

LOSING . . .

Well she was perfectly normal, fullterm, 20 inches, 7 pounds. She was a good child, liked what little girls like. Was fond of cake and ice cream, too, like children are. She was a happy child. We were happy the usual ups and downs, nothing serious, though. I believe she got plenty of our love and attention. plenty of love she was our little girl. In school she did well enough, was a popular child—with boys and girls. She took ballet. She liked riding her bike and swimming. In high school she made cheerleader. We never imagined, never imagined there would be any trouble about her weight I guess. I mean we used to remind her sometimes she couldn't overindulge and expect to keep her pretty figure, but every girl knows that. TV and magazines are always reminding you. All the young girls in the ads, young, slim, desirable, she could get that idea anywhere we didn't. I assure you we didn't make a big thing out of it. She was about five-seven, weighed about 133, not at all what you'd call chubby, even she just felt there was a little too much . . .

We always encouraged her to do what she wanted. To go out for sports or cheerleading. Of course we were pleased if she did well in school too, and let her know it, but she always knew there wasn't a whole lot of pressure from us there. As long as she kept her head above water, didn't give anyone cause for complaint. She was a real girl, anxious to please. Bright . . . we backed her all the way, if you know what I mean. If she didn't want to go to college, why there would be no sense in pushing, though we thought it would be a fine thing too. You know we have a boy in college right now. Anyway, She seems to have decided on her own, she decided she'd look better, feel better, if she dieted a bit and took off that little extra roundness. You know all girls go through something like it, don't they? It's a stage in growing up, concern with their appearance. Maybe ideas about becoming a model or some such. She was taking dance classes at school, working very hard at it, I understand. She wasn't one to stare at herself in the mirror for hours or sit around with curlers doing her nails, like some do, she just wanted to look a certain way. Thought it would be best for her, for herself.

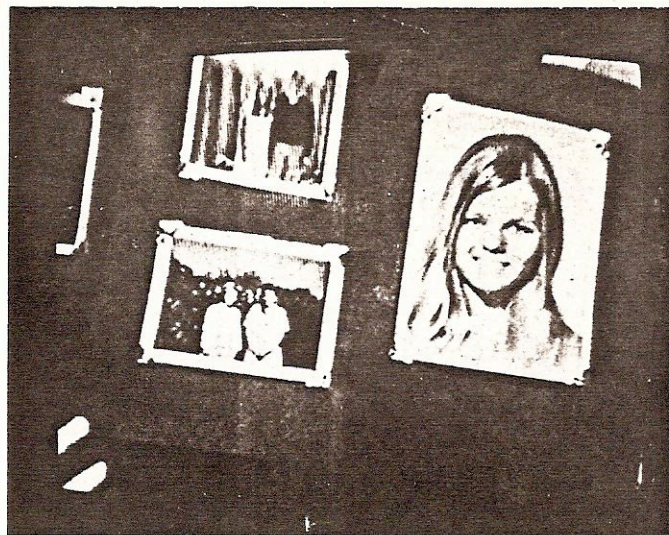
Being a model . . . five-seven is a wee bit tall, and tall girls do have a chance for modelling, beauty queens and so on, if they have that willowy look. When I was young you'd still hear about carriage and deportment for young girls, we'd try walking with books on our heads. Marilyn Monroe, was it, said she would roll a coke bottle under her instep to develop a good walking or standing style; I forget which. So she decided to lose some weight. Sensibly, it seemed. The doctor recommended a diet. Basically, it was, cut down on intake. Protein, salads, cottage cheese, yoghurt, boiled eggs, vegetables, these are the staples of any diet, and she was good about, about not wanting to stop eating altogether, and go on a liquid diet or one of the crazy crash diets they always advertise and so many young girls try. I remember once there was a young girl wanted to lose a few pounds quickly to fit into her formal for the prom, this was a few years back, so she ate nothing but some raw vegetable for a week or so—I have in mind that it was carrots but maybe something else . . . anyway the hitch was that there is some toxic substance something in them that acts as a poison if you eat too much of them or only them. To bring the story to its tragic end, she died. I know this is true. Not an old wives' tale. It was in all the papers at the time—*Young Girl Dieting Dies*.

