

PASSING FOR THIN

Losing Half My Weight and Finding My Self



"Bravely intimate . . . inspiring . . . brutally honest . . . *Passing for Thin* offers a powerful rebuff to anyone who believes that people can't change. Read [Kuffel's] memoir and you can be assured of one of two results: You will be motivated to maintain a diet, or you will think twice before judging someone for being fat." —USA Today

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Passing for Thin: Losing Half My Weight and Finding My Self Frances Kuffel

An intimate and darkly comic memoir of a woman who does a 180 with her body.

When she was in her early forties, Frances Kuffel lost half her body weight. In *Passing for Thin*, Frances describes with unflinching honesty and a wickedly dark sense of humor her first fumbling introductions to her newly slender body, shining a light on the shared human experience of feeling uncomfortable in one's own skin. She gradually moves from observer to player—enjoying for the first time flirting, exercising, and shopping—as she explores the terrain on the “Planet of Thin.” As Frances gradually comes to know—and love—the stranger in the mirror, she learns that her body does not define her, but enables her to become the woman she's always wanted to be.

Passing for Thin: Losing Half My Weight and Finding My Self Details

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From Reader Review Passing for Thin: Losing Half My Weight and Finding My Self for online ebook

Nancy Loe says

Raw, honest, brilliant.

Carianne Carleo-Evangelist says

I really enjoyed this read.

While I'm on my own WL journey I haven't faced anywhere near the struggles that Francie did because I have significantly less to lose. Her OA meetings are an interesting parallel to my WW meetings, although I think she takes far more out of it. I'd love to know where she is 10 years later. She yo-yoed so much on her last trip home that I truly wonder if she kept it off - if she got to the root of her problems related to eating.

Like a previous reviewer, I agree this fell apart in the last section. She seemed to lose her voice

Violet says

The first part of this book was something I could have written myself, save for the differences in the numbers (weights) between the author and myself. The feelings, perceptions and some of the experiences were absolutely accurate to me. It was uncomfortable to read - in a good way - for that very reason.

I have not lost half my weight, however, so the second half was easier to read in that sense. I'm still processing my feelings and thoughts on much of it. The author and I have other differences that made the second half feel less personal to me, as well.

Frances Kuffel writes in a way that 'worked' for me - which made this book 'work' for me, too. I'd definitely recommend it.

Amory says

I picked this book because I wanted to read about someone else who has struggled with compulsive overeating and who has recovered/is recovering from it with some success.

I really did appreciate the descriptions the author, Frances Kuffel, gave of her life as a compulsive overeater - her thoughts, her feelings, her food associations, the secretive nature of this problem, the amount of time, energy and money taken up by food - eating it and thinking about it. I could identify with so much of her experience.

But...

There was as much about the book that I disliked as I liked. Frances Kuffel is a writer by trade and she seems to have written this memoir with an audience similar to herself in mind - that is, for other writers and people in the "literary circle". In my opinion, her use of "big words" detracted from the message of her story. Despite the fact that I have a graduate-level education, I found that on most pages of this book, there were either words or references that I did not understand. I came across so many words that I have never heard of that I lost count. I wasn't far into the book when I lost the desire to look them up as well. I ended up doing my best to approximate the meaning of unknown words using context clues, then moved on. In addition to so many "big money" words, there were countless references to classic literature (which I will admit, I did not "get"). There were also many "relates" to plays, Broadway productions, classic movie stars and gay icons (Barbara Streisand, etc.).

So...all that was annoying enough, but...

Toward the end of the book (p. 228 out of 257 total), Ms. Kuffel drew a comparison between the end of a 3-month relationship and the loss of a child:

"I'd been disappointed in love when I was fat, but it was the grief of miscarriage, a deformed possibility of mostly unadmitted love that couldn't survive gestation. This was a funeral for an infant. It had a name and a personality and a future. And it was dead."

I found this so offensive, it's hard for me to put into words how I felt when I read it. My jaw dropped. It was one of those, "Oh, no she **didn't**!" moments. I could hardly believe it. I mean, where on earth does she get off comparing the end of a three month relationship - even if she did fall in love - to the death of an infant???? I get that she was making a point, trying to explain the pain she felt over the loss of her first love relationship. But comparing it to the death of an infant??? Even comparing it to a miscarriage would have been outrageous in my opinion. I read that passage over several times and shook my head, marveling over the fact that Ms. Kuffel had the nerve to even *think* those words, let alone write them out for the world to read. And on top of that, her words presumably had the approval of an editor and a publisher as well. I don't get it.

Imagine my surprise when just 12 pages later, I found another stunningly inappropriate comparison regarding that same failed relationship:

"City Hall. The fountain where the Boy from Connecticut and I had kissed such a long kiss that I could probably find our shadows seared into the concrete like the immolated citizens of Hiroshima."

OMG. I don't even know what to say to that.

I think it's a shame that this memoir contains such glaring drawbacks because Frances Kuffel's story is such a touching one. She conveyed her struggle with compulsive overeating and obesity and the challenges of recovery that face her every with such honesty. I saw myself in so many of the things she did and recognized my own feelings in so many of the feelings she described.

Even though I disliked her writing style and was appalled at some of the comparisons she drew regarding her suffering during a breakup, I was deeply touched by Frances Kuffel's story. It is such a comfort to know that there are other people in this world who interact with food in many of the same ways that I do, and that at least some of those people have found a way to leave their addiction behind.

Karyn Wynne says

I have had this book for 4 years. It just sat on the shelf. Then, one day, I finally opened it. The first several chapters were as if the author had inhabited my body.

Her voyage to the land of girls is familiar to me. I have used 12 steps for more than half my life, although it has always baffled me with food. This book has me looking at everything. Why I eat, why I gained so much weight. Why I will not surrender to win.

