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INTRODUCTION

this book started out as a bit of a joke.

It began life as a spin-off from the chapter in my how-to book *Wannabe a Writer?* that advised on Writer's Bottom – a term I take full credit for coining – which is an occupational hazard associated with spending long hours welded to the computer while failing to take enough exercise or eat anything other than chocolate. (some authors complain of Writer's stomach, chins, and Upper Arms too.)

Written mostly to amuse myself, and perhaps give fellow scribes a smile, this small e-publication, available on Kindle, was advertised as containing one hundred “hilarious” suggestions for keeping a spreading rear at bay.

the tips were all intended to be light-hearted, but almost as soon as I'd finished recording them, I realised how seriously I take them.

number one was “eat chocolate”. that's got to be a joke, right? Actually, no. I eat chocolate every day. It is one of my chief weight-control tactics (as well as being a fine excuse). I rather like crisps too.

I wrote then that I am probably not thin enough to be writing a diet book – if thin means having no bum and legs like twigs. But nor am I obese. Weight charts rate me as “normal”; I have a BMI of under 22, a hip-to-waist ratio

that passes muster with the medical profession and I have, when wearing black and the sort of underwear that crushes your internal organs, even been described as “slim”.

Which, considering my unhealthy career choice, vast consumption of wine and nibbles, and somewhat erratic approach to exercise, is, you might say, a small miracle.

except it isn't. It is the simple result of a set of strategies I have learned to rely on to keep tubbiness at arm's length. so that if I want to, I can eat junk food and still fit into a tight dress.

This is not a diet book.

I am not thin enough to write a diet book so this isn't one. I bet that's not the first time you've heard that!

the authors may call it an 'eating Plan', a 'Whole new Approach', or put the emphasis on a change of 'Lifestyle'. But scratch the surface of most get-thin books and underneath they've all got the same bad news. You've got to stop eating anything nice!

typically, there's a skinny bird on the front cover, or some mumbo-science on the back and a strap line telling you you'll never go hungry. they use words like “permanent” and “healthy”. they tell you that after reading these particular pearls of wisdom, you *need never go on a diet again* ...

At this point, you know that's going to be bunkum. You might not be going on their definition of “diet” but do any of these fine works, on any of their 350 pages (largely

comprised of repeating themselves and giving endless recipes for steamed dullard with low-fat, sugar-free, tedium dressing), ever recommend sitting down with a bottle of chablis and a packet of Kettle chips? do they suggest on day Four of *Lose a Stone and Never Feel Hungry* that a danish pastry is the way to go? Any mention of it being just fine to mop up fourteen cold chips and half a fish finger from the kids' plates?

I think not.

Whichever way you look at it, it is all about cutting out.

Books like that occasionally allow a "daily treat." One fun-sized Mars Bar, say, or a small glass of dry white wine.

What's fun about a chocolate bar an inch long? Where is the joy in knowing before you start you are restricted to *one* glass of wine?

We're not stupid. However much we may bluster about slow metabolisms and big bones and layers of lard running in the family, even those of us with absolutely zilch in the understanding-science department, can secretly grasp the basic equation regarding portions in and expenditure of energy out. namely:

if what goes in is greater than what goes out, you get fat.

If what goes in equals what goes out, you stay the same (this may equal above).

If what goes in is less than the sum of what goes out you get thin (hurrah!).

though maybe not "hurrah" for long, because, as entire volumes on the perils of yo-yo dieting have hastened to tell us, the moment you go back to eating anything at all that you like, you'll be waddling again.

depressing, innit?

that's why there's all this emphasis on a 'change of lifestyle'. It's short-hand for never, ever, eat what you really want again.

I am here to tell you, you can. I am here to tell you there is, dear reader, *another way* ...

And I will share it with you.

But first, as a disclaimer, I must point out that I am not a nutritionist, or a doctor and if you are truly massive and needing three airline seats there is little I can do except to suggest you don't wear white leggings. (And hope that there is perhaps one tip in this book that speaks to you and helps you turn things around – especially with the cost of air travel these days!)

Also, in fairness, I should tell you, I have never been HUGe.

I can't offer you stories about how I topped twenty-five stone and had to be winched out of the hotel bath after I'd broken the bed.

