

TUNA BREATH

*The Inspiring True Story of a Guy Who Beat
Childhood Obesity and Found Peace, Happiness, and
Balance in Life!*

Written by Doug Pedersen
Chicago, Illinois

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Selected Reviews

“Doug Pedersen’s story of beating obesity is necessary and inspirational in a time when the American public is inundated with ‘quick-fix’ programs. This self-help book reads like a memoir – at once funny, poignant, and generous, while offering genuine advice. It is the honest account of how a young boy who uses food for comfort grows into a young man consciously choosing to improve the quality of his health and life. A must read in 2011.”

~ Lila Jkanovic (Chicago, IL)

“TUNA BREATH is a pleasure to read...so utterly ENJOYABLE (and the lessons to be learned are visceral).”

~ Ellen Woods (Chicago, IL)

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TUNA BREATH

My first sales trainer was a real nice guy who had a thick southern accent, you know the kind that produced a “whistle sound” every time he said a word that had an “s” at the end. He made friends easily and he used to introduce himself as “the ‘ole boy from Missouri-ah!” And he always followed that up with, “You know Missouri-ah, don’t ya? That’s where hillbilly started!”

Sam also taught me my first corporate acronym: “WIIFM” (pronounced “whiff-im”). Much to my surprise, WIIFM stood for “What’s In It For Me?” only though the “Me” didn’t refer to myself or any of us in the class. “Me” referred to our customers and as new sales people we were being taught to answer this question for our customer because this is the question that would be in his/her head every time we made a sales presentation or pitch. So to make Sam proud, I want to give you, my readers, a real WIIFM about my story and why this book is worth your time.

My battle with childhood obesity started when I was only seven years old. It was the 1980’s and before grunge music, the internet, renewable anything, mass media, social media, cable news, and before global epidemics like obesity existed. Gastric bypasses weren’t performed and drug makers weren’t advertising on TV. The Real World was the only reality TV show and we didn’t know The Biggest Loser or have documentaries on MSNBC, TLC or A&E chronicling how people coped with being morbidly obese.

I was working as a security guard when one day my environment changed and I began to wake up slowly. Once I got serious about life I lost one-hundred and twenty five pounds in eight months all on my own. I didn’t have a coach, doctors, or my parents helping but I learned about desire, sacrifice, self discipline and physical balance. I became extremely confident and joined the Marine Corps, finished college and got a finance degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder, and I pursued Wall Street before leaving Investment Banking to become a successful salesman. In mastering my desire and discipline I became very arrogant and cocky, and generally felt lonely and deeply unhappy.

My life changed for the best, ironically, when my grandfather died. I was forced to come into my own, having spent years reflecting on my story and on my accomplishments. I had achieved everything I had ever set my mind to, but yet I was still personally lonely, empty, and deeply unhappy until I realized my errors and learned what peace, happiness, and balance in life is really all about.

TUNA BREATH outlines the events I experienced that delivered my soul and brought me into physical, mental, and emotional balance. I’m not a doctor and I’m not a counselor. I’m a real guy who has lived life, a lot of life, and who has overcome overwhelming obstacles to control his own destiny. I’m sensitive and emotional, and I’m willing to expose this to help others – and I want to help you. My humble hope is that you find inspiration in my story and avoid the mistakes I made while gleaning the lessons I learned. Live Now; Live free, my friends!

Doug Pedersen

Chapter 1



Don't Be An OxyMoron

"The only certainties in life are "time" and "change." The question you must ask yourself: "is now the time to change?"

~Doug Pedersen

I don't know about you, but I've never felt like I was the smartest person in the room. Not that I've ever felt dumb, it's just that since I was a kid in grammar school no one's ever accused me of being the brightest bulb on the tree, the sharpest knife in the drawer, or the one you want to copy off of in class if you know what I mean. I suppose you could say that I was a bit of a slacker when it came to academics.

