

The Gospel  
According<sup>™</sup> Chubby

By Jeremy Rochford



## Chapter 12: Start Living or Die Trying

Among the many things I brought back from our Jersey vacation, other than tear-stained eyes and a feeling of self-loathing, there was one redeeming souvenir that needs to be mentioned. ~~Before~~ the ~~Go-Kart~~ Incident, now officially recognized **BGKI**, I purchased a limited edition, officially licensed Eric Cartman South Park t-shirt. Now, most cartoon t-shirts (and NASCAR t-shirts for that matter) tend to get way too busy and obnoxious with their designs. Not this one. No, the simplicity of this shirt was just too normal to pass up. It had one small logo on the front, one large logo on the back. Most importantly, there was no annoying catchphrase that would be culturally irrelevant four months after I purchased the shirt, printed anywhere on it.

However, the problem was this: while I was a huge Eric Cartman fan in **BGKI** times, it was now in the **AGKI** or ~~A~~fter the ~~Go-Kart~~ Incident era, and I could no longer endorse the fat kid qualities that Eric Cartman embodied. He is loud-mouthed, obnoxious, insulting, and while you were not able to miss him, most would go out of their way to avoid a person like that.

In the before times (**BGKI**), I would have done anything for attention, so having adoration for Cartman made sense to me. Problem was, I no longer wanted to be known as the fat kid who was angry at the world. I was already avoided for no other reason than being an orb-like obstacle to those walking in the hallway. Truthfully, I didn't want to be remembered for any of

that. In my condition, rigorous weight loss could literally have killed me. I would rather be remembered for trying something than forgotten for doing nothing. If I was ever going to be the change I wanted to see in this world, then I needed to become the change I wanted to see in myself.

Once I got home, I found that Cartman shirt, symbolizing whom I no longer wanted to be. I cut the sleeves off and committed to wear it as my weight loss uniform. I wanted it to serve as a reminder that until my weight was gone, I would forever carry the burden of misrepresentation, judgment, and hate from an outside world that didn't care to understand the heartbreak of being overweight. The laughing world may never have the desire to change their opinion of the overweight. That's fine. I'll change it for them.

Now, while I admit that was a captivating story in all forms of literary expression, it serves absolutely no purpose in addressing the fact that I still needed to find a way to work my weight off. Looking back, I often wonder how my journey would have played out if it started in present day. I say that because there seems to be a gym on every corner now. But I digress. Because this was a few years back in the day (which contrary to popular belief, was not a Wednesday), my options were limited to the high school facilities, Carnegie Library of Homestead gymnasium, or buying my own home workout equipment.

Each one had their drawback. The drawbacks to working out at the high school facility were self-evident. If I decided to work out at home, I would have to deal with the awkwardness of parental encouragement, which is sometimes more annoying than it is helpful. My father, bless his heart, had every best intention when he purchased discount exercise equipment. For

some reason, he never got the point that it was inexpensive for a reason. At one time or another, our basement was filled with manually powered treadmills, some Nordic-looking apparatus, and cable-based weight restraints. These were all manually powered and were so painstaking to assemble, that once you did, the last thing you wanted to do was look at them again. They were not my friends. So our inexpensive workout equipment matured into really expensive clothing hangers.

I needed something that was going to work with me, not against me. This was my time to follow through, which left my only viable option as the Carnegie Library gym. Being one with a nerdy disposition, I already knew where the library was. I had spent numerous hours there, but it never occurred to me until I saw the advertisement that a gymnasium was right upstairs. I had to see for myself just how useful those facilities might be. I saddled up the minivan and drove on down. I only wanted a tour, but after the nice elderly gentleman told me they offered a student discount, I signed up on the spot. I guess that's my lineage coming out. I saw a potentially useless item or service at a discount price and I couldn't resist.

