



FAT NO MORE

A Teenager's Victory over Obesity

Alberto Hidalgo-Robert

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*You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire
universe, deserve your love and affection.*

—Gautama Buddha

Foreword

Obesity's Chestnut

What is this? Who am I? Why in the world did I write this book?

MY STORY STARTS WITH A FIVE-YEAR-OLD KID HOLDING A LARGE chocolate milkshake and an extra-large order of french fries. *What's wrong with this picture?*

Well, first thing, it looked like the milkshake weighed more than the kid holding it. He almost dropped the cup as soon as it was placed in his tiny hands.

Let's be realistic! We live in the twenty-first century in the most "supersized" country of them all. So let's face reality here. Let's not lie to ourselves—because you, your mom and dad, your brothers and sisters, your dogs, your cat and your canary know that, nowadays, a ten-pound milkshake is considered "normal."

But realistically, what is normal when it comes to food? Two plus two equals four; that's normal. Going to school is normal. Breathing is normal. Eating is normal. But E.T. (remember him?) is not normal, and the day I saw that child was just like an E.T. experience for me. A five-year-old kid about to drink a milkshake he could barely hold up is crazy—it's out of this world!

What is wrong with us?

Did I mention that the milkshake was bigger than the kid's head? Tip: Anything bigger than your head should not be eaten by anyone—not by and especially not by a five-year-old child.

When someone who weighs barely fifty pounds is about to drink—from one glass—something that weighs up to five percent of his weight, that is not normal.

And really, did he need the extra-large fries? Does a fifty-pound child need an extra-large serving of anything?

All this begs the question: Where were the parents? By buying that food for him, they were giving their approval to unhealthy food choices. They didn't need their voice boxes to do so. They were letting their child fall prey to something called manipulation, and also something that they might consider to be unconditional love.

In the first chapter of this book, you'll discover how those two factors can affect a child from the day he is born through the rest of his days.

But how does this E.T. episode relate to my memoir?

Fourteen years ago, I *was* that kid with the large chocolate milkshake in one hand and the extra-large order of french fries in the other. How did I end up? Like a limping dog—in pain, deprived of self-esteem and self-confidence, with an enormous lack of self-respect, completely alienated from self-love. You'll see.

Just as an appetizer, let me tell you a fact about me and my journey: I ended up weighing as much as a newborn baby elephant! And if that kid I saw holding the overgrown milkshake keeps eating that way—if the kid's parents let him keep eating that way—then he'll end up on the route I was traveling on. I'm not talking about the road less traveled, folks, but rather the one that a good 60 percent of our nation is now traveling.

My name is Alberto Hidalgo-Robert or—as my friends Rukshana, Megan and Miriam call me—Bert, for short. And because I'm your friend now, and because you became part of this crazy, circus-like ride the moment you picked up this book, you are welcome to call me that too!

I was born in the tiniest country in Central America, little bean-shaped El Salvador, on September 12, 1991. I was the first

son, grandson, nephew and great-grandson of a tiny family: ten people maximum. In November 2002, my parents and I immigrated to Redwood City, California, where we now reside—and where we remain a tiny family.

By trade, I'm a college student at Notre Dame de Namur University, where I study biochemistry. I'm also the founder of an online anti-obesity campaign, *Healthy Bert: No Child Left with a Big Behind Foundation*. You might have read one of my blogs, or you may have seen one of my YouTube videos, or you might follow me on Twitter . . . or maybe, just maybe, you've cooked one of my healthy recipes.

For those who don't know me, I want to welcome you to my zany journey and life. Hello, friend I haven't met yet! No matter what you already know about me, what you do *not* know about me is what I want to share with you in the following pages.

Have you noticed how the problem of obesity has grown nonstop in this country in the past few years? I used to be part of that cadre of obese Americans. Not long ago, my life was about to crumble down . . . and it would have, if it hadn't been for the Lucile Packard Weight Control Program, the healthy "tools" I was presented with and my parents (keep reading, and you'll understand how everything came into play).