To me, I was just picking my spots in life and only paying attention to things I felt interested in. Like picking a good restaurant or swinging at a good pitch. You don't pick a place that serves nasty food and you don't swing your bat at a wild pitch. So, why concentrate on things that you don't like – like homework? At least that's how my young brain worked.

Most of the time I thought sitting in a classroom was like watching a soap opera: nothing said was relevant to my life and the conversations were as interesting as yarn. In any given class in any given grade you could assume that I was daydreaming about anything but schoolwork, cracking jokes, talking in the back of the class, or ditching school altogether.

Chapter 2



Cut Your Hair & Get A Job

"Knowledge is that which is acquired by learning. Wisdom is knowing what to do with it."

~Unknown

Having Have you ever made a simple choice that had really big consequences? You know, ever made a choice that seemed small but its meaning grew like a snowball rolling down a mountain. Not like choosing a mate or choosing to go after your first thirty year Adjustable Rate Mortgage – yikes! I'm talking about a no brainer; a "no big deal" decision; the kind of choice you make when you're seventeen. But somehow when you weren't looking, and maybe only when you really stopped to think about it, that small choice actually changed your life. This happened to me when I chose to follow *Dad Rule #3* and become a security guard.

In case you skipped the last chapter, *Dad Rule #3* required that my brother and I work at some point in our lives. The rule didn't say what kind of work we had to do. The rule simply stated that we needed to be presentable in public and support ourselves someday. Actually, to quote the man it went more like this: "Boys, the free ride will be over soon. Don't kid yourself about living under my roof for free with your mother and I. You *will* be weaned from the *teat!* When you're eighteen you need to cut your hair and get a job."

My brother Ben and I heard "when you're eighteen, cut your hair and get a job" starting at a very early age. This

wasn't a scare tactic from an overbearing Dad. It was actually said out of love in an instructive way – like “here's your roadmap to becoming a man.” In fact, my Dad started teaching us the value of honest work maybe even before I spoke English. “Ha-ha-ha. He said *teat* again,” the two year old chuckled while skimming the classifieds.

My Dad's name is Bill and he's awesome. There's no doubt that he's my hero and I love him very much. He's a real provider, a protector, and a family man. Bill is also the epitome of a man's man; a real straight shooter with a “get it done” type attitude. You won't find a more honest person than him and he is the guy people love to have in charge.

A mountain of a man (literally), my Dad has hands like a polar bear. His shoulders are broad and his neck and wrists are thick, like a wrestler. He's not a big football fan, but he has been called “Hey Ditka!” in public before, if you get my drift. Dad's *city* now, but I always figured that *Dad Rule #3* came from his more rural roots. See, Bill grew up doing manual labor on the Nebraska farm that he and his four brothers and five sisters were raised on – which also gave him an awesome work ethic and a heart that is made of gold. It apparently also gave him *awesome* insight into *teat weaning*.

Dad had other quotable moments besides *Dad Rules*. When he wasn't busy working, Ben and I could often talk him into taking us to the neighborhood pool. But not before we heard, “You boys are too *city*; your Uncle Carl and I used to swim in irrigation ditches.” Or if we wanted to watch a show like the *The Love Boat* or *Alf* he would say, “You boys are too *city*; whatever happened to *The Rifelman* or *The Lone Ranger*?” He's absolutely right, though. I'm a city boy

through and through and liked Los Angeles. The only thing I've ever done in an irrigation ditch is take a leak in one during a family reunion.

I didn't think that it got too cold where we lived. Still, sometimes Dad liked to say “It's colder than a *coaly's* ass in here!” Or if we were at the beach he'd say, “Watch your nuts, boys. That water is colder than a *coaly's* ass.” I didn't understand the *coaly* reference most of the time. It actually took me thirty years to figure out he was relating the temperature to a guy's butt – or more specifically, a coal miner's butt. A *coaly* (a coal miner I think), whose butt must get very cold while working underground. That's obvious; right?