I love it, I hate it.

Anneksmart says

Tackling the last frontier of acceptable prejudice, Kuffel examines her life before and after she is transformed from morbidly obese to healthy of body and mind. Although 12 steps are mentioned - this is not the focus of the book. Instead we learn what life is really like for those who are very obese and what lessons are in store for anyone who changes their outward appearance without changing w/in. Kuffel is a fun and funny writer. She deftly handles the twin demons of self pity and self sabotage in a way that makes the reader want to see what happens next w/o selling "program" or making her success into a redemption story. Good book.

Travel Writing says

I wanted to love this book. I have so much respect and hope for folks who share their stories. It takes a lot of courage and even more grit to share these journeys, to open up and share your life with complete strangers.

And yet, this story was alternately boring, redundant, shallow, trite, full of assumptions, and hard to follow.

This is going to assure me a decent table in hell, but she was not overly likeable. I never cared about her, or her friends, or her journey, or really anything. It was a very whiny, self-indulgent story.

Sheryl says

Interesting account of the mental changes she went through after losing a large amount of weight. (What struck me is my own emotional dependence on food, and what a ludicrous concept it is to think I can derive emotional security from food.) I grew tired of her studying inhabitants of "The Planet Girl" like an anthropologist. I know her intent was to observe what she had missed socially and physically due to her obesity, and to discover herself, but it came off as studying what a "girl" *should* be like. Gender stereotypes just perpetuate the trap she was trying to escape before and after she lost the weight.

David Jay says

Kuffel is a wonderful writer and her story is fascinating--losing close to 200 pounds in her 40s and doing it the old fashioned way, eating less and exercising more. But she is obsessed with attractiveness, her own and everyone else's, and this gets tiring very quickly.

Katie Foster says

This book was fantastic. The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars is because there were a few moments that I thought it was a little boring, but for the most part, I loved it! It was refreshing to read about the AFTER effects of losing a lot of weight rather than a how-to kind of weight loss book. I've recently lost about 85 pounds and I've found myself feeling a lot like Frances Kuffel did (the same person inside, different body). For someone who is going through a large weight loss, this book is PERFECT. It's nice to know that I'm not the only one having these thoughts about my weight and weight loss.

Barbara says

I found this memoir both disturbingly similar to my own journey working at overcoming compulsive eating, and disturbingly alien. Those of us who walk that path know that obesity is NOT an issue of intelligence or education alone. Bald and honest truth, from the author's point of view, speaks from every page.

Kristen says

This was a very interesting book. The author documents her emotional path to thinness, and pretty much no little time is spent on how she loses the weight. It's a very personal and intimate story, but unfortunately the author is unlikable. She's judgemental and mean about herself and others, and I didn't enjoy being in her head.

melissa says

For anyone who has struggled with weight and self-image and then discovered the new set of issues that comes with weightloss. Kuffel, a cynical New Yorker, writes a very raw journal of her experience of losing over 100 pounds from beginning to end. She never hides an emotion or an embarrassment. She is a heroine to anyone facing their own demons or addictions. Funny and inspiring.

Lisa says

I would not describe this nasty manifesto as "darkly comic". This woman is one bitter fritter. The book reminded me of an incident that happened to me in 1999. I know the year because I was in a department store shopping for a bathing suit for a Caribbean vacation. I was very lean at that time, from sheer hard work and sacrifice. There was a woman, about forty years old and fifty pounds overweight, rummaging through bathing suits on the other side of the same rack I was looking through. She had a miserable ten year old girl

with her, who would not shut up and stop fussing. The two bickered back and forth. Suddenly, with absolutely no prior words exchanged between us, the woman looks at me and says "Oh, you're so thin. What problems could you possibly have?" WTF? I said nothing. Ms. Kuffel, like many fat women, blanketly assumes thinner women have no problems, and lead mystical lives in tune with their perfect bodies. Yet she never bothers to ask them. She makes judgments about her own acquaintances instead of finding out their true feelings. Several times throughout I wondered if she was a complete sociopath. I could go on and on about personal choice and its consequences. I also, as a New Yorker, wasn't crazy about the way she coldly inserts her problems into the backdrop of 9/11. But the worst thing about this book by far was the corny, hackneyed, eye-rolling prose. And her strange (anti?) gay agenda. For instance: "And I was sober, with nothing to prove except everything. The last time I'd been out dancing I'd weighed three-hundred-some pounds, had been drunk, and had a roomful of gay boys join me in the weird ritual rondo of fags and hags. I had been thrilled by my sip of popularity, while the fags were thrilled to be queer but, by association and comparison to me, not freaks."

And this one: "I was startled when I overheard her talking about a boyfriend. I'd assumed she was a biker dyke and that someday she would order me up in front of the Lesbian Tribunal for Failure to Be Gay." Draw your own conclusions from those two outbursts. Kuffel herself admits that she doesn't know a lot about joining "The Planet of Girls". I'll say. This is how Kuffel defines the epitome of cool chic rebelliousness in another woman: "Jennifer wore sunglasses at night." Wow. She also goes on and freaking on about her loose leftover skin. For Christ's sake get some plastic surgery already. And I know this will probably get me into hell that much quicker, but 170 pounds is a lot to lose in one year. That coupled with her mysterious emergency stomach surgery makes me wonder if it isn't just possible she actually has had gastric bypass. While still going to Weight Watchers of course. Which is a wonderful organization. Not like gastric bypass in which about 3 out of 10 people will gain it back. Richard Simmons claims it's more like half.

Danielle says

I was disturbed by how much this woman appeared to hate fat people once she had lost her weight. It paints a much harsher picture of successful weight loss than you usually find celebrated in a book.
