

If you have a problem with food, food may not be the problem.

It hasn't been for me, anyway. If ever there was an unofficial January ritual, surely proposed pound-dropping is it. Why? Because we want to get back to where we were before The Holidays. And weight-loss companies want new business. Besides, the good folks at the National Institute of Health keep announcing that an exponentially increasing number of us are overweight.

New recipes are everywhere (How many recipes can there really be?), new "lifestyles" are offered by enthusiastic authors, and every gym that can afford a marketing campaign, and television has turned random victims of pressurized sweat and salad regi-



Musings

By Robert Morton-Ranney

mens into before-and-after stars.

The difficulty with all of this, as I see it, is that the focus is in the wrong place. Newsweek magazine devoted a large chunk of its Jan. 16 edition to advice from a plethora of experts on how to live longer and better. Included were several articles on (surprise!) weight loss. For instance, a point system was offered for physical exertion during such activities as dusting, heavy house cleaning, digging in the yard, stair climb-

ing, and even sex.

Once again, we were reminded that if we walk an extra 10 minutes twice a day, we could lose 10 pounds in a year. And, just in case you were wondering, you can double that by eliminating a 100-calorie cookie from your daily intake.

Allow me to pause here and say that if — in your relationship with your weight — you are at the point where your greatest concerns are tallying the number of minutes you did more than sit, and deciding whether you're going to have a ('nother?) cookie on the basis of its contribution to your overall nutritional balance, you have my congratulations. And my admiration.

Such questions were at the very end of a long list of things that needed my attention. More importantly, starting at the wrong end of that list was frustrating and useless.

Everybody knows that eating more will help you gain weight and eating less will help you lose it. Everybody knows that moving around more will tilt you toward svelte and moving around less will do the opposite.

The greater truth, for me and for anyone else like me, is that the details of caloric interaction only mattered after enduring and absorbing years of little self-discoveries.

To call on that old cliché yet again, I had to come to terms with myself. I had to understand my own history.

Only as I fashioned a more accurate self-portrait did I begin to get a sense of how food fit in. I'll spare you the gory details but the summary is that food played four distinct roles for me. First, it

was a connection with the first love that was shown me (my mother expressing her love for me by offering, among other culinary treats, another slice of lemon meringue pie). Second, it was a form of self-medication (when you're stuffed to the gills, there is less energy for anxiety).

Third, it was a bold foray into sensuality. The tastes and textures of a carefully chosen series of palate-pleasing delights offer an experience that rivals any other attempt at physical thrills. And it's socially acceptable to boot.

Fourth, food was for me an expression of personal freedom. My siblings were substantially younger; my father was out of the house most of the time, and my mother was overwhelmed. I was responsible by necessity. One of the few things I could do any way I wanted was eat. I was grateful for that small piece of liberty. And I took advantage of it.

Embracing the roles food played, I exercised them long after reaching the age of majority. Feeling a little unloved? Eat. A little anxious? Eat. Looking for a cheap thrill? Eat. Feel like life is boxing you in? (You get the idea.)

Throw in our cultural penchant for adding food to every special event we have, mixed with a little boredom in social situations, and — Voila! Bring on the oversizes.

It wasn't until I discerned these connections, and grudgingly learned other ways to deal with similar circumstances, that calorie counts began to be meaningful for me.

Technically, I'm still overweight. But it's been quite a while since I was obese. I'm very proud of that.

Don't get me wrong. It's tough sledding. Food is a lot of fun. And the reality is that — though it would be easier to ignore food completely — you can't get through life without it. Still, now the number of minutes I move around does actually matter to me.

If you're one of those fortunate creatures who can calorify with impunity, I envy you.

If, on the other hand, you want to reduce your weight and it's just not happening, maybe it's time to take a journey into yourself.

Lawmakers

Continued from page one

associated with bussing students out of the districts.

"We want the state to pick up some of the costs," Paiva Weed said.

Long agreed, saying that he wanted there to be a commission that looks at all state mandates to determine cost versus benefits and said if the state mandates something, they should pay for it.

"If we have to do it, we want to be reimbursed," Long said.

He noted that some inroads were made last year by a joint educators and legislators committee that he was a part of, in that they were able to reduce the amount that towns spend on charter school tuition. In Jamestown, the savings was nearly 23 percent, with tuition dropping from \$11,008 to \$8,496 from fiscal year 2005 to FY 2006.

The creation of a municipal court in Jamestown, by introducing enabling legislation, is another issue that the two legislators are working on.

Paiva Weed said that having a municipal court would "allow for improved enforcement of town ordinances" and deal with issues of land-use, traffic, noise, and other issues that "are a low priority" in Newport District Court.

"It's a terrific idea," Long said about having a municipal court. The court will allow issues to be dealt with immediately instead of sending them to district court, "which takes forever" to resolve a matter, he said.

He wants to look at establishing health care savings accounts for all state and municipal employees that would "put a greater responsibility on the policy holder to watch their health," Long said.

Paiva Weed said she is looking into ways to improve the costs of health insurance to small businesses.

Long said he will continue to fight against bringing LNG tankers up Narragansett Bay to a proposed new terminal in Fall River.

He called the tankers as "1,000-foot time bombs," and said, "I'll fight them as far as it goes."

He also said he is "absolutely opposed" to changing the state constitution to allow the issue of a Narragansett Indian Tribe casino to appear for a vote on a state ballot.

The constitution currently states that all gaming activities have to be overseen by the state, Long said. The Narragansetts want to alter the constitution to allow a private company to engage in a casino operation, he noted.

"This is the most outrageous idea of the year," Long said.

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A bar that voluntarily employed guards on its premises could be liable for failing to protect a patron who was attacked by another patron in the parking lot, the California Supreme Court has ruled in reversing the Court of Appeal.

And a fast-food restaurant could be sued for failing to call 911 to summon assistance when employees saw a patron attacked and stabbed in the parking lot, the court ruled in a companion case issued on the same day.

The court ruled these establishments owed the patrons a duty of care.

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