

# I Am Not Sorry

By Kelly M

**I. Am. Not. Sorry.** These four words took me nearly twenty years to say out loud. **I am not sorry**, I repeated, firmly to my new primary care doctor. **I need to talk to you, because I think you care about me. I've been here a few times to see that. I want to make this new relationship work.** How many times had I apologized to everyone around me for myself? I was sorry I couldn't get it together and lose weight permanently. I was sorry for being so fat. Sorry for being unable to fix my broken self. Though, in retrospect, it certainly was not for lack of trying. *In all these years, I apologized to everyone, everyone, except myself.*

I held my 15-year-old self in my heart as I spoke, calmly and clearly. Because she could not speak for herself, I would speak for her. She needed the world to know, all she wanted was some comfort. She needed help. She had become lost. Her eating disorder saved her in countless ways. It actually served her well in some respects because it allowed her to function. She had yet to realized what was happening at such a young age. She was unaware of the lifelong consequences that would result. Her family failed to hear her cries for help. The devastation of a lifetime membership to Jenny Craig for Christmas still hurts her. She learned that Christmas morning as she opened her gift, for the first time, that she was truly broken. She needed to be fixed. **There are some things about me that I need you to understand**, I continued.

In my mind I could see my 20-year-old self, still broken from trauma, only now believing there truly was something inherently wrong with her. Why couldn't she lose the weight for good? She knows exactly what to do. She'd lost the weight only to regain it back and then some. She felt in her heart she was a true failure. Obviously, she just didn't want it bad enough. She doesn't really want to be thin. She doesn't really care about her health. And what does that mean, if she doesn't want it badly enough to make it happen? Is she beyond repair? Will she ever be whole? How many times did she hold herself back because she felt she wasn't pretty enough? She had learned she is only valuable when she is thin. She's only been complimented when she loses weight. Can I blame her now? **I have an eating disorder and it's complicated**, I said unapologetically. **I'm in active recovery.**

My 25-year-old self flashed before me. She is hard working, kind and loving but still feels broken inside. She is convinced everything about her is wrong and she is not worthy of respect. She has come to believe and internalize she is likely beyond repair. I held her close for a moment. **I need you to know that getting competent, respectful healthcare in a fat body is very hard, almost impossible.** I took a breath.

**I want to share my experience seeking healthcare in a fat body. I want you to understand how hard it really is.** The first time I was fat shamed by my doctor I was told that if I didn't lose weight I would have terrible joint pain and find it hard to be mobile, as I got older. I was only 20 years old and my weight had begun to cycle back up after another failed diet. For the record, I did not go to see that doctor for joint pain. I went for something unrelated.

The second time, my weight was cycling back up after yet another failed diet. I was 23. My primary care doctor told me that I "better do something quick". I was destined to a life of heart disease, diabetes and a number of other conditions. This meant I would certainly meet an early death. When exactly? Well that was anyone's guess, but definitely early. Didn't I understand? This was hard for my doctor to say to me. According to her it was coming from a place of caring. She was trying to save me after all. Save me from my broken self. She diagnosed me as dying when I was still so full of life. This is the first time a medical professional left me so disgusted with myself and full of terror. She never thought to ask me anything about my eating. Perhaps if she had, I could have gotten help sooner. Rather, she blamed me and I in turn, continued to blame myself. I felt lost.

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**There isn't enough time to recount all of my experiences. I can't even count them all. You should know that fat discrimination in the medical community is pervasive. One time I had to go to urgent care. I cried out in pain as the blood pressure cuff squeezed my arm so tight I could barely breathe. The med tech said, "Oh, it's just because you have high blood pressure". I countered, "I don't have high blood pressure. I never have". He laughed at me, and said, "You wanna bet"? I had never been so uncomfortable with a stranger in a medical setting. My blood pressure reading came back normal. He didn't even try to hide the shock on his face when he saw it. "Huh", he said, "I guess you were right". Is it so crazy that I might know something about the fat body I live in that he doesn't? **That is not acceptable treatment. This is a single example of countless examples. For the sake of time I won't share more, but this is what happens to me when I seek medical care.****

**Medical providers never seem to hide their shock that I am metabolically healthy. But that's not even the point. You see, even if I DID have a health issue like high blood pressure, diabetes or any other number of issues, I wouldn't deserve any less respect. I would not deserve substandard treatment. That is discrimination.** I did not cause myself to have those conditions anymore than a thin person. That's the unfair part of all this; a thin person is able to blame their issues on bad genes. Fat people are assumed to be lazy and unwilling to fix themselves; their illnesses are their fault. Fat people are a burden, that is society's message for us.

