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Nonfiction

Skinny, Fat, Perfect is part memoir, part road map, and whole-heartedly designed to help readers approach healthy eating and weight loss from a different perspective.

The book is a guide for returning to self-love, healing old wounds, and being happy in your body at any size or age. It's time to abandon the popular fear-based and fight-oriented diet paradigm, and instead see how accepting ourselves and our bodies will lead to natural, healthy, and sustainable weight.

This book chronicles the author's personal journey of releasing 100 pounds permanently, and overcoming the self-loathing and addiction that dominated her life. Now a teacher and mentor to others facing similar challenges around the world, she shares the techniques she uses to help her students break free of the diet mentality, release significant weight, and see themselves in a new, loving light, for *good*.



"Laura's vision is living in a world where health and body image are celebrated. If you want to feel comfortable, safe and motivated in your body, and get results, *read this book*."

—Jack Canfield, co-creator of
The Chicken Soup for the Soul series

"It's like Laura's speaking directly to you and sharing her story, with arms extended to embrace, love and heal with you. Thank you Laura for caring to share."

—Teresa Tapp, Creator and President of T-Tapp, Inc.



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Skinny, Fat, Perfect

LAURA FENAMORE



Skinny,
Fat,

Perfect

*Love Who You See In
The Mirror*

"I know an endless number of women who could—and will—benefit from the wisdom in this book. . . .
Women will love this book."

—Caroline Myss,
Author of *Anatomy of the Spirit*
and *Sacred Contracts*

LAURA FENAMORE

REPUTATION BOOKS

Praise for ***Skinny, Fat, Perfect***

“How many people do you know who have lost 100 lbs.? How many of those people have kept it off for well over a quarter century and will keep it off FOREVER? Laura Fenamore has, and in *Skinny, Fat, Perfect*, she will show you how you can make permanent changes from the inside out. She is 100% committed to helping people who struggle with weight and body image issues!”

—Marci Shimoff, *NY Times* bestselling author of *Happy for No Reason*

“*Skinny, Fat, Perfect* is required reading for the modern woman. Laura reveals how women can heal and transform their relationship with their body *for good*.”

—John Gray, bestselling author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*

“Simply put: *Skinny, Fat, Perfect* isn’t a diet book that tells readers what to eat. It’s a road map to self-love and self-acceptance.”

—Dr. Joe Vitale, bestselling author and star of the *The Secret* movie

“*Skinny, Fat, Perfect* is an essential tool for every woman who has said something mean to herself or her body. This book offers hope and help and teaches us that healing is possible. Laura’s story of healing from addiction, obesity, and self-hatred is inspiring for all of us.”

—Diane Cirincione, Ph.D., Executive Director,
Attitudinal Healing International

“Laura devotes so much of her book, *Skinny, Fat, Perfect* to a subject that is near and dear to my heart . . . forgiveness. I encourage all women who struggle with body image to read this book that teaches us that self-love is possible for all of us . . . no matter what our size or age is.”

—Gerald G. Jampolsky, M.D., Author,
Forgiveness, the Greatest Healer of All

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FAT,
PERFECT

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*Love Who You See
In The Mirror*

LAURA FENAMORE

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To my true love Kathleen
who makes me laugh and smile every day.
I thank you and I love you.

You are NOT your weight
You live in a body
And you can love that body
And yet you are *not* your body.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

When I received the message that my life's work was to teach, it came through like the emergency broadcast system on TV.

"Laura," it said. "This is your mission. Your transformation will ultimately help a lot of people."

In my heart the path was clear, but in my body and mind it wasn't. I was still struggling with diet pills, laxatives, and a critical inner voice. I knew I could not work with others until I was completely in love with my own body. That included letting go of all of my methods of self-abuse and of my obsession with the scale. I knew I could do this, and eventually I did. That personal journey shaped this book.

