



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend, how are you? I'm so glad you're here today. Thanks for tuning in. I'm just really excited to talk to you today. I feel like I have a lot to say. I feel like we're just hanging out having a cup of tea. I have not told you... I, my whole adult life have been- Well, really just starting a medical school, which is basically most of my adult life, I was a huge, huge coffee fan. And last summer, its been about a year, I took a break from drinking coffee because I was working on getting myself off of the proton pump inhibitor I'd been taking for over 20 years. If you've been listening for a while, you know I did an episode last year about that, but if you haven't listened to that one yet, it's a bit of a long story.

The short of it is that I was really just trying to not contribute to my stomach acidity while I was trying to get myself off of that, and it was a several weeks and months long process to get myself off of it. I've been off now for almost a year. I'm super happy about that. But anyway, the point is I just stopped drinking coffee there for a while. And I've been on decaf for several years now anyway, because me and caffeine in general don't get along very well, and I lost the taste for coffee.

I mean, I don't have anything against it. It's not like I don't like it. I just literally do not desire it anymore. Every now and then on the weekend I might have just one small cup. I don't know. It no longer is really a big thing for me. And in some ways I'm sad about that, and in some ways I'm happy because it's just nice to have freedom to not be like, "Oh, are they going to have good coffee there? And then will they have decaf?" Because that's the other thing when you're not on caffeine, if you have a caffeinated cup of coffee, you feel like you took some drugs, like speed. "Oh, my God."

That's happened where I've forgotten. I'll be like, "Why do I feel so anxious? What is going on?" I'm like, "Oh, that's right. I had caffeine." Anyway, the point is, yeah, I wouldn't be drinking coffee if we were hanging out today, maybe I'd be having some tea. That would be good.

Anyway, I have a lot of things I want to talk to you about. Today is the first day of school for my kids as I'm recording this. And I will tell you, my oldest child started 10th grade. So I've been doing this a while, first day of school thing. And in general, I mean, I'll be 100% honest, first day he went to kindergarten and moms were crying, I was like, "I don't get it. I mean, what did she think was going to happen?" I'm like, "This is a great thing. They get to go to school and they're growing up, and this is good news," right, and it's really never been that big of a deal for me.

This year, I think, has been my hardest year. There've been several changes, some of them very last minute, in terms of what my kids are going to be doing and teachers and some beloved teachers, no longer being there, and some things like that. And there were some tears shed by one this morning, there was one who was so nervous that she thought she might throw up. She didn't think she was nervous, but I was like, "If you throw up, they won't let you go in." She was just nervous.

Just a lot. This year feels to me just like those road bumps that the kids feel when they go back, and I'm not sure really why it's hitting me so hard except for, yeah, I'm just going with it, right? This is just what we do. All right. My heart's just going out to them. I actually have to pick two of them up here in a little bit, so I'm hoping they're having a great day. I know they're having a good day. I know they're going to get in the car and have tons to tell me and it'll be great. It's still... It's hard. I feel like it's harder as they grow up. My heart really is living outside my body. Maybe it's because I feel like there's like more threats to them physically and emotionally. Maybe that's part of it. Anyway, I'm not going to coach myself out loud at you.

But I have another thing that I want to start doing. I'm probably not going to do this every single episode, but I... So, you may know, I announced it a little while ago that I am currently writing a book that is going to be published next September 2022. It's called "How to Lose Weight for the Last Time", and I am going through the process of writing it right now. And what I will tell you is this, the whole journey thus far has opened my eyes in a new way about, first of all, what it takes for a book to be published. I mean, I'm not joking. You go into the library, you see all these books, you go into a bookstore or just look on Amazon. There are so many books.

Do you know how hard it is, though, to get a book published? It's so much work. So much goes into it. And I just have a totally new... I was going to say renewed, but not even renewed, just a new appreciation for books and authors and the whole editing staff and agents and just everything that everybody does to get books out there. Books have always been special to me, but extra super-duper special to me now being in this process right now.

So what I thought I would do, because I thought it would be fun, is I want to, periodically here, highlight a book that has really meant something to me because it's hard enough for an author to write the book, but then you got to get the message out to people that the book exists, and that's also really hard. So, I just want to share something that I really love. I'm not being compensated for any of this. It's just something that I really want to do. And I want to just shout out some great authors. If any of them seem like you might be interested in them, then maybe you'll have a look at them. Maybe you'll get them from the library. Maybe you'll purchase them yourself. Or maybe you'll just skip, fast forward through this part, and that's fine too.