Even though Dad was an ordained minister at one point, he still would commit blasphemy. “Jesus Christ, Anne! The boy is five years old.” He would tell my mother while defending his decision to let Ben and me launch ourselves off the high dive. Or, “Jesus Christ, Anne! The boy is nine. It didn't even come close to his toes.” he said before snatching the electric chain saw from my hands as we worked in the yard. “Jesus Christ, Anne! The boy is seventeen. Of course he'll graduate; he'll only be sitting behind a desk passing out radios to the other security guards.”

My mom really had nothing to worry about. Dad's a real pragmatic type and would never let anything happen to us. Plus, I never aspired to be a real *super trooper* if you know what I mean. At the time, I only knew two things about security work. 1.) Everybody dressed like *Andy Griffith*; and 2.) Dad had worked as a security guard when I was a younger kid. It was during the rough patch in the mid

'80's I mentioned before. He was searching for work after leaving our church and he took security shifts that paid \$4.11 an hour. He used to tell my brother and I, "*Four-eleven* is better than *No-eleven*. And if you get two *four-elevens*, that's *eight-twenty two*. You do what you have to do, boys." To this day, my Dad still uses the "four eleven" speech when referring to work, or anything in life, that isn't particularly fun. Like a mantra for getting through things that *suck*.

I never forgot my Dad's ability to focus on the task at hand and do whatever was necessary. When my task at hand was to stop going to high-school during my senior year I remembered *Dad Rule #3*. Working was the perfect *out* from class. Why not work more, get paid more, and get away from the mechanics at the gas station that played basketball with my backside? So, I applied to a "work experience" program and got it. My guidance counselor only required that I keep my "B" average and enroll in the college-level English and Math courses. My reaction: "*Whatever!*" But I did what she said and then asked my Dad to help me get a job as a guard. You can imagine my excitement when they wanted to pay me *nine fifty-five*. "Wow! One *nine fifty-five* crushes two *four-elevens*."

Now to bring the story full circle, this really simple choice started a really big series of snowballing events. I didn't realize it at the time, nor was I looking for it, but working security at Universal Studios, Hollywood changed my life forever. It was huge; like a divine intervention. I had taken this job for superficial reasons as a chump teenager. No long term perspective here; just a kid looking to get out of class and earn some easy money for babysitting something. However, two very powerful miracles happened while I tried to float through this job: 1.) I met *Loveable*

Louie who helped me find ambition; and 2.) I lost a few fluke pounds for the first time ever.

The fix was in with my new security job. There wasn't really much of an application or screening process, especially with my dad vouching for me. He had made quite a name for himself coming up through the security ranks at Universal Studios (aka, "Universal" or just "the Studios"). By the time I stumbled in at Universal in the winter of 1991, he was the Chief of Investigations for Corporate Security and sort of a big wig.

Universal was a massive group of TV and movie making studios that also ran a theme park for tourists. It was situated in North Hollywood on a four hundred and eighty acre property that was only a few miles from where I grew up. Shows like *Magnum P.I.*, *The A-Team*, *Knight Rider* and *Bonanza* were produced there. Movies like *ET*, *Back to the Future*, and *Jurassic Park* were huge there. The theme park was open to the public – after you bought a ticket of course – and it attracted close to twenty thousand tourists a day from all over the world. I was excited to work there as, like many kids in the '80's, I had grown to be a huge fan of TV and movies – I had grown up to be a huge couch potato. Even a local kid like me was struck by the "magic of Hollywood" when I got to see famous people like Jean Claude Van Dame, Bob Hope, and even Michael Jackson in person.

Through a stroke of luck I got the best job on the shift. Actually, my dad pulled some strings and they put me in the main security office of the theme park. It was called "Tours Security" and I was the swing shift dispatcher. I laughed out loud when I heard what my job was. My main

responsibilities included passing out radios; answering phones; recording alarms; dispatching the roving guards; and coordinating their breaks. To me this translated into: sit on your butt; sit on your butt some more, visit the Riverboat food stand and grab some hot dogs; sit on your butt again; take a dump; and finally go back to the desk and sit on your butt until your shift is over. I thought it was the perfect job for a kid with my type of ambition – with the ambition of a throw pillow.

