



Withstanding the Tests of Temptation

Weeks later, Sarah had a new lease on life. She had solicited the services of Trevor to help her get on track with a healthier lifestyle. A devout Christian, he helped Sarah to create balance and reduce the distractions in her life. Each day was filled with anticipation, rather than despair. No longer held hostage to her insecurities, there was a freedom to unveil the real Sarah. Not just physically, but she had matured spiritually, emotionally and socially. The gift of obedience and discipline allowed her to eliminate what was harmful in achieving a healthy mind, body, and soul.

Sarah recognized that through prayer and faith her life could prosper in areas unimagined. She eventually united with Friendship Missionary Baptist Church and became involved in ministry work. The gratification she experienced from serving and helping others surpassed the people and worldly possessions that were the focus of the first half of her adult life. She was beginning to recognize and accept the purpose of her existence.

It had been months since Sarah hung out with her girlfriends, but now it was time for their cruise. The telephone rang. Sarah looked at the caller I.D. and recognized the number as Cathy's. "Hi Cathy."



"Hi Sarah. We haven't heard from you in a while. Is everything okay?" Cathy asked. "We've missed you at happy hour. Marvin has been asking about you. We didn't know what to tell him since we haven't heard from you. And I know you've satisfied your twelve months probation at Bell and Yates. We definitely needed to celebrate that."

"Everything is great. I did make probation, but I had to step back and take a look at the direction my life was heading. I had to get my priorities in order. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was headed down a road to disaster," Sarah admitted.

"Okay," Cathy said, hesitating. "Are you still planning to go on the cruise with us?"

"Yes, I am," Sarah responded.

"Great! Marcie is getting the alcohol together. Do you want her to get you some Cognac? She is going to get a bunch of assorted miniature bottles."

"Actually, I've stopped drinking alcohol. That was one of the most significant changes I had to make in my life," Sarah said, waiting for Cathy's reaction.

"Okay," Cathy said with a slight pause. "We'll just plan on drinking by ourselves. The travel agency mailed our cruise information to Marcie. Let's plan on meeting at the airport on Thursday at six o'clock in the morning. The flight for Miami leaves at 8:30."

"Sounds good. What are you packing?" Sarah asked.

"Mainly shorts and tank tops. I know we'll need evening attire for the Captain's dinner. Also, we'll probably need some casual wear if we decide to attend some of the special shows. I've heard the shows are like the ones you'll find in Las Vegas — showgirls, dancers, comedians, and singers. The good thing for us is that the shows are included in our cost. Are you bringing a swimsuit? What about extra money for the casinos?"

"I haven't been shopping yet, but I'm going to try and find a swimsuit," Sarah said. "I doubt I'll be spending money in the casino."

“Okay, we’ll see you on Thursday. Don’t forget your dancing shoes. Maybe we’ll get to do the Electric Slide or the Macarena in Grand Cayman. And I will be sporting my itsy bitsy teeny weeny black and white striped bikini,” Cathy said proudly.

The cruise came at a pivotal time in Sarah’s life. It could turn out to be the “deal breaker”. Up until this point, she had managed to stay on track with her healthier lifestyle transition, but that was partly because she had removed herself from her social traditions — happy hour with her girls and all-you-can-eat buffets. Now she would be faced with dancing and partying — activities known for pulling her into a scene of heavy drinking and excessive eating.



A week later, Sarah, Cathy, and Marcie met at the airport to catch their flight to Miami where their cruise ship to Grand Cayman and Ocho Rios, Jamaica would embark.

Standing in line waiting to check in their luggage, Cathy and Marcie were astonished by Sarah’s new look. “You look great, Sarah,” Cathy said, admiring Sarah’s noticeable weight loss.

“Hi ladies. It’s good to see you guys,” Sarah said, embracing Cathy and Marcie.

“You’ve lost weight!” Marcie replied. “A lot of weight! How did you do it? Did you go on a diet or something?”

Sarah wasn’t a size eight, but she had settled quite nicely into a size twelve. “Actually, I just decided to take that quantum leap forward to lose weight and get healthy,” Sarah admitted. “This is the best I’ve ever felt about myself.”



Enjoying the onboard experience of their fun ship, *Imagination...* those words of encouragement handed down from Trevor a day earlier, directed Sarah’s every move. Uninhibited, she explored the



adventures of kayaking on secluded shorelines, snorkeling and jet skiing in clear waters. Committed to healthier habits, she resisted the tempting grand gala buffet, ice cream parties, 24-hour pizzeria, bars and clubs. She awoke each morning at 6:00 a.m. and headed to the workout facility. For the first time in her life, she felt comfortable mixing with others. In the past, she had felt self-conscious about her size, but now things were different. She finally felt that she fit in. Preparing for the company's 5K walk and run dominated her thoughts. She knew she had to stick with the training schedule Trevor had developed if she was going to walk and jog during the event. Cathy and Marcie, on the other hand, spent their days partaking in the daily cruise rituals... drink specials, the captain's afternoon cocktail parties, and the nightly club scene.

