

JIM'S STORY

In July of 2011 I found myself in yet another doctor's office. I had been in the emergency room the night before because I had been bleeding from somewhere on my thigh that I couldn't see; my apartment looked like a crime scene from a TV show. The ER doctor said it looked like a vein that needed to be taken care of by a vascular surgeon. So I found one in my insurance network and went the next day. When they called my name and showed me into an exam room I passed who I believed to be the doctor on the way. The look on his face is one I have seen many times before in my life as a morbidly obese (I really hate that term) person: one of disgust and dismissal.

I was shown into the exam room and was asked to remove my pants and I explained everything to the Physician's Assistant before the doctor came in. The door opened and as the doctor walked into the room he announced, "You are in the wrong place. You need gastric bypass." I responded, "Hello, um, yeah, I know that, but can we take care of the issue I came to see you about?" He proceeded to say once again that I needed surgery, basically ignoring the reason that I was there. I told him that there were two very good reasons that gastric bypass was not an option for me: 1) my insurance company wouldn't pay for it, and 2) I was diagnosed with moderately/severe heart disease and told that no surgeon would touch me. His response? Sue your insurance company and get a second opinion. Losing my patience I asked, "Will you just exam me?" He then stood up and said, "Your whole problem is that you should weigh no more than 190 pounds," and walked out the door never having examined me.

I was mortified, demoralized, furious, embarrassed and many more emotions all at once. I wanted to walk out into his waiting room and announce to everyone that they should just leave and not bother seeing the doctor, but I didn't. I did what any sane and rational person would do - I went to McDonald's, ordered as much food with the money I had and shoved it into my face and sobbed as I drove home.

For three days I didn't talk to anyone and I was so depressed I could barely function – I just did what I had to do. At the end of these three days I came to a realization – I was sick and tired of living this way. I had to make a change. I was tired of not being treated like a human being. I needed help and I had to find it. I started searching on line for in-patient rehab facilities that treated food addiction but all of them were either in Florida or the mid-west and not covered by insurance. Then I found an out-patient intensive recovery center in Manhattan. With nothing to lose I called and made an appointment for a couple of weeks later.

Early in August I drove into Manhattan for my appointment. I got lost – really lost. I had no idea where I was and I called to try to get directions but the person who answered the phone didn't know how to give me directions. I finally asked a cop on the street and I found my way. I parked and then I couldn't find the entrance to the center. At 484 pounds I had difficulty walking from the couch to the bathroom, so I brought a cane that I had from some injury I had at some point to help me walk. I spent an hour walking around in over 90-degree weather looking for the entrance. At one point I went into a building just to sit down because I really thought I was going to pass out. I was on and off the phone with a receptionist and I finally found the entrance – 100 feet from where I parked my car.

I was now over an hour and a half late but I went up. I sat down on this couch that was very low to the ground and then when they called my name I couldn't get up. Someone had to help me out of it. I went in and met with someone and explained everything to her. I told this complete stranger more about myself than I think I had ever told anyone and I was more honest about how much I was eating than I ever was in my life. The financial person came in and told me that this wouldn't be covered by insurance. I have to admit at this point I was totally defeated; from being lost, almost passing out, getting stuck in the sofa and now this I was ready to just leave and forget the whole thing. She told me not to make any decisions and she wanted me to meet the woman who ran the food program. In came this very tiny woman who proceeded to tell me that she could change my life if I would follow her plan and do what she suggested. I sat there and I thought about what it took for me to get there and how much it would take for me to get there on a regular basis but I trusted this woman and what she said. I had to nothing to lose and I wanted, needed, desperately to change and I just felt that this was the place that was going to help me do it. It would prove to be the best decision that I have ever made and the beginning of journey that would ultimately be the best experience of my life and what brought me to OA.

~Jim H.