

Praise for
Love Food and Live Well

“In *Love Food and Live Well*, Chantel Hobbs helps readers re-create their lives from the inside out. As you turn the pages of this book, you can’t help but feel that Chantel is right there with you to guide and inspire every step in your quest to eat better, move more, and enjoy a more fulfilled and more healthful life.”

—ELISA ZIED, MS, RD, CDN, regular contributor to msnbc.com
and GALTtime.com; author of *Nutrition at Your Fingertips*
and *Feed Your Family Right!*

“Behind Chantel’s extraordinary story and unquestioned expertise is a heart that sets her apart. Regardless of whom she encounters, she lives for the opportunity to help them discover their fullest and fittest potential. As you read *Love Food and Live Well*, it will become clear that Chantel is doing what God created her to do. How refreshing to find a fitness expert who is devoted to changing lives on the inside as well as the outside!”

—BOB COY, pastor of Calvary Chapel, Fort Lauderdale

“Chantel Hobbs uses wit, wisdom, and poignant insights to open our eyes regarding our health and well-being. With helpful tips, exercises, recipes, and workout plans, Chantel has put together a perfect plan that anyone can follow. And she points out that allowing God to take control is the only way to live a life that will make everything else fall into place.”

—MIKE HUCKABEE, former Arkansas governor; author of *Quit Digging Your Grave with a Knife and Fork*; host of *Huckabee*

“*Love Food and Live Well* inspires you to focus on what’s good, what’s true, and what works. If you have ever felt trapped and miserable, Chantel Hobbs

will show you how to surrender your life and gain control of what matters most. Filled with real-life success stories, *Love Food and Live Well* will help you begin the journey that will change your life forever.”

—MILES METTLER, PhD in exercise and wellness; general manager
of Saint Mary’s Center for Health and Fitness, Reno, Nevada

Love  Food
&
Live Well

Chantel Hobbs

author of *Never Say Diet*

Lose Weight, Get Fit, & Taste Life
at Its Very Best



Love
& Food
Live Well



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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For the lost



Some of us know what it feels like to be alone in a crowded room.

*This book is for you. May you find the love you long for
and the acceptance you've needed your entire life.*

*Believe me: neither a scale nor a pair of jeans nor a human being
can provide it.*

I pray that after reading this book, you will find the answer.

*It is the ultimate deal of a lifetime,
and it can be yours today!*

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FOREWORD

You need to meet Chantel Hobbs.

I'll do my best, but it won't be the typical, surface-level introduction. Chantel is a mom, yes; and a loving wife, yes; and she now makes her living as a writer. All those things are wonderful, but not why you should meet her.

You should meet her because she's *been there*. And by "there" I mean "here," for many of us. "Here" is a place where we're utterly heartbroken. We're not who we want to be, frustrated with how we look and feel, maybe even disgusted. To know Chantel, you will know her story and how God took not only two hundred excess pounds from her body, but He took away much more in guilt and disappointment with herself.

So, like I say, she's been there. And she's seen what can happen—what works in our relationship with food and what doesn't. And she's experienced how God sees us, which is so much more clearly than we see ourselves.

She's an expert, yes, but she's not just an expert. In Chantel, you have much better.

You have a friend.

Experts can be wonderful, of course. So wonderful, in fact, that they inspire you...to just give up. They're too awesome, too amazing, too "together," and too unapproachable. You spend time with them, and you're left impressed—but only with them. You're left depressed about yourself.

As you'll find in this book, Chantel is just the opposite. When she joins me on my radio show, we are flooded with callers. And to each one, she's unfailingly patient and compassionate. She listens and she nods, because she's

Foreword

been where they now are. She knows why they're calling, and that's not for mere advice: they're looking for hope.

Make friends with Chantel, and she will point you to Hope.

—Brant Hansen, host of the syndicated radio show *Mornings with Brant*, www.morningswithbrant.com

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Friends, this book was written out of my own desperate need for the deal of a lifetime!

To my husband, Keith: Babe, thank you for giving me the space for God to do what only He can do. I adore watching you “be daddy” to our children. The way you love me could never be compared. . .

To my daughter Ashley: As you venture into young adulthood, I feel blessed to call you “my teenager.” Your heart for the least of these is a beautiful thing to witness. We can’t wait to watch God continue to reveal His unique will for your life.