So the first book then I decided to talk about is the book that I read in a day, two days ago. This is the freshest one in my mind. And I do have to say this was sent to me by the author. I don't know her. I've never talked to her. She communicated with my team and sent me this book, and it's called "Letter to a Young Female Physician: Notes from a Medical Life" by Suzanne Koven.

And I have to tell you that, first of all, the cover art, I really enjoy a lot. These are all the things that I'm noticing now. I'm not joking. I'm like, "Oh, wow. I like that. I see how they did that. That's really cool." So I do enjoy the cover art. I do also want to say though that I think that the title is a little misleading because I, at 45 years old, feel like I'm very firmly in middle age now. And I thought, "Oh, this book is for someone younger than me." I thought, "Oh, maybe this will be good for people who know a doctor who's just graduating medical school, or going into medical school, or going into their training, or maybe just graduating and going out into their first "real job"."

And then I read the book and I was like, "Oh no, this is for all of us." This is literally for all of us. It's for me, and I'm probably 15 years younger than the author. I related with so much of what she talked about. And if you are later in your career, as the author is, I think you'll really, really enjoy this book as well. I just, first of all, love myself a memoir. I always have, I just love hearing people's stories and lessons they've learned in their life. So, I was already set up to like this book.

But I just found her honesty, her candor, her vulnerability about her experience all throughout her life as a doctor to be just, so good. I just loved it. I got so much out of it. She shares a lot of her own stories with her struggles around her weight, and around her relationship with her mother, and around sexism in medicine, and just all kinds of different issues relating to a female physician at all various stages of her life. And I just thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it.

I have to say too that her picture in the back makes her just look like she's just such a lovely person, and so I'm sure somebody listening is going to be like, "I know her," and you never know Suzanne, you might be listening. And if you are, I loved your book. Thank you for sending it to me. I thought it was great. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Okay, now I'm going to go over the top.

So you know how there's the book jacket and then there's the actual book inside? Because I got a hard cover, and that is often a different color. The color of the inside book is this beautiful blue. I was looking at it. I'm like, "Oh, that is such a pretty color," and then I started thinking, "I wonder if she got to choose that or if that's just what the publisher came up with." I don't know. Anyway, the point is I thought it was a great book. I think it's a great gift for any doctor that you know in your life.

And then, I went and actually looked at a couple of reviews and there are plenty of male doctors saying, "You know what? I really like this book too. It is actually really helpful for me too." So like I said, I feel like the title is maybe a little misleading, but I think that really any doctor could get a lot out of it, especially if you like the memoir type of format.

So, "Letter to a Young Female Physician: Notes from a Medical Life" by Suzanne Koven. Great book, highly recommend. And like I said, I read it in a day. And I'm not a fast reader, but I do like to dig into a book and read it. I did stay up late to finish it. So I was like, "At this point, I'm committed. Let's do it. Let's finish this."

So today I want to talk to you about dreams versus fantasies. And this is something that I've been thinking about for a little while. I'm actually really excited to talk to you about it, because I think that we get really confused when it comes, particularly to our weight loss, about fantasies and dreams. I think this can come up in other areas of your life as well. I'm going to mostly give you examples related to your body and weight, but I think it's a really interesting thing.

It's a really good way to check yourself. "What is this? Is this actually a dream or is this a fantasy?" So let's just start with some definitions, look these up on the ol' internet. And so, dream is a cherished aspiration, ambition, or ideal. A cherished aspiration, ambition, or ideal. And what is a fantasy? A fantasy is imagining things, especially things that are impossible or improbable. I thought, "Oh, that is really interesting," right? Impossible or improbable.

Now, I like to not spend a lot of time thinking about what's impossible or improbable, but I do think that in this case it can be useful to think about that. Improbability, in particular, I do think that there's a lot of things that are actually possible that we think are impossible that we artificially limit ourselves. But in this case, I think improbability probably makes more sense.

So when we think about what we want to accomplish when we lose weight, we often have an idea of what that's going to look like, right? We have maybe a dream that we'll somehow, someday, fit back into the jeans that we wore when we graduated high school or something. I know plenty of people have done that. My high school jeans are long since gone. I don't keep stuff like that. I like to declutter regularly. So mine are long gone, but that is something. Sometimes we just think, "I have this fantasy that my body's going to look a certain way when I'm done losing weight."

