



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with *Katrina Ubell, MD* —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend, welcome back to the podcast. I'm so happy that you are here. How are you doing? How are you settling in to life? We've got American Thanksgiving next week. I know that in other areas of the world, there are other holidays that are happening and have already happened. There's just a lot going on in the world, and I'm so pleased to today be able to bring you another Weight loss success story. Because often when life feels crazy, we think that things aren't possible for us. When we start seeing that other people totally create amazing things for themselves, even when life is crazy, even when all the things happen it starts to give us some sense of hope, right?

Maybe we can figure this out. Maybe we really can do this. Today you're going to be getting such a great story from Melinda Rothkopf. She is an allergist in Alaska of all places. So amazing. I can't tell you how many times I've coached her and she's been like camping somewhere, and there's the most amazing nature backdrop. I'm like, "Hold on a second, where are you? Why are you living such a good life, living out in nature?" She's super lucky in that way. She is, as I said, an amazing allergist. She is really coming from a very unique background. She was in the military for a long time and struggled with her weight. I know that she is not alone in having those same issues of having to do some extensive weight loss dieting tactics in order to make weight for the military then getting back again, and having children, and then trying to lose that weight, and then coming out of the military and sorting yourself out after that.

She's now as we currently speak in the beginning stages of being an empty nester as I think some ... I think that it's still okay to call people that. Basically, her children have now left to go on their own. All the changes that come with that, and so she's got a really interesting perspective, just a really, really awesome, great person and they know you're going to really enjoy this conversation that I had with Melinda so please listen in, and enjoy.

All right, Melinda, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

Melinda Rathkopf: Thanks for having me.

Katrina Ubell: I am so happy to have you here. I would love it if you would just start off by telling us a little bit about yourself, where you live what you do just a little background.

Melinda Rathkopf: Okay, so my name is Melinda and I am currently living in Alaska. I'm in private practice as an allergist, immunologist, and trained before that, as a pediatrician. I grew up in the deep south. I grew up where food was love and comfort and family. I've really always kind of struggled with my weight. I was the chubby one growing up in my family. I have two blond haired blue eyed sisters who were ... one was a actual swimsuit model and a Hooters girl. But neither ever had trouble with their weight. I was just the chubby one. I was the youngest, and I was the chubby one growing up. I kind of always identified with being overweight, and that kind of being who I was. Probably lost my first significant amount of weight in high school.

I don't really recall what the trigger was, or what the motivation was it might have been a boy just in general, it might have been caring about my looks. But I do recall successfully losing weight in high school and even like a teacher commenting about I can tell you've lost weight, maybe you've lost enough weight, but it really wasn't until college, that I put on the freshmen ... It was probably more than 15, whatever you want to call it, but I put on the weight as a freshman because you could pick up a phone, and they would deliver food right to you. I had that first credit card. Definitely put on weight. It wasn't till later in college, when I was looking at going to medical school and ways to pay for medical school, that I decided I wanted to join the military and do a military scholarship.

I had worked my way through college myself and really had no financial way to pay for medical school. The idea of loans was overwhelming at that time, because I'd never known anyone to take out school loans. I remember I walked into a recruitment

Katrina Ubell: Can we just pause for one second.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Think about the contrast to what it's like now, where the average person leaving medical school has like a quarter of a million dollars worth of debt is like standard.

Melinda Rathkopf: Isn't that amazing? If I was applying now, I wouldn't think twice because it's the norm to have the loans and stuff. But I actually made it through all of undergrad and med school without ever taking an educational loan. But I joined the military, so I just sold my soul.

Katrina Ubell: Had you ever been in the military before that? I'm just curious.

Melinda Rathkopf: I had not no. I did not grow up ... Of course, my father served and my stepfather served their required couple of years each but did not grow up around anyone in the military. We had invited the recruiters to speak at our pre medical student association. We had a branch of the American Medical Student Association at our college that I helped start. We had them come and talk. I met with a recruiter. The first thing he said was go lose 20 pounds and if you can do that, come back and talk to me.

Katrina Ubell: That was immediately

Melinda Rathkopf: And so that

Katrina Ubell: ... like your day one.

Melinda Rathkopf: Exactly, it was immediately about the weight again, and I was now being labeled ... I'd been away from home for quite a few years at that point, so now I was kind of relabeled as the chubby one. But I think it was the first time that my weight could be keeping me from something I wanted to get. At that point in college and right before med school, we were all kind of used to getting what we wanted if we worked hard enough. It was kind of the first thing of, "Oh, my weight could prevent me from being able to do something I want to do." Went on some not so good crash diets.

