

Kathy Foley speaks to Shauna Reid, the author of a funny and frank weight-loss blog and book, about shedding 12 stone and gaining a new take on life



SHAUNA REID is a slim, pretty 30-year-old, with a neat strawberry blonde bob, strikingly clear skin and an open smile. She is smartly turned out in a flattering wrap dress and knee-high leather boots. Watching her, as she sips tea and chats animatedly, it is difficult to accept that she is, quite literally, half the woman she used to be.

Seven years ago, Reid, an Australian who lives in Scotland, weighed 25 stone. After the sickening experience of her first Weight Watchers meeting, when she realised to her horror that she was too fat for the scales, she was determined to lose weight.

It took her over five years, but she succeeded in losing 12-and-a-half stone.

"The moment when I was on the scales crying, I really thought, 'Surely this has to be the worst I could ever feel in my life,'" recalls Reid. "I wanted to run away from how I was feeling, but there was no way I could go on like that, so I decided to keep chipping away at it no matter how long it took. There was a stubbornness there."

Reid's journey from battling with size 26 knickers to sporting size 14 clothes is recounted in her new book, *The Amazing Adventures of Dietgirl*. It's not just the frequently hilarious story of how she lost so much weight, but also the story of how she learned to live life again, overcoming depression, moving to Scotland and falling in love. The book is named after her blog (dietgirl.org), which she started anonymously to chart her fatbusting efforts.

"I started the blog after the moment in Weight Watcher when I realised this was going to be difficult," she said. "I didn't know anyone with the same extent of a weight problem. I thought if I put it out on the internet, maybe someone would find it and, as it turned out, heaps of people did."

"I really felt quite lonely and despondent. I would go into the shops and have the women looking snootily at me. I almost felt not quite human, as though I was just this asexual thing that hung around."

"The fact that the blog turned into a huge support network meant that this was not just another attempt to lose weight. The readers were like a cheer squad. If I went quiet for a week, I would get messages from them, saying, 'Have you fallen into a bag of crisps?' It was like having extra nagging parents, but it was different

because they were in the same boat."

Hearing the stories of her readers, who would share their own experiences by commenting on her website, was also a huge source of support for Reid. "It gave me the hope that it was possible and the belief that I could do it with effort. It was like a bridge to self-esteem."

Reid, it should be remembered, is Australian and like many of her fellow citizens, not given to dramatic outward displays of emotion. "I was extremely cynical and not a touchy-feely person, but my online persona became more compassionate. I became able to empathise with people."

"I gave the impression in real life that I was cool with my weight, but starting anonymously online, I was able to admit that it was a big deal. I was able to be more open about my emotions."

So how did she lose so much weight? For the first year, she followed the Weight Watchers plan rigorously, keeping track of the points value of everything she ate. She also started going to the gym, where all she could manage initially was 20 minutes on the treadmill at the snail's pace of 2.5mph.

Having lost over seven stone, she left Weight Watchers, but struggling career-wise and sinking under depression, she put on 40lbs over the following six months. She then joined SureSlim, another slimming club, but after the death of her grandfather, decided to move to Scotland with her sister, Rhiannon.

Once they had moved, Reid followed her own weight-loss plan, avoiding fattening foods and exercising. At times, the dieting was put on hold. "Once I was in Scotland, I got a social life. I would go out for pints and have hot chips on the way home. The weight loss slowed down, but life became more interesting," she smiles.

Along with the blog readers, Rhiannon was a constant support to Reid in her weight loss marathon, going to Weight Watchers, although she only needed to lose a stone, helping Reid plan her diet and accompanying her to the gym.

"She was someone to give me self-belief, to see things in me that I did not think I was capable of, to hold my hand through it. I felt guilty for how pathetic I was, but it was not such a chore to go to the gym if I had someone with me."

Just three months after she moved to Scotland, Reid was at a pub quiz and met Gareth, an "unpretentious, warm and

witty" PhD student from Dunfermline. Over the months that followed, the pair became closer, despite her worrying that she was "too fat for men" and being acutely aware that it had been a very long time since she had so much as been on a date.

She needn't have worried, though. Within two years, they were married. It was only after they were married that Reid told her husband exactly how much she used to weigh. His response? "It doesn't matter what you used to weigh. What matters is you found the guts to change your life."

Another interesting strand of the book is Reid's relationship with her mother, jokingly referred to as The Mothership. She was a Weight Watchers leader when Reid was a little girl, and Reid spent much of her childhood at Weight Watchers meetings or playing at Weight Watchers with her sister. Her mother's hyper-consciousness of weight issues clearly had a strong negative impact on her.

"Little remarks get under your skin and rot away at you. I never forgot idle comments like when my mother said, 'Oh if you lost a few pounds, you would look pretty', or when she gave me carrot sticks

for lunch instead of a normal sandwich. Adults are not always aware that kids absorb everything you say. It took me years to realise that I was not ugly and horrible and that was the hardest thing to change, stop that thinking that my weight was my most defining characteristic.

"Parents should be conscious of how words can be absorbed by kids for many years. I always worry about what would happen if I had kids. I would just want to make sure that there was no such thing as good or bad food and I would not want to use food as punishment or reward."

Having battled the bulge for so long, Reid doesn't weigh herself any more: "I don't worry about my exact weight — my life was ruled by the numbers for so many years. Now I am happy if my clothes are fitting, especially my jeans. That is the best test, because jeans are quite unforgiving.

"When I was writing the book, I did not know how I was going to end it, I thought reaching my goal weight had to be the end, but then I realised that coming to self-acceptance was more important. Looking at myself honestly, I have

broad shoulders, a little waist and big thighs. So I accept it and work with it."

She also refuses to join in when healthy-sized women start muttering about their weight. "When I was big, I would think to myself, 'I would kill to have your 5lb weight problem'," she says. "Now, I feel that having lost so much weight, I have a much better body image than many people. They are obsessing about how they look, but I am fit and healthy and wearing things I wanted to wear. I don't take that for granted, but I don't fret about my appearance."

Reid also loves exercise and is an avid fan of kickboxing, among other pursuits. "I absolutely never thought I would be an exercise person, but it makes me feel great," she says.

"At some point, the bullshit detector went off in my head and my motives changed. To start with, my motives were pretty regular. I wanted to be skinny and acceptable, but that changed to 'I do not want to be old before my time'."

■ *The Amazing Adventures of Dietgirl*, by Shauna Reid, €11.75, (Corgi) is available now.