

 Eating is something I take for granted. Not only do I open my refrigerator fully expecting the ready availability of sustenance, I have the benefit of ♦free♦ meals during business travel. However, dining on the road is not always exotic or pleasurable. Eating a gyro at a desk in my hotel room, anchored between my laptop and a 42-inch widescreen television, is not inviting and can have the overtones of comfortable solitary confinement. Frankly, business travel has kept me away from my weekly Weight Watchers meeting on Charles Street, and falling off of the WW wagon sets the stage for relapse into chocolate, butter, and cookies.

To reinforce my willpower before Thanksgiving, I went to a Monday night meeting to get a pep talk on points and portion size. We learned about the dangers of eating a cup of mashed potatoes versus a half-cup. We considered the benefits of white turkey breast over the dark and fatty meat of thighs, and learned that pecan pie is three points higher than a slice of pumpkin but both desserts are off the caloric charts. Members offered personal strategies and ideas to avoid overeating on Turkey Day, and I suggested the option of drinking until you pass out as a means to avoiding the meal altogether ♦ a clear alternative, but one that could lead to participation in other sorts of support groups.

Of course, this is all backdrop to the anticipation of a day dedicated to gratitude. No matter the potential pounds this traditional November meal holds in store, many of us will delight in the savory aroma of a roasting turkey wafting from the oven, witness the smoke rings rising from a bowl filled with creamy, mashed potatoes, and partake of the buttery carbohydrates playing hide and seek inside our favorite stuffing. Thanksgiving is the tipoff to a season of food, frenzy and the grand finale of 2011.

The holidays are a mixture of consumption and stress. They are also sacred. I began reading *Women, Food and God* by Geneen Roth on a return flight to Savannah, and her premise is that ♦the way you eat is inseparable from your core beliefs about being alive.♦ A lot to swallow (LOL), but there may be some hard truths in Roth♦s message I need to consider when I return home from a WW meeting, eat a plate full of pasta and crab, wash it down with a Fresca, and top it all off with a Klondike bar. What exactly do I learn about my core beliefs in my mid-life journey when I examine a plate filled with Ramen noodles and unwrap a melting square block of vanilla ice cream?

I am living in a state of confusion. I go to Weight Watchers, listen to the Points Plus epistle, and answer it with calories encased in chocolate. I go to the gym and complain about it every single step of the way. I sit beside a beautiful blonde on a flight from Memphis to Atlanta, and ooze envy over her youth, her wrinkle-free face, and the full body, black leotard she sports wrapped in a silk, leopard print skirt with no hint of a single crease or roll of flabby skin.

Discipline sucks. It just plain does. The other morning while I plodded along on a treadmill barely past a speed setting of 3, I told myself that discipline is within my reach. I CAN exercise, write, work, and take care of the home front. No, I do not believe I can have it all, but it is possible to etch out time for what is important to me, set goals, stick to them, and not give up. Along with accepting how and what I eat as a reflection of who I am, I know there are no problems that prayer and a good walk can♦t cure.

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During a recent weekend road trip to the Blue Ridge Mountains, the cabin my family rented had Direct TV and I flipped to an old broadcast of *The Rifleman*. Chuck Connors was busy wrestling a cowboy that had been a friend to Lucas McCain and his son Mark, but was actually a bad apple. When Mark asked his dad why the villain♦s friendship turned sour, the Rifleman philosophically replied, ♦The older you get, the more questions don♦t have answers.♦ He followed this lesson by instructing his son to remember to wash behind his ears as the program faded out to the

theme music of the series.

There are messages everywhere ♦ from meetings and books that reinforce the dangers of gobbling down food, to old television programs reminding us that not every question we ask will have an answer. During these days of playoff games and possible bouts of shopaholism, and food-filled moments wrapped in old tunes about figgy pudding (whatever that is), I plan to seek out a bit of the discipline I have lost along the way ♦ in my eating, my focus on moving my body, and my work. In an atmosphere of economic unrest and insecurity, there is still an awful lot to be grateful for and nothing that a chilly autumn walk cannot illuminate.

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