Katrina Ubell: What was the timeframe? You needed to lose 25 pounds in how long?

Melinda Rathkopf: I think I probably did it within a month or two because it was a pretty strict timeline applying before I had to apply through the recruiter for the program around the same time. This was probably spring of my junior year, where with the intent of what applying in fall of our summer and fall of the last year of college. I remember eating next to nothing. I remember eating oranges and celery for lunch. I was probably burning more calories at the gym than I was consuming and eating very little but it worked right? It worked short term.

Katrina Ubell: When you're that young your body's like, "Okay, fine. I'll do it." Like, "Haha, that's funny. Try again."

Melinda Rathkopf: Exactly. Right. At that time it set up this pattern of, "Oh, I could just crash diet and lose the weight." I did, I joined the Air Force on a health profession scholarship program. That's one where I didn't go to a military medical school. I went to a civilian medical school. During medical school, you're considered a reservist. You don't have to do the weekend duty. I was the same as every other student in my class, but you had to do the one month every year rotation at the military, and so they were still clinical rotations. We were considered active duty that month, we were in uniform, and we were at a military medical facility, but you had to weigh in that month, every year.

There's now a weight requirement not just to get in, but to maintain it. I would do the cycle of crash diet, the two months before I had to weigh in, and then I would gain it all back over then the next 10 to 11 months. I did that throughout medical school.

Katrina Ubell: The upper limit, is it based on BMI or something, or they just have their own charts?

Melinda Rathkopf: No, I think it is BMI because looking at it now, I've just reached that military weight, which is what I kind of initially set the weight goal in this program, because that's what's been ingrained in my head for all those years. It's at the top range of my BMI. I think you have to be in a normal BMI range, but they use a combination ... It changes a little throughout the year, but there used to be a bike test now it's like push ups, sit ups abdominal girth, and weight. But I've been out now for 14 years, so I've been out longer than I was in. That kind of started the yo yo dieting.

Katrina Ubell: You did that in medical school. Yeah, exactly.

Melinda Rathkopf: Then so I would lose the weight for that one month, every year. Then even as a resident struggled. I got married while I was in medical school. My husband and I have been married 26 years now and got married while I was in medical school, and just continued to kind of do the the weight fluctuation. Even as a resident, it would go up and down. I knew when I had to weigh, I knew when I had to do my fitness test, and I would just kind of squeak by. I do remember when I went to my program director to tell him I've been put on a medical profile, and his purse words out of his mouth were, "Oh, is it for your weight?" And I said, "No, it's because I'm pregnant." But that made me think that he's noticed my weight is up, and if I had to weigh in today, I would have been put on a medical profile so I just got pregnant.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Solved that problem right there.

Melinda Rathkopf: Exactly. I had this baby to deal with, but anyway. That just kind of set up ... and trying all the diets. I think most of us in this program have tried ... Whether it was Jenny Craig it was Weight Watchers. I literally made my weight goal in Weight Watchers the week I found out I was pregnant with my second one, I think. But anyway, so the weight just continued and Nutrisystem, Jenny Craig, Weight Watchers did all of that and continued that pattern. When I got out of the military ... We always joke when you get out of the military all the men grow mustaches and beards and grow their hair and I just put on weight.

Katrina Ubell: Right.

Melinda Rathkopf: And just kind of continued that pattern really, for decades.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Why did you leave the military?

Melinda Rathkopf: I just finished my payback time. It came down to being in a small specialty. I did my pediatric residency. Then I was a general pediatrician for a couple of years. Then I applied for fellowship and allergy immunology got accepted into that program. When I finished up my fellowship training, I still had a couple years, I owed the Air Force, and I stayed at the fellowship training program. Initially, I thought I would stay until retirement. I was on a track to be the program director there. Then there's kind of the whole separation of then met with the assignments officer who's just the military person who decides where you are going. GME doesn't factor into that, continuity doesn't factor and they said, "Nope, you'd be able to stay here, maybe two years, then you'd have to move."

It was kind of the idea of, "Well, let me look outside the military, see what opportunities there are, and then I can make a better decision." There was a lot of restructuring going on in the military in graduate medical education at that time, and I just decided it was time to get out. I had finished my pay back and so I could get out, so I did.

Katrina Ubell: Now is that when you moved to Alaska?

Melinda Rathkopf: It is. I was never stationed up here, but the practice I joined was founded by an Air Force physician, and at that time there were two doctors that were partners and I joined them. I knew them both from the Air Force. Although I was never stationed in Alaska, it was a military connection that brought me up here.

