

My Personal Story

A picture of my life

Introduction

This is my story, told as an honest reflection of the path I have walked. For much of my life, I carried struggles that felt too heavy, battles with my body, my self worth and my place in the world. There were years of pain, doubt and feeling like I was moving through life without truly living it. But somewhere within that darkness, a quiet resilience grew. Piece by piece, I learned, I healed and began to create a life that feels more aligned, authentic, honest and free. It lead me to wanting to help other women too.

I share this not because I have all the answers but because I know how isolating it can feel when you are stuck in your own struggle.

My only wish is that as you read it you feel less alone in your own journey. I ask that you hold my story with respect as I offer it with openness in the hope it might resonate with you, remind you that you are understood, and perhaps spark even a small glimmer of hope or belief that change is always possible.

If my journey makes you feel seen then it was worth sharing.

Before, the old me....

I grew up in the 80's, era of super models, big hair, aerobics and heavy diet culture. It shaped my world in ways that I didn't fully understand at the time. That culture influenced my parents thinking, my adolescence and my emotionally fragile teenage years. Back then, what you looked like seemed to matter more than who you were. It still does really.

I was often complimented on what I looked like growing up and it seemed to hold a lot of value in being liked and seen. I watched my mother dieting and being addicted to aerobics (gym culture was becoming popular) as I grew up. She actually ended up working in a gym and we spent a lot my teenage years immersed in the gym culture (not that it made me terribly active!). My first job was at the juice bar. As a very creative person I was always drawn to beauty and style and was really into art, fashion, beauty and supermodels, Vogue magazines and Morten Harket from A-Ha. I had great dreams of moving to Norway but went on to study fashion design as my first career.

Looking back on my teenage years, I suffered from depression and a lot of internal unhappiness. Raging hormones, moodiness, and continuous feelings of being misunderstood shaped those years. I struggled to feel I mattered or had any value and repeated heartbreak only contributed to a lack of real self-worth.





I started dieting from as early as 15 or 16 years old, I definitely was not overweight as a child or adolescent and did not need to lose weight but somehow, I believed I needed to be thinner and got hooked by the desire to be skinny. In hindsight, I was likely experiencing an undiagnosed eating disorder because I can remember weighing as little as 49kg at one stage through starving myself. Perhaps it was the only way I could feel in control of my life and my emotions. This yoyo dieting continued through my teenage years. Binge eating, starving, gaining weight, losing weight.

After school and studying Fashion Design enter the cigarettes and alcohol fuelled party days. Getting home in the early hours and binge eating buttered toast to soak up the alcohol along with sugary drinks for the dehydration. Followed by the next day in recovery eating anything greasy, salty or sweet to feel better. Slowly but surely the weight kept piling on as well as intermittently dieting to lose weight. I could never lose more than 10kgs. Lose 10kg over time, pick up 15 and so it went. An endless cycle.

I got married at 28, had lost 10kg for the wedding but still weighed 80kg on my wedding day. All I had wanted in life was to have children and the following year I fell pregnant and boy did the weight pile on. I gained 32 kg with my first pregnancy. I had studied photography while I was pregnant with a plan to be a stay-at-home mother who did family photography on the side. I had my son by emergency c-section and tried for 2 years to lose the weight, not very successfully, while struggling with mild post-natal depression.

Motherhood was overwhelming and I was fiercely overprotective while trying to do everything perfectly. I joined a mom's exercise class lost a little but struggled to make any meaningful impact on the baby weight. 5 years later I had my daughter and while I didn't put on quite as much weight as the first time, the problems came afterwards when my milk supply was low, and I was put on a mild anti-depressant (which ironically, I didn't need), to help my milk supply. As a result, my weight ballooned to my heaviest at 125kgs!!



I had tried everything: Weighless, Weight Watchers, Sure Slim, Banting. The most I ever lost was 14 kgs. I didn't think I could ever be thin again. Exercise was never a huge part of my life but I discovered walking and it turned out to be something I could consistently stick to...

I hated how I felt and hated what I looked like. I felt deeply self-conscious of my size. I hated bumping into people I used to know because I knew they would go off saying, "Wow, she has picked up a lot of weight" or hearing, "She is pretty, if only she just lost some weight", the double-edged sword. My doctor said: "It's really only calories in versus calories out, if you are putting in more than you burn you won't lose weight", which was never very helpful.

I would start diets on Monday, ending them by Friday with chips and chocolate. I blew the week, so might as well blow the weekend and start again on Monday, over and over.