Being the dispatcher didn't only involve desk work. There was some *light* walking involved too. On top of dispatching guards, they also wanted me to watch the front door and greet the tourists that approached our office. The door was cut in half – like the door to a day-care playroom – and seemed like it was a mile away. Actually, it was only six whole feet from my desk, which just made it a pain in the ass anytime someone stopped by. Some tourists tried to open our “cubby door” to come in, so I was supposed to greet them and find out “what the f^cking problem was.” Most of them wanted to know where to find *Conan the Barbarian*, the *Miami Vice* set, or the famous grey DeLorean from *Back to the Future* that they literally had to walk by to get to our door. A lot of them also thought that our office was the bathroom. One time a guy tried the door knob for what seemed like thirty seconds; kicking the door while looking at me and my boss before saying, “Are you going to let me in or what? I'm about to shit my pants out here in front of my little girl!”

“Calm down, sir, and step away from the little girl, right now!” is all I could think to say.

It was a fun job and I encountered a lot of interesting people. Working with the other guards brought lots of goofy situations similar to the movies *Armed and Dangerous*, *Paul Blart Mall Cop*, or like *Supertroopers*. The tourists were great too, but you had to watch out for little nuances like the kamikaze tourists that didn't pay attention to where they walked or the pooping dad that used his daughter as a human shield. Most security incidents were minor as well. The park quieted down after seven o'clock at night and then it was really about locking the place down and keeping an eye on things – a good time for mischief between the guards and the other park employees.

My favorite caper was raiding the food kitchens for leftovers. Restaurants like the Italian Kitchen or The Park Grille were great for getting big plates of pasta, pizza, and soda. Another one of my favorite food scores was the Riverboat. It was a patio style concession counter that looked like it was steaming down the mighty Mississippi – big water wheel and all. I've already documented my binging habits, so there's no need to revisit them. But you can imagine my delight while smelling many freshly wrapped, warm hot dogs that had been tossed in the garbage for the night. Yes, I had no shame then either.

As dispatcher I got to spend a lot of time with a guy I chose to admire more than a Riverboat hot dog: *Loveable Louie*. Louie was a manager and to me he was the most interesting guy in the room. Our desks sat facing each other and I worked the radio while he called the shots. He was in his early sixties and wore a full head of silver hair that he combed straight back – like Pat Riley. Louie's eyes were always wide open – watching everything – and although he was polished, he had a rough, manly look illustrated best by

the pear size tattoo on his right forearm. The ink was dark green and faded; you could tell that it had been there a while.

I thought Louie's background was fascinating from the very beginning. He was retired from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). If you brought it up, which I often did, he would let you know that he had done and seen everything. He worked homicide and vice; he worked Police Intel and covered organized crime; he was a detective and had investigated some of LA's most famous crimes and murders. Louie also was a member of the elite Special Investigative Service (SIS) at one point. SIS was notorious for taking down big criminals – the worst of the worst. They were more high-speed and more ruthless than even SWAT.

Before running the streets for thirty years with LAPD, Louie was a United States Marine. He enlisted after the Korean War and did his own time during the Viet Nam War – in the late 1950's and '60's. That's when he got the tattoo on his forearm of the Marine's famous insignia: the eagle, globe, and anchor. As a Marine, Louie was a grunt; an infantry man; and a sniper. Although he didn't like to talk about his experiences in Viet Nam, he was a wealth of knowledge when it came to Marine Corps history, World War II trivia, and on life in the Corps. You knew Louie was proud of the Marines and happy to greet other veterans that joined the security team. "Semper Fi! Once a Marine always a Marine!" he would bark out across the office.

