



# Y<sup>B a r i a t r i c s</sup> Weight?

March, 2006

## Peterson drops 300 pounds without surgery

By Larry Peterson

*(Motivational speaker Larry Peterson told his story at The Center for Weight Management's first Walk From Obesity event held last fall. Because the event was such a success, it's our hope this could be an annual highlight for the community. This year's walk is set for Sept. 30. Mark your calendars now. See back for more.)*



*“My life insurance policy was worth a lot more to my wife than I was.”*

Larry Peterson, guest speaker for the 2005 Walk From Obesity event held in Park Rapids in September, didn't pull any punches. He spoke candidly to his audience.

Being morbidly obese at 603 pounds and wearing a size 6X pant was a nightmare for him. His belt measured practically the length of a fold-out table. He knew he was in big trouble when the skin on his leg split open from the stress of the weight on his skin. It happened more than once.

His excessive weight became a life or death struggle; at one of his lowest points he rationalized to himself that he was worth more to his wife dead so she could collect on his life insurance policy.

Peterson was told by doctors he would die within six months if he didn't lose weight. An even lower point came when after those six months and he was still living. He rationalized to himself that he was such a failure, he couldn't even die.

He told his story with brutally straightforward candor. He does so to help others struggling with weight issues. The Larry Peterson on stage these days has an energy to him that you don't see in his before pictures. Having lost close to 300 pounds, it's encouraging to see him in a photograph stretched out on a snowtube with grandchildren

piled on his back.

“This is what it's for,” he says with a smile. His dream is to educate, inspire, and support others.

Peterson lost his weight through behavioral modification efforts. Essentially he became honest with himself and changed his old ways of thinking which, up to that point, hadn't been working. He took charge of his health.

Peterson once had a good life and owned a realty business in his home town in Iowa. He was overweight, but thought he could get a handle on it by himself.

The more weight he would gain, the more he dealt with discrimination. His business started to suffer. He reached a point at which he could no longer show homes and began to lose agents.

“People look at you and say you can't handle your own business, how could you handle theirs,” he says. When his business began to fail he noticed his wife crying when trying to figure out how to pay the bills. “I had turned her into a care provider. My life insurance policy was worth a lot more to my wife than I was.”

Economically, he suffered from loss of income, mobility, and medical bills were through the roof. On a personal level he suffered as well. “That was the worst. My wife and I had no family because I was too obese to have kids.”

When he fell during a trip to Las Vegas and couldn't pick himself up off the floor, he realized he had lost his self-esteem, not to mention his independence.

His health eventually began to fail. He developed pneumonia and could hardly breath. After examining his imaging report, his doctor informed

Catholic Health Initiatives

St. Joseph's Area Health Services

The mission of the Y Weight gastric bypass support group is to provide a supportive learning environment for pre- and post-surgical patients and their families and friends. We exist to help, with kindness and compassion, those who have completed or are contemplating gastric bypass surgery (GBPS).

Knowing that GBPS is a life-changing operation, Y Weight promotes lifestyle changes which enhance the holistic health of its members. Through meetings where education, affirmation, inspiration and socialization occur, the following personal growth tools are provided:

- ▶ Open forum discussion
- ▶ Supportive relationships
- ▶ Special guest lectures
- ▶ Success celebrations
- ▶ Small group discussion



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## “If it is to be, then it’s up to me”

### Testimony / from cover

him that the only time he’s seen so many blood clots was in a cadaver. Some medical diagnostic machines couldn’t be used on Peterson because the technology couldn’t see through his fat, he said. He knew he was in real trouble when one day he felt a drip on his foot. The skin on his leg had split open.

His physician recommended that Peterson consider weight-loss surgery. “His (the doctor’s) agenda was to help me live,” Peterson says. He opted instead, half-heartedly at that, to take part in an experimental, behavioral modification session in which he would undergo treatment during an intense, two-week session in a hospital setting. Really he was ready to stay there until he died, but his dietitian wasn’t about to let that happen.

He lost weight. For the first time it occurred to him that, “maybe I’ve got a chance.”

Peterson faced the denial in which he had veiled himself. He once thought he would eventually be able to lose weight by himself, he finally realized that he couldn’t.

Another revelation came to him: “Of all of those people I hated for judging me, I realized I was one of them.”

His excuse list had gotten rather extensive: I’m not ready; It’s my thyroid; I inherited these genes; I’m happy the way I am; I have a slow metabolism; Diets don’t work; It’s society’s problem; or I’ll start tomorrow. He made no more excuses.

The hospital in which Peterson had been treated asked him to come and talk to patients. He told the patients that when he changed his way of thinking, became honest with himself, the weight started to come off. He educated himself, kept in contact with his physicians and surrounded himself with a support network.

He had to make a choice to get moving, to get out of his



*Motivational speaker Larry Peterson brought along a few of the health aides he had to use to get him through his day.*

*From sleep apnea machines to orthopedic equipment, Peterson fought back hard enough to the point in which these items have become relics in his closet.*

chair and start using a walker. Then he worked on losing the walker and advancing to two canes to get around.

His health became his business. “I am worth it,” he declared. “I did it wrong for 53 years.”

Peterson made being healthy a way of life, not just a diet. He learned to read labels, drink water, measure portions, and cut the fat. Junk food became limited in the house. If he wanted potato chips, small one-serving bags were available to him. (Previously, he would eat one chip after the other until a large, family-sized bag had disappeared.) He savors the flavor of food and eats slower. Plates, bowls, and utensils in the Peterson household became smaller. He puts his fork down between bites. He eats until he’s comfortable, not full.

Within a year and a half, Peterson lost close to 300 pounds. He wants to be an example of how to succeed and admits he still has more weight to lose.