To my daughter Kayla: I see so much of me in you. Not only does it make me smile; it makes me feel quite humble. I know God will use your thoughtfulness and willingness to serve in mighty ways. Always be proud of who He created you to be.

To my son Jake: You are so very special to me. Not to mention insanely funny and witty! Your take on most situations offers the entire family a great opportunity to laugh together. I love cooking with you and seeing you catch all those big bass!

To my son Luke: You are my “son-shine”! Even though your entrance was a surprise to us, God handpicked you for our home. Everyone isn’t always being mean to you, by the way. They are just jealous because you’re the baby!

To my mother: You’re a brave and beautiful woman. I am constantly in awe of your ability to let life happen and still trust God. Thank you for displaying true faith and utter dependence on your Savior.

Acknowledgments

To my dad: You are a three-ring circus on a stage and disguised as Johnny Cash or Elvis most of the time. Thanks for teaching me how to laugh more and love life. You're also a wonderful husband and father.

To my in-laws, Ken and Linda: You truly run the race well. While sanctification may require a lifetime, your lives make me want to keep my foot on the gas! Your son is a remarkable man. Thank you for sacrificing and investing in his life as you have. Our children and I now reap what you have sown. My gratitude cannot be expressed in words.

To my dear friend Kerri: Your arrival back in my life, in a fancy bathroom on a late night in Manhattan, was more than a miracle. It was a kiss from God. Thank you for always letting me “bring it” and mostly for keeping it real—even if it meant helping me face my funk. There's no one I'd rather face it with than you.

To Ron Lee: You are a wonderful editor. I appreciate your ear and willingness to let me ramble. I value your gift more than you know.

Thank you to the entire staff at WaterBrook Press: From sales to marketing and publicity, you all have a passion for books that can make a difference. Thank you for your encouragement in all I do.

To my agent, Chip MacGregor: Thanks for being a friend and for supporting my mission of faith, food, and fitness.

To Christy, David, Michael, Kenny, Kevin, and Kris: I am in awe of God's providence in our lives. We are so blessed! I pray you will each seek His will and freely abandon your own will on a regular basis. It has been amazing to watch us all grow up and have families of our own. Let's stay the course and keep Christ the center of our homes.

Thank you to the many people I have met in the past few years who have been so gracious. I am honored that you trust me enough to share your struggles and pain. You are always in my heart and on my mind. You are the

Acknowledgments

reason I seek God while I write. Please pray as you begin to read this book, and allow Him to set you free. He's whispering your name...

To my Rescuer: Thank You, thank You for giving me mercy. I have done nothing to deserve it. I pray I will never hesitate to show compassion and understanding to those who come across my path. Please help me love my neighbor better all the time. Amazing grace is more than a sweet sound. Thank You for saving a wretch like me.

Introduction

Love Food as Never Before

*M*ost days I don't go looking for adventure, but somehow one finds me. My life is a great adventure, and today is no exception. I had intended to write the introduction to this book weeks ago, but it didn't happen. Then my flight from New York to Fort Lauderdale was canceled, so suddenly I have time on my hands.

After spending the night in a hotel, I'm sitting on a bench in Lower Manhattan, and it's barely daylight. I'm one block from Wall Street, cabs are speeding by, and the people who pull the levers of high finance keep streaming out of a nearby subway station. It's crazy how appropriate all this is, because in this book you and I are going to talk about deals.

We'll look at the deal the world has been selling us all our lives—the message that we're not good enough, not pretty enough, not thin enough, and just basically that we're not enough. Then we'll talk about your particular deal. (Many of you have already told me your stories, so I have a good idea

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of what you've been struggling with.) And after that, I'll tell you about my past deal involving a pair of jeans, living in constant fear of embarrassment, and much more. Thankfully, that's all behind me.

Then I want to introduce you to the deal of a lifetime, which is available at no cost to you—at least no financial cost—and which has the power to change your life if you choose to go there.

You've heard all the hype, I know. You've been lied to by the diet industry. You've wasted your hard-earned money on gadgets and miracle pills and supplements that were supposed to melt the fat away. Right? So you're understandably skeptical about me or anyone else who promises you a deal that will deliver what the other programs failed to do.