Instead, I have spent a lot of my life at the sort of weight where, if I've dressed cleverly, held my stomach in and made sure I'm not snapped with a wide-angled lens, I've managed to get by without anybody thinking I'm too much of a fat moo (heavy weekend on the peanuts, a badly cut dress, and the skinniest friend in tow: different story).

But I always weighed just that bit more than I wanted to be. I have seen photos of myself that have made me shudder (Google-image me – you'll see what I mean), and there have been phases of my life when I've carried very definite layers of podge – where even if I've got it well covered,

I've known about the flabby bits round my middle and have longed for just the one chin and spaghetti arms.

I've felt miserable on the mornings when I've weighed more, guilty when I knew it was all my own fault for being weak-willed, pleased with myself when I've lost a bit and when it's been really, really important to me, I have put my mind to losing half a stone. Which I then, invariably, put back on the moment I went back to "normal".

Why? Because there are two big reasons why all diets/eating plans/changes of lifestyle eventually fail. And that is, that unless you have a will of iron and a very high tolerance to emotional and physical discomfort (in which case you are probably already as thin as a rake and won't be reading this book anyway) they all involve feeling either hungry or deprived or both. It is no wonder that nobody sticks to a diet for long and the overweight have a whole shelf load of books promising dramatic weight loss, have tried them all, and are still waddling round the house with a KitKat in each hand.

Because it is pretty dispiriting for anyone to face a future in which there is a stark choice between waving goodbye to the notion of cake for the next twenty years or getting your jeans up past your knees.

If you can get round those twin problems of hunger and feeling that you're missing out, you can be the weight you want for ever. And you'll find it much easier to cope with either one of them, if you do have to, if you know that feeling will be short-lived. Weight loss is a question of attitude as much as what you put in your mouth – a case, if you like, of mind over large quantities of matter.

In this book, I will share my tips on shifting the flab in the first place, if that's what you need to do, but, more importantly, on keeping to a happy weight afterwards, while still actually having *a life*.

(For me, that means being able to have a drink, eat chocolate, and go out to dinner with friends without being a tedious pain in the *derrière*.) Because there is a middle way between living on tissue paper and being as thin as a stick, and eating what makes you happy and watching the pounds pile on.

I am still not as totally sylph-like as I might dream of being – because one is never satisfied – but my weight doesn't fluctuate by more than a couple of pounds and I get into all my clothes – even the garments I've had for over a decade. If I've got an event coming up and am feeling extra vain, if there will be a lot of photos taken and/or the frock I'll be wearing is particularly unforgiving, I can shed a few pounds quite quickly – see the section entitled **Shift it Fast** – but for the rest of the time I eat, drink, make merry, and still manage to keep my Writer's Bottom into just the one chair.

Here's how.

GETTING STARTED ON FLAB-FIGHTING

By this, I don't mean you have to do anything right now. You can go and get a chocolate biscuit if you want and settle yourself comfortably and indulge in a little reverie about what you are going to eat for dinner. Yes, chips are fine (maybe have a side salad too – vitamins are always good) – there is no need to start to fret about what you have to give up because you don't have to say goodbye to anything. not for ever, anyway.

Keep that in mind, because the thought of giving up anything permanently is likely to evoke immediate feelings of misery and loss.

I can remember thinking, when I was a smoker, that if I should never put another cigarette in my mouth, my life wouldn't be worth living. (that was over twenty years ago and of course I am entirely delighted to be a non-smoker now.)

If you have a serious alcohol dependency, then the advice is going to be to turn your back on the booze for ever. And many diet books seem to take the similar view that if you're an overweight over-eater you should train yourself to treat chocolate cake like a dangerous drug. I don't agree.

there is no doubt that a sugar overload is bad for you for all sorts of reasons, but you don't want to start your new way of approaching what you eat by feeling miserable.

If you usually begin a diet and immediately start thinking of all the stuff you're going to miss out on, you can relax because this time you're not. Because A) we're going to be realistic about what we can do and when we can do it, and B) because we are going to deal with any sense of deprivation we feel.

Instead of feeling fed up already, you should be feeling happy and thrilled and hugely grateful (no worries, you can thank me later) because you're going to have a great time, keep your weight down without worrying, and eat chocolate without guilt. Hurrah!

You are going to be slimmer.

Or the "slimmer" that works for you. Because rule no 1 is: be realistic. About yourself and what is achievable. For while it is desirable to be fit and healthy, there is no point feeling despondent and guilty about one's natural shape. especially, if you are female and using women from the fashion pages as your role model.