We moved up here 14 years ago now. I was on terminal leave from the military. Finishing up my last month or so we moved up here and then we just decided ... It boiled down to why not try Alaska, we know how to move and we just kind of looked at it that way. My husband actually said I had this whole pro con list what job to take. It was going to be between here and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. My husband just said, "Okay, in five years, would we say, "Man, we should have moved to Alaska," or would we say, "Man, we should have moved to Philadelphia." So here we are.

Katrina Ubell: Here you are, still there. Well it's just so interesting, especially coming from the deep south, right. It's like massive contrast in lots of—

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah. My husband's from Florida. We met in college, actually. We met at Georgia Tech and met in the band. We were in the marching band in college, and so he had never lived anywhere north of Atlanta until we moved here so ...

Katrina Ubell: That is super cool. Okay, so then now you're in private practice, you've got a family, you're not in the military anymore, you don't have anybody breathing down your neck to lose weight. What was happening then?

Melinda Rathkopf: It's still obviously bothered me. I wanted to set a good example for my girls. I didn't want that whole ... I have two girls. They are now 21 and 18. But I wanted to be a good example to my girls growing up about dietary choices and body images and self esteem. I wanted to be thinner. I initially I really rebelled against exercise and fitness because it was required in the military. When I got out, I didn't want to initially do that. But then I learned to find what I enjoy and embrace that. I just wanted ... For myself at that time, I wanted to be thinner. I like the way I felt in a thinner body. I liked the energy and all of that. I continued to yo-yo diet, even for the last you know ...

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, until you found weight loss for doctors only pretty much right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yes, exactly.

Katrina Ubell: Where were you at when you decided to sign up? Like Where were you in terms of your like, headspace?

Melinda Rathkopf: Tired, tired of yo-yo dieting. It's like, I know, I'd know how to lose weight. I've shown that. I don't know how to maintain the weight loss, and so really looking for something that worked on how to maintain the weight loss without it being some weird, bizarre thing or impacting my family, expecting ... My husband was an at home dad for most of our daughter's time growing up here in the home. He works now, part time, he's a substitute school teacher. He does most of the cooking, and he's not a planner. Trying to find a balance of ... I'm sure he would roll his eyes every time ... My perception was that he would roll his eyes every time I brought up some new fat diet or what I'm eating today, what I'm not eating today, that type of thing. Trying to find something that I could do and maintain mentally and in actuality.

Katrina Ubell: What was attractive? I'm just so curious. What made you go, "You know what? I'm going to try this."

Melinda Rathkopf: I think someone introduced me to your podcast. I think it was in the Alaska Women's Physician Group, which was formerly our PMG group. Someone had posted ... because people were talking about nutrition or I don't know if the word diets the right, but something came up in a post and someone had posted yours and I have about a 30 minute commute, so podcasts were great, I'd listen to them on my commute, so I started listening to your podcast, and went back and started at the beginning. I would listen to the current one, but then would go back and listen to the ... from day one. It just really struck me. I think I bonded with you immediately as a female pediatrician. I think that helped. I don't know if you were a female surgeon would I have bonded as quickly. But I kind of thought, "Oh, wow." And you told your story and some of those early ones, and I thought, "Oh, she did this too. She's been through this." You're a mom, and you're a pediatrician. It really did. It just kind of clicked that I thought this is going to work for me better.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Okay, so you decided to sign up, and then let's just talk about what your journey has been like in this process.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah. I probably started listening to the podcast the summer of 2018. Then listened for a couple of months before deciding ... I think it was for that Christmas you came out with the, have your loved one gift you.

Katrina Ubell: Oh, yeah. Did you buy one of those ... You guys got one of the guests, yeah?

Melinda Rathkopf: I did and ...

Katrina Ubell: I didn't know that was you.

Melinda Rathkopf: ...because definitely my husband's the type who he will give me anything I ask for, do anything I ask. But he's not usually going to figure out on his own what I want, and I need to quit expecting him to read my mind. I literally sent him the link and said, "I would like to do this." It was never a matter of should you? Is that too much money? He's always been, you're the one working the most and it's your money. If this is important to you ... He's always been supportive of that. I think he had issues trying to sign up, so we actually ended up having to call and talk to your assistant, who turned out herparents used to live in Eagle River Alaska, which is where we live. Kind of that connection was made then too.It was a Christmas gift for Christmas of 2018.