I was skeptical too, until I developed the program that made it possible for me to lose 200 pounds, tone my muscles, and maintain a healthy weight while pursuing a fun and active life. I described this program in my first book, *Never Say Diet*. Now every day I hear from people who have adopted it and lost 15, 50, or 150 pounds. Their lives will never be the same.

I expanded on that program and put it within easy reach for anyone seeking weight loss in my book *The One-Day Way*. That book simplifies goals, overall fitness, and sustainable weight loss to a committed focus on what you do today. By doing the right things for just one day and then repeating them when another day arrives, you can achieve the results you've been seeking.

Now, in *Love Food and Live Well*, we are going to take the steps that will free you from the most damaging food traps. I will expose the lies that trap dieters in self-defeating habits, and I'll show you how to break free from destructive attitudes toward food. Best of all, I'll show you that fitness and weight loss don't require you to hate food. Nor do they limit you to eating only boring, bland, unsatisfying meals for the rest of your life.

This book will open your eyes to a new way of maintaining your weight,

health, and fitness. We will explore healthy eating and new exercises, to be sure. And we'll arrive at the place where you will achieve all your goals and know how to maintain them for a lifetime. But what good is it to work and sweat to lose weight and get healthy if it means drudgery for the rest of your life? If it means you might extend your life span but hate every minute of it? Or if it means you live in a state of constant fear that you'll slide back into your previous self-defeating habits? Who wants that?

That's why I'm so excited about sharing the best deal you've been offered in a long, long time. Being fit and healthy doesn't require that you starve yourself or even that you hate food. It doesn't demand that you become paranoid that you'll slip up and overindulge. Nor does it require you to drag around an exercise bike every time you leave town so you can be sure to burn off the calories from that meal you enjoyed with your friends while on vacation.

The deal we're going to talk about involves more than just losing weight and getting strong and then maintaining a healthy weight for a lifetime. The deal we'll explore involves losing weight, getting strong, living healthy, and loving every minute of it. Even better, it involves loving food while we live well! Great news! We can do both of these at the same time!

We all want to enjoy life and be healthy in all areas: body, mind, and spirit, right? Plus, who wants to go through life regarding food as the enemy? God gave us food not only to keep us strong and vital but also to enjoy. That's part of the deal of a lifetime, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

When you're stuck in New York City, you can either shop or work. And out of desperation to meet my deadline, I chose the option that wasn't my first

Introduction

inclination. But I'm glad I had to stay over, because my improvised work station inspires me to tell you about the deal of a lifetime.

Soon after I sat down on this bench in sight of Wall Street, I realized this was the perfect place. Megadeals are made in this financial mecca every day. As governments and heads of state try to decide how to plug their leaking economies, I am preparing to introduce you to a deal you won't believe!

This deal is personal for you and me both. Together, we are going to find the solution to physical, emotional, and spiritual bankruptcy. Struggling with your weight, your body image, your self-confidence, and your health can exhaust and defeat you. But I am here to tell you that you can overcome the forces that want to keep you locked in a lifestyle of discouragement, failure, and despair.

The road we will take is a superhighway to claiming the life you desire, and the bonus is that you will enjoy what it takes to get there. This road is fashioned with freedom. Traveling on it, you will find the enjoyment of living well in every area of your life and experience more love than you have ever known.

When I woke up yesterday, I looked forward to getting home to hug my family the night before my daughter Ashley's first big school dance. I wasn't going to miss this for anything. I showed up at the airport nearly two hours early, which is totally not like me. I run late regularly and also miss airplanes on occasion. But not this time. I was excited and ready to get back to the zoo I call Home Sweet Home.

Ashley would be dressing up for her first homecoming dance. Jake would be an honored guest at a sports banquet where he would receive a football

trophy. I was looking forward to both of these big events. Mostly, I was ready to just be Mom. You know, the lady who enjoys embarrassing her children by taking a million pictures.

As I strolled into LaGuardia Airport with time to spare, the place was in chaos. Battles were taking place everywhere, with people screaming at any airline employee in sight. I actually felt sorry for a few of them—until I had to stop and pray not to lose my cool with an insensitive airline employee myself.

I witnessed a fellow passenger sobbing uncontrollably. Between whimpers, she told the airline representative she needed to get to the wedding of her baby sister. In spite of her tears, he told her, “You should have planned better,” insinuating that she should have left a few days in advance. I wanted to take him out!

