

CHAPTER FIVE:

A DOUBLE TRIUMPH

Although Les was fully *obsessed with*, and had an insatiable appetite for, the taste of most high-fat foods, he surprised us all. In fact, knowing the true depth of his desires, it was almost a shock that he not only started eating healthier full-force, but kept it up unwaveringly! He took in almost no fat, and ran 30 to 60 minutes every other day. From these changes alone, he actually lost well over 20 pounds during the first two months. But how did he maintain such self-control? Addictions are typically difficult to beat, even with outside help. What was it, I wondered, that gave him this incredibly uncharacteristic ability?

Truthfully, I had another personal reason for wanting to know the answer to that question. You see, like many people, I too had a vice: shopping. On many occasions, it had reached the point of creating many more problems than pleasures. Though shopping might seem to be merely an enjoyable activity, the urge to splurge was not something that I could simply turn off like a light switch. One night a few years after his diagnosis, I finally asked Les the question, not realizing his answer would be the simple secret that many people are searching for. I asked him, “How do you do it? How have you been able to maintain such perfect self-discipline after more than three years of this? I’ve seen so many other people in similar situations fall off track. How can you

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possibly have such control all the time, especially in the face of constant temptation?”

It was obvious by Les’ response that he had started to dig deeply into his soul to understand the connection between life and death, between what was important and what was not.

“I guess I was just forced into looking more closely and honestly at my priorities,” he replied. “You know how much I love to eat. On some level, I think that I had actually begun to define how happy I was by the things I ate. When I found out that I was in real trouble, I got hit in the face with the realization that the times I’ve shared with you and the kids meant more to me than any meal ever could, no matter how delicious.

“When I really thought about it, even the idea of never being able to eat the things I enjoyed most seemed secondary to the thought of being torn away from my family, which was far more devastating. No amount of instant gratification could relieve the fear of being taken away from you and the kids.

“Our children are magnificent, and I want to be here to watch them grow into even more accomplished adults, and to help guide them and share in their joy. I love you and the two of them so much that it isn’t even a question of fighting temptation. Instead, it’s the overwhelming desire to spend longer and healthier lives together that gives me the strength I need to maintain my new attitude.”

He paused a moment and continued, “The funny thing is, when I finally realized my true priorities, I actually began to enjoy, and even prefer, the taste of healthier foods. Obviously, there are times when I’m with other people, and they’re offering me things to eat that aren’t consistent with my ‘lifestyle’, that I feel tempted — especially if I’m hungry. But whenever that happens, all I have to do is focus on the thought of the four of us staying together, and it works magic every time. *That* hunger (for family) is stronger than any temptation that can be put on a plate in front of

me. And when I explain to people why I'm not 'chowing down' like I used to, it just serves to remind me, all over again, how much you all mean to me, and it makes my resolve even more firm. It also further supports my efforts to exercise, even though it sometimes gets grueling. I never really enjoyed running before, but now it feels like I'm doing something important, for the best reasons I can imagine. I'm taking control of my life, and I will not let a piece of fried chicken get in the way."

He then went on, "Remember the theme of the movie *Hook*? When Peter Pan recognized that his purpose in life — his happy thought — was his family, he suddenly found that he really could fly. I can now relate to the truth in that, and in my own way, I guess I've learned to fly, too."

Les' response that night actually helped me to find the self-control I needed to overcome my shopping fetish, and to exercise it ever since.

Heart And Soul

One day, as the children were eating pizza, I noticed that the usual covetous look in Les' eyes was missing. That look (or, rather, the absence of it) really hit home, and illustrated what he had shared about his strength of purpose. I realized from his expression that this could not just be about Les changing his diet. It was imperative that our entire family embrace health. Thus, it was Les who became my motivation to learn and teach others, in order to live healthy lives. My inspiration came from my love for the man in my life, who realized — and helped me to realize — that no piece of meat or slice of pizza will ever be more important than the love we have for our family. After all, that's what gives our lives real meaning. We never know how long our lives will last, but we can make whatever years or moments we have the very best they can be. Les and I learned that improving our health is truly an act of love, and that without good health, nothing else matters.

Apply this lesson to your own life. To win any personal tug-of-war, ask yourself: "What is really most important?" If you are deeply and com-

pletely honest, the obvious conclusion you achieve may not only surprise you, but can provide you with tools to last a lifetime.

In the years following Les' angioplasty, I continued to learn as much as possible about healthy eating, and began the process of transforming myself into a health-conscious cook. I was not previously a gourmet cook or even a mother who particularly enjoyed preparing meals. I was, however, a teacher, and decided to use that experience to its best advantage.

Realizing that this journey would be lifelong, I continued to experiment with, and create, many healthy and tasty dishes for my husband (who, by the way, could easily win an award for raising the art of finicky eating to new levels). Our process of trial and learning has led us to understand that healthy eating does not have to mean boring, flavorless eating. It simply means applying certain modifications. In the process you will come to realize that you absolutely *can* turn your own particular vice... "*versa*".