

Slimming World – 24 months on...

It's been 2 years now since I walked through the doors of a Slimming World group, and I can honestly say, it's one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life. That said, the decision was in fact made in October 2008, setting my "D-Day" – "Diet Day" to be 1st December 2008. It seemed odd so soon to be starting a "diet" so soon before the Christmas festivities, but I knew I had to act and soon.

Life, as I now realise, was becoming unbearable – standing up after sitting down for any length of time was getting more and more painful in the knees and hips. Having broken two office chairs in the space of 2 weeks earlier in 2008 wasn't a help either – the second one after only 2 days. I was afraid to sit down on chairs or park benches, and being as big as I was back then, needing to sit down when out shopping was needed as it didn't take much exertion to make me very short of breath. Strangely none of this had spurred me into action and I continued to live with it, thinking I'll do something about it next month for some time; of course "next month" never came.

Finally I saw a photograph of myself, at the wedding of one of my brother's at the end of August 2008. Easily being twice the size of anyone else in that photo, I cried. I truly hadn't realised just how big I had become. I knew something had to be done, but I also knew that timing wasn't quite right for me, or at least that was the excuse I gave. Then a few weeks later, my other brother asked me to be an usher at his wedding in August 2009 – I had to give it all serious thought. I will always feel that I ruined that first set of wedding photos by my size, and for my own sake, I wasn't going to see another set of wedding photos and cry at how I looked against others. I set that "D-Day" date, in order to prepare for what was coming, and to make sure I was ready to face that challenge ahead of me, and most importantly, to make sure I was going to be doing it for all the right reasons – which basically meant that I had to make sure that I was doing it for me and no-one else, for nearly any time I tried previously to shift the weight, it was because I felt "I had to" for whatever reason, rather than me wanting to be slimmer.

So around came the 1st December 2008 and in the doors I walked of a Slimming World group around the corner from work. As all new joiners are, I was nervous, even more so being a bloke – it's hard to walk into a room knowing you're going to be one of a few, or even the only, male there. Went through the new member talk with the consultant and stood on the scales for the first time. Oh my. I was at least 5 stone heavier than I thought I was, and swore quite audibly. I knew I was in a bad way, but never knew that it was by that much. During Image Therapy the consultant asked all the people who joined that night how much we'd like to lose in our first week – I joked "all of it" but then in a more serious note, said "I'd be happy with just a few pounds" knowing then that if I was going to be serious about losing the weight, I was going to be in it for the long haul with the surprise I just had on the scales. Once I was back in the car though, I cried for the second time in the space of a few months at just how much I did weigh.

One shopping trip later and my fridge was stocked full of vegetables, and fresh meats, fish, etc, and with the herb and spice collection I had built up over the previous few months, I was set to go – I had even brought a few packets of scan bran whilst I was in the group for my lunch in the office. I got home from work the next evening and in

that first meal, re-found my long disappeared love of cooking. After a diet that consisted of takeaways and junk food for so long, the taste of properly prepared fresh meat and vegetables, was an awakening call, and with the exception of the potatoes, I could eat as much of this as I wanted? All I could say was “bring it on”. My plates were piled high with vegetables, something I’d never have done before. I was having my 15 syns a day, and enjoying my cheese allowance from the healthy extra lists every day rather than being a weekend treat.

Then that first weigh in after joining came around, with all that I’d eaten – much more than I’d probably actually have eaten before joining (at least it felt that way) – like everyone else after their first week, I was nervous, I’d eaten everything I’d like and in what seemed like huge quantities – I figured there was no way I’d have lost weight that week – not even that “few pounds” that I had said I’d be happy with. Well, I needn’t of worried – I had lost not a “few pounds” but 14 pounds – a whole stone gone in my first week. I couldn’t believe it (and neither could anyone else) – I sat there in group in total shock.

I carried on losing throughout December 2008, being two stone lighter by the end of that month, January 2009 came along and still I kept on losing. I also knew that by the time of my brother’s wedding in August 2009, I wanted to be at least 7.5st lighter, not super slim by any shot, but well on my way and without doubt able to look a lot better in the pictures than that first wedding in 2008. There was my goal, something to aim for. If I carried on losing at the rate I was then – it was an achievable goal too. In April 2009, I changed groups to one nearer home than work, to give me more consistency in weighing in, and also it meant I got home slightly earlier each week.