But I took the route of nonviolence and tried to focus on my own flight plans. As it turned out, the woman who was about to miss her sister’s wedding wasn’t alone. I was about to join her with my own travel crisis. Due to bad weather, all flights to Fort Lauderdale were canceled for the night. “So sad, too bad” should be the motto of the airline industry. I was totally stuck and completely frustrated, and there seemed to be no one around who cared to find a solution. Here’s a quote from the man behind the counter: “Mrs. Hobbs, we are sorry. Feel free to try us again tomorrow or perhaps the next day. It’s your call.”

I had to regroup and make a plan or else cry. I just went for it and did both. I needed a hotel at least for that night, so I grabbed my laptop and played a game I had played before. The Priceline.com Game, I call it. It can be fun because of the potential for saving money on a nice hotel room. Then there is an added edge of excitement that comes from the uncertainty of where you can end up for the night. I enjoy an occasional calculated risk, so I gave it a try.

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First, I chose an area in New York City where I would be willing to stay. I actually put in seven. Then I decided on the quality level of the hotel. I chose four stars. (I was traveling alone in Manhattan, so safety was a factor.) Next I had to determine the price; I decided \$150. This is about one-third of the going rate for a luxury hotel in this town. Then I clicked Buy and prayed. My fleece was out there, my cry was heard, and my bid was accepted! The winning hotel was in the financial district and rather swanky, judging by the name of it.

I grabbed a cab, and very soon it was obvious that the driver was lost, which is not that unusual, considering that cabbies get paid according to the meter. I phoned the hotel, and, shockingly, the front desk manager and a valet walked a full city block to find me. They also helped with my luggage. I had never been met by this kind of welcome committee in New York City. I was ecstatic. Remember, it had been a long day.

I settled into this beautiful hotel on a crisp, fall evening in the Big Apple, and then God provided one more treat. This was His way of reminding me I was under His wing for the night. Please, friends, don't laugh. I really am being completely serious. I spotted a create-a-salad establishment across the street! I went over, grabbed dinner, returned to my room, got some sleep, and then woke up inspired to write. I had the entire day to work until I would be flying home.

Now as I'm talking with you, sitting here bundled up in three layers of sweaters with my laptop resting on a crossed leg, I'm going to tell you about a deal that will blow away every deal made on these streets of international finance. And I'm convinced God brought me here to think about how to introduce

you to the deal of a lifetime. This deal will guarantee your freedom to live well forever! I promise you, this is more real than anything I have ever known.

With the title *Love Food and Live Well*, you may be thinking this book will relate only to your relationship with food. Truthfully, it was the starting place for me when I decided to live healthy and then lost two hundred pounds. However, what I learned after I lost the weight and worked so hard to maintain it is this: after you succeed, you still face a struggle. How do you hold on to fitness and health and remain at a healthy weight without becoming obsessive about it? What good does it do to get healthy if you can't also have a life?

If you think losing two hundred pounds is hard, try losing that much weight and then learning how to enjoy life again. It's not as easy as it might sound.

But I learned that living well while loving food is entirely possible. Not only that, but feeling free to admit I like food was bigger than anything I could have imagined. It's bigger because of the word *love* attached to it. A word we often use and abuse and don't completely understand. Yet we still seek to know more about it and have more of it than anything on the planet.

Too many of us confuse love with control. In the past, most things I really loved I loved poorly. I know this because as I tried to control them, I always felt out of control. Whether it was food, friendships, jobs, or material stuff, I lived in fear—the fear of losing whatever I was trying to possess. Eventually my attempts to control everything always backfired.

My lifelong weight struggle was a perfect example. The more I made food something to control, the more weight I gained. It seems crazy, but you may be able to relate after many years of living in this tug of war. God whispered my name, and I finally answered. It was there I began a journey to freedom. Of course the release from my weight problem took time, tears, and lots of hard work. However, I realized some amazing truths along the way.

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Each of us is meant to love all the things God has provided. The problem occurs when we try to cut a deal that allows us to love them on our own terms. It's tempting to try to swing a special side deal just for us so we can love food, for example, on our terms. If the deal has been designed by you, me, or the world, I can guarantee this: it will eventually lead to heartache. By seeking to maintain control, which usually involves shutting out others and propping up a false version of ourselves, who wins? Not me or you or anyone you care about, and mostly not God.