Louie was also a crafty flirt. That's how he got the name *Loveable Louie*. He always amazed me with his effortless charm. Now I'm not saying he was a ladies' man, because Louie had a ton of respect for women – especially his wife. But he was a widower and I could tell that he liked

the feeling when he would flirt a little and get some playful admiration, and even some validation, in return. Louie had what I called the *Harry Connick Junior effect*. He didn't say anything to be especially funny or outwardly flirty. It was more of his ore; just his energy I suppose. Still, the women giggled at everything he said. He could say, "These cherries are amazing! I love the chocolate covered cherries that come from Michigan in the fall. Aren't they lovely? They remind me of a cute bed and breakfast where you can sleep in and take long romantic walks among the foliage." Without fail, every female security guard would melt and start to giggle. "Oh, Louie; you're just so gosh darn loveable!"

"Oh Louie, you're such a sly devil!" I would think to myself as he winked at me. For a native Angelino, he reminded me of a European ladies man with a slight raspy voice from smoking too many cigarettes. I always waited for him to follow up with a cheesy line like, "Tell me something, doll; if I told you that you had an amazing body, would you hold it against me?" But he never did.

To me Louie was the type of guy that you wanted next to you in the foxhole. You wanted to be on his team. He was the warrior poet type: strong yet sensitive; foul mouthed in private, yet eloquent in public; the guy you were sort of afraid to make mad but that could make you laugh out loud. "Doug!" he'd say. "Who was that; that fucking guard with the short pants. Was he serious with those maroon socks? Call his ass back in here." When the guy showed up Louie stood up, planted his foot on top of the desk and pulled his own pant leg up. "Blue or black – not fucking maroon! Now go get some new goddamn socks before Doug's dad sees you!" he scolded while pointing at his dark blue socks. The guy looked at me while his ass puckered like a lime tart

before darting out the door. “How’d I do, Doug?” he’d say with a grin.

Louie took me under his wing. He showed me what to do and helped me get respect from the other guards. Instead of being around younger, greasy mechanics that razed me about my butt crack, I was now working under a guy that showed me respect – and I respected him. I figured that he did this out of respect for my Dad because they were friends. But later on I felt that Louie did this out of respect for me. “Doug!” he would say. “You’re a good man. You’ve earned your salt. Your Dad was right about you.” I didn’t know what he meant at the time, but I knew that it just felt good to be respected; to feel a bit of confidence and self esteem. Admiring Louie struck me like a magic trick after I had spent so much time floating through school and avoiding responsibility. It was inspiring; it was like being mentored in a way that parents can’t – like when you’re seventeen and think you know everything already. It was valuable and it was the beginning of some very big changes in my life.

In time, Louie trusted me to make decisions for the shift. He preferred to be out of the office making rounds anyway, versus sitting in the office processing paperwork. Once he felt that I could handle it, Louie would leave the office like a thief in the night and disappear for hours on end. The office to him was like school for me. There were times where I would see him maybe once in an eight hour shift. We talked on the radio or on the phone a lot, but he hated the office. Without fail, though, Louie would stroll in thirty minutes before shift change and say, “Doug! What happened today?” as he walked through the door. It was like his announcement that he was there. “Doug! What happened today?” meant “Hey, Doug. How are ya? Tell me what I

need to tell the oncoming shift so that we can get the hell outta here!” I would rundown through the list of events and always get cut off by, “Doug! Did we get reports for all that?” The answer was always, “yes,” and I would hear “You’re a good man, Doug. Your Dad was right about you. Enough nonsense – now let’s go get an ice cream.”

Louie always had a back up watch the radio and we’d walk and talk about stuff while we ate ice cream together. I really got the sense that he liked me and I used that opportunity to ask him about everything. And I listened to every story Louie would tell about his life as a cop and as a Marine.

Almost a year into my time with Louie the Studio hosted a huge special event called “Halloween Horror Nights.” It was October 1992 and I had graduated high-school a few months before in June. The event lasted the whole month and it sure lived up to its name. The park transformed into a huge haunted house full of ghosts, goblins, ware wolves, and witches that shrieked in horror. Fog machines blanketed the park with thick wet smoke while miles of fake cob webs, loud blood curdling sound effects, and frightened tourists filled the park. The first time I walked to the office at night I thought that even Count Dracula might even crap his pants if he saw this set up.