Katrina Ubell: Then you started in January 2019.

Melinda Rathkopf: I started in January, yeah. I had done Mel Robbins did this mindset reset that January also, which actually worked out perfect because it was about three or four weeks, it kind of filled that early January, so I had the motivation of New Year's, and I kind of did her little mindset reset, and did the preparing for Waldo because you gave out tips as early as Christmas New Years. I had already read the obesity code, and that really clicked with me. The fact that you recommended that, I reread that again, right before starting.

I think the fact that again, it's another thing that I thought, "Oh this program's going to work because that book really resonated and changed my outlook on dieting on weight loss. I knew that there was another thing that would resonate with me.

Katrina Ubell: The weight just fell off and you never ever had a problem every again, right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yep, not at all right? Because that's all it's about, right?

Katrina Ubell: Once you sign up for life coaching you never have a problem, ever again. Okay, so what was the experience like? How did it go?

Melinda Rathkopf: I wanted to jump in on Christmas, or as soon as I knew that I was going to get it. It was a little bit about rein yourself in. You got to approach this differently to make it work long term. I've always been a rule follower. Whether it's a people pleasing thing, or it's the military or it's what attracted me to the military. But so I worked really well with these are the assignments, and this is what you're going to do each month and setting that up. Looking at the food protocol, trying to find something that would work. Not to scare anyone away, I don't think it was overly regimented. But it was regimented enough to make it fit into a program that I could do and that appealed to me. But yet enough flexibility.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, exactly. It's like figuring out what your own boundaries are based on your own life. Some people are going to want to have more boundaries, others less. You can create that to work for your life, which is the whole point, because then you're so much more likely to follow it when you've created it. Right? Yeah.

Melinda Rathkopf: Well, and I think that's what kind of blew me away to about the food protocol. When you're like, "Well, it's really what you want. It's your protocol. You put on there what you want, because this Georgia girl is not given up her grits." Grits have been on my protocol from day one, because in my mind, grits are not flour. They're on my protocol. There are other things that that are not on my protocol, because they don't work for me, even though they could be. I think that kind of two is that the only one I'm accountable to is myself. Really building that I need to have the respect for myself, and the dedication to do it for myself, because at the end of the day, that's the only way it's going to work.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. As you were going through this whole, like discovery kind of period, which is really what it is, right? Where we start realizing, "Well, why do I eat too much food?" And like, "Why do I sometimes drink more alcohol than I'd like to," and things like that? Like, what kinds of things did you discover?

Melinda Rathkopf: That I am very much an emotional eater. I eat to to feel better. I eat to cover up feeling. There's certain things Even I was thinking about it earlier today, comfort food. Well what does that mean? That's good comfort food? Or and how many times do we say, "It's been a rough day, I need to have a glass of wine," or having unwinding at the end of the day, that type of thing, and using food and alcohol to do that. I think that was the biggest realization is if you really just boiled down to food as fuel for my body, and I only need X amount to fuel my body, and everything else I don't need.

That's been months and months. That didn't happen in month one. But it set up the base for that to happen and realizing that.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah. Then you have spent a lot of time to with just various relationships. I mean, which is like, I don't know, anybody who doesn't have to do that work in some way, shape, or form, because we all interact with other humans, that's oftentimes, some of our biggest struggles in our lives are because of the other humans, right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I know you've done a ton of work on relationships. Could you speak to that a little bit, and just how you've seen yourself change?

Melinda Rathkopf: It's interesting that you ask that because I think if you had ever sold this program as a relationship builder, or working ... I don't think I would ever sign up for it, of course. But really, it's probably the biggest thing that's come out of this. The weight loss has been great, and I have ... I guess we haven't really said that, but I have lost over 50 pounds, I have about 15 or 20 more to go. But it's really been about the relationship. I think it has saved so many of my relationships. I don't know if I would go as far as say, saved my marriage, but it's definitely made my marriage better. Working on my relationship with my husband. Some of the other big transitions in my life that I know we'll talk a little bit more about, but I took over ...

The practice I'm with has been open for over 20 years now, 21 years. The founding partner is semi retired and stepped down as the director and I took over as director around the same time I started this program. Took on this big new model at work that definitely changed the relationship. My two partners are two of the closest friends we all did residency. One's internal medicine, and the other is a pediatrician also, but we all did residency at the same place at the same time 20 years ago in Mississippi, and never would have thought we'd be partners in Alaska together, but we are. But we had to change those relationships because I'm not just now friends and partner but I'm also now the director.