Any diet that attempts to give us a figure that only about three per cent of women are actually genetically programmed to have is going to take up far too much concentration and energy, be exceedingly dispiriting and dull, and you would basically have to stay on it for ever. Look at the malnourished twig-people, wafting up the catwalk wearing clothes that you or I couldn't get one leg in – do they look happy?

Being realistic is the key.

You may have no desire to look like a stick, anyway, but simply want to be a little fitter and less flabby round the edges. I have no wish to be the Fat Police (nor am I in a

position to be!). Big does not preclude beautiful and I am quite comfortable with the argument that being overweight is only a problem if it is making you unhappy or affects your health.

After all, *very* thin people may look lovely in magazines but in real life they can be quite annoying. You wonder why they bother going to a restaurant at all just to suck on a piece of lettuce; and who wants a non-wheat, non-dairy, can't-eat-fat, what's-its carb-content, I hope-there's-no-sugar-in-that, teetotaller round to dinner? nice, fun, rounded guests are much more the ticket.

In fact, a few years back, I conceived a book called **Bugger the Diet and Everything Else Life's Too Short For.**

When this was, sadly, not fallen upon by an eager publishing world I contented myself with putting an extract up on my website, together with the following illustrated chart, entitled "How Fat Are You?" – the sub-text being: And does it really matter? It looked like this:

How Fat ARE you? Do you look like:



A) An anorexic stick insect. What are you doing reading a book with Diet in the title? Go get help.

B) Only 4% of women look like this and boy do they suffer for it. No chocolate, no wine, no crisps, no deep crust pizza with extra toppings. Do you want to be a miserable cow?

C) Not perfect but average. And what's wrong with that?

D) Soft and voluptuous. Men love it!

E) Yeah, OK, getting a bit obese here but nothing a floor-length tent wouldn't put right

Ha, ha hilarious etc. I went on to remind my readers that whoever first said that older women had to choose between their figures or their faces was spot on. A bit of fat does make you look younger.

And even if you are young already, I reasoned, you might as well be prepared.

I have since discovered that having a big bottom, for example, can actually be a healthy life choice – research carried out at Oxford University found that those with plenty of gluteofemoral fat – that’s a lard arse to you and me – have a lower risk of diabetes, while further studies have shown that the owners of a fat bum are set for a ripper old age than those with a ballooning belly.

(not so great for those *with* the large belly but it does go to show that not all excess weight is a terrible thing). Indeed when you are very old – so old, I suspect that your face has had it, whatever the scales say – it is generally agreed that it is better longevity-wise to be a little over-weight than under.

And, at any age, just because you’re not size zero and have never been mistaken for Kate Moss, it doesn’t mean you’re an elephant with a weight issue.

I wasted a lot of time in my youth thinking all the problems in my life would dissolve away if only I lost a stone. (It takes a few years to learn that in reality what really improves things is to ditch the dodgy boyfriend, get a job you actually like, and do anything at all to boost your self-esteem – more of that later.)

But there is also no doubt that being slimmer feels very nice and that we all want to lose the flab and shape up from

time to time – after christmas and easter; before the summer; when a wedding's coming up or your thin friend is having a party; any time one needs to bare arms.

Presumably if you've bothered to open this book, you do too. And think how good it would be if you could then stay like that without getting bored and disgruntled.

so my outlook has altered a little. But since art is not my strong point, and I still have a lot of book to write, it seems a shame to waste the drawings. so I am using the same ones again on which I have updated my thoughts. Which are that, actually, sometimes, being overweight does matter – particularly, as we've said, if it upsets you or is adversely affecting your health.

I'm all for being large and bonny if those on the hefty side are happy with that. But considering this is just one of about a zillion books on the market right now on the subject of how to shift the lard, and the diet industry as a whole is worth billions of pounds, I can only assume not many are.

so let's look at this new chart instead:

Yes, I mean it. *Get excited!*

Because you are going to lose weight reading this book and then you are going to keep that weight off for a long, long time. (I won't say for ever because that's what they all say and by the time you're ninety, you might decide that a peaceful death by chocolate cake is what you want.)

But for now – you are going to be slim. Let us sum up and focus for a moment on why:

Ten great things about being slimmer.