Being so close to losing that battle was the worst feeling I've ever experienced. It was as if I were signing my life over to the devil. I felt like I was trying to fight a battle unarmed, without a scintilla of self-love. Self-love is described by the *World English Dictionary* as "the instinct or tendency to seek one's own well-being or to further one's own interests." The container where my self-love was supposed to be was unoccupied. Vacant. Empty. I had zero, nil, nada.

What I didn't have in self-respect, I had in weight: more than sixty pounds of excess weight and about to cross into the Diabetic Zone. I went *that* far! I almost ended up giving up my life, dreams and hopes, handing them over to Obesity. I don't

want you to go through what I went through. I'd rather make my life an obese example *not* to follow. I'd rather let my story be known than hear that the statistics of kids dying due to the effects of obesity are increasing by the hour. I'd rather you laugh at my crazy experiences and episodes, and learn something from them. I'd rather share my Tools, in every single chapter, than see *you* heading for the thin ice. I'd rather help you than waste the knowledge I've learned. Becoming your health template would be more rewarding than keeping this knowledge to myself and seeing you deteriorate, bit by bit. I'd rather use that knowledge to help you save your life or help you help others save their lives.

Oh yeah! I forgot to tell you. Once you finish this book, you will have many weapons to counteract obesity and build a healthier life—and I don't want you to waste those weapons. I want this to be a domino effect. I'll give you information, you give information to someone else and they pass it along and so on. Why waste useful weapons and let our lives go to waste? So this book is not only about you learning; it is about you learning and then becoming the teacher. You'll be like a health guru!

Last-minute words:

I know I am not the greatest philosopher or novelist of all time, but I'm a young adult who has taken the responsibility to help others save their own lives and other people's lives. I'm a young adult who has taken the responsibility to promote a healthy lifestyle. I have taken the responsibility to protect others from Obesity.

My writing is probably not the best; sometimes I won't make sense. I know that if I've made a thousand grammar mistakes or have used the wrong wording too often, I might lose you. But if, because of my journey, you absorb at least one new healthy habit—either an eating or an exercising habit—I will

know my hard work is paying off and your new life has become a work in progress.

Revolutionizing your life and turning it into a healthier life takes time. You might get frustrated, tired, annoyed or mad, but let me tell you something: Do not give up! Also, remember that now you have a new friend, *me*, who will take you by the hand. You can take my crazy, hilarious stories with you wherever you want, and I'll be right next to you. With this book, you can let me lead you to a healthier lifestyle, by sharing my journey. I'll be here 24/7.

Pretend my "fable," if you want to call it that, is like a lunch menu. First of all, you will have to sit and relax; breathe in, breathe out.

Then we will start with an appetizer—which, in this case, will be the stories behind my bulging fat, the history of my limping life and stretch marks. After finishing my appetizer, we will dive right into the main dish, which will contain all the secrets behind how I won the battle. You'll learn the truth behind the pounds I lost. In other words, the main dish will be like the juicy, delicious, grilled patty in a hamburger—the best part!

At last, we will get to the dessert (the second-best part!) In this memoir, the dessert will represent the end of my struggle against my demon and the beginning of my new life. It will include the beginning of my self-love, the beginning of my ability to walk down the street without looking straight down at the gray cement, afraid of what others are saying about my bulging lump of a body.

The end of my story is a break from my obese past, which I chose not to continue, and the beginning of the present and future that I chose! Moreover, during this third part of my memoir, I will share some decadent and delicious personal recipes—some I've come up with and others that I've modified—which might help you to begin your new lifestyle.

We will have to go slowly, because otherwise the message is lost and your head might just explode. I didn't want our memoir (Yes! It is already yours, too!) to be just another diet book or another weight-loss book hanging out on the shelf. You know those books . . . the ones that tell us what to do until we discover that those regimens don't even work? Yeah, those! I wanted our memoir, and my laughable experiences, to be remarkable—but most of all, useful!

I will stop yapping now, which I will do a lot in this book, so that you can start.

To begin, we will have to travel close to nineteen years back into the past. So turn the page and let's begin.