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Fat No More: A Teenager's Victory over Obesity

Alberto Hidalgo Robert
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By the age of three months, Alberto Hidalgo-Robert was already the size of a one-year-old child. By seven years, the rotund little boy known affectionately as “El Gordito,” little fat boy, weighed 120 pounds, his dependence on food an unstoppable addiction. By nine, Hidalgo-Robert entered the restrictive world of doctor-prescribed diets that wreaked havoc on his body and fueled a cycle of overeating, low self-esteem, and hours spent in front of the television. By the time he was a teenager, food and television had become his only source of joy and solace, obesity setting him on a path toward disease and early death.

Fat No More is a memoir that chronicles Hidalgo-Robert’s journey from childhood obesity to healthy, vibrant living as a young adult. Moving chronologically from birth to present day, Hidalgo-Robert deals both humorously and sensitively with intensely painful and infuriating moments from his childhood, where parental control over food and unhealthy habits were lax, and in most cases, completely absent. Using his parents as a source to trigger memories from his early days as the cherished first grandchild in El Salvador, Hidalgo-Robert pinpoints the ways in which obesity in a young child insidiously became a normal state for his family.

Aimed at teens, this memoir has a bright and lively spirit, Hidalgo-Robert’s untutored style exuding fraternity and enthusiasm as he reaches out to other young people struggling with weight and self-esteem. Passages showcase and mimic his intense focus on food, the language delivering vibrant images and the necessary sensory detail to connect with a reader. When he describes wanting another burger at his eighth birthday party, the reader is wound into his daydream, their desires reflected in his own: “I had begun thinking and daydreaming about the burger I had just eaten. I was remembering the juicy patty in the middle of the buns, the melting cheese, and the crunch of the onions and pickles. The tang of the mustard and the salty flavor of the fries. I was remembering every single bite I had taken.”

The book’s prose has the quality of casual speech, as if Hidalgo-Robert has sat down in front of you to tell you a story, drifting into asides, sometimes leaping into sudden exclamations. Though the author’s simple, chatty style engages the reader, it can also serve as a deterrent, with the chronological narrative fairly bulging with superfluous material.

Despite this defect, however, *Fat No More* highlights health-related themes that pinpoint the contributing factors of high-calorie addictive diets, weaving in controversial issues like children’s advertising and misleading health labels on food items in a natural, easily digestible style.

This memoir will appeal to youth and adults alike and is an important contribution to the literature discussing one of the leading health issues facing young people today.
SHOILEE KHAN (May 31, 2012)

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