The park hours also extended to 9:00pm and the attendance increased from twenty thousand people per day to almost forty or fifty thousand. For us, that meant more incidents and more guards to watch everything. The surge in coverage also meant that the shift needed an additional supervisor. The new supervisor was supposed to make sure

that everyone was where they needed to be when they were supposed to be there – or so I thought.

Much to my surprise, Louie asked me to be his junior field supervisor for the month. I never asked him for it because I thought I was a long shot as the youngest guy on the shift – but I felt honored that he considered me. I wondered if he was just trying to stay on my Dad's good side, but I wanted to please him anyway. Louie had other concerns besides maroon socks and he refused to let anything big happen on his watch. As a result, he told me to check the guards at least three times per shift. Wanting to please him, my plan was to check everybody at least five times – walking from post to post and checking socks, haircuts, and be the “the first responder” if an incident happened. When I wasn't doing that I thought I could catch some of the shows. “Don't get any smart ideas, Doug. I need you in the parking lots; you're going to be *Lord of the Lots* – get it? I need someone out there that I can trust to keep those *slappers* in line. It's going to be busy, Doug. So buckle up.”

I didn't know if *slappers* were the tourists or the guards. Turned out Louie was referring to the other guards, like *slap dicks* or just plain *slappers*. It's a cop thing, I guess, but I understood what he meant after my first shift and thought he should have called me *King of the Dipshits* instead of *Lord of the Lots* because the new parking lot guards followed directions as well as a rogue vampire.

My first shift set the tone for an action packed month. And like Louie had told me, it was busier than a Chinese train station at high noon. I made an activity plan (for the first time ever) and set my sights on getting around to all the

guards at least five times – that should take up the entire shift, I thought. With my clipboard in hand, I was “on the beat” for the first four hours (3:00pm to 7:00pm), checking guards posted in the parking garages and in the many parking lots. I walked a lot but was also able to hitch rides on golf carts here and there. But like a sudden thunder and lightning strike – or the moment in a college party where the alcohol seems to hit everyone at the same time – at 7:00pm the shift went from dull to “what the hell!” in an instant.

“Zombie down! Zombie down!” was the radio call that changed everything. Once this hit the security airwaves I was running like Forest Gump – or at least trying to – because incident after incident tore through the park. The “zombie call” turned out to be funnier than the panicked voice on the radio let on. Once I got there, a tourist from Amsterdam had literally flattened an actor that was in character as a Zombie in the *Horror Maze*. Apparently, the actor jumped out of the wall and scared the poop out of our friend from Amsterdam. The Dutchman didn't appreciate that one bit and felt that a punch in the face was a fair trade for a poop in the pants.

Before I could clear that scene I got another hair raising call. “My foot! My foot! This is post forty-nine and I've just been run over by a yellow taxi!” Turns out the guard's foot didn't get run over. But he did have an altercation where the cab driver opened his car door into the guard. You know, like the guard was standing too close to the car and got bumped when the guy opened his door. There were no major injuries, or injuries period, but I still had to roll the paramedics, get all the operations managers involved, and get statements from all fifty witnesses that saw our guy basically provoke the whole thing – whoopsie!

The next significant incident involved a man and a horse. Actually the radio call went like this: “Dope in the turn-styles! I’ve got dope in the turn-styles!” I learned when I arrived on the scene that our guard thought he saw somebody trying to sell marijuana to the tourists. All I saw was a guy passing out brochures, inappropriately of course, but I didn’t see any refer bags. When out of the “wild blue yonder” I see a West Hollywood Sherriff Deputy in full gallop coming straight towards me on horseback. The Sherriff’s were on the property for serious incidents and this cop thought we were serious. He was serious at least. He wore tall, black leather riding boots to the knee; a riot stick that was as long as a samurai sword; and his olive green cowboy hat covered the biggest handle bar mustache I’d ever seen. The horse skid in front of me while the Sheriff grunted, “Where is he?” I pointed in the general direction of the brochure guy while the *mouty* dismounted. “Here, hold my horse!” as he passed the reins and smartly stepped to the perp. I stood there in amazement, eye to eye with a horse that was huffing and puffing in my face – the snot literally dripped from both its nostrils. “I’m too *city*, eh? If Dad could only see me now.” I thought.