In this book I want you to recognize the power of being vulnerable. When you learn how to say, "I'm falling apart," or admit you haven't figured it all out, you can finally discover the path to peaceful living. Let's face it: you're not in control. It's healthy to admit that to yourself and to others.

Even after admitting it, it's easy to slip back into the fantasy that we can control our lives, our circumstances, and the people and the world around us. I fell back into that trap for a few minutes when my flight was canceled and I was stranded in New York. But then I remembered what I had learned the hard way, after losing two hundred pounds but still trying to control my personal world. Admitting that you're not in control and living like you really believe it are huge! If you learn this well, it will change your life.

And all of this is captured in one word—*surrender*—which is what makes the difference. Surrender to the fact that you are not in control. Admit it. Say it out loud. Believe it. In the chapters that follow, we will talk more about the power of surrender, and together we will practice living it.

Now, who doesn't love a good deal? There's a rush of adrenaline that comes when we get something of incredible value for less cost than was expected.

For me, the more I save, the more excited I feel. Can you relate? Would you be interested in a deal that would banish the pain of struggling with food and weight issues forever? At the same time, this deal will deliver excitement and a passion for living well. This means there will be filet mignon and apple pie à la mode on occasion. Can you handle that?

What if I promised this freedom would be totally free? I'd guess you might be willing to strike the deal today. But hold on; there is a catch. This deal will still cost you something: you'll have to hand over your insecurities, your pride, your self-protective habits, and your inhibitions. The deal you will be making is the same deal I made when I realized that healthy living was only a partial reward if I wasn't also living happy and fulfilled. You can be fit and strong and still enjoy life. That's what the deal of a lifetime does for you.

Before we move to the specifics of a life-changing diet and exercise program, I strongly advise you to consult your physician first. When I created the nutrition, cardio, and strength-training portions of Love Food and Live Well—the program I'll introduce you to in this book—I worked closely with experts in medicine, nutrition, and physiology. The program is sound, but, regardless, you should see your personal physician before beginning this or any nutrition, exercise, and fitness program.

Now, I want to show you how your Creator, the God of the universe, is the ultimate Deal Maker and how you can love food and live well for a lifetime.

(Before you turn the page, I would love for you to hear the song that inspired me to write this book. Please visit www.faithfoodandfitness.com and listen to “The Way You Love Me.”)

PART 1



Choose a Deal
That Really
Delivers



1

The Battle over Blue Jeans

People, Here Is My Deal!

*F*or as long as I can remember, I have loved clothes and makeup. Even when I weighed close to 350 pounds, I experimented with trendy hairstyles while checking out the latest plus-size fashion catalogs.

When I was in elementary school, I would spend afternoons with my sister Christy, sitting on the floor of the closet in the decked-out pink bedroom we shared. This was a supersized closet where we would set up our Barbie dolls for fashion shows. Because I had blond hair and Christy was a brunette, it was only natural for me to

Choose a Deal That Really Delivers

pretend to be Barbie and her to be Skipper, Barbie's little sister. At least that's how I sold the idea to Christy. As we grew up and began to put our dolls away, I still enjoyed being prissy, often spending way too much time in front of a mirror.

Even as a young mother, I was a fashionista. I'll never forget entering the hospital to have a scheduled cesarean to deliver my son Jake. I had spent the day before the delivery getting a pedicure and manicure and shopping for a matching nightgown set. Really, I did this! As I lay on the table in the operating room, the doctor arrived and started to chuckle. "Well, Chantel, I can see nothing about this is going to be a natural delivery." All I could say was, "At least I left the false eyelashes at home." I was only half kidding.

One reason I went overboard with my appearance was because I loved hearing friends and family comment on how together I looked. Even while having a baby, I wanted to look great. But today, in hindsight, I feel seriously sorry for the woman I used to be. She was always exhausted from trying to maintain her unreal image. Plus, I knew deep down that I wasn't fooling anyone but myself. My weight problem wasn't going to vanish underneath fancy clothing and attempts to camouflage my problem areas. I really did know that owning an all-black wardrobe wouldn't keep my body issues a secret.