I was really struggling to make a dent in my weight and then I would console myself with food. I kept feeling like a failure, like I just had no willpower. No matter how many diets or wellness tips I tried, nothing I tried worked and I failed to be consistent. I would lose some weight and go back to my unhealthy habits. I stopped believing anything could work. I felt like I was chasing solutions but never finding peace

The turning point...

A friend of mine had been on the HCG vibrational drops diet and lost 20kgs. I couldn't believe her success but by this stage I felt like it was quite extreme and I would probably lose some weight but just put it all back on again. I felt like "Why try, if ultimately, I will just fail again?"

After seeing a picture of myself at my son's birthday party, something inside me snapped. I couldn't believe how big and round I looked and that was the turning point for me. I tried to convince myself the camera just made me look even bigger, being on the outside, but deep down, I knew. No more.

I decided things needed to change, I had to at least try, even if I could just lose 20kg. I had been feeling so desperate, I felt if I could JUST lose the weight, I would know what to do to maintain it. I had got to a healthier place and was walking consistently and better at maintaining my weight but just not able to make any significant weight loss. On hind sight I was by now probably metabolically inflexible and full of inflammation.

So, that was it. I ordered a 2 month supply of the drops (you can only do 55 days at a time) and on 11th October 2017, I just started. I didn't tell anyone. I just got started. It was hard the first 3 weeks. You take drops before every meal and eat a low 500 calorie diet along with some herbal supplements. All natural. It was hard to start with but once I got over the hump

I lost my hunger. The drops activate your body's ability to burn abnormal fat and it uses those calories in addition to the 500 calories of food. Almost like going into ketosis. The weight kept dropping off me. The fact it was working kept me motivated and I followed it without so much as a mouthful of food I shouldn't have. I was extremely disciplined. Sometimes I CAN lock in and be disciplined.



The photo that sparked the change

When the 55 days were up, I had lost 17 kgs. I felt so good. The diet requires you to take 3 weeks in reintroducing food and 3 weeks maintenance before you can do another round. I went on summer holidays and maintained my weight. It worked so well I decided to do another round and another over a period of 2 years until I lost 50kgs!! I had started at 111kgs and ended up at 61kgs. Looking back, I see that weight was very low and I probably looked a bit skeletal but I think I was so determined to make the round number of 50 kgs, I kept going.

I literally took myself out of my life and missed social events or timed my diet periods around them, to focus solely on my mission. Yes, it was extreme. Yes, it was radical and probably not the healthiest way to lose weight but I did finally lose it. It wasn't easy and required very strong discipline but I persevered and I did it.

Radical weight loss is an interesting process. I had finally reached a goal I had failed at probably since the age of 20, by the time I lost the weight I was 47 years old. In hindsight, I was probably smack in the middle of peri-menopause, people were not talking about it yet. I have no idea the real impact this weight loss had on my hormones or muscle mass. I didn't know about any of this stuff at the time. My doctors said it may not have been the healthiest way to lose it but who knows what impact the extra weight would have had on my health long term if I hadn't lost the weight.



My initial before and after photos after I had lost 44 kgs



Before and after at my heaviest and lightest after losing 50 kgs

The Journey – The learning, unlearning, rebuilding.

Then came the next challenge, keeping it off. I had finally, finally lost the weight. Now what? Now, I had to keep it off and I am not going to lie, it swung me to the other extreme. I became obsessed with maintaining my weight loss. There was NO WAY I was going back to the way I was.

If you had to ask me what the one thing I learned was, it would be this:

You cannot lose the weight and go back to your old lifestyle and hope to maintain your weight loss. You have to change your lifestyle.

You have to change your habits, your mindset and your life.

I had already been changing my lifestyle slowly but surely over the last 2 years anyway, I just knew I had to make it stick. It wasn't that difficult because I felt so good, strong, energised and alive. I had energy, I wasn't tired and needing afternoon naps all the time. I had taken my walking from 30 minutes to 90 mins sessions pushing myself further. I had taken up Pilates. I felt so alive again, vibrant and inspired. I had cut back my alcohol intake drastically and besides a "night of fun" wasn't worth the next day. Also, after a night of "fun" I realised it often left me craving unhealthy foods and alcohol leads to unhealthy choices. It seemed meaningless to me. I had much less desire for sugary foods. I craved healthy foods, salads and vegetables. I knew what didn't work for me and tried to steer clear of those foods. Yes, alcohol, sugar and bread. I stuck to good healthy wholefoods. I have always enjoyed cooking and learned how to make healthy food delicious. This is when the passion for nutrition began to take root.