He claims it doesn’t matter what method people use to

lose weight, and doesn’t appear judgmental of any weight-loss choices people make whether it’s surgery, intensive weight management, self-education, support groups, or other methods. What matters, he says, is how you control it.

Peterson developed his passion for sharing his story with others. Whether a person has to lose 10 pounds or 300, it affects your self-esteem in the same manner, he says. He admits he had lost the drive to lose weight because of the way he thought. He understands when people have doubts because at one point or another he felt the same way. He, in fact, had refused to believe in himself until others, his wife and his dietitian, forced him to.

“You are worth it,” is his lesson to others.



## When we give, it takes the focus away from ourselves

Christmas in December, my birthday in January, and Valentine's Day in February. They're all wonderful gift days, and ones that I have treasured since childhood. I can remember how the focus was always on getting wonderful presents from my many admirers. I would anticipate those days, just dreaming of the things I would get. There were times, too, especially as I grew older, when I was disappointed, because I didn't get "quite enough" in my mind.

Maturity and a focus not so much on myself, but for others (husband, children, friends), have given me an opportunity to learn the blessings of giving instead of getting.

Instead of moping when I am forgotten or don't get those roses on the right day, or the card filled with birthday wishes, I began to change my focus. On those special occasions, I send cards to others (maybe shut-ins or old

### From the Outside In

By Cheryl Mickunas



friends) or buy some pretty flowers and send them to somebody who would never be remembered by another.

Now I have found that one of the most important ways I can deal with my struggle with overeating or weight maintenance is to concentrate on someone who may struggle more than me, someone who hasn't been able to lose any of their weight and aren't a candidate for bariatric surgery, or somebody who is unable to exercise. It takes such little effort to think more of them, to say a little prayer, make a phone call, or send a card. It is when giving becomes more important than getting that we are truly blessed. Then I can sigh, sink down into that recliner, and smile just a bit.

## Group notes

### Group leader training

The second annual Surgical Weight Loss Support Group Leader Training, "Making a difference: Leading with Action and Attitude!", is scheduled for Friday, April 21, at St. Joseph's Area Health Services.

Support group leaders, or those interested in becoming support group leaders, are invited to learn the basics of leading an effective, meaningful support group.

Speakers this year include: Dave Otterness, Pharmacist, "Medication Absorption Post-Weight Loss Surgery"; and Rachel Mueller, Licensed Drug and Alcohol Counselor; "Addictions & Addictive Behavior."

Come for a day of education, networking, and fun. Call Arlys Hess, MSW, at 218-237-5588 for more information.

### Educational conference

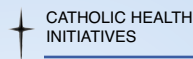
Plan to attend the 6th annual Weight Loss Surgery Education Conference, Inc., "Spring Thaw," April 28 & 29 at Grand Casino in Hinckley. This conference features Katie Jay, WLS Author and Coach; Bo McCoy, Obesity Help Product Manager; and Chef David Fouts, World's First WLS Chef. Information and registration forms are available at [www.wlsec.org](http://www.wlsec.org)

Arrangements to take a bus from Park Rapids will be made if there are at least 35 attendees wanting to utilize that form of transportation. Rates charged for the bus ride will be determined by the number of riders, not to exceed \$20 per person. Please contact Arlys Hess at 218-237-5588 if interested in riding the bus.

## We appreciate your input

Y Weight invites you to submit articles, questions, stories, your personal profile or any information you feel would benefit other gastric patients, to Arlys Hess, social worker, at 218-237-5588. Address correspondence to her at St. Joseph's Area Health Services, 600 Pleasant Ave., Park Rapids, MN 56470. Her e-mail address is [arlyshess@catholichealth.net](mailto:arlyshess@catholichealth.net)

If you choose to no longer receive this newsletter, please call 218-237-5711 or 1-800-566-3311 ext. 588 and ask to have your name removed from the mailing list. Thank you.



### The Center for Weight Management

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For more information about bariatric services call

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at 1-800-566-3311 or 218-237-5757.



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## Weight?

B a r i a t r i c s

### Back on Track

Struggling with weight gain since gastric bypass surgery? For bariatric patients who struggle with staying on track or maybe even gaining some weight back, we have a new six-week educational group.

"Back on Track" meets weekly for six weeks on Thursdays at 5:30 p.m. at St. Joseph's Area Health Services (basement all-purpose room).

Cost is \$60 for materials. Explore ways of getting back on track, including following a diet to get you back in the fat burning mode. We also talk about the psychosocial reasons your weight gain may be occurring. "Back on Track" is led by Arlys Hess, MSW, and Ilene Hensel, RN. If you are interested, please call Arlys at 218-237-5588 or Ilene at 218-237-5707. The next session begins April 6.

**Question:** I am so tired. I am taking my vitamins, and following all the recommendations, what is wrong with me?

**Answer:** Fatigue is common in the first few months after surgery. Feeling tired is often related to dehydration so be sure you are getting *at least* eight cups of water per day.

Also, if you are a menstruating female, you need to replace iron during and a few days after your cycle.

We will check your blood levels of iron at about six months, but if you have



By Leah Walters,  
RD, LD, CDE

### Why do I feel so fatigued?

persistent fatigue prior to that, be sure to make an appointment with Dr. Smith.

## Walk From Obesity to be held Sept. 30

Mark your calendars because the ASBS Foundation will hold the fourth annual nationwide Walk From Obesity Sept. 30. It's a fundraising event designed to reduce disability, death, and discrimination of people who are obese by educating the public and healthcare professionals about effective treatments. St. Joseph's Area Health Services will be sponsoring a Walk in Park Rapids and you are invited to participate. This walk is for everyone; participants can be young or old, active or non-active, thin or obese. Watch future newsletters for additional information.