But back then I had convinced myself I needed to make a serious effort to look pretty from the neck up because I was too overweight for the rest of me to look decent. I rationalized that if I could highlight my best features, people would see my positive attributes and look past my greatest flaw: my obese body. At this point my life was one big head game.

I'll never forget the weekend I went on a business trip with my husband, Keith, to Bermuda. This was a dream coming true for someone who spent most days watching Barney and folding laundry. But when we started to

pack, panic set in. Bermuda is one huge beach, and I knew I'd embarrass my husband if I wore a swimsuit in front of his bosses and work friends. On the other hand, this was Bermuda! It was a free trip and a chance to escape the zoo I called home!

After we boarded the plane, I found my seat and immediately put a jacket over my waist. This was a trick I had learned from previous travel experiences, and it almost always worked. If I could hide where the seat belt was supposed to be, the flight attendant wouldn't notice that mine was unbuckled. The truth is, I did this because I couldn't connect the seat belt. I was too big around. This time, however, my system failed. As the attendant stopped by our row, she asked me to buckle my seat belt. As I struggled to latch it, she stood impatiently with one hand on her hip. I whispered that I was having trouble making it fit.

So being the sensitive, tall, and freakishly thin woman she was, she shouted to her co-worker, "Could you look in one of the overhead compartments for a seat-belt extension?"

I was mortified. I closed my eyes and tried to pretend the attendant was talking about someone else. A few moments later she handed me the hated seat-belt extension, and I fastened the thing as quickly as I could. I promise you, I could feel the pity of strangers as they witnessed my shame. But instead of shedding tears, I did what I had rehearsed in previous situations. I took a deep breath and grabbed Keith's hand, squeezing it for dear life as the aircraft took off. *My vacation is off to a great start, I told myself. I can't wait to see what other embarrassing moments lie ahead.*

Surprisingly, our Bermuda trip ended up being the trip of a lifetime. The island was beautiful, the water was the clearest blue I had ever seen, and I felt beautiful for the entire week. Strangely, it was another young mother, the wife of one of Keith's co-workers, who was mostly responsible.

Choose a Deal That Really Delivers

Each day I would get dolled up and make my entrance into the meeting room for the company's group breakfast. This girl went out of her way to say something sincere and extraordinary about the way I looked, morning after morning. She would also ask me for fashion advice. By her looks, she didn't need any, certainly none from me. Yet she still inquired and never in a condescending way.

Best of all, she never breathed the dreaded words "You have such a pretty face." The trip to Bermuda taught me the intense power we all have when we speak to someone, especially to a person who is feeling weak and vulnerable. Just by saying something simple and positive, we can brighten someone's outlook, even if it's only for a few seconds.

For most of my life I had become accustomed to backhanded compliments. When it came to my weight and all my failed attempts to lose it, I had heard everything. I'd try yet another diet, and two weeks into it over and over I would hear from those around me, "Now keep up the good work." And I would always think, *Are you kidding? I'm trying here. Just tell me "good job," and don't worry about whether I lose another dad-gum pound. I get that you are letting me know I have a long way to go!*

YET ANOTHER NEW START

Coming home from Bermuda, where I felt sincere acceptance, I had real hope. I felt different. I was relaxed, revived, and encouraged. I decided that I was ready to give weight loss another shot. As I set out to lose weight for the eighty-sixth time in my life, I felt prepared. I bought the latest diet book from Sam's Club and a twelve-pack of muffins. I rationalized the muffin purchase by telling myself I needed to have one last hurrah.

On Monday my plan was to go for it. I would try with everything in me

not to let anything stand in my way. Of course, I didn't see any need to crack open the new book I'd bought until the weekend was over! What would a few more days of indulgence hurt?

Then Monday arrived, and I made my grand entrance at the gym. I even went back three days in a row. The only problem was that by the end of the week I was hanging out more than working out. I'd been trying to get David, the juice bar owner, to tell me his recipe for the yummy chocolate-peanut butter protein shake I was ordering every day. The first clue it wasn't all that healthy should have been the chocolate syrup he poured in. But I told myself, if it's made on gym property, how bad could it be?

By the time the week ended, I had followed the plan in my recently purchased book and had my cheat day. Not surprisingly, I quickly indulged in an entire cheat weekend. However, I managed to get back to the gym the following Monday. The plan I was on was doable, and even with halfhearted efforts, I was slowly losing weight.

