

# NOTES FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

By Irina Diyankova

**Early Monday morning.** My alarm went off. Coming out of sleep, I am listening to the discussion of the new diet pills over the radio. A woman is narrating about her experiences with these new wonderful pills. She is excited because she was able to lose 20 pounds in three weeks without restricting her food intake or exercising. I wonder why this is so important.

**Tuesday morning.** I am half awake. Between the dream and reality I am listening to the story of a young woman who lost 30 pounds before her wedding and was happy ever after. After this story an expert explains how the new method works. He says that there are no negative consequences. Weight loss is stable and no change in lifestyle is needed. Sounds like a paradise, doesn't it? May be I should try?

**Wednesday night.** I am worn out after the long work day. I am sitting on the couch in front of the TV watching a movie. Suddenly it is interrupted by the commercials. I don't have energy to reach for the remote and change a channel or go to another room. So, I am continuing to stare at the screen. A middle-aged woman reveals a story of her struggle with weight and how unhappy she was when overweight. Now, after losing 50 pounds, she is as happy as you can only imagine. And all her gratitude goes to the magic cocktail. I start wondering if an excessive weight is really an evil monster causing majority of my troubles? But I am so tired, I will think about it tomorrow.

**Thursday morning.** I wake up in a really good mood. Today I am defending my master's thesis. I am sick of this work and feel really excited about making this final step. I am involved with my inner experiences, when I go to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Suddenly I feel a bout of frustration coming out of the blue. Oh, no! Not again! Wedding lady recites a romantic story of her affair with the diet pills. Why do I have to listen to this crap again? Furious, I am changing the station. I go on with my morning routine. In the middle of breakfast I feel familiar annoyance rising inside of me. What??? She lost 35 pounds in 5 weeks? I am happy for her!!! Why do I care? Why do you have to tell me about it? How is this relevant to my thesis defense, to my daughter's fight with her friend, to the struggle that my husband and I are going through trying to balance family and career, to the sunrise, to us being mortals, to the war in Iraq, to the HUMAN LIFE??? I am sick of hearing this nonsense!

**Thursday night.** I go grocery shopping. With the cart full of stuff I am waiting in line in front of the register browsing magazines on display. You gotta be kidding me! Four new ways to drop lbs. without deprivation, Magic diet, Liposurgery, New sexy look, Oprah went over 220 pounds, Five fixes that bust any weight loss plateau, Oh, don't take me wrong! These are not the only things talked about. Of course, there is some info about the Bush-Kerry latest debate as well as discussion of the reasons that US army is still in Iraq. Also, you can learn everything you don't want to know about J. Lo's newest husband hunt as well as about Julia Roberts's pregnancy experiences. If you are a parent, you will be enlightened on how to say "No" to your child. Anything on the purpose of life? A little bit about women's issues? May be, something about alternatives to traditional family? Or, what about how not to spend money on the stuff that you don't need? What are you, going nuts? Too serious issues for the general public media. Who will read about those?

**Friday morning.** I am on the bus headed towards the campus. A couple of my female acquaintances from the Russian speaking community are boarding. They are in full parade. One

of them is wearing a short white skirt, a bright blue blouse with unusually low neckline that reveals cleavage. Both wear make-up. In addition, their hair is beautifully done. I am wearing a shirt and jeans with the raincoat on top. One of these women looks at me critically and asks if I am going to pick up mushrooms. I am not even angry. Rather I feel sorry for her. They proceed to their seats complaining to each other about recently gained pounds. I don't need to worry about them. With the abundance of pills, cocktails and diets they will be able to take care of the additional pounds really quickly. Good luck!

**Saturday night.** I call home to talk to Veronica, my close friend back in Russia. She tells me the latest news. She works really hard and her business goes well. Our other female friend has lost 20 pounds with the help of the honey-based cleansing procedures. Veronica and some of her colleagues decided to try these procedures too. Now that our friend lost 20 pounds, she looks wonderful. She also successfully moved up in her business career. When I tell Veronica that I feel angry about the amount of attention she and others are paying to our other friend's weight, she assures me that everybody loves our friend the way she is, nobody pressured her to lose that weight and that it was her independent decision to go on a diet. I feel trapped.

**Sunday night.** I am reflecting back on my experiences of the week. There is no need to say that they are very similar to the experiences that an average adult woman in the middle-sized American town has on the regular basis. We all feel bombarded with the messages related to our appearance twenty four-seven. We feel pressured to work hard on how we look and to feel bad no matter how much we try. We are being brainwashed to believe that our appearance is the most important thing and that being thin and beautiful will influence every area of our lives.

At this point, I feel intoxicated. I am starting to spit out all this crap. I feel furious, because I cannot escape these messages. They crawl into my mind, when I am tired and worn out, when I am half awake, when I am not ready to defend myself. But what is much more troubling, they are poured on my young and immature daughter in abundance. She does not have the means to protect her developing personality from the hard artillery of these ideas and directives. And, I feel alone in my struggle for her and myself against the culture of beauty, objectification and sexism.

I am screaming on the inside, "Shut the fuck up! You don't have any right to tell me what MY BODY should look like and how I SHOULD FEEL about it". That's it! I am taking my body back! It belongs to me, and ONLY I am going to decide what is OK and what is beautiful for me.

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