- 1** You feel better. When you lose weight, there is quite literally a lightness about you. You will find you move more quickly, with a spring in your step. You will feel more confident so you will stand up straighter and smile more and when you do both these things you will look even better.
- 2** You can wear a much greater range of clothing without going into meltdown when you look in the mirror.
- 3** You can drift around with a doughnut hanging out of your mouth, pretending to be one of those infuriating, naturally skinny people with a metabolism on overdrive who eat all day long and never put on an ounce. (nB if you dig beneath the surface of the lifestyles of same, you will find that they in fact do a lot of things outlined in this book – sometimes without even realising.)

- 4 You can run, jump, hop, skip, without puffing like a steam engine. this in turn will make you even slimmer.
- 5 Your son will stop talking to you in the voice of Matt Lucas's Marjorie from *Little Britain*'s Fat-fighters, and shrieking *cake* and "Get that in your fat gob ..." every time you open the biscuit tin. (nB this might just be in my house.)
- 6 You will be healthier, and lower your risk of getting all sorts of nasties in later life. (nB if you are already in later life, it is not too late to make it easier on your body from now on.)
- 7 You'll only need one airline, theatre, or cinema seat and the metal safety bar things on the rides will fit over your stomach should you go to a theme park. small children will not point and laugh if you wedge yourself into the roller-coaster chair but fail to get out. nor will the fire brigade be called. (And if they are, the nice fireman who rescues you will be able to throw you over his shoulder – mmm 😊)
- 8 there'll be no more gross pictures of you popping up on Facebook when you least expect it (don't you just love those sort of "friends" with cameras?)
- 9 there'll be room for you in that crowded lift or on the tube in the rush-hour.

10 If do you go mad and eat a whole chocolate gateau, three-tier pizza, and a bucket of pork-scratchings with a battered Mars Bar, at least you'll have a bit of leeway there and won't actually explode.

You might have your own reason for wanting to be thinner and be able to think up extra benefits I haven't listed.

e.g. the next time you bump into your ex, you will be able to sashay/swagger past looking amazing, sculpted, toned, and entirely yummy and irresistible and leaving him/her pig sick about letting you go when you are so much more alluring than the new partner (who will also be there looking rather tired and flabby).

Or: Your husband/wife will have to stop calling you Podge because you have now clearly have a waist the circumference of his/her thigh.

Or you will be able to finally fit into that hugely expensive but rather optimistically purchased dress/suit you bought five years ago in a size too small, because it was reduced.

Or you can now pinch your sister's clothes and get her back for the way she always takes your shoes.

Write your own most pressing reason for wanting to become and stay slim here:

And hold that thought!

Are you holding it? Yes, I hear you cry, but I've done all this before. Of course you have. A good friend made me laugh when she told me that the "fat" photo of herself she'd once pinned to her fridge door as a reminder to lose weight, was now there to illustrate her target! (A lesson on counting one's blessings at the time – I wouldn't mind being the weight I was when I was twenty-five and thought I was gross or to look as I did when I was thirty and fretting about all my "wrinkles".) However much we might long to be thinner, have the incentives and know all the theory, in practice we start our diets with high hopes and we still give up and give in and buy the next size up. Why?

KNOW YOUR ENEMIES: HUNGER, DEPRIVATION, AND BOREDOM

I said there were two reasons why diets fail – I should perhaps have made it three.

If you are hungry, or feeling a sense of deprivation, or are just plain bored, you won't stick to any sort of eating plan for more than a few days – or even hours.

Wanting to put food in our mouths is a primal instinct and the feeling of actual hunger – as opposed to the feeling of “mmm – that smells good, I could just do with a burger and large fries, even though I had lunch an hour ago” – is hard to ignore.

there are ways to manage it, suppress it, and turn it to your advantage which we will look at later, but as we know it is basically a protective mechanism to prevent you from starving to death (unlikely as that scenario is in the obesity-ridden Western world) and your body's way of telling you, via contraction of the stomach muscles and the release of gastrointestinal hormones, that it needs sustenance.

All your natural impulses are geared up to giving that body what it wants, so you shouldn't feel too guilty if you can't resist them. And you shouldn't ignore them for too long either. If you are feeling wobbly or dizzy, can't concentrate, have a headache or stomach cramps, then for heaven's sake eat something. Go and do it now!

there is however, a big difference between real hunger and just fancying something because you are bored or tired, or it looks nice, or you've had one and now you've got the taste in your mouth you find you can easily consume six.