After shedding about twenty pounds, I decided I needed some new clothes. This was kind of funny, especially since not one person had noticed that I had lost an ounce. As I said earlier, I've always loved fashion. But at this point, with my weight so high, I was stuck wearing mostly dresses and skirts. I just couldn't face the prospect of trying to fit my behind into a pair of pants at Lane Bryant. But now, since I was feeling pretty good about myself and getting results, I headed over to the Coral Square Mall. I was there to hunt down a pair of blue jeans. Even if I had to lie down to zip them and not breathe while I wore them, I was determined to come home with new jeans.

I picked up three pairs with plenty of stretch to take into the dressing room. Once the door was closed, though, no amount of sucking it in, squeezing hard, or holding my breath got the jeans up to my waist. I couldn't make any of them fit. As I held the jeans up and looked in the mirror, I wondered

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how anyone could stand to look at me. I was a disgusting blob of pain and misery.

I had left home that day feeling good about my progress. I was finally losing some weight. But after a few minutes in a dressing room, I wanted to die. How had I let myself become this pathetic mess of a woman?

A few Cinnabons later I went home. Two weeks after my blue jean horror show, I found out I was expecting. A month into the pregnancy I miscarried due to a badly infected gallbladder, and I ended up having emergency surgery. I wondered if I would ever change my life or if I would die first. Death seemed like perhaps the only escape out of this prison.

About six months later I had an unforgettable encounter with God. I was alone in my car, driving home from a meeting. I had reached my lowest point ever, and I let God in. I had known Him for years, ever since I had been saved from an eternity separated from Him. As a little girl in Sunday school, I had asked Jesus into my heart to save me from my sins. What I needed now, as a desperate, hurting, damaged woman, was to be saved from myself. I was still trying to run my own life.

God had whispered my name through many embarrassing moments and hurtful situations; I just never answered. But that night, alone in my car, He finally got through to me. I experienced a supernatural intervention. And it compels me now to tell my friends, my clients, and my readers my Lazarus story.

AN INCREDIBLE SECOND CHANCE

Remember the story of Lazarus in the Bible? When Jesus brought him back from the dead, and we're talking dead as a doornail (he was four-days dead), I imagine all he wanted was to blow a trumpet and tell the world about his

miracle. Today I feel a similar kind of zeal resulting from my own miracle. As I surrendered all the pain of my lifelong weight problem to God, my heart began a major shift. God gave me a deep desire to go to work. For the first time, I took on the task of losing the weight with Him in charge. I was no longer alone as I had been in the past. By allowing God, who never breaks a promise, to give me the strength, self-control, and focus I needed, how could I fail?

Ten years later I am on the same course He set for my life that night. My life is still filled with unexpected moments, both tragedies and celebrations. But I have never looked back.

After going on to lose two hundred pounds, I designed my own fitness and weight-loss program and became a certified Spinning teacher, personal trainer, and marathon runner. I love feeling strong, being healthy, and knowing I'm not a slave to my former appetites. Often I run into people I haven't seen in many years. They may have known me as the overweight girl with a pretty face. And if I dare to attempt a reacquaintance, I am usually in for a good laugh.

I'll never forget one woman from a church I attended years earlier. I ran into her at the grocery store and tried to convince her who I was. "You aren't really Chantel from West Lauderdale Baptist," she insisted. I tried to get her to believe it was me, just an improved version. I think she finally accepted the truth, but it took awhile.

I am proud of the woman I have worked to become. However, I am most thankful that God rescued me from a place where I had lost all hope. God's care for me and His work in my life give me the strength to stay on course. Now, after writing four books and producing a learning system for weight loss and fitness, I can see that God continues to use me as a voice of real-life experience. A big part of my message is this: let me help you stop sabotaging

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yourself and your life. I know, from hard experience, how to overcome self-defeat. Every day I get to hear the stories of people who were losing hope, as I was, and now are finding the life they had dreamed of. I receive e-mails from women who have heard me speak, read one of my books, or heard me on the radio and now are surrendering their failed attempts to God. They are learning the truth and power of surrender and then doing the hard work of changing their lives.

In my work of helping people reclaim their health, I never know what is coming next. Recently I got a call from my publicist. She was so excited she could hardly tell me the news. “While you are in New York later this week to do *The Today Show* and *Fox and Friends*, a major women’s magazine wants to set up a photo shoot.”