It's a sad thing isn't it in our country of plenty that people don't know how to control their food intake. Millions, literally millions of people, most of them children, die every year of hunger. In other parts of the world. They just can't take care of their people, don't have the knowhow, technology or the skills . . .

You know that's not it, we've found out since it happened . . . they say 15 thousand a day, mostly kids, imagine watching your baby die. I know watching her just shrivel up to nothing, too weak to cry, its eyes plead for food, sometimes their bodies are swollen, riddled with worms.

We are blinded to this terrible fact because we live in a land of abundance and don't see the starvation. The fact is, the fact is, there are poor right here in America that don't get nearly enough to eat. Many right down there at starvation level. I remember Murrow in *Harvest of Shame* on TV, about the migrants, but things haven't changed much. *This isn't Cape Town or Johannesburg*, he said. Well there are plenty in Mississippi right down there at starvation level and plenty of Indians and Spanish-speaking, but of course we don't see them in our neighbourhoods and they don't get the press coverage. I hear Butz and Ford're going to knock people off the food-stamp rolls. Well, is this a time for that, I ask you? The rest of the poor, they don't eat right either, they don't even know how. They'll spend on liquor or buy sweets or potato chips, go out to a drive-in for a hamburger before they'll put together a square meal for the kids.

on May 21, 1975, Costa Rica charged that Del Monte, United Brands and Standard Fruit had created a \$5 million secret fund to 'destabilize' governments belonging to the Union of Banana Exporting Countries, much as ITT and Kennecott had done in Chile.



you don't know that . . .

I'm not blaming 'em. It's a lack of knowledge and education, poor training

no money

together with no money

A CONVERSATION WITH THE PARENTS

But most of us have more than enough, the cupboards, the refrigerators, the shelves, are overflowing, even the dog eats like a king. It's shameful. Ads are always pushing us toward the wrong choices and the women's magazines on one page they'll have a pie advertisement or a feature—*please your family tonight with this scrumptious new pie!* and on the next they'll have a new diet plan, 650 calories a day, *guaranteed to make you lose*. I saw one at the checkout with a strawberry cream pie on the cover and advertising a 'permanent diet' inside. I think I could tell them about permanent diets, if people from India could get inside the minds of the people who think these things up—there'd go their nonviolence, I'm sure.

It's not the magazines make us wasteful or keep people starving

They play their part, fashion magazines too. Anyway, she must've been skipping most of her meals at school and frankly lying about it. She used to be so 'busy' at dinnertime, dash down and join us, eat a bite and run right back up to her room. So many youngsters do this, I, we, didn't watch her closely then, I never thought she did lose weight and we complimented her, of course. She showed no loss of energy. She seemed so energetic, she rose early and seemed almost overly interested, you might say, in physical activity. We were afraid she'd wear herself out or become mannish. I thought then that she was right, though in saying she'd feel better if she were thinner. I know models and women jockeys have to skip meals. Every goal in life involves some sacrifice. Just being a wife and mother means a thousand daily sacrifices—worth it, in the long run, but still there they are.

I have heard . . . that people may become dependent on us for food. I know that was not supposed to be good news. To me that was good news, because before people can do anything they have to eat. And if you are looking for a way to get people to lean on you and to be dependent on you, in terms of their cooperation with you, it seems to me that food dependence would be terrific . . .

—Hubert H. Humphrey

Some have one idea, others have another idea about how much you have to give up to play your proper part. We don't know what such girls think about really. About the tiny little binges they allow themselves, feel driven to, and then they punish themselves. The way every little bite looms large and every excess must be paid for. To think how others

in England they do lobotomies on the uncooperative girls

struggle for an extra morsel every day of their lives while thousands of girls like her. She confessed finally that she even tried to walk and move in ways that put more stress on the body, make it work harder, to use up more calories, burn up more energy. Starving people often do not have the energy to get up. We learned later that she stopped losing after her initial losses and got panicky so she cut down even more almost to nothing. She told the doctors she subsisted on a hard-boiled egg and some lettuce every day and threw away anything else she was given. We became concerned when she began to look gaunt so if she couldn't avoid our watchful eyes then she'd eat some and then she says go to the bathroom and make herself throw up.

This, to me, is self-punishment. Sticking your finger down your throat . . . it can't have been pleasant.

