



Amber Lewis, 28

Occupation: Personal trainer

Residence: Smyrna, Georgia

Height: 5' 9"

Peak weight: 180

Current weight: 145



Her weekly maintenance program:

Strength training three times a week; cardio three times a week—a 90-minute Spinning class, an hour-long kickboxing class and 60 minutes on the StairMaster; and yoga once a week

I feel fat today. It's not that time of the month, and I didn't eat too much. I feel fat today because I feel fat every day. I know I'm not the overweight eighth grader I once was. I'm 5' 9" and 145 pounds. I wear a size six. When others look at me, they see a tall, slender woman with freckles and a pretty smile. If I had a dollar for every time someone tells me I favor Halle Berry... Despite that, I still feel fat. When I look in the mirror, I see stretch marks I've had for as long as I can re-

Reflections of a Size 6 Fat Girl

A fitness instructor helps others get fit while wrestling with her old body image

member. I see extra skin on the back of my arms, despite my intense triceps training. And I see a little pooch camouflaged by clothes, but irritatingly visible every morning when I exit the shower. I was a normal size as a young

child, but I gained weight at adolescence. Since being chosen for kickball during recess and excelling in sports were out of the question, I studied so I could stand out for something other than being twice as big as the other girls. At least I could be the "Smart Fat Girl."

One day in sixth grade, two classmates were arguing. They exchanged verbal blows, like, "You're ugly" to "You smell like skunk." As the volleying intensified, one girl saw me and said, "Oh yeah? Well, you're as big as Amber!"

Due to a nicely timed growth spurt, I added two inches and lost nearly 40 pounds the summer between eighth and ninth grades. This was an answered prayer. For two years, I would alter the nightly prayer my parents taught me: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Please, please, pretty please help me lose weight." On the first day of high school, I started a new life. Those who knew me couldn't believe their eyes, and the new kids thought I'd always been 135 pounds, lean and popular. The experience ended up tainting the way I felt about myself and feeding

my unhealthy preoccupation with weight.

I've never been able to shake my body insecurities completely. Three years ago I thought getting down to a size four would make me happy. In the summer of 2003 it happened, and just like Oprah during the wagon-full-of-fat episode, I was on top of the world. And, like Oprah, I was that size for about 22 hours. That convinced me I wasn't meant to be a size four. I turned to the Lord for guidance. He helped me take all I had learned and use it to help others reach their goals. I became a certified group fitness instructor in 2001 and certified personal trainer in 2002. Instead of dwelling on the fat girl I used to be or what I look like in a swimsuit, I pat myself on the back for doing an awesome kickboxing class, running four miles or helping others get fit. But I'm a work in progress, still learning to accept the butterfly I've become on a daily basis. ❖

The Expert Weighs In

"Amber has done an awesome job,"

says psychoanalyst Marilyn Martin, M.D.

"With much determination you have made changes in your outer appearance. What you are now struggling with are the internal hurts and conflicts that prevent you from breaking free and cause people to regain the weight. A good therapist will help change these internal conversations and let this beautiful black butterfly really fly."

What's Your Story? Have you improved your health or fitness, quit smoking or overcome substance abuse? Send details, photos and contact information to editor@heartandsoul.com or *Heart & Soul*, 2514 Maryland Ave., Baltimore, MD 21218.