Needless to say, I had to pick up the pieces after all of these incidents. It was my job to get there, coordinate the scene, get the right operations managers, paramedics, and cops to deal with the may lay. It was my job to respond, assess, take control, and then gather the information before writing reports for the security bosses – for Louie. Smaller incidents always popped up in between the big ones, like a lost child or a tourist that couldn’t remember which of the ten parking lots they parked their rental car in. Every day that month was like this and I thought it was exciting. It was like being in a TV show versus watching a TV show. So much

drama; so much to talk about; so little time to think about anything – especially eating or drowning in any type of self loathing thoughts.

By the end of the event I had earned my own little reputation, with Louie at least. “Doug! You were definitely *Lord of the Lots*. They should name a character after you.” I didn’t know how to take his praise. I just thought I was doing my job and I wanted to please him. But I think Louie sensed that I wanted more. He could see that I was thriving in the role and that I had become more confident with the other guards. That’s when he said, “Doug! You’re a good man and you did a good job for me. I want to promote you permanently. Do you think you can handle it?”

I wanted to keep that job more than anything. I felt like I had succeeded at something and I knew I was capable of more; maybe I could run the shift at some point. I never had ambitions like this before. Usually, I was trying to find the easier route and I could’ve easily snuck back into the office as his dispatcher. When I asked him what my job would be he simply said, “I’m going to make some changes when these *slappers* leave. You’re going to be second in charge, after me. I tell you what to do; then you tell them what to do. Get it; do you think you can handle that? I was ecstatic and still a little surprised. I was the youngest guy on the shift and thought that others would think I got promoted because of my Dad. For the first time in a really long time, though, I dismissed what others might think and told Louie “hell yeah!”

“Good, but get your uniforms switched out over the weekend, you look like hell, man! We don’t want people thinking you’re the *Sultan of Slappers*.”

Louie was right; I looked like hell. In the end, Halloween Horror Nights turned out to be my “sweaty lip month.” You know, how you’re upper lip glistens with small beads of sweat. No? Just me? Well, as a two hundred and seventy five pound eighteen year old racing around a four hundred and eighty acre fun house, my upper lip was never dry. My collar was never clean, always soiled from the ring around the collar, and my pits were always steamy. I was a busy beaver and I worked (walked) my ass off. As a result, I wore a sweat mustache on my upper lip most of the time.

I knew that my uniforms fit differently before Louie mentioned it. I never analyzed it, though, because I didn’t have the time. When I got home that night I stepped on my parents scale and couldn’t believe my eyes. By the time the needle stopped spinning, the dial read “two, five, zero.”

“Wow! Two hundred and fifty pounds? Me? I haven’t weighed two-fifty since tenth grade. I leapt of the scale for joy and looked in the mirror. I hadn’t seen a smile that big since I got dumbbells for Christmas. I was amazed that during the four weeks of Halloween Horror Nights I lost twenty five pounds without trying. It was shocking and it blew my mind. I stood there in disbelief just letting the wonder run through my mind. Not only had I never had sex before; I had never lost weight before – ever! My steady weight gains as a kid didn’t allow me to believe that any of this was even possible. This was a miracle; a divine intervention; my first victory in my heavyweight bought with obesity and it felt like I had dominated the first round.