Doctors don't really know . . . some say it's a form of hostility or anger. When young boys go berserk they'll take a shotgun or an axe to the family. I guess girls are made to take things out more on themselves. Other doctors say it's a way of denying womanhood, making the curves go away. But I don't buy that. To be an ideal woman means to be thin, even if the curves do go. Besides, they say the same things about getting fat, it's burying the curves. Some men, it seems, will say anything against a woman's attempt to. No, I think it was some misplaced idea on her part to be the best young woman she could be in whatever way she could. To be more pleasing to others. That Twiggy is still a woman, isn't she? Some man's idea of an overgrown little girl, maybe. I say there's too much pressure on a girl to be thin.

I've had to do a lot of thinking and I can't think where we went wrong. Oh, I guess I believe deep down we must be responsible but she lived out there in the same world we do and not all her ideas, by any means, came from us. There's just so much control and no more that a person has over what the kids pick up. But she was determined.

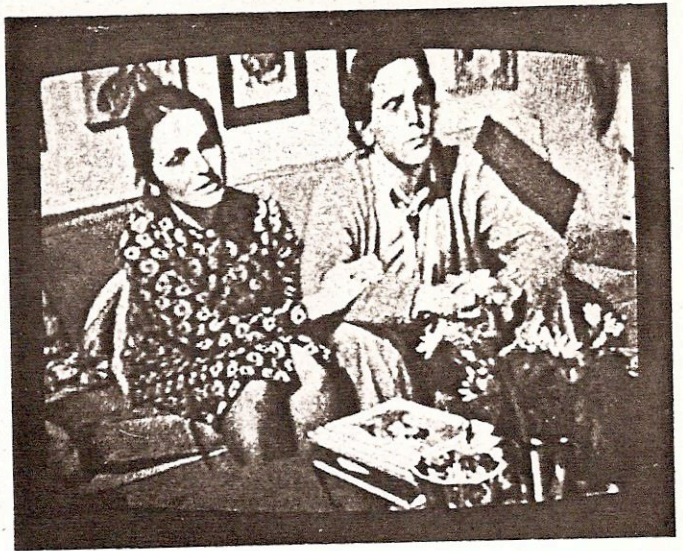
Did she feel guilty about eating, about being above worry? I know she was upset over Biafra, over Bangladesh. She said later near the end that she was becoming afraid to eat afraid once she started she'd never stop. I read once about two little boys, starving somewhere, who broke into a storehouse where raw rice was being held. Their country was having a famine, which seems to mean that the poor no longer could afford to buy the stockpiled grain, and people were dying. Anyhow, those little boys stuffed themselves with raw rice and of course it all swelled in their bellies. Rice swells to about 2½ times its dry volume I believe and their little stomachs burst and they died.

What kind of policy is it that keeps food from the starving . . . they say hunger is a weapon, a political weapon. The rich stay rich, the poor starve. Rich countries eat the bananas and drink the coffee grown in poor countries where the people starve . . . Earl Butz told *Time* magazine, *Food is a weapon. It is now one of the principal tools in our negotiating kit.* What I want to know is, whom are they negotiating with? and about what?

But starving yourself is a political weapon.

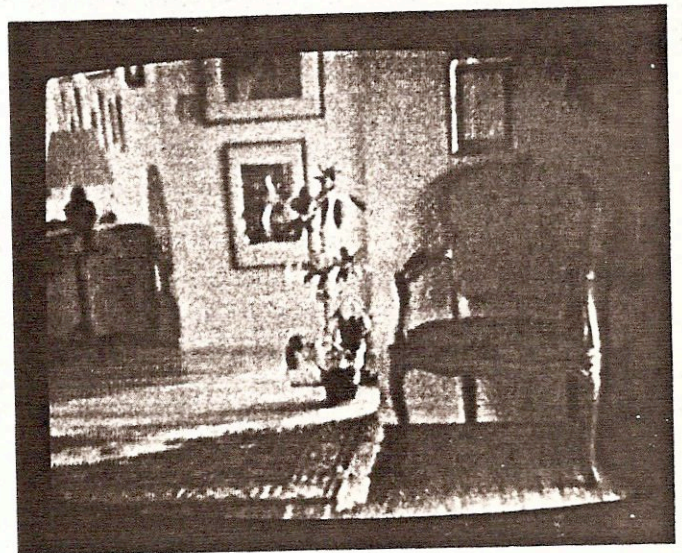
You mean a hunger strike a weapon of the last resort a form of self-sacrifice. Cesar Chavez. The mayor of Dublin lived 74 days in a British jail in 1920 before succumbing. Political prisoners are starving even now. I don't know, maybe she felt powerless too.