And already I was feeling the benefits of the weight loss – slightly more energy, and slightly more confidence and although a shock to me, someone with absolutely no self-confidence – I was starting to like these changes. Slowly, as the year progressed, I moved from walking to the bus stop to go to town each Saturday, to walking to town on Saturdays and catching the bus home, and then walking both to and from town on Saturdays, and before I knew it, I was walking to and from town on both days at the weekend, and slowly branching out from there.

August 2009 came around and the long awaited wedding day. I had set myself that 7.5stone target to reach by then. I hit that early July. By the time of the wedding, I was 8st0.5lb lighter than when I joined Slimming World that previous December. My family was shocked by the change in me, but the biggest surprise was still to come that evening. I started this journey with the mindset of it being a “diet”. That evening, at the wedding reception, is what I call my Slimming World revelation. I went to the buffet table and there was a load of my pre-Food Optimising, favourite foods – potato wedges, pizza slices, chicken skewers. I didn’t want any of them – that wasn’t the way I ate anymore. That was the day I realised that this diet wasn’t a “diet” but it was now my lifestyle, one that I wasn’t prepared to give up easily.

Went to weigh-in a few days after the wedding, and with two flexi-syn days and one day that I had originally promised myself to be off-plan for, I truly expected a gain but was also ready to get straight back on plan, and conquer any gain. I lost another 2.5lb.

It would have been so easy – having reached that target that I had set – to stop there, but the increase in energy, the newly found self-confidence, and the joy of being able to start shopping on the high street again all lead me to the conclusion that it wasn't worth stopping, I wanted, for once in my life, to be "slim". I set myself two new goals; I wanted to have lost 10stone or more by October 2009, with an eventual aim of having lost 12.5stone by my birthday at the end of March 2010. Small, slow steps, but providing I kept to the plan – more than realistic ones. End of October came, and I was that 10 stone lighter and I gave myself my first reward for the weight loss – a new watch – something I hadn't had since my 18th birthday in 1992. I carried on eating the food optimising way and carried on losing, by mid-March 2010; I hit that next target, and weighed, for the first time in my adult life, less than 15stone. It had been my original intention to call target there, but I knew I really had a few more stone to lose and kept on going.

At the end of February 2010 though, I had submitted the entry forms for Slimming World's "Greatest Loser" competition, and the same week that I hit that 15stone target, I received the invite to the finals dinner in London at the end of April – where I would be one of the top 10 "Greatest Losers" for 2010. Time for a new goal, I wanted another stone off by that dinner. 6 weeks, should be easily doable. Well 5 weeks into those 6 weeks I had given myself to lose that stone; I was 5lbs off being able to say I had done it. By now, I was walking to and from group on a Monday night, as well as all the walking at weekends. On the walk home that night I figured that the 5lb I needed for the next weigh-in (the one before the dinner) was not going to be achievable that week, and rather than stressing out about it, that I was just going to relax and be happy with any loss by then – I had done my best and that's all I could ever ask of myself. I was shocked to have lost 5lb that next weigh-in. I hadn't been in anyway strict with myself – just relaxed and let things go the way they were going to go, and the results spoke for themselves.

That afternoon in London two days later was fantastic. I heard so many inspirational stories, both from the other 9 finalists, and from the other past "of the year" winners in the room. I came 9th with my 12st7.5lb weight loss (as of the end of February when the entry forms were submitted). It was scary going up on stage in front of everyone to answer questions from Slimming World's Managing Director, and then I said something in the heat of the moment that maybe shouldn't have been said – that I was planning to do a parachute jump to celebrate the weight loss, now that I was under the maximum permitted weight for doing a tandem jump. It had been something I was thinking about for some time, but saying it there on stage, sealed it, and two days later, at the start of May 2010, I had booked my place on a tandem parachute jump for the end of July 2010. I had also that day in London made arrangements to Wales at the start of that July to walk up Snowdon.

June 2010 came around, and I called target, having lost a little more than 14stone and more than half my original starting weight. Unfortunately, my body had other plans, and in my first week as a target member, took me out of range with a 3.5lb weight loss, another loss the following week, lead me to decide to listen to my body and stop when it's happy to stop, hopefully once I'd lost another 7lb – so I reset my target.