The reality of this important victory was really due to the fact that I was cut off from eating so much junk food – and because I didn’t have access to the Riverboat – and by

going from a very stationary post behind a desk to a roving post where I was in a constant state of movement. Very slow movement too. Sure, I made it into the park to get some food here and there, but nothing like what I had been doing before. And as a young teenager I never packed my lunch and I never planned. My plan had always been to get something, a lot of something, for free or to just buy a pizza when that didn’t work out. But during the Halloween Horror nights I simply didn’t have the time. I was too busy going from guard to guard. I wanted to please my bosses and do a really good job – so I didn’t take breaks. As a result, I avoided a lot of soda, tons of hot dogs, ice cream, pasta, and pizza from my daily diet. I simply, and accidently, reduced the amount of food I was consuming and I moved my body a lot more.

Let me repeat that: I simply, and accidently, reduced the amount of food I was consuming and I moved my body a lot more.

It was simple to understand why this worked a few years later when I started learning about nutrition and exercise, but I hadn’t really changed any of my personal habits yet. When I ate, I still ate junk food. I just got a lot less than I was used to. And I still didn’t know how to, or want to, be motivated to exercise. Still after realizing what I had just done, I really felt like it was a new day for me. I started to dream again about what it would be like to be skinny. I started to ask myself if I ever would be skinny. Could I do it? How would I do it? Would that mean that I could get a good girl friend? Maybe get married and have a family? Could I get a good job? Maybe I could be a cop? Or maybe I could go in the military and fight for my country the way Louie did; the way my Dad did?

Whatever it meant, this was the point of acknowledgement in my story. The point where I started to take control; the point where I started to understand control; the point where I changed my definition of “what’s normal for Doug,” My choice to follow *Dad Rule #3* and be a security guard had huge consequences. It changed my life; it changed my mind; it changed my future. It was the point where I started to wonder what was possible. What was I really capable of if I applied myself to something? What would it mean to have hope; to dream again; to beat my obesity demon? What would it mean to be somebody?

Honestly speaking I was still lost without a program and without anybody to really guide me. I didn’t know how to harness what I had done during the Horror Nights but I was very sure that I didn’t want to gain any fat back. It was confusing. I didn’t have any guidance. No doctors, trainers, pills, TV shows, the internet, books, or any knowledge really. And honestly, I was too proud at first to really let myself be vulnerable to other people about it. I wanted people to think that I was in control.

After several days of reckoning a huge surge of inspiration rushed through my veins. It was like a tsunami of hope and inspiration. I didn’t know where it came from, but I got pissed, I got scared of gaining my weight back, and I made a very firm decision. I chose to fight back. I told myself that I was done. I was done with being a junior supervisor with great cleavage; I was done being an oxymoron; I was done with obesity. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I was tired of analyzing everything and my mind was exhausted. I wanted to change, desperately, and I finally decided that I needed to change. I realized that I needed to take control of my life and of myself and stop

letting things happen to me. I needed to grow up, man up, figure it out and stop being passive in life. I was better than what I lead myself to believe and I needed to respect myself. I needed to respect myself the way Louie respected me.

How did I do this? The cold, hard truth is simple: I made a choice. That’s right; I made one simple choice. I chose to no longer be scared of being fat forever and do something about it. I chose to no longer accept what I thought was my fate, my genetics, and my shame to live as a fat kid. It wasn’t okay anymore to be teased by other people, to be ashamed of myself and my habits, to be hurt or feel limited. I decided to stop acting like a helpless victim – because I was not a helpless victim. I chose a full life of happiness over a depressing, limited life full of fear and anxiety. I chose to make life happen, not to let life happen to me. I decided to, at all costs, figure out my fat problem and beat it! I didn’t know what or how I was going to do it; I just knew that I had to do something about it – anything. I chose to not let my hopes and dreams die at the bottom of an empty ice cream carton.

For the first time in a long time, I dreamt about how I really wanted to be good at what I did – maybe even the best. I started to feel ambition. I was showing myself that I wanted something more than food. I finally got my head put on straight, as they say. I chose to follow *Dad Rule #3*, which freed my mind and helped me find a purpose. Thanks, Dad; I love you!