My relationships with my daughters. Both my daughters are now out of the house and are in college. Relationships has been really interesting. I never would have thought would have come out of this work, but it does and it's been really helpful. The same thought model, and the way we work on the weight loss has really helped me in my life with relationships. I think what blew me away the most was a comment you made, and feel free to correct if I don't say this correctly, that it only takes one person to have a good relationship. How my relationship is with my husband, my daughters, my co workers, even my patience is all in my mind. It's all my thoughts, and how I interpret it, how I respond, how I react. That's a concept that took a long time to build in the program but it's been invaluable.

It's been worth everything. Even if I weighed more at the end of this program than I did at the beginning, which I don't, and I won't, but it still would be so worth it. Because there are people that go through and don't lose a lot of weight, don't choose to lose a lot of weight, but they work on other things. I think that's something that I never thought when I signed up for this, that it would be about relationships and thoughts and my relationship with myself. That actually is probably the most important.

Katrina Ubell: When we have people who sign up, they're like, "Listen, I guess if I have to lose a couple pounds, I will. But what I really want to do is work on my marriage or like whatever it is," right? Not everybody really has a lot of weight that they want to lose, or even wants to focus on that too much. Or they're like, "I don't have a lot of weight to lose, but I really need to straight my mind out around food." We really have the whole gamut, right? We have people who have 100 plus pound saloons down to not really that much. What I always tell you guys to is like, even if you don't have that much weight to lose, or you lose it very quickly, like there's still work you have to do on your brain. You can do it at maintenance, or you can do it while you're losing or you can do it first and then lose your weight. But you can't skip that part, so it doesn't really matter how much weight you have to lose, because there's this other part that you have to do.

Melinda Rathkopf: I think I started with some weight loss because that gave me the positive feedback and affirmation that this is working. Then I don't even like the word plateau, because it's not really accurate. But then we kind of made other things more important and have really put the relationships and the thought work. I can't imagine going through the last six months of what we've gone through as a world as a nation, as a physician, as a business owner, as a mom, without this work. This has been invaluable during COVID.

Katrina Ubell: Let's talk about, yes.

Melinda Rathkopf: it's been really, really challenging. I'm sure everyone can identify during COVID. We may be a little unique in Alaska, because one of my favorite memes shows Alaska in the rest of the United States, which we call the lower 48. Alaska has been socially distancing since 1959. Everything's a little delayed here. We could almost like see it coming. I drew an analogy, I think when you and I were coaching before, on when I lived in Mississippi during residency, and we knew a hurricane was coming, and the slow moving hurricane was coming our way and it was huge. But it was far enough away, that we had days to prepare and just kind of that pin being you know it's coming, we can't stop it, we have zero control so how could we prepare, and we kind of had that here with COVID.

We shut down as a state before we even had a single positive case. But unfortunately, because of spring break it wasn't that long after spring break that it hit here. Seattle is our backyard. I mean, you almost can't get a flight in and out of Alaska that doesn't go through Seattle. Since Washington state in the Seattle area had it so bad, we knew it was just a matter of time, but it was kind of a slow moving thing coming our way and we were able to prepare. But having to balance preparing my family personally, emotionally as a parent. At that time, only my oldest was out of state in college and I did convinced her just fly home. Let's just get a one way ticket, get your cat come home and she did.

My husband and youngest had traveled for spring break to look at colleges. It was even just that week, when they left it was ... We knew it was coming, it was there. We're like, be careful, but we didn't even question them going on the trip. We didn't even question. I know you had something out of state around that, kind of that same time to travel and

Katrina Ubell: Right before it was like shutdown.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I'm just like, "Are we okay? I don't know what's happening."

Melinda Rathkopf: But I remember on the trip back I remember telling my husband like, "Tell her not to touch anything at the airport. Tell her to put her hands in her pocket. Did you get hand sanitizer?" Because she left here without a mask, without a hand sanitizer. It all kind of hit at that time. When my oldest came home and my my husband and youngest came back, I actually moved out of the house for two weeks, because I needed to protect myself I felt for work for patients. As a business owner, so my practice is five physicians, two PAs and a nurse practitioner. We have about 45 employees, so it's a fairly significant size for a single specialty private practice. We never close completely. We felt allergy shots going into the spring was something that if we could keep people healthy, and keep their allergy shots going, that would keep them out of the ER and stuff.

