

Becoming Paris

Written by Carole Audet | Photography by Kennedy Durbruiel

Paris Sturgeon's journey to transform his life began eight years ago, and was a moment he recalls vividly.

It was in October of 2013. Paris set out for a walk, and less than a block later he was completely out of breath—his nearly 500 pound body suddenly felt like a prison. This was the moment when he decided he had to do something.

"I wanted to be a part of things in life, I wanted to climb mountains. I wanted to be able to experience nature and all of these things that I physically wasn't capable of doing because of my body. I was sleeping my life away. I was exhausted all the time, and all I wanted to do was watch TV and eat."

His life was one of denial, not wanting to admit to himself that it had become so out of control. Some of this had to do with his reluctance to admit he was in a loveless relationship, something he's happy is now in his past, but it led him to perpetually reach for comfort food.

At the start of this journey, Paris was working as a graphic designer, and one of his clients was a hypnotherapist who referred him to someone who specialized in weight loss. Paris worked with this specialist for three months over Skype, and he eventually introduced Paris to plant-based eating, providing him with information about its benefits. This prompted him to do his own research. "I started to wake up. It makes so much more sense to be vegan."

During the first three months, Paris lost 50 pounds—the hypnosis was reprogramming him to be mindful about what he was putting in his body, and he was learning to cook without added oils, salt, sugar, or animal products. It helped him to retrain his brain to understand that exercise was not horrible, that he could look forward to working out and enjoy it.

He was also learning to let go of the co-dependency in his relationship. Even when his partner had no interest in being active with him, Paris would do things on his

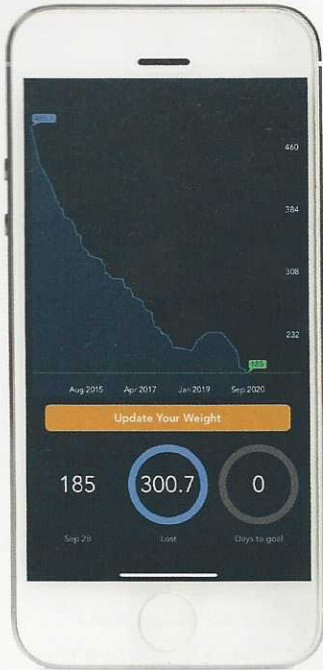
own. "I'm very family-oriented and it was difficult for me to not include him in my exercise."

Paris continued to use the MP3s from his hypnosis sessions well beyond the three months. "When you say the word hypnosis, it sounds all magical and mystical, but it's not. It's being in tune with your mind and figuring out your triggers. It's a learning journey. Therapy is like figuring out what the problem is and what tools you can use in your daily life to change your bad habits."

When he started working with the hypnotherapist, he was asked his goal weight. Not giving it much thought, he said 185. "It was just a number I threw out there thinking I would never, ever get there."

The prospect of the monumental task of losing 300 pounds did not deter Paris. He started with walking, worked his way up to swimming, then ventured into gym workouts, something that initially intimidated him. But he pushed past this fear and began to go to the





Paris captured the moment he met his goal from the Lose It! app on his phone.

gym regularly, working out on his own on cardio equipment. He used every machine available to him and continued to do that for many years. Then about two years ago, he started strength training with a trainer.

When on the treadmill, he would turn his head and look in the opposite direction. His trainer once asked him why he was doing that. "I'm looking at my future self," he responded.

Now, Paris loves exercising and pushing his body to its limits. "I love the treadmill because

I run as fast as I humanly can, and it feels awesome. I love the music—I get really good, fast tempo music, and I just go. I was always the subject of conversation at the gym. I used to jog when I was in Victoria and there was a stretch right in front of the Parliament Buildings in the inner harbour where I would go flat out. I love that feeling."

When the dramatic weight loss resulted in a lot of excess skin, he found tight bands that he would wear around a compression shirt and spandex shorts. This helped reduce the discomfort he was experiencing and allowed him to continue running.

Earlier this year, Paris had surgery to remove the excess skin from his chest area. Even this journey had its challenges, from being on the wait-list for 18 months to needing to work another job to pay for it to iffy blood test results before the surgery. "Because I was very aggressive with trying to lose the weight, I did have a dark period when I was bulimic. I was not eating properly. I was not a very good vegan at the time either, and not being mindful of vitamins from different foods, or supplementing with B12. So, my blood work was a mess, and I was anemic. For a month prior to the surgery, I was on an iron supplement, and I was eating as much food as I could, like spinach. I was eating so much it was hard to keep it down."

Six months after the first surgery, Paris had the excess skin removed from his abdomen. "You look like you were taken apart and put back together. Emotionally, it's

something that I have to learn to accept and be happy with my body."

Paris cautions that you must be emotionally ready for a weight loss journey of this magnitude. "You have to be committed at the start or you're going to go back to your old eating habits because you haven't fixed anything emotionally. This is why I'm happy to share my story because I hope that it's the catalyst for somebody to want this for themselves."

His journey was not always a smooth one. "Sometimes I would have a really bad day where I would eat things that were bad, and I knew it. I felt guilty and that led to bulimia. It's not something I like to talk about, but I feel it's necessary to let people know that it's not an easy road and you're not going to be 100 percent perfect the whole way. Things are going to happen. You're going to feel bad."

Part of his transformation involved imagining his future self, his future body. He had to stop worrying about the state of his body as it was and simply envision the future body he was determined to achieve.

"I legally changed my name to something that I have always loved. I was out of a bad relationship of 18 years, I shed my old life, I lost three hundred pounds. I'm completely the person I envisioned I was going to be. When I had my second surgery, I stared at myself in the mirror and I thought, Hey, nice to meet you. It's the new you. I teared up and thought, I did it. I'm now that future person. My name change was part of that."

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Paris's advice for anyone who wants to lose weight is to begin with small changes and to be prepared for a long journey with many bends on the road. "I think it's a very personal thing. I don't think there's one solution to lose weight.



The emotional issues are different for everyone, so seeking out some sort of therapy is my recommendation to fix that part. I think that's a very important part of weight loss—getting the support and tools. Next is diet, then exercise. That's what it boils down to, those three things."

Eighty-three months and fifteen days after Paris began his journey, he reached his goal weight. He's now ready for what's next, including a loving relationship. He has no intention of ever going back to his former self. He's done the work to heal physically, mentally, and emotionally to ensure that his transformation is permanent.

Paris is currently living his best life in Ladysmith, BC and works as the manager at Plantitude, the local vegan restaurant. "My journey at Ladysmith so far has been reconnecting with what brings me happiness."

He loves being part of the vegan community, sharing his passion for food, and talking with others about their vegan journeys.

He begins each day watching the sun rise from his kayak. "Being out on the water first thing in the morning is a beautiful way to start the day.

"I learned how to be happy." ●

Find Paris on social

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