

the incredible shrinking woman

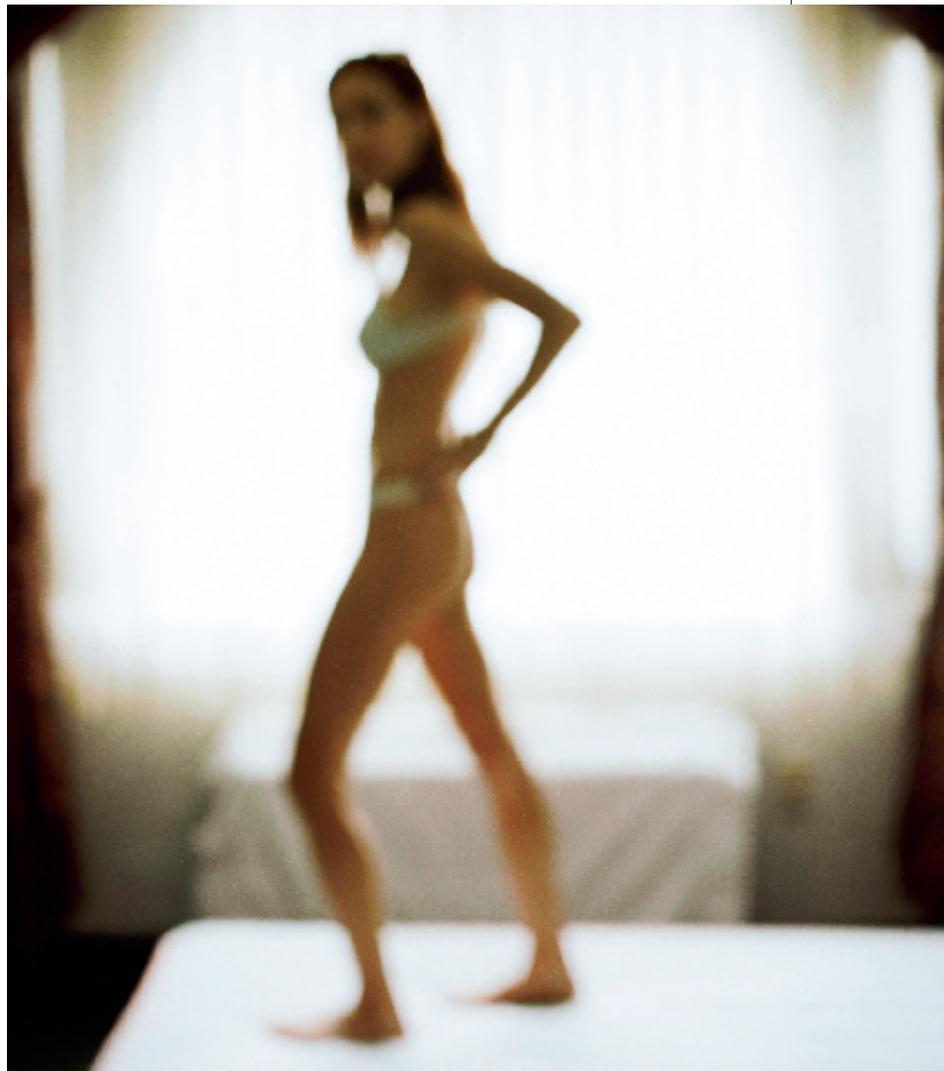
*Most people turn to food for comfort.
But when the going got tough for
KIM IZZO, she did just the opposite*

I WAS NATURALLY SKINNY as a teenager and right up into my early 20s—I'm talking 5'10" and 130 pounds. Then, at 33, I landed my first 9-to-5 job. The sedentary lifestyle, coupled with a boyfriend whose idea of a romantic evening was lying on the couch inhaling buckets of butter-drenched popcorn, caused my weight to inch up to 160 pounds, the heaviest of my life. Intellectually, I knew I was supposed to embrace my curvaceous self, but let's face it—Rubenesque may have been the look circa 1633; in 2003, fat was just fat.

Then a serendipitous thing happened—I got sick with an intolerable combo of bronchitis and the Norwalk stomach virus. I'll spare you the details, but I dropped 10 pounds in two weeks without effort. This jump-started my weight loss, and in less than a year, I was 145 pounds. Healthy. Normal. I had no idea what was lurking up ahead.

Within one horrible month, I was reeling from a trio of traumas—I lost my dream job, my close cousin died after an 11-year battle with cancer, and, due to my mother's chaotic financial mismanagement, I had to sell the family home that I co-owned and move into a tiny apartment I hated. Many people might have turned to food for comfort. I was too angry and depressed for that. Instead, I stopped eating.

As my world hit rock bottom, so did my weight. A mere six months later, I was a skeletal 120 pounds—and it felt like consolation. I >>



was convinced that my severely skinny state snagged the affections of a man 10 years my junior. We started seeing each other regularly (after I dumped the couch potato), and while things were going well, staying thin, I reasoned, was the only way to hold his interest. I even bought a scale for my apartment, weighing myself whenever my mood needed a boost, which was often.

While I was clearly unwell, many of my friends, especially those in the fashion business, saw my whittled-down physique as entirely attractive. Clothes looked fabulous on me, like they do on hangers. In my vulnerability, I lived for their compliments, their genuine envy. But it wasn't the real nourishment I needed.

I was maid of honor at my best friend's wedding.
I FELT SEXY AND BEAUTIFUL
 in that clingy silk gown. But the photos told another story.

Nicole Richie had nothing on me. For well over a year, I would never finish a plate of food, no matter how small. What I binged on instead were skirts, pants, and dresses—all size 4. My once-starved closet was now full to bursting.

I could slide a pair of jeans with a 27-inch waist over my hips to the floor—without unbuttoning them. (Conscious of how scary this was, I was secretly satisfied at the same time.) I was maid of honor at my best friend's wedding, and on the actual day, I felt sexy and beautiful in that silk bias-cut (read: clingy) slip gown. But the photos told another story. I had no ass and no arms, and my complexion was sallow—the picture of unhealthiness and unhappiness.

Fortunately, one very close fashion-stylist friend, intimately acquainted

with the female form, took notice. We were at a boutique where I was modeling a hip-hugging Miu Miu pencil skirt and cropped sweater. In the mirror, all I could see was how perfectly it fit. My friend had a different opinion: "You're too skinny for fashion. You need to eat."

He was right. My appetite was mirroring my emotions. I was starving.

Recounting the sacrifices I had made—from the missed birthday cakes to the skipped Sunday brunches—I finally realized that fitting into that wispy size 4 was not worth the mental and physical stress. So with the support of friends—and my own concerted effort—I gobbled up burgers, pasta, and desserts as

best I could. I gradually regained the energy I needed to campaign for a new job—which I got—and then left that horrid apartment to move in with my younger guy. The dual victories helped my appetite return. In a year's time, I was back to a happy 145 pounds—size 8.

But what about going forward? When life throws me a curveball in the future, will my weight remain steady? Well, maybe not always. But I can accept that. Coming to terms with my emotional eating was winning half the battle. And in hopes of conquering the rest, I gave away the scale. **mc**

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