I now have a perspective on weight and body image that I am proud to share with the world. I no longer fixate

on the number on the scale. My weight is important for my health, and my appearance has nothing to do with who I am. I am madly in love with my body for what it does for me. It serves me by functioning twenty-four hours a day without my having to tell it what to do. I don't have to order my brain to think, my heart to beat, or my lungs to breathe. My body spontaneously pumps blood, digests food, inhales air.

Our bodies are so forgiving. I thank mine daily for being in constant self-correction mode, building itself up even as I wear it down with everyday use.

My body has been here for me through all the trauma, drama, and abuse, and it continues to function. It is a miracle, and I do not take it for granted.

Loving who I am has little to do with what I weigh or how I eat. It is not about the food or the scale. My goal in this lifetime is to be more of who I am and help you be more of who you are. It is only from that place that any transformation can happen. I've seen it happen again and again. I know what's possible.

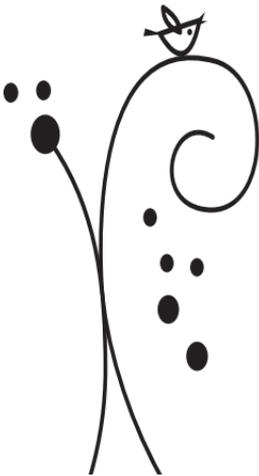
My path to self-love and weight release has not been a straight line. There have been challenges along the way. While difficult, these setbacks have made me able to

recognize triggers and helped me shape my teaching with a firsthand understanding of the challenges my students may face in staying on a path to self-love. We can teach ourselves to love our bodies, starting with a small body part. The pinky finger. So no matter what the mind says about your being too skinny or too fat, you will discover you are perfect, meaning perfectly imperfect, regardless of age, size or looks.

You are perfect just as you are.

And from that place of self-love and self-acceptance, anything is possible.

My Story





The day that changed my life was February 6, 1988.

I was living in San Francisco, and my house was a couple of miles from the Golden Gate Bridge. While bingeing uncontrollably on food or other substances or sitting in therapy, I would fantasize about jumping off of it and finding freedom from the weight of self-loathing I carried with me.

I was tired of all the false promises I made to myself over and over and over again. I was tired of telling myself every day, “Today is the day I will stop overeating, stop drinking and using drugs, stop smoking, stop lying to myself, stop cheating myself.” But every day I broke these promises because my addictions were strong, stronger than I could admit. They were buried deep in my psyche, a dangerous coping mechanism to overcome feeling defective.

The part of me that wanted to die was the binger. The drinker. The smoker.

The one who wasn't worthy. The one who had problems she couldn't fix.

There was another part of me, though: my spirit. My essence. The part of me that understood I wasn't to blame for the abuse I experienced as a child. That was the part of me that wanted to live.

DEFECTIVE

I was the last of eight children born to Italian Catholic parents in a blue-collar neighborhood in suburban Long Island, New York. I arrived on a Saturday at 10 p.m.; my mother was dutifully ironing when her water broke.

Our house was too small for us eight children, our passive mother, and our abusive father. On the outside we were a typical family: the clamor of children, a clean house, a packed fridge. And although we hovered around the poverty level, there were always snacks after school, and the dinner table was always piled high with all the pasta and bread a hungry girl could dream of.

My father was the elementary school janitor, belonged to the Knights of Columbus and the American Legion, and was respected in the community.

But in the background, terror lurked. We were constantly waiting for the next roar of the beast and the beatings that followed. Night after night, I sat at the table listening to my father rage about how we kids should have never been born.

In the background of his diatribes, the news was always blasting: Vietnam and the hosing down of the blacks during riots. I ate those words—about a broken world and a broken me—for years. I believed them with my whole being.

The only thing that ever numbed the fear was food. Food and more food. It filled the longing inside me to be nurtured and loved. Stuffing seconds, thirds, and fourths down my throat at mealtimes was my way of coping with the attacks from my father. As you can imagine, I was overweight from a very early age.