And on the flip side of that, sometimes we just have a dream. "You know what? My aspiration is to get to a place where I just have freedom around food, where I'm not so obsessed with food, I'm not thinking about food all the time, there's all this chatter anymore. I can just co-exist around food, eat when I need to, so I can live and survive and maybe get a little appropriate amount of pleasure out of it, and otherwise just move on with my life to bigger and better things."

And so, here's an example though that I think will make the difference clear to you. If I come to you and say, "Hey, listen, I'm 45 years old and I've decided that I want to become an Olympic gymnast." You would probably say that the likelihood of me developing, at 45, with no experience besides, I think last time I did gymnastics, I was maybe 10, the likelihood of me being able to accomplish that is low, right?

I mean, that's improbable that at 45, I could start the process of becoming an Olympic gymnast. We could call that a fantasy, right? That's really probably not going to happen. Even if I worked really, really, really, really, really hard, the chances of that happening are extremely small. Particularly because I'm also way too tall and there's nothing I can do about that. I'm 5'9, and that does not really work for gymnasts.

Okay. But I could have a dream, at 45 years old, to compete in an Olympics. And the difference here is that that is possible. If I just said, "You know what? I want to have the Olympic experience." What I could do is I could figure out, "Okay, what would be some of the sports that would be available to me that I could, with a lot of work and effort and practice and focus, actually become Olympic level at."

One thing that's coming to mind, possibly, would be archery. I mean maybe, maybe not. I've never really actively done a lot of archery. But when I watched it recently in Japan, when the Olympics were there, the main competitors were not super young. And so, maybe that would be something. I'm sure there are certain things that I could look into, ways to compete, so that I could become an Olympic athlete in some way, shape or form.

So it still may require a lot of effort. I may still have to give up a lot of things in my life, really focus so much of my time and effort intention into doing that. But that's a dream that is attainable. I could make that happen. Or at least, the chances of me being able to make that happen are much higher.

So the fantasy is the thing that if we're just being honest, I mean, it's not going to happen, right? Versus the dream where it's like, "You know what? I may have to put in some significant effort, but if I really want this, this is possible for me. I really could do this." Now, when it comes to our bodies, and when we think about what we want to achieve and how we want to look and what size clothes we want to have, it's really easy for us to get into the fantasy land.

I know for myself, very often, I, especially before I lost weight for the last time and really got this information, I used to just think, "You know what? If I could just get this weight off, then I would look a certain way, this way that I had in my head." And no evidence pointed to any probability of me looking that way.

Mostly because, I never had looked that way. And what I mean by that is, even when I was 16, my body didn't look that way. Even when I was very fit as a 16 year old, my body didn't look that way. My fantasy was that my body wasn't my body, basically. That shapes and sizes of things were just not the way my body is. My bony structure is my bony structure. It doesn't matter what I do, I'm not going to be able to change that, barring some very invasive surgery that it would be probably hard to find anybody who would even be willing to do it.

So, that was a fantasy that did not serve me because it wasn't even possible. But at the same time, I probably could get pretty close to that ideal, that fantasy, that idea that I had, and we could call that a fantasy too. But what I'm talking about is being super fit. I was just working out on the Peloton this morning and I did a ride with Tunde, if you know her, she's just... I mean, they're all, the instructors are amazing.

But anyway, she has got this body that's just totally ripped. She is just lean and muscular, but in the good muscular way. It's an appropriate muscular way. I just look at her body, I'm like, "Damn, she looks good." She looks good. And she also has this amazing smile, which is totally addictive. I just see her smile and I'm like, "I have to smile back at you. I can't help it. I'm like a baby. I have to return the smile."

Anyway the point is, could I do things to get my body to look like hers? I mean, yeah, I could. But I think it's also a fantasy when, if we're being really honest with ourselves, we're not willing to do the work that's required. Because here's the thing, it's her entire job to do fitness. Not necessarily to look like that, but to be fit and to work out, and so it makes sense that her body looks that way. It's on brand for her.

In order for me to do that, it would require me saying no to certain things in my life that I value right now, so I could say yes to working out more, potentially being possibly much more stringent with my food, which is another thing I'm not willing to do. Many people who are very, very fit and lean count macros, I'm not willing to do that. There's a lot of things that I know would probably help me to get there that I'm not willing to do. So therefore, having a body like that is a fantasy.

