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WHO ARE YOU CALLING

fat?

HOW THREE MONTHS IN A NEW CITY—AND ONE GAME OF BEER PONG—SENT MY SELF-IMAGE SPIRALING.

BY JAMIE STONE

FOOD HAS always been a big part of my life: I never met a potato or noodle I didn't like. And although my home city of New York is the fashion capital of the world, I never felt pressure to be super thin while living there. At a pear-shaped 5 feet 6 and 140 pounds, I figured I was normal. (I mean, the average American woman is about 5 feet 4 and 166 pounds.)



AT 26, I MOVED to L.A. for a change of pace, and that's what I got—I was meeting new people and eating and drinking my way through a city that has great food, some of which I had never tried or even heard of. (Taquitos?!) Of course, in the land of the yoga instructor and aspiring actress, most women don't indulge, and if they do, they go into a shame spiral afterward. I, however, happily piled on 15 pounds within a few months. I was having so much fun, the weight didn't bother me.

One night, I was playing beer pong at a house party with some new people. The guys were slinging harmless insults at one another, as they do. Then it happened. A guy on the opposite team slung one at me: "Hey Jamie, you should really lose 10 pounds." Everyone went silent, which made it worse. "She is a pretty girl and would look a lot better if she just lost a little weight," he told our now-uneasy onlookers. I could feel the heat rise in my face before I stormed out.

So, this is how it's going to be now, I thought. In Los Angeles, I'm "the fat girl" at the party.

For months, I replayed that night in my head. While my new (thin) bestie assured me I looked great—even I didn't truly think I was "fat"—it didn't matter. I was already holding myself hostage to a new body standard. At my

current shape, I didn't fit into the L.A. crowd, and I so wanted to. Maybe it would have flown in the bars I hung out in in New York, where there is more body diversity, but not here.

Some of my L.A. friends were eager to help, recommending their vegan diets ("Vegans are *so* skinny") and chicken-broth dinners. For what seemed like ages, I tried different diets, losing weight here and there, but nothing stuck. I eventually started working out with a trainer, who recommended an almost no-carb plan. I did it and lost 20 pounds in five months. Three years into my L.A. life, I finally got the body to match: I fit into my favorite Seven jeans from college that I hadn't been able to pull over my hips in years. Everyone told me I was "so tiny!" People thought I was a size 2. (A 2!) But I was miserable.

I WAS BARELY allowed to eat a thing. A piece of toast in the morning? Nope. A sliver of cake at someone's birthday? Ha! I felt like I was walking around half-dead all the time, not actually from hunger but because I wasn't having any fun. That fabulous L.A. life I once had was over.

Being so restricted was a constant game of negotiation. My one "cheat" night eventually became two. Before long, I had "cheat weeks." A year and a half after reaching my goal weight, I'd gained back almost half of what I'd lost—I didn't look much different

than I did back when that jerk teased me. And even though I was once happy walking around L.A. at this size, I now felt fat and berated myself every morning in the mirror. I wasn't the old, happy Jamie who would walk into a bar on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, grab a beer and wings, and talk to anyone. Somewhere along the way, I'd lost myself. I knew something had to change.

After 18 months of obsessive yo-yoing, I realized that the L.A. version of me I'd dreamed of—and for a hot minute, achieved—was never going to be sustainable. Every time I gained a pound or two, I felt defeated, which made losing weight harder, like trying to walk down an up escalator. Equally as important, I just couldn't live a life where a piece of whole-wheat toast was forbidden. It sounds trite, but I needed to find some sort of balance.

Like a true L.A. girl, I found it at the gym. Once I took the pressure to be skinny out of the equation, I found a new appreciation for moving my body. Now when I box and lift weights, I tell myself it's to keep fit, not thin. I still adhere to some low-carb principles, but I'm not afraid of a taquito. My new routine has put me back to my fresh-off-the-plane weight, but the best part is, I'm stronger, leaner, and happier with who I am. ■