"It's nine o'clock. Time to get the party started! There's a party on the main deck. We only have one more night after tonight," Cathy said, looking through her closest. "Sarah, are you going to the midnight buffet with us? We can alternate between the dance and the midnight buffet!"

"No, I think I'll retire early so I can hit the gym in the morning," Sarah said.

"It's a seafood buffet. I know you're watching what you eat, but how fattening is seafood. Lobster, king crab legs, shrimp, crawfish and lobster bisque, shrimp scampi, seafood gumbo, clam chowder, mussels, and scallops. All of our favorites included in the price."

"Stop! Stop! Don't say another word! Seafood! You're treading on my favorites. I just can't do it. Since my health transformation, I've been attending a healthy-living class on Thursdays. And I have a fitness consultant, Trevor, who has taught me so much about the foods I've traditionally eaten..." Sarah said while fluffing her hair and sighing. "Seafood and the assorted dishes have a lot of calories. It's hard to conceptualize the amount of calories, fat, and sodium I was consuming when we ate at Nick's Seafood Circle."

"I thought seafood was low in calories," Marcie said.

"Seafood is low in fat, calories and carbohydrates," Sarah said, "and according to my dietician, cold-water fish like salmon

and mackerel are packed with omega-3 fatty oil, the good fat known for promoting a healthy heart.”

“Okay, so that all sounds good to me,” Marcie responded.

“It would be good if we ate those foods straight... baked, broiled, grilled or steamed... not battered, breaded and fried. The preparation of potentially healthy seafood items can quickly turn from good cop to bad cop... high in fat and sodium, saturated with cocktail sauces, tartar sauces, and heavy cream sauces. When you combine everything that we eat in one setting at a buffet, it’s a lot,” Sarah said. “At Nick’s, the fried seafood platter with fish, shrimp and clams with fries, hushpuppies and coleslaw is a great example of high calories — based on my tally that platter is around 1,240 – 1,600 calories and over 70 grams of fat depending on the portion size. The fried calamari is around 360 calories and 12 grams of fat per serving. I don’t want to consider the volume of sodium. I don’t know how we even managed to walk out. Then there were the drinks. Alcoholic beverages can carry up to 600 calories and a lot more depending on the alcohol and ingredients used in our specialty drinks. That’s calories in addition to those we’ve consumed while eating. And you guys know we generally averaged two to three drinks.”

“What do you mean?” Cathy said, assisting Sarah with straightening her hair. “How do you know those numbers?”

“I’ve been using calorie counting tools from the Internet and a little handbook I purchased at the grocery store. I’ve discovered that those seafood buffets carry a huge amount of calories. Mix all of that with a few drinks — it’s a health torpedo in waiting.”

“That’s pretty strong... a torpedo in waiting,” Marcie responded. “Give me a break.”

“Is that why you stopped drinking?” Cathy asked.

“Yes. Once I increased my knowledge about calories overall, especially the calories in alcoholic beverages, I stopped,” Sarah said, pausing before she continued. “To be honest, my reason for eliminating the alcohol was much bigger than the calories and the fact that they presented more harm than good to my body. Bottom



line... I was using the alcohol as an escape from the things hurting me inside."

"Hurt... what hurt! You've got it going on," Cathy responded. "I wish I was a top marketing executive... and all of those success stories you tell us about."

"The stories... the eating... the drinking were the diversions I used to mask my unhappiness and insecurities with self," Sarah added, contemplating whether or not she should share the horrors of her childhood with Cathy and Marcie.

"What about your infamous V.S.O.P cognac?" Marcie asked.

"Some information I found on the Internet indicated that one ounce is about 69 calories. I can't bring myself to imagine how many calories I've inhaled after an evening of hanging out. I remember one time drinking almost an entire bottle."

"I remember that night. You stayed in bed all day the next day," Marcie said. "How do you know that the information on the Internet is true and accurate?"

"I don't know, but it's the best estimate I have. With any information on the Internet, they explain that they do their best to provide the most accurate information on beverages and food items, but that the nutritional facts for alcoholic beverages is extremely difficult to attain or research. For me, it basically provides a frame of reference. Those margaritas made with our top shelf tequila, triple sec and lime juice average around 550 calories."