When I was seven, my twelve-year-old sister Liz suggested things I shouldn't eat if I wanted to lose weight. She was on a mission to fix me. Her intention was pure. She wanted so much to save me, and I wanted so much to be saved. At that time, I did not know that I did not need to be saved from anyone except myself.

That time I spent with my sister was the unofficial beginning of my attempts to lose weight. My first real diet came in fourth grade. By then I weighed nearly 100 pounds and was taken to an obesity clinic. I can still feel in my bones the shame of facing that doctor. Pointing his finger at me, he told me that I had a problem (as if I didn't know) and that I had to go on a diet to be saved. There it was again—saved.

I needed to be saved. I was broken. Defective. I cried the whole way home.

The “restrictive diet” the doctor put me on did not last long—it was torture. All I wanted was food. I dreamed about it every night and obsessed about how I could sneak snacks to get me to my next meal.

HIDING

My home life got worse and worse. My father often flew into rages and beat my mother, my brothers and sisters, and me. Trips to the hospital were commonplace to treat our wounds, even though the neighbors heard the screams and the fights. It was the 1970's, and there was little, if any awareness about child abuse. But when I was 11 my father went too far. He threw my sister into the wall, sent her to

the hospital, and the authorities finally stepped in to take us out.

At age 11, I went into foster care due to child abuse, and that experience made my longing for love and salvation that much stronger. By adolescence I was an overweight alcoholic who used drugs and had promiscuous sex. I was drinking and driving daily, and after a couple of car accidents, I was in bad shape. I knew in my soul that if I stayed in New York I was going to die very young.

So I moved to California, a place I thought would cure me overnight. After an inauspicious start (a drunken, binge-eating plane ride), California turned out to be as difficult as New York; beaches and sunshine couldn't cure my self-hatred. Yet something in me persevered. Somehow I made my way to San Francisco, determined to get into college. I was rejected from two colleges because my SAT scores were atrocious, as were my high school grades. My innate determination and fortitude paid off, though—I refused to leave until the admissions officer at San Francisco State said yes, and she finally did. I wore her out.

I did a thousand times better in college than I did in high school. I loved my friends, classes and the whole experience. Still, I was out of control. There was a sign in my dorm room that read, “Cocktails with Laura.”

My bulimia went into overdrive. I would eat double and triple lunches in the dorm cafeteria, stuffing down giant burritos and then I would throw them up later in the dorm bathroom. It was a way for me to eat as much as I could without getting too full, because I still didn't feel good enough, and the food temporarily filled that black hole.

Deep down, though, I knew the truth. I knew I was a good person stuck in addictive patterns. I had this crazy belief that I could flick a switch in my head and take all my pain away. The addiction, the obsession, the self-hatred would be gone. I just needed to find the switch.

There was a problem. I soon learned there was no switch. When you try over and over to fix a problem and can't, you start to believe that you are unfixable. I began to believe I was hopeless. So I spiraled further into my addictions.

THE DAY IT ALL CHANGED

In the fall of 1987 I went to my first meeting of Overeaters Anonymous (OA)—a spacious room with chairs placed in a circle at a church in the Sunset District of San Francisco. I felt no pressure in OA to “get it right,” and I started to feel a

glimmer of hope. It was about willingness; if I was sitting in that room, they said, then that was the first step. Knowing that I could attend meetings without being forced to change felt liberating.

I started to talk publicly about my inner secrets at meetings, but on my way home I would head straight for the grocery store. I would binge on chips, bread, and cookies in the car, thinking, “Well, I’m not ready yet, and I am doing the best I can right now.” Even though by this point I had begun to wake up and see my pain more clearly, I was still living in my old world of self-abuse. Part of me was seeking something better but the other part was still a wreck. One wanted to live, the other did not.

Still I clung to the belief that something might change. So I kept going to meetings until one day I heard four words that rocked my world.