When you reach a certain stage of starvation your body processes change in a way our scientists still don't know much about. You can become very energetic or very lethargic. You can keep your breasts to the end or they can dry up and disappear, cachexia, it's called. Of course you think about food all the time. She had a subscription to *Gourmet* isn't that ironic she liked to bake things to take as gifts. You stop having your period. Researchers say starvation is a form of population control. Your hair gets thin your skin changes color you bruise and scar your liver and kidneys suffer damage. A British suffragist who went on hunger strikes wrote of her experiences the agonies she suffered she never really recovered from the last one. The Germans gave orders to starve the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto they had less than 300 calories a day. The Jewish doctors inside as they were starving performed the most extensive tests on themselves and their fellow sufferers some of their research survived. Most of the doctors died. Sometimes when you are given food to eat again you cannot eat it. You have almost forgotten how and it becomes almost impossible to gain weight. You feel like an animal. You are afraid to eat in company yet you know you are dying to eat. We read of a starving Dutch couple in the War who ate the body of their dead little girl and later after they had been fed they were overcome with remorse. But sometimes not even the best-intentioned doctors can save you and you pass away anyway, like she did.



Bibliography

- Hilde Bruch, *Eating Disorders*. N.Y.: Basic Books, 1973.
Josué de Castro, *Black Book of Hunger*. Boston: Beacon, 1967.
Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States, *Hunger, USA*. Washington, D.C.: Board of Inquiry, 1968.
Robert Coles, *Still Hungry in America*. N.Y.: New American Library & World Publishing, 1969.
Peter Dally, *Anorexia Nervosa*. London: Heinemann, 1969.
William Drummond, 'Girls Suffer Most in India Food Crisis—Girls Starve First.' N.Y. *Times*, May 23, 1974.
Leslie H. Gelb, 'Rome Strategy on Food is Dividing U.S. Officials,' N.Y. *Times*, Nov. 3, 1974.
Frederick Hocking, MD, *Starvation*. Sydney: Australian Medical Association, 1969.
Pierre Jalée, *The Third World in World Economy*. N.Y.: Monthly Review Press, 1969.
Ancel Keys, et al., *Biology of Human Starvation*, Vol. II. Minneapolis: U. Minn. Press, 1950.
Nick Kotz, *Let Them Eat Promises*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971.
Joseph Lelyveld, 'Workers in Richest Philippine Sugar Region Are Still Untouched by Boom,' N.Y. *Times*, Nov. 8, 1974.
W. Stanley Mooneyham, *What Do You Say To a Hungry World?* Waco, Tx.: World Books, 1973.
N.W. Pirie, *Food Resources, Conventional and Novel*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969.
Poverty Law Report (Montgomery, Ala.), Vol. 2, No. 6, 'Failure of Food Programs Leaves 18.5 Million Hungry,' December 1974.
Boyce Rensberger, '32 Nations Close to Starvation,' N.Y. *Times*, Oct. 20, 1974.
John R. K. Robson, *Malnutrition, Its Causation and Control*, Vol. I. N.Y.: Gordon & Breach, 1972.
Paul Simon and Arthur Simon, *Politics of World Hunger*. N.Y.: Harper's Magazine Press.
Harriet Stix, 'The Problem of Losing Too Much Weight,' L. A. *Times*, July 23, 1975.
Helmut Thomä, *Anorexia Nervosa*. N.Y.: International Universities Press, 1967.
Time, 'The World Food Crisis,' Nov. 11, 1974.
Time, 'The Self-Starvers,' July 28, 1975.
Hugh C. Trowell, 'Kwashiorkor,' in *Food, Readings from Scientific American*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1970.
Leonard Tushnet, *The Uses of Adversity*, N.Y. & London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966.
Vernon R. Young and Nevin Scrimshaw, 'The Physiology of Starvation,' in *Sci. Am.*, *Food*.



©1976 martha rosler