"I understand what you're saying, but I'm not giving up alcohol, nor my fried seafood, gumbos, or bisque any time soon," Marcie added firmly.

"Continuing healthier habits is my path to a longer and better life," Sarah said. "For too long, I allowed unhealthy habits to chip away my ability to live longer and healthier."

"I'm curious to know what other things you have discovered," Cathy asked.

"For starters... you know the honey BBQ buffalo wings we love so much... three pieces are 190 calories and loaded with fat, cholesterol, and sodium. The numbers were about the same for our

favorite cheddar and bacon potato skins and chicken quesadilla rolls," Sarah shared. "I found out that I was slowly setting myself up for a myriad of disease and illness. The bad stuff was entirely too much for my body to continue to handle. My warning sign came with a diagnosis of high cholesterol."

"High cholesterol... my mother and father have high cholesterol. You're young... how did you get it?" Cathy inquired.

"There could be a number of reasons, but I believe for me it was my diet. Once I took an inventory of the foods and beverages I was consuming daily, I discovered that I was knocking on death's door. Or, at least marching toward a band of health problems."

"Wow! I guess I'd better start thinking about making some modifications," Cathy said.

"You just might consider that. If both your parents have high cholesterol, you are probably genetically predisposed to inherit it. Now is the time to start making changes so you can reduce your risks," Sarah said. "High cholesterol can lead to cardiovascular disease, the number one killer of women."

"How did you make your changes?" Cathy asked.

"Believe me it was hard in the beginning. I gravitated towards the gimmicks of weight loss programs that promised quick results. That was in part because my initial primary focus was to lose weight. I looked and explored every option for getting the weight off quickly. My friend at work, Mary, and my trainer, Trevor, helped me to shift my focus. I'm now more concerned about being healthy on the inside. By changing the order, my outside becomes a reflection of my inside."

"What about seafood nights at your house?" Cathy asked.

"Okay, brace yourself... I discovered that the same high caloric numbers exists for our favorite shrimp cakes, crab cakes, and stuffed crab. One shrimp cake is 160 calories, one crab cake is 170 calories, and three ounces of stuffed crab is 170 calories. If we ate the recommended servings, we would consume approximately 500 calories and a lot of fat, cholesterol, and sodium. If my memory serves me correctly, we generally ate two to three times the recommended amount. Keep in mind, those figures do not



include what we ate for breakfast, snacks, and lunch. And don't forget the alcoholic beverages!"

"You've definitely given me something to think about. Everything I eat comes ready-made from the restaurant or the grocery store," Cathy admitted.

"Everything I eat is pre-packaged and pre-cooked... it's quick and convenient for me to stop by the grocery deli and get a rotisserie chicken that will last me for about two days — a half one day and the other half the next. Plus, some tasty sides. Or, I can get the pre-packaged meals — battered, breaded and pre-seasoned and ready to cook in the oven or heat in the microwave — chicken fritters, buffalo bites... nuggets, tenders, or strips... plus some sides," Marcie said. "Why would I spend my evenings, after a nine hour day at work, slaving over a stove?"

"The only reason I can come up with is that it's healthier. What I discovered was that the shortcuts were hazardous to my health. Everything I gravitated towards was buttered, sautéed, fried... in a cream sauce or au gratin, all of which in most cases, denotes foods high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium," Sarah shared.

"I eat at the cafeteria most days for lunch. That's healthy, right!" Cathy asked.

"What do you eat?" Sarah asked.

"The other day I ate the chicken & dumplings, praline topped sweet potato, fried okra, and a tossed green salad," Cathy said with excitement. "Wasn't that a medley of healthy selections?"

"The total meal sounds high in calories. Personally, my old recipe for chicken & dumplings wasn't healthy. The main ingredients like cream of chicken soup is high in sodium. Whole milk is high in fat. Biscuit baking mix is high in sodium and fat. Chicken and eggs are high in cholesterol. I don't think the recipe for the one at the cafeteria is going to be very different. Just think, those ingredients mixed with the ingredients in the praline topped sweet potato and fried okra is a lot. The tossed green salad was probably your best item, and that depends on the extras and salad dressing you used."

"You're sure putting a damper on this trip!" Marcie said.

"Don't get me wrong, eating chicken & dumplings every so often is okay. But, don't eat chicken & dumplings, praline topped sweet potato, fried okra, a tossed green salad and a roll on Monday. Chicken & sour cream enchiladas, refried beans, and spanish style rice on Tuesday. Chicken tetrazzini, candied sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes and gravy, and cornbread on Wednesday. Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, navy beans and garlic toast on Thursday. Southern fried fish, macaroni and cheese, hushpuppies, and turnip greens on Friday. It's just too much. And once again, you haven't even considered your breakfast, snacks, and dinner on those days. And don't forget happy hour! It's all about your CHOICES!"

