

"...I decided then and there..."

A trip to the grocery store isn't usually a big event. But that one day in Ralph's parking lot changed everything for twenty-seven year old Amy Suter. There she was, driving around on that sweltering summer day, praying she could find a spot so close to the air-conditioned entry that she would not be drenched in sweat and out of breath by the time she got there. "All of a sudden, I was so disgusted with myself, all three hundred pounds of me. It was then and there I decided I would finally do something about it."

The diets, the pills, the crying jags, nothing had jettisoned her out of what she calls "that weird Amy world I lived in since I was a kid." That world was her Alice in Wonderland place where she believed she was okay, maybe even skinny. "I just didn't think I really had to do something about my obesity until that moment of utter self loathing painted the picture of truth for me."

She spent the next few weeks on the internet, researching gastric bypass surgery, one of the fastest growing surgical procedures in the United States. She learned that San Diego is considered a leader in this bariatric specialty, a procedure that actually shrinks the size of the stomach pouch making it impossible to binge or eat large quantities of food. This bolstered her confidence to ask a lot of questions and interview several doctors. Her investigation led her to Alvarado Hospital Center for Surgical Weight Control and Dr. Julie Ellner. "I knew from that moment on I could overcome my fears because Dr. Ellner made me feel comfortable." But the decision made in the doctor's office would be challenged by the inner demons which lurked in the shadows at home. "Doctor Ellner made me realize I had to change everything about my approach to life or

I would fail as a bypass patient. It was unexpected, but now I had fears about having to overhaul my life. I was going to miss being able to eat a couple boxes of macaroni and cheese at a sitting. Could I really change that much?"

That's when Amy decided to go public. She started her own website, to help others struggling with obesity. "There's a lot of help out there, including obesityhelp.com, and sites specifically for gastric bypass patients."

She called KGTV, to see if health reporter Carol LeBeau might be interested in following her through the process. "If I went public, there could be no turning back. I needed that and I wanted to help others in my same position make a change in their life."

Gastric bypass candidates are carefully chosen; patients who do not have the drive and conviction to do the preliminary work will not be allowed the procedure in quality medical settings. It is major surgery with hours of anesthesia required.

In August, 2001 Amy Suter came out of gastric bypass a new woman, soon half her size, more than one hundred and ninety pounds lighter. But that was the relatively easy part.

What many patients of the procedure don't consider is that gastric bypass surgery often leaves large amounts of loose skin hanging just about everywhere. Amy winces when she says "this will sound gross, but I had to lift my skin flaps around my waist to clean inside the folds. I had wings where there used to be full, if flabby upper arms." At that moment, she fully understood this was to be an odyssey, not a quick fix.