I screamed. I couldn’t help it. Not only would the exposure help sell my book, but doing a photo shoot in New York, as the author of fitness books, was an experience I never dreamed I’d have. When I weighed nearly 350 pounds, an opportunity like this never entered my mind.

I couldn’t wait, but I had to. It was still a few weeks away. As New Year’s came and went, I was more careful than ever about fitting in all my workouts and eating clean. (*Clean eating* is the best way for me to think about food that delivers maximum energy with a reasonable calorie content.) When the day arrived, a driver came to our New York hotel to take Keith and me to the shoot. In the previous week, I had given my measurements to a stylist. She informed me she would be shopping for the clothes I would wear for the photo shoot. To use a term from my Southern-rooted parents, I was in hog heaven! I used to be the woman who was embarrassed to tell anyone her sizes, and now I had someone else buying me clothes based on them! The great part was the freedom in sharing what size I was. For the first time, I felt no shame.

When we arrived at the studio, I noticed that the loft where the photographer had scheduled the shoot was trendy and chic. It had sky-high ceilings complete with lots of lights and screened umbrellas to ensure perfect lighting. Taking up an entire wall was a buffet of food the magazine had catered for the event, my event! All of it was healthy fare with me in mind.

As I entered a dressing room, fun music filled the air. A makeup artist and hairstylist began their magic. I listened while they talked about their past work. One had done Heidi Klum's makeup not long before, and the other spoke of doing the makeup for big names on a major movie set. I was a little overwhelmed with the emotion of the moment. I felt like I was back to playing Barbie dolls with my sister.

After hair and makeup were underway, the stylist had me try on all the clothes she had bought. We settled on a great pair of designer jeans with a sleek white sweater and a trendy hot pink top. I put on the heels she had purchased—a perfect fit—and some fabulous jewelry. Then I was whisked away to the main part of the studio. In that moment I felt like a million bucks.

It was then the stylist asked me what I believed to be an insane question: "Where are your old blue jeans?" At first I couldn't believe I had heard her right, but I knew what she was getting at. She said the creative director wanted me to hold up a supersized pair of pants in the photo to show the dramatic contrast represented by clothes I had worn in my previous life.

I understood the point of playing up the shock value. Shoppers standing in line at the supermarket checkout would be amazed by the pants I had once filled out. But the idea that I would have to display a symbol of the old life I had left behind made me feel sick, like I had never lost a pound. How could I hold up a pair of jeans that represented my old humiliation?

I explained to the stylist that not only had I not brought a pair of jeans

but I didn't feel comfortable doing this. As I held my breath, a few phone calls were made, and the shoot continued without the troubling reminder of my past. It turned out to be a great experience, and I was pleased with the photographs. However, I felt a little angry and upset with myself. Hadn't I moved on past my old image? I could now fit two of me inside my old jeans, so why was this such a big deal? I also wondered if readers might have been helped by seeing me holding up the pants I used to wear. Why couldn't I just smile into the camera with confidence even if I was standing behind a pair of my old jeans?

I WILL NEVER RETURN

Back in my hotel room, I awoke in the middle of the night still thinking about the photo shoot. Finally I could see clearly what had offended me. Supersized blue jeans were a symbol of major pain in my life. Holding them up in front of me would not feel as if I was showcasing success. I was now on an exciting journey to share my life and my program to help other people. I had ditched the old jeans, just as I had ditched diets—and both of them for good! Sure, I will always be able to relate to the woman who desperately tries to zip up a pair of pants in a store's dressing room. But I didn't want to spend another special moment of my life sharing the spotlight with my former self. I had crossed the point of no return. I now knew without question that I would never go back.

I have a completely new deal, one that focuses on living my new life, the life that God led me to when I fell into my darkest moment. The old me had long wanted to leave behind the constant torment of being overweight and undisciplined. That life is now over. My new deal is much sweeter than I dreamed was possible.

The Battle over Blue Jeans

You can have the same deal! You can start living a life of security and freedom. You can be released from the prison of defeat, failure, and negative self-image. And best of all, the new deal we're going to explore is guaranteed to last.

I won't ever return to being the person I started out as. There is no going back. And I'll show you how to take full advantage of the same deal!