"So, what are we supposed to do? Those are the things we like to eat," Cathy said.

"I'm not saying you can't eat those foods. The key is to work at discovering ways to make the food you like to eat healthier," Sarah said, "and eating the right portion sizes."

"Okay, now that you've said all of that... how do we make changes? That's what we need to know. HOW!" Cathy asked.

"It's all about substituting unhealthy items for healthy items. The only way you can make sure that happens is to start preparing the food yourself."

"You've been exercising the entire trip. What's that all about? I guess you really didn't come to hang out with us?" Marcie suggested.

"Exercise and healthier eating is like Batman and Robin, the two complement one another. True enough, you can lose weight by reduced eating or excessive exercising, but the combination of the two have prove most effective for me. I'm not into some extreme makeover, but I'm going to do what's necessary to safeguard my body from future health concerns. Some people dive into an exercise program and end up crashing. Trevor started me on a moderate program of walking and jogging. To keep me motivated and on track, I've made a commitment to participate in some of the local races, like the 5K walk/run event my company is sponsoring."



"The last thing I have time for is exercise," Marcie responded. "I'm restoring my home, and each evening I'm dealing with these non-responsive contractors. After working all day, and trying to combat their shenanigans, the last thing I want to do is exercise," she confessed.

"Just admit it, you don't want to exercise. Time is not the problem. If you can find time for happy hour two and three nights a week, and your other social gatherings, you can find time to exercise," Sarah said.

"Happy hour relaxes me," Marcie said. "There's effort involved in exercise. Effort that requires effort. After dealing with drama all day at work, the last thing I want to employ is more effort."

"I know what she means. Trying to get my business off the ground takes up a lot of my time. Most nights, I'm working into the wee hours trying to prepare bids and proposals," Cathy added. "The stress of trying to achieve a steady stream of income is what consumes me. The jaws of failure knocking at my back door can be overwhelming when I'm alone at night. Marcie's right... those two nights of happy hour relaxes me. After an evening of drinking, the only thing I can do is jump in bed."

"Once again, those two or three nights of happy hour can be replaced with an activity that provides real value to your life," Sarah confirmed. "Plus, it will probably help you save money while you create that steady stream of income. It's all about what's important to you. Once you really understand the scope of a healthier lifestyle, you will do what's necessary to achieve it. We often talk about stress. Exercise relieves stress. The body's release of good chemicals, the happy chemicals, helps to combat the pressures of life. Aside from those two nights during the week, you can find an hour on a Saturday and Sunday to exercise. Making simple modifications to your daily routine can accommodate an exercise program. Personally, I was expending time with activities that didn't advance me. Happy hour, the latest T.V. shows, and social gatherings dominated my life. The things I pursued added no value to my life."

“So, I guess with your newfound revelations, hanging out with us at happy hour added no value to your life?” Marcie said angrily.

“All I’m saying is that I wasn’t happy doing what I was doing. Drinking was a way to mask the pain I felt inside. Pain I had denied and dismissed,” Sarah shared. “The whole transformation has created in me an awareness of God’s expectations for my life. No longer consumed with things and people, I’ve committed myself to being a servant. I’ve realized that I had to connect and redirect the traditional programming of inactivity and poor eating habits. The hazards that lie in restaurant foods helped to solidify my position. Keep in mind that we’re approaching forty, quickly. When you’re younger, your body is resilient, able to rebound from sickness and illness. As you get older, the effects of an unhealthy lifestyle begin to catch up with you. You might not make it out alive.”

“Aren’t you the rain on our parade, or better, the rain that ruined the deck party. I’m not ready to put in motion some major transformation just yet. All that research about food and exercising is not important to me at this point in my life,” Marcie said, while preparing to head out the door. “Sarah, I’ve heard enough. It’s time to party. I’ll wait until I get back home to start considering changes. I’m on this cruise to eat, drink, and be merry!”



The cruise ended two days later. Although they didn’t make it to Jamica due to Hurricane Allison, they had a memorable time on and off the ship. Sarah would never forget hanging out in Grand Cayman, exploring Seven Mile Beach, visiting the turtle farm and the town of Hell. And working out in the state-of-the-art fitness center, experiencing a soothing massage, and walking and jogging around the outdoor track enjoying the spectacular ocean views. Among many of her discoveries, Sarah recognized the path she was pursuing was different from that of Marcie and Cathy. Their lives had taken different turns, and she knew it would be their last trip together.