We also have an infusion center for our immune deficient patients. But we had to balance having highly vulnerable at risk patient in the office, versus having all the other people coming in for allergy shots. That role changed completely. I had to do a lot of work on my permanent brain telling me, "Well, yeah, you signed up to be the new medical director, and that was going to be a hard enough transition, but you never signed up for being the medical director during a pandemic." There's no playbook for this. All the training ... and I did some leadership transition training for taking over as the medical director, none of it covered what to do during a pandemic.

Yeah, so it was a lot of struggle. I think one thing I thought that was interesting, during this time, I felt like, I didn't deserve the accolades and the pat on the back, and the hero worship that a lot of providers were getting on the front lines. I'm not in the ICU, I'm not in the ER. My sister's a respiratory therapist in downtown Atlanta. I mean, she is in the trenches and she has been since March. That's not me, we are actively screening out COVID positive patients if we can, we're trying to keep the office open. But yet, I'm also not in that, "Oh, I got to work from home, and I got to spend extra time with my kids. I got to do all this."

I was still going to the office every single day, 11 hours a day. I kind of felt like I was in this weird in between, and not sure how to identify with that.

Katrina Ubell: You also had some struggles, like you had been involved in planning, like a big meeting to right? That all got canceled.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Then we had, of course, our masters live event that was canceled. You had a whole bunch of things planned and you were displeased, we might say.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yes, a lot of grief over that. it was hard to admit because every time you want to kind of be upset about it. It was like, "Well, but I'm so fortunate I'm not sick, I don't have COVID." There was a lot of grief. I think I canceled now 10 trips since March. One thing as a new empty nester, my husband was like once the kids are gone, I'm going to start going to all these meetings. I'm very active nationally, international professional organizations. I even this year was my first year I was going to be lecturing for the World Allergy Association. I had trips planned International.

I had been asked about going to Malaysia and doing a lecture, things like that. All of that got canceled. One was actually late February, early March was to be one of our national meetings, and it got canceled on 48 hours notice. We were one of the first meetings to cancel back in the spring, or late winter. Yeah, there was a lot of grief over that, and how to deal with that. Even regionally this past weekend, I'm on a staycation this week, because this past weekend was going to be our big regional conference that I was in charge of, and then I was going to go to Hawaii for vacation right after. Neither of those happen. All the work that went into that, and the loss that came from from dealing with that.

Katrina Ubell: it is grief. That's what we coached on, right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: It's okay to let yourself be sad. You don't have to brush it under the rug by being like, "Yeah, but I'm healthy and my family is healthy and we're okay." You know what I mean? "I shouldn't be feeling this bad," but if you really are feeling that way, right? You put a whole bunch of time and effort and planning into things and then it gets canceled, it's okay to feel sad about it, knowing that at any point, when you're ready to feel differently, you can and you can move past it. But letting yourself stay in that and stopping thinking that you shouldn't be feeling the way you're feeling because you are, that's how you're feeling. Now, let me ask you this, in Alaska we might agree that it's a long winter yeah? Most of the time?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Often a lot of people in Alaska like to go to warm other places, just because you mentioned Hawaii to have a break. What are your thoughts about the winter coming up and how you're going to manage your brain about being home a lot?

Melinda Rathkopf: I like being home and I've been doing a lot of projects, and we get out. If you have to be locked into a state ... I think what's different here is we really are locked in. My husband was going to drive our youngest to ... She's at Auburn University in Alabama and he was going to drive with her so she'd have a car down there. Luckily my parents are really close to her, so we're actually going to leave the car with my parents. They have it as an extra car, but it's near her. He couldn't, Canada would not let him drive. They would have let her but I'm not letting my 18 year old drive the Al pean by herself, but he was not considered an essential essential traveler, she was since she was going to school. That got changed, and he ended up flying and taking her to school.

But we still have I mean, even as of today when we're doing this, a 14 day quarantine if you come back into the stat. If I wanted to go and even visit her ... I didn't move my daughter into college, because if I had gone down and moved her in, it would be an extra two weeks after I came back before I could go back to work of quarantining. I'm not sure if what ... Not to get political, but I'd ever thought when a wall was being built, that we'd all be stuck inside it. A lot of thoughts on no one wants this right? The last two summers we went to Europe for the first time ever, I'd never been to Europe till two summers ago, I bought a Volvo and went to Sweden to get it, which is an amazing whole nother story, but that is doable. And we would have gone back this year. We would have done the big senior trip to Disney.