Mentally things were changing too. My negative self-image was no longer weighing me down. I felt free. It didn't come without its challenges but I was in a much better place mentally and emotionally to handle them. I had truly proven the cliché. You can achieve anything you set your mind to if you really want it.

I got better at boundaries for myself, what I was and wasn't willing to compromise on for my continued health. I tried to be kinder to myself and believe in my ability to maintain my new lifestyle. I know I have been judged sometimes and I know I have been a bit obsessive too but when you truly learn what does and doesn't work for yourself and you truly learn to love and respect yourself, you will do what matters to maintain your health.



My husband kept telling me I should help other women and I felt I would love to but I wasn't sure anyone wanted to do the hard work. I continued learning all I could about health and nutrition and really wanted to find an outlet for this passion. Cue the Universe to step in and start planting seeds. I started learning a lot from following people on Instagram in the wellness space and one woman talked about Health Coaching and studying through IIN. I looked into it and it was very expensive. Then I talked to my Pilates teacher about it. Unbeknown to me she had studied that EXACT course the year before!!

This was a sign showing me the way.

I spoke to my husband about it, took some real time to think about it. It was a big financial commitment. I had turned 50 in January that year, I was in the best shape of my life. I was officially just, post-menopause. Managing my symptoms naturally and I was ready for a new challenge besides painting the entire outside of my house!!

I had been on a trip to the UK with my mother (a gift for my 50th), it was the first time I had been away from my family for a length of time, it was a very freeing experience. A time entirely to myself, for myself.

I came back with clarity, certain that I wanted to do the course and study to become a Health Coach, so I signed up that November and began a year of intensive study. I also madly signed up for 3 extra courses in Hormone, Gut Health and Emotional Eating. It was a hectic year. Mom's don't get to take a sabbatical, you just have to add to the load and juggle it all.



My 50th birthday this was my
happiest weight



Christmas 2020



Where I am today...

I learned so much. Not just about food but about the whole picture of health, that it includes sleep, stress management, movement, mindfulness and mindset. True wellness really is about balance and the WHOLE big picture.

I am still learning all the time and menopause causing changes in my body and weight has really thrown me some curveballs and taken me on a couple of detours. I won't lie, maintaining my weight is a lot more challenging now and I have at times still gone back to the drops now and then to keep my weight in check. It has become harder and harder to lose weight this way and I need to look at other options. It's something I am constantly working on. It's frustrating but I did the damage to my body long ago and I have had to let go of some unrealistic expectations along the way but, I have consistently stayed on the path of health.

I have started listening to my body instead of punishing it. I traded all-or-nothing for small, thoughtful, mindful shifts. I feel more grounded, clear, more at home in myself again.

It hasn't all been easy. I have had to face the emotional side of eating, which was always there, just waiting. I'm still dealing with it but coaching, energy healing, RTT (Rapid Transformation Therapy) which included hypnosis, has helped. Learning to believe I am enough as I am and a huge dose of self-love and self-compassion are helping me get to a better place. I have reclaimed who I am and who I WILL NOT be. I feel empowered, vibrant and passionate about this next chapter. Now I really want to help other women to claim that right too. To find their way back to themselves.

Honestly, my journey is ongoing but I am in a new relationship with myself. I am not done, I am human. I have found tools, rhythms and a deep sense of trust in myself. I try to live from a place of peace instead of pressure. A feeling that I am free and able to be whoever I want to be.

I want to help you to have that too from the bottom of my heart.

I share this story because I know what its like to feel stuck and alone in your body. I want you to know you are not broken or worthless, I have been where you are and it's never too late to come home to yourself. I believe I can help you find the way if you are willing to commit to yourself. You CAN change your life.

If you are ready to believe in yourself too, I am here to help you find the way.

With love
Charlotte

Where I am now compared to where I was



Life Update:

After resisting HRT thinking I can do it all naturally, I have since been to see a Well women doctor and decided to give HRT a try. If I don't try I won't know if it works for me or not. I have also consulted a dietician to see what I can do about my weight moving forward. She confirmed that I was doing everything right and that menopause is a challenging time metabolically.

I realised that sometimes we need to let the medical professionals assist us. For now I will just keep following my daily habits consistently. They did both stress how important resistance weight training is for building muscle, bone and metabolic health. I am trying to add that into my routine, one small step at a time.

HRT is early days, so when I can report more fully on my experience I will update.