wine and a bag of chocolate – after all, I'm a normal (greedy) woman. But it wasn't until I fronted a new series called *Secret Eaters* for Channel 4 that something really clicked for me. The idea behind the show was that they would secretly film overweight people, using hidden cameras and private investigators, and then confront them back in the TV studio with the 'evidence' of their overeating. Once they'd faced the reality of their ever-expanding waistlines, the team would put them on a healthy-eating plan for several weeks and track their transformation. I should make it clear here that all the contributors had applied to be on the show because they all wanted to lose weight, and simply had no idea what was making them fat. Almost without exception, I could

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predict who would go on to completely transform their lives. Much depended on the reaction they gave when they saw, for the first time, the hidden-camera footage of themselves eating. Imagine seeing yourself, in private, slumped in front of your TV scoffing a 12-inch pizza in your pyjamas. Maybe you'd do a belch and pick your nose. Maybe your boobs are resting on your belly as you crack open another beer. And that's just the guys. Many people didn't recognize themselves. Some people just laughed and enjoyed the spectacle. But those people who paused, watched in disbelief, and then cried, were more often than not the ones who went on to change. Something shifted for them, something very deep. They were finally exposed, their denial laid bare. They were forced to confront not only what they were eating but what was eating them. This interested me. This interested me very much, particularly given my own experience as a chubby child and an overweight adult. Food is a crutch. Food is a friend. But ultimately, too much food makes us a prisoner of our own self-constructed misery.

It was while I was working on *Secret Eaters* that I met psychologist and diet expert Dr Christy Fergusson. As well as secretly filming overweight people in their everyday lives, the show also put science to the test by doing psychological stunts on the public, to prove just how susceptible we all are to overeating. If we could show how easily we overeat, we could also show how easily we can combat it. Christy was key in helping to prove the research, and it was meeting her, as well as working with the entire team on that brilliant show, that prompted me to take things a little further. After all, I knew loads about this diet stuff right? I'd shifted a ton of weight myself right? Right. But I was still picking at the Jaffa cakes between takes on the studio floor. And I was still a fan of contouring 'shapewear'. Why? Why? Why? I needed to find the final piece of the jigsaw…

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FUTURE PERFECT

So I decided to train as a hypnotherapist myself.

The power of the mind is a magical and mysterious thing. The power of the mind enables us to shape not just our bodies, but our future. The power of the mind is the difference between success… and failure. And the power of the mind is what has urged me to bring all my knowledge and experience into one book – to help you to achieve what you're truly capable of.

Hypnotherapy works. It's a fact. Meeting Marisa Peer changed my life in a surprising and positive way, which is why I asked her to collaborate with me on this book. Her expertise is invaluable in helping us transform ourselves just by using our subconscious mind.

Psychology is what shapes and drives us: fact. And so I also asked Dr Christy Fergusson to collaborate with me on this book. She brings her expert knowledge on the mind to these pages to prove to us that if we want a different life – a different way to eat – then it is merely a thought away.

Our challenge was this: using the power of hypnosis, some practical psychology, plus a healthy-eating plan, would it be possible to drop a dress size without even really trying? We all thought so. So together, we promise to rearrange your mind, as well as rearrange your menu.

'THE POWER OF THE MIND IS A MAGICAL AND MYSTERIOUS THING.'

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