It's hard because I didn't get to do those trips and didn't get to do that. I think the hardest is knowing so my ... my oldest I mentioned came home around spring break and stayed home for three months and about June, she just had enough she turned 21 in May, she wanted to get back. She had an apartment down there, so it's not like she was living in the dorm, she had an apartment, she was still paying for. Her friends were still there because most of them lived near the school or lived in the state and could drive. She went back down there. She went back in June and I won't see her now till Christmas. I can't go visit her. I could, but it would require an extra two ... And even my youngest who went down in August, she's not going to be home till Thanksgiving.

Really, it is harder going into the winter knowing I didn't get to revitalize myself and experience these other things. But Alaska is an amazing place. I did more camping this year than I ever have. We have an RV.

Katrina Ubell: How many times have I coached you and you're literally

Melinda Rathkopf: In the RV.

Katrina Ubell: ... in the most beautiful place. I'm like, "What the heck? Where are you? I need to be there immediately. It's so pretty." You're like, "We're camping."

Melinda Rathkopf: It is. Actually I just just got back from camping earlier this week. We camped in Denali this year, which I've been here 14 years and I visited Denali National Park, but we've never actually camped in in the park and so we camped there this year. We've had a lot of amazing opportunities and time to do that. But yeah, is it going to make it harder the winter and being here and not being able to travel? Hoping I just rebooked what ... this should have been my Hawaii vacation this week, so I rebooked it for February keeping my fingers crossed, and we'll see if it happens. It's kind of nice to plan a vacation.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, well, it's like this is the year to get into snowshoeing, cross country skiing if you don't already Like all the winter snow sports, just to do something else.

Melinda Rathkopf: I think Alaskans are good about ... We joke about we don't hunker down, because it's too long to hunker down, we embrace the winter. I do. I have a fat bike I ride, so I do bike riding. I don't ski. I've tried multiple times. I'm not a skier.

Katrina Ubell: Not your things.

Melinda Rathkopf: But I ride a bike, and I have a fat bike that has studs on it, so I can ride in the snow and can ride outside year Round.

Katrina Ubell: By saying fat bike that doesn't mean a bike for fat people. What a fat bike is, so tell people what that is.

Melinda Rathkopf: A fat tire bike. It's a bike with really wide

Katrina Ubell: The really, really big one.

Melinda Rathkopf: ... really big tires. They have studs on them for gripping the, and you do a low pressure. Yeah, actually, a friend gave me a T shirt and it said, "Do these tires make my bike look fat?" It was a picture of a fat bike.

Katrina Ubell: Very cute. Let's let's just transition a little bit to talking more about camping too, because camping, it's like you're outside, you're in this beautiful place often with friends hanging out what else are you going to do? You're going to eat and drink usually. Right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: That's something that you've put a lot of time and effort into is figuring out how to have a lot of fun, be away, be camping and still honor the plan that you've created for yourself. I'd love for you to speak to that a little bit.

Melinda Rathkopf: That probably has been and still is probably my biggest struggle with my protocol. I'm really regimented during the week. On Sunday, I fixed my lunches for the whole week. I eat the same thing every day, and I have zero problem with that. Maybe by Thursday, Friday, I'm getting tired of it, but I eat it. Even planning meals during the week for dinner with my husband, we're really regimented. But the two places I struggle the most is camping in the RV, and then we actually have a condo in one of the ski resorts that's about an hour drive away, and I kind of joked that's my happy place. That's where I quarantined away from my family for two weeks because I can commute ... Work is between my home and that place so I can commute from there.

But that place has minimal food and it's always stocked with coffee, and beer and wine. Because we drink coffee when we get up, and then if we're going to do food, there's restaurants down there and stuff. It's a very social place in my mind and that always has a glass of wine or a beer. There's a little brewery taproom down there, that's a local brew pub kind of thing. Really working on protocols for those places and working on protocols for camping had been hard and challenging. I really just try to ... I did special events and travel planning, and I have a separate protocol for when I'm camping and planning the meals and allowing an exception meal or a joy eat.

Almost saw my exception meal or joy eats around being in one of those two places, and I save them for those events. I can tell when ... or just expecting, I'm choosing to do this, it's off protocol, I know the scale will go up a few pounds, but to me, it's worth it and it'll come back down, kind of thing. But really trying to work on the food protocol, and the alcohol protocol.