And so, I don't know that having a fantasy is a bad thing. I don't think we have to get rid of our fantasies, we just have to recognize that it's a fantasy. It's just like the Olympic athlete thing. It's fun to think, "What would it be like to be an Olympic gymnast?" But it's a fantasy. It's not going to happen. I'm not going to go try to become an Olympic gymnast right now. So, we just have to understand what it is that's a fantasy, and separate it from what our dream actually is, because our dream is something that's much more attainable.

So my body dream, my dream, and I feel like I'm pretty close to this but it's still something I'm working on. My dream is to feel connected to and accepting of my body at all times. It's like being married to your body, in the sense that... Well, marriage to your body with no chance of divorce. Divorce is not on the table, right. I want to love my body in good times and bad, in sickness and in health. I want to be my body's biggest cheerleader.

And so, no matter what it looks like, right? I don't want it to be like, "My body's only okay if my body looks like Tunde's." I can also just appreciate Tunde's body and know that she put a hell of a lot of work into that thing, and she looks amazing and great, and that doesn't take anything away from me, and I don't have to like her to also be okay, right?

I can just go, "You know what? My dream for myself is different." And maybe it doesn't amount to a certain shape, or muscliness, or certain cuts, or seeing your ab lines, or any of that stuff. It could be something entirely different, which is, "No matter what my body looks like, I'm going to love it fiercely. I'm going to accept it no matter what, I'm going to work with it instead of against it." That is a dream that is an aspiration, it's an ambition, and it's something that I have complete control over and I can work toward and I can actually create.

So, you want to make sure that whatever you're to reach with your weight loss is a dream and not a fantasy. We want to make sure that your dream is the thing that you're going after. And the fantasy? It's for fun. It can be fun to think about it, daydream about it a little bit, but we don't want to be feeling bad about the fact that we're not achieving the fantasy. That makes no sense.

We just want to recognize, "You know what, that's a fantasy and that's fun to think about, but what's my actual dream? What am I going to go and create? And what do I at least have a reasonable chance of going and creating, if I decide I want to?" That's what we want to be focusing on. For me, having freedom around food, having peace in my mind around food, is infinitely more important to me than what my body looks like in terms of shape and size.

I just actually recently went and saw a new doctor who offered some, just unsolicited, some advice on what "healthy eating" is, and sent me off with some papers on it and stuff. And I was looking at it and I was like, "You know what? I will take this into consideration, and I am done with manipulating the way I eat because of whatever is "healthy"." I did that for decades. It messed me up in the head. It was not good for me at all. Thanks, but no, I'm not going to get into a fear-based, "You have to eat this way. This is the best way," that so many people say.

That's why I'm like, "Listen, I will help you to lose weight and you can do it that way, or you can do it however way you want to." The food is not the most important part. The most important part is your brain, and your thoughts around all of it. So if someone told me, "If you don't eat this way, you're going to die in six months." Yes, I would do it, because I would have different thoughts around it. But that's not current situation.

So, we just let that go. The peace and freedom around food is invaluable to me, and I'm incredibly protective of it because I am not going back to the way it was when I was yo-yo dieting, and everything that came with all of that. The more I tried to be "healthy", the more I struggled with food and my weight. It just didn't work for me. So, I mean, certainly it's not the doctor's fault for offering that to me at all, but it was just interesting to see. "Oh, yeah. Thank you, and I'm going to put that down now. That's not what I need."

So anyway, that is my message for you today. Dreams or fantasies, which is it? Do you have a little blend of both? Maybe you need to separate them out a little bit. We want to be working toward the dreams, and we want to just let the fantasies be there for fun. We don't have to give them up. We can just recognize, "Oh, that's a fantasy. Fun little daydream, and now let me get back to work on actually creating my real dream here."

All right. I hope you have a great of your week. And the final thing I just want to say is my little goodbye message to you is... Well, also check out Suzanne Koven's book, "Letter to a Young Female Physician: Notes from a Medical Life".

Now the final thing on tell you is, please look at your patients when you're there in the room with you. I know that we're all about trying to be as efficient as possible, but I am just more and more convinced of how important it is to have someone's eyeballs looking at you when you're talking to them. So as a doctor does know, it's really important from the patient's standpoint that as best as you can, you try to look people in the face when they're speaking to you or sharing about what's going on with them.

So, just a little public service announcement there for you. Okay, I hope you have a great rest of your week and I will talk to you next time. Take care, friend. Bye-bye.