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Marcia Meislin, author of "The Goodbye Cookie," at her home in Hartsdale.

Binge-eater shares lessons of the Road to recovery

By JACKIE LUPO

Marcia Meislin looks like she's ready for anything, even for an early morning interview in her kitchen. It's hard to believe that this slim, energetic 59-year-old with the bouncy corkscrew curls, trim jeans and scarlet blazer is the same woman who wrote a book about her decades of living out of control and overweight, a hostage to her cravings for food.

Meislin's new book, "The Goodbye Cookie: A Memoir About Never Giving Up," is the story of a woman leading a double life: a dynamic public speaker, executive coach and former

bank vice president ... and a compulsive binge eater who topped out at 300 pounds on her petite 5'3" frame.

Writing it was hard — but not as hard as losing 135 pounds and changing her outlook on life. The memoir is an unvarnished account of her life story, in which binge-eating disorder is one of the main characters. To reveal the truth about her love/hate affair with food, she also had to go into detail about her childhood, her quest for personal and professional validation and her intimate relationships.

When she did lay herself bare in print, Meislin said, "It did feel very good to get it all out. But I didn't

want to stop there. I wanted to reach out to people who were not feeling worthy, people with self-esteem, self-image and body image issues. I knew my shame would be exposed to the world."

Meislin is a longtime resident of Hartsdale. She has been married for 30 years to physician and pharmaceutical executive Steve Weinstein, and they have two sons, Jon, 26, and Adam, 23. When she began working on her book she had to decide how much to write about her marriage.

"My husband is a very private per-

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A former binge eater shares lessons of recovery

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son, but he was OK with it,” she said. “I could have been more superficial, but then I couldn’t have said the personal things I said.”

She decided to spare few details (although she did change a few names and places to protect others’ privacy). “The more you reveal, the more authentic your story’s going to be,” she said. “You can touch people’s lives and help them come out of shame, to learn to ask for help.”

Meislin said that her goal has become “to see her life as being of service.” She wrote the book to “reach people, give them the message that there’s hope even if they’ve tried every diet in the world, that everybody can get healthier, can potentially have higher self-esteem, balance and serenity.”

As principal of MCM Management Consultants since 1987, Meislin is a frequent public speaker and works with corporate clients, teaching leadership, communication and negotiation skills. She graduated from Cornell University with a B.S. in human development and earned an M.Ed. in counseling from Cambridge College in Massachusetts. She is a licensed mental health counselor in New York State and a professional certified coach through the International Coach Federation. She is also a certified therapist from the Gestalt Center of Long Island, where she has been a trustee since 1994.

Now that she has published her book, she is also talking to groups on issues related to self-esteem, body image and self-acceptance — what she calls “coming out of the darkness of shame.”

Her family lived in Ardsley when she was a little girl, but moved to a predominantly Orthodox Jewish community in Rockland County before she started elementary school. Meals in the Meislin household were the focal point of family life, and because her father had become a vegetarian after a trip to a slaughterhouse in his native Russia when he was a teenager, all the members of the family were also vegetarians. As Meislin recounts it, their diet was composed largely of starches and sweets, with salads drenched in sugary dressing.

The females in her family all struggled with their weight; Meislin remembers her mother’s on-again, off-again preoccupation



with dieting, and her hiding a personal stash of “forbidden” chocolate from the children. Marcia, the baby of the family, suffered from asthma and was never able to be as physically active as other children. She was short and chubby, with dark, curly hair, and when she came of age in the late ’60s, her appearance was out of sync with the ultra-thin, blond models such as Twiggy, who set the standard for female beauty (and whose legacy never really faded). Throughout high school and college she was zaftig but not obese, her weight held in check with yo-yo dieting. She remembers her mother bribing her to lose weight with trips and new clothing, but nothing stuck. And over the years, her weight crept upward.

Ironically, in her professional life, she became successful in counseling others, rising to the position of vice president of human resources at National Westminster Bank USA before opening her own coaching and consulting practice. She also taught organizational behavior at Pace University’s M.B.A. program and in the graduate school of the College of New Rochelle, and taught management and in-

ternal consulting skills at NYU.

When it came to forging ahead in her career, she was fearless. For years, she projected a bubbly, confident demeanor when working with clients and talking in front of large audiences, despite her embarrassment about her weight. She invested in expensive plus-size clothing and wore eye-catching accessories. She felt she had to be more engaging, more memorable, more clever, than other speakers to compensate for her excess weight.

“No one accepts a fat woman. It’s like the last bias,” she said. “I think a lot of heavy women would have gone inside the house and drawn the blinds and just stayed inside and watched daytime TV. My way was, I’m going to hold my head higher.”

But even after she had achieved professional success, she continued to be plagued by the compulsion to binge. “I’d be out there [giving a talk] and when I was out there, I was happy and excited,” she said. “But on the drive home, somehow, between that Marcia and the one that was driving home, because of my body, my shame, I would have to fill myself up.”

Meislin’s mantra is “never give up,” and she gained and lost significant amounts of weight several times. She tried therapists, diet pills, meetings and even weight-loss surgery. A support group finally helped her to look squarely at binge-eating disorder as a disease to be managed rather than as a personal failing, and to accept help from others. Finally, in her 50s, she learned to like herself, and she has maintained the loss of over 135 pounds for eight years. She is no longer fat, but her history is a part of her that she accepts.

“I can look back at my journey and not be ashamed of it,” she said. “I can stand in front of people in my curly hair. I’m an aging woman. I can look with love, humility and humor at the common roadblocks we all face, without having to cover up. I feel so much more real. I can just approach someone with all my strengths and flaws, and it’s fine.”

“The Goodbye Cookie” is available in paperback from Amazon.com (\$13.32) and will soon be published as an e-book. Meislin also blogs about weight and self-esteem issues on her website, marciameislin.com, and on the Huffington Post.