That's right, I called out the truth. I'm fat. **I'm fat and I still deserve to be treated well. In fact, I deserve everything anyone else deserves. My size does not dictate my worthiness. You should know I'm about as far as lazy as you can get, so please don't make assumptions about me or pretend you think you know who I am. I promise, I'll give you the same courtesy.**

My 30-year-old self flashed before me. She had begun to wonder after all these years if maybe she was not the problem after all. Gaining confidence, ever so slowly, she began to carve a different path. One thing she was and always has been was relentlessly persistent and resilient. She sought answers. She sought the truth. And to her, I am forever grateful. Without her, I would not be here. She is the quiet, yet persistent part of me that found the strength and courage to seek a different course.

And then, finally, She stepped forward to carry me through the rest of the conversation. The confident 35-year-old woman I had become. This woman is different. She holds within her the years of apologizing, tears, despair, self-loathing and disgust the previous versions of her carried. She holds them all gently, with compassion and without judgment. But this woman has had enough. She is done tiptoeing around and trying to appease others. She is unapologetic in her confidence and demands to be heard. She will protect herself at all costs. She knows she is worthy. She has put friends and family in their respective places. You can either join in and support her in recovery, on her terms or leave. The ultimatum has been given more than once. She is willing to give up everything and anything for herself. Only she can protect herself. She will take nothing less than respect. She will not apologize.

**I want you to know first and foremost that I recognize I am coming from a place of privilege. I am an educated, white female, with access to extraordinary resources. And yet with all of that, it has taken me 20 years to reach this point. I want you to know that what I am about to say to you not only applies to my care, but anyone you care for in a fat body. Many fat people do not have the voice or knowledge to share this with you, but I hope you**

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**will carry this knowledge with you when you care for them. They deserve everything I deserve, even if they don't ask for it. You can teach them what they don't yet know.**

**I want you to know it will never be acceptable for you to tell me I should lose weight as part of my treatment plan. I've accepted that far too often, putting off medical procedures that never would have been withheld from a thin person. It's not fair. When I am sick, I need to know that you will consider any of the causes and treatments you would consider for thinner people. It's what I deserve too.**

**I want you to know that I do not know what my body will do in terms of weight. My weight has cycled for most of my life now, but the trend has always been up. I am working on active recovery from my eating disorder and I am going to trust my body to care for itself. I will not try to lose weight ever again. I may develop Type 2 diabetes. It runs strongly in my family and I have some indications that my blood sugar is trending up. Please know that I certainly do not want this to happen, but I will not risk a full-blown relapse of my eating disorder to go on a diet. Ultimately, if I relapse, I will be less able to care for myself, diabetic or not. A relapse of my eating disorder will only hurt me. I need you on my team.**

**I need you to trust that I will care for my body in the best way that I can. I need you to remain neutral towards my weight and not make assumptions. Please do not assume what I do or don't eat and whether I engage in exercise or not. I'm repairing my relationship to food, exercise and most importantly my body. I've neglected it, hated it and never valued it. I'm changing that. Will you support me in my recovery journey?**

For the first time, I was greeted with a smile and my doctor said emphatically "Yes"! She didn't speak in fat friendly terms, but she tried so hard. She is eager to learn. She wanted me to know she heard me. She said, "I don't think your health issues are your fault or caused by your weight. I will always treat you the same as others". I knew she meant it. Her disgust, as I recounted my past treatment was not only visible but also palpable. She truly cares. I finally found a healthcare partner and it was so worth the wait. It took me years to find her. It was worth the fear of rejection. I'm so glad I spoke the truth.

I will never apologize again for who I am. I am not the only person willing to accept myself exactly as I am. My doctor sees my worth too. She knows I am worthy of respect, independent of my size. My friends and family are learning too. Those who are willing to stay with me are worth the time it takes to teach them. I am holding them close.

*You too are worthy, no matter what kind of body you have or the state of your health. Apologize one last time, but this time, to yourself. Give yourself the gift of acceptance. Seek those who will accept you exactly as you are. Reflect on the strength you have within. You are seeking a different path. You are healing and can only heal if you surround yourself with those who support you. Let your past experiences and pain be a source of strength to demand what you deserve. Only you can protect yourself. You are worth it. Do not apologize anymore to anyone. You are worthy, you deserve respect. Demand respect from others, but most importantly from yourself, accept nothing less.*