It is a little like the old adage about the difference between having a cold and flu. Men, of course, always suffer from the latter, but for women, it boils down to what you would do if someone left a grand on your front lawn. If you'd get out of bed and retrieve it, you've got a cold. If you still couldn't manage to make it down the stairs, it's probably flu.

If you were really starving, you'd tuck in gratefully to all the things you'd usually approach with caution – say liver (ugh) or banana custard (yuck) – fill in your own *bêtes noires* as applicable – and if truly at death's door, munch on your grandmother.

But if the only thing you fancy is a packet of crisps or a jam doughnut then you are probably simply peckish or a bit sugar-depleted.

that is not to say you can't have said snack – if you can balance it out later – but it is worth holding on to the difference between the two feelings.

I believe a lot of people are overweight because they've actually lost their ability to discern proper hunger and now ignore, or don't even notice, the signals of satiety.

In order to keep your weight down you either need to avoid hunger or harness it as a power for good and turn it to your advantage. (More of that in the later section – imaginatively entitled: **How to deal with hunger.**)

But it's not always feeling hungry that's the problem.

Let us say you are on a low-fat diet, involving lots of

plain baked potatoes and pasta without a creamy sauce, dry wholemeal toast and salad (no dressing), etc. You probably won't be hungry because those foods are filling and have a low rating on the GI index, meaning they release their energy slowly, but very soon you may well feel deprived.

Because, however much the diet sheet entreats you to add flavour with pepper or herbs, fat-free dressing (always unpleasant) or spices, baked potatoes are only really nice with butter and grated cheese; plain pasta is dull, and toast without butter is, frankly, a travesty. So the moment you see someone else tucking into a buttery crumpet, dolloping the mayonnaise onto their chips or having a spaghetti carbonara you are going to start feeling sorry for yourself and deprived. Even if you hold out, sooner or later the temptation will become too much, and you'll think "sod it" and pour cream on your apple crumble.

If your regime allows fat but cuts out the carbohydrates and sugars, you may well enjoy your steak with hollandaise sauce, your egg and bacon and don't-hold-the-sausage breakfasts, and start out thoroughly enthusiastic about your nightly cheese platter. But, sooner or later, you will find yourself unable to think about anything except how much you'd like a sandwich and if you're invited out for tea to where there are homemade biscuits and a particularly luscious-looking cake, you may feel equally hard done by if you have to sit there with only a lump of cheddar.

If you're simply cutting calories and have committed yourself to a routine of living on yoghurt and fruit and chicken salad and crispbreads, washed down with water,

how are you going to feel when you go out to dinner with the friends who believe in three courses, 1000-cal puddings, and chocolate mints with the port once the wine bottles are all empty?

And nobody (except the naturally teetotal) should be expected to go to a wedding or a big birthday and say no to champagne.

sooner or later, hunger or deprivation (or plain fed-up-ness) will knock us off the dietary wagon and have us stuffing our faces with abandon.

so how do we avoid these twin evils, enjoy ourselves, and yet not end up the size of a house?

I'll tell you. We do not pin our colours to any one diet plan or even have a plan at all. We have a collection of strategies and tactics – think of it as a big bright bucket we can dip into – that we adapt to our individual lives and what works for Us.

the problem with how-to books on so many subjects (and I speak as one who writes them) – from how to write a novel, to how to bring up children, to how to lose weight – is that they are generally so damn bossy.

Plot the whole of your story out first, they command, using colour-coded index cards and a spread-sheet. Ban sugar, limit tV, and put them on the naughty step. raise your heartbeat for twenty minutes, three times a week and never eat cheese at the same meal as red meat. And so on.

Many diets consist of a series of instructions: you must eat this, must cut out that, and under no circumstances be tempted by a second helping of the other. But, when losing weight, as with so many things in life, there is no one size

fits all (literally!) and the only route to lasting success in anything is to find our own way.

Mine is to tailor the way I eat, what exercise I do, and how much chocolate I get down my neck according to what's going on in my life that week and what appeals to me.

I have a short attention span, am easily bored and my levels of self-discipline cannot always be relied on. so I don't want to feel pinned down to the same eating and exercise patterns week in and week out. You may be different.