July 2010 and oh boy, what a month. July 4th saw me at Slimming World's Head Office in Derbyshire taking part in national semi-finals of the "Man of the Year"

competition. I made it through as one of the 12 national finalists in the finals that same afternoon, and although I wasn't awarded the title, it was such a fantastic day meeting so many other people, and listening to so many fantastic journeys. The following weekend, was the Snowdon walk, and although tiring, the views were more than worth it, and walking up and down the hill with other Slimming World members was very enjoyable to.

Then the day I had been dreading came along. July 31st 2010. The day of the sky dive. I was a little disappointed, I'd have loved to be saying that day that I was at the new target weight I had set at the end of June, but it wasn't to be, again – I had done my best and that was all that mattered after all what was a few pounds in the 14.5stone or so I needed? The day was an absolute wonder – falling out of a plane at about 12,500 feet and 90 seconds or so of free fall at 120mph before slowly coming to the ground with views of the Oxfordshire countryside around me – and raising over £750 for the NSPCC in the process. And as to that second target – I got it two days later at my next weigh-in to cap off a wonderful weekend, and a wonderful July.

I had more success at maintaining that target, bouncing around in that 6lb that target members are allowed for about 4 weeks before going under again. Struggle as I may, I just couldn't put the weight back on, and I found myself resetting target again. I got to the point of being half a pound below the next step that I would be allowed to call target, and saying that night in group that next weight loss and I'll claim target for the third time, and then work hard at the "Christmas Wish" of being a target and successfully maintaining it. I could relax again – I wasn't after any particularly weight loss, just a loss to be able to once again say that I was a target member. Next weigh-in – I was shocked with a 5.5lb weight loss and having lost exactly 15.5stone and most definitely called target there. That was middle of October 2010. Now, having gone for 24months as a Slimming World member, I'm 15st10.5lb lighter than I was on the 1st December 2008. Slightly below range, but hopefully I'll redress the balance soon enough – I'm weighing in at less the 12stone for the first time since I was probably 12years old.

I look back though at the last 24months and I know I couldn't have done it without a lot of help and inspiration along the way – both from people in the two groups I've been a member of, and that I've met along the way online and in other places. I also couldn't have done it without two brilliant consultants along the way either.

These last 24months have given me a new lease of life, something I've never really experienced before. I am still walking whenever possible. The pain in the knees and hips that I used to experience is long gone, and my energy levels have never been higher and I have so much more confidence than I can ever remember having before. I can stand up and talk in front of groups of other members about my journey without feeling self-conscious about my weight, and walk up mountains. I've fallen out of a plane at 12,500 feet, and walked over burning coals.

My outlook on life has changed so dramatically. I thought I was happy with how I was, but now, in reflection, I wasn't happy at all. Now I'm living the life I should have been living before and loving every moment of it. I now know that after this journey that I can do anything I set my mind to, and am already looking for that next

challenge for 2011. I've lost 15st10.5lb and gained a life. Seems like a pretty good trade to me.

I was once asked if "loosing the weight has changed your life". I answered with one word "Absolutely". I was wrong. It hasn't changed my life; it has, as I've already said, given me a life. I didn't live before, I simply existed. Now I'm here, there is no going back. I'd probably go as far as saying that walking through those doors on December 1st 2008 didn't just change my life, it probably saved my life. I hate to think what would have happened if I hadn't done that then. I truly expect I'd be over 30stone in weight by now, the pain in standing/walking would have lead to me being bed-ridden and that is if it hadn't killed me already for I truly was a walk heart-attack waiting to happen.

Gone are the days of takeaways and junk food. Fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, and good honest home cooked meals are what I crave these days. Gone are the 54inch waist trousers, and 5 and 6 XL sized tops, and in are the 30/32 inch trousers and S or M tops. And also gone are the days of living for the next piece of food – I'm not living to eat anymore but eating to live. I can walk for what seems like forever these days, and even run if I have to without feeling like I'm about to collapse afterwards.

All this in 24months of being a Slimming World member and following the Food Optimising plans. I don't know what is coming next. All I do know is that I fully intend to continue planning on attending a group once a week having never missed a weigh-in and only once not stayed to group, and doing my best to maintain this weight loss. Only a month till 2011 starts, and all I can say is "bring it on".