Katrina Ubell: That's what makes this doable and sustainable long term, right? You could just be ... You're just like no more drinking for whatever the next six months or a year, or what ... I mean, just pick some arbitrary number, right? And cut back on this and cut back on that, and you could get to your goal, but then it would be no different than the other times where you just don't want to do that forever. How do you do the things you want to do, which is to be able to have a glass of wine from time to time, have a beer from time to time, like enjoy and relax and be with your family or your friends in that way? And have it be something that works for you? Something that you can continue on. It's not causing weight gain, and it allows you to stay where you want to be, and doesn't create other problems for you. Yeah.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah. I've gone extended periods with no alcohol before. I've done a whole 30, I've done Ideal Protein. I went months with Ideal Protein with zero alcohol. I know I could do it, but I know I don't want to long term. I figured out ... so what really works for me is I don't drink during the week, I don't drink at home without a preplan. I plan my alcohol if and when I want it. If I want it because we are going camping, or I want it because it's someone's birthday, and I plan it. But I no longer do that, "Oh, it's a rough day, I'm going to have a glass of wine to relax at the end of the day." I really ... Even talking with my my husband about it, and it's been really zero problem ... I don't want to drink out of habit, and I don't want to drink alcohol out of using it as a way to relax or unwind. It really is more of a celebratory thing, and I get to pick and choose when I want to celebrate with it. That's been really empowering it. I don't have to give it up completely.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, well then you're in control. Right?

Melinda Rathkopf: Yes, exactly.

Katrina Ubell: You're in control of it then. You're not like, "Oh, I can't deal with my life if I don't have a drink. I need alcohol to help me deal with my life." Not, "Oh, I'm out of control when I'm around it." It's just I totally can have this when I want to and I like my reasons, and that's exactly what you're doing here.

Melinda Rathkopf: Society really embraces that whole using it to calm your life or soothe you. I mean, how many memes have especially during COVID, have a glass of wine or it's Miller time or whatever?

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, exactly.

Melinda Rathkopf: Exactly.

Katrina Ubell: Love it. Love it. Wow, we could talk a long time, Melinda. We can talk about a lot of good stuff. Well if you could talk to you, who was listening to the podcast beforehand, everything or someone who's similar to where you were, what message would you have for them? What would you tell them? This person who's struggling, who's a doctor, who's like, "I don't even know, I need some help. I got to get my life together. I got to sort myself out." What message would you have for her?

Melinda Rathkopf: I think one of my favorite things, and I write it in my bullet journal every week is, it's all figureoutable. I think you said that or use that—

Katrina Ubell: That's not me. That's a Marie Forleo quote that I love to use. Yeah that's great. Everything's figureoutable, that's right.

Melinda Rathkopf: Don't be in a hurry to try to lose the weight because ... In general, I'm going to assume that most people doing your program have tried all the other stuff and probably have lost weight on many different diets along the way, and many different weight loss plans. But really just the realization that it's really all in our thoughts, and it's how we approach our thoughts and handle our thoughts. Whether you're talking about the weight loss, the relationships, it's all our thoughts and learning how to work on that, and how successful you can be when you get that in check. You get to define what you mean by success.

Katrina Ubell: Totally, totally. Because here's the thing, too, I feel I talk about this all the time, but I feel I should always say it again and again, because people are always so confused. I don't care what you weigh. I can give you a suggestion. But if you're at a weight where you are totally happy, and you're managing your mind, and you're just everything is the way you want it to be, I am all in for that. I just know that most of us sell ourselves short and believe we can't accomplish more. That's why I'm like, "Well, before we start believing that something else and then from there, we can decide, right?"

Because you might lose a little bit more weight and then go, "You know what? That military weight, that's my sweet spot. That's where I like to be. When I do that, when I'm aiming for that I'm able to have the alcohol that I want to have when I ... or sweets or whatever, when I want to have them, and it's easy, and it's comfortable, and it's great." But then you know you're choosing this number, not thinking that you're limited, like anything lower is not possible for you.

Melinda Rathkopf: Yeah, and it's interesting looking back at my goals at different points, because initially I picked a number even 15 pounds above my military weight. I think I picked a number that would have been losing about 35 pounds because I knew I could do that. I had zero doubt I could lose to that weight, because I've successfully lost down to that weight fairly easily. Then I set it as my military weight, which is at the normal BMI range, but at the top end. Then I think it was what? Month six of Waldo that you spring on us that the goal of our mid range BMI, working through that thought and really ... For the longest time, I didn't believe that was even possible. I would pull it out and I would work on those thoughts, then I would put it away again for a while and pull it back out. I have zero doubt now that I can get there.

Katrina Ubell: Melinda thank you so much for coming on and sharing your whole story with everybody and just your whole experience. I know it's going to help so many people, so thank you so much.

Melinda Rathkopf: Well, thank you. I really appreciate being asked and chatting with you.