February 6, 1988, was a life-saving turning point for me. On that day I woke up to my truth, and everything in my world shifted. My latest New Year’s resolution to heal had died, and I was eating like a cow and drinking like a fish. There was a daylong OA conference in San Francisco, and as disappointed as I was in myself yet again, I knew I needed to go.

The very first speaker, a normal-sized woman, had a story similar to mine: a lifetime of yo-yo diets and self-hatred. She talked about feeling desperate and determined at the same time, of living her life in two parts: the one who knew there was more, and the one who felt defeated.

She recounted all of her excuses and stories and lies and self-betraysals, and how they had been digging her grave deeper. She, like me, wanted out of the quicksand but could never find a hand to grab onto. Then, one day in a meeting, she heard a woman say four words. Those words changed her life and as soon as she shared them they changed mine too.

“If not now, when?”

When she spoke those words, I burst into tears and experienced an actual physical release in my body. Just then, I got it.

If not now, when?

What was I waiting for?

How long was I going to play the game of dieting and cheating, dieting and lying to myself? How long would I feel ashamed? How much longer would I fantasize about taking my own life?

If not now, when?

Until I heard these words I was sitting alone, feeling fat and useless, in a conference room full of people. The words took me home. Home to who I was.

Home to the infant born innocent who was told she was fat and ugly and dumb. Home to the person who was not defective, who was capable of healing and changing her story. Home to what was possible. Home to believing that I could stop hating myself, learn to love myself, and release the weight for good.

It all flooded in like a tidal wave. I knew then that the part of me that wanted to die was right in a way: some things would have to die in order for me to live. The seeker in me would have to embrace change and live in courage no matter how hard it was. This was my life, and I was taking my power back.

I danced my way through the rest of the day's conference. I had already started the slow process of crossing over from shame into glory, and I knew it. I was finally going home.

THE WEIGHT IS ONLY PART OF THE STORY

This was the beginning of my journey to self-love, during which I released 100 pounds and kept it off. That

weight release was important, but what happened to me emotionally and spiritually was far more significant.

Before my permanent weight release, I lost and regained many pounds through crash-and-burn dieting and abused myself almost to the point of death. It was only when I realized the pounds were not the point that they stayed off for good. The way to true health is through self-love from the inside out—something that most diets are missing.

Regardless of how skinny or fat I was, regardless of the amount of weight I released—and regardless of how much you wish to release—the day I realized I was not defective, rather I was perfectly imperfect, the way I chose to be, transformed me and gave me a new image of myself.

I believe this book can do the same for you.

An Invitation

We Are Made in Our Image





Your image of yourself is a mosaic of beliefs that you hold about your place in the world. It is how you see your personality, mind, body, and skills. According to Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff, founder of Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child, your early experiences have a tremendous impact on your sense of self. Your self-image is primarily based on the reality you formed by age five, before the memory center of your brain was fully developed.

Until that point your brain's emotional center dominated and you were very susceptible to messages about yourself. The more intense the emotion attached to these messages was, the more powerful its impression became on your subconscious mind.

As a result, even as adults we see ourselves not as we truly are but as others told us we were when we were small children.

But what are these old messages? Most of the time, we don't even notice they exist. They are so deeply a part of us that we never question where they came from or if they're even true. And so they continually run, unchecked, like programs in the background of our brains, sabotaging our every effort to improve our lives. I was programmed to believe that I was broken, defective, dumb, and unable to lose weight.

These programs cause us to inevitably remake ourselves in the same image over and over again. We can change our body only to have it reform back to its original shape.

It's time to break the old patterns.

Imagine that tomorrow you wake up and you can't remember anything. You have amnesia.

Who are you? What are your skills, your passions, your limits, and your beliefs?

What else—beyond what you believe you are currently capable of—could you do? You wouldn't have any stories from the past to define your limits.

Everything would be possible.

As we move through this book, I will share with you how I wrote new stories that gave my body amnesia so that I could achieve what I had not believed was possible.