So it was. Signed and sealed. Jeremy Rochford, the next day of the rest of your life was about to begin. School came, went, and for once in my life, food wasn't at the forefront of my thought process. All day my mind was focused on going to the gym. I could not wait to show people how wrong they were for giving up on me. I was so afraid and yet so excited at the exact same time.

I walked up the stairs, shoulders straight, head held high as I passed through the doors. Making my way up one final flight, I found myself face to face with the receptionist, who was

male. Maybe receptor would be a more masculine term for him. It doesn't matter. I showed him my card and proceeded. As I passed through the poorly lit corridor that connected the outside world to this valley that overlooked the shadow of death, I promise you, I feared no evil. I made sure my Walkman was cocked and loaded, ready to disengage any negative emotions with the flick of a finger. I pressed play to allow "Bulls on Parade" the right to usher in a new legacy of what could only be known as:

JEREMY ROCHFORD, VERSION 2.0. UPGRADE. BETA

The fluorescent light nearly blinded me as the scenery went from cave-like to operating room in a matter of seconds. As I was greeted by an empty canvas in the form of a workout facility, I quickly realized that I had absolutely no idea what I was supposed to do next. I looked around the room; clearly there was a machine for every part of the body that would need to be worked. Being as large as I was, I knew any of them would have been beneficial. But they all looked so potentially painful and awkwardly confusing. Fortunately, I was the only one there, so no one noticed me staring without aim. I knew, however, that it would not last for long. I had to make a plan.

I was about to go over to the chest weights when out of the corner of my eye an angelic piece of grey and black machinery caught my attention. It called to me with an intimate voice that until now, only frosting had known. It was indeed a treadmill. Right next to it was a stationary bike. While not knowing the first thing about weight training, I did know how to walk. Even further, I knew how to ride a bike. I was now equipped to sculpt this body of mine.

Not now.

In haste, I propelled myself over to the treadmill. I stepped on it and began to enter my weight. Slowly, I watched the number climb from 155 to 300. Then it beeped. So I kept pressing. And it kept beeping, showing 300 all the while. Then it started to flash. Then I started to swear. "What? What is this? What do you mean it won't go past 300 pounds? So what happens now? Have I reached the level where I am too fat to be fat? Am I too overweight to work out? Did I break it just by stepping on it? You've got to be kidding me." I thought to myself.

I fired back. "You know what? You are probably one of those treadmills who waits around for a nice high school girl with a slender tan behind wearing cute little boy shorts to work out on you. Well guess what Lyfe Fitness? You're getting a fat and sweaty one today! Deal with it!"

Once I came to terms with the fact that I just argued with an inanimate treadmill over its gender preference, I decided to enter 300 pounds and move on.

Maybe it was the anger of the aforementioned argument, but I ambitiously set the timer to 30 minutes. I was on my way. Five minutes went by and I decided to BAM, take it up a notch. At the ten-minute mark, I was dying for air. You never truly realize how out of shape you are until something else determines how hard you have to work. By the 15-minute mark I had to BAM ...retract it down a notch. Once 20 minutes rolled around, it looked as though a rain cloud had hovered above and released sheets of sweat over me. After 25 minutes, I

was holding onto the side rails for dear life, and when it finally hit 30 minutes and decelerated for cool-down, I honestly could not feel my legs underneath me.

Once cool-down was complete and I regained feeling in my lower extremities, I walked over to the water fountain to get a drink. On my way over, my reflection stopped me dead in my tracks. This was the first time in 30 minutes that I had actually looked in the mirror.

Words cannot do justice to the visual fiasco I beheld. As it turned out, a very large high school student sweating himself into shape while wearing a white t-shirt bears a strikingly similar resemblance to a very well-endowed female college student participating in a wet-t shirt contest. And while there has been no scientific evidence as to why men have nipples, I was convinced it was to embarrass me to death at that very moment.

By the time my eyes were able to disengage from the mirror, I noticed that I was not the only one pondering my nipple query. To this day, I have never seen such confused looks. Unbeknownst to me, three other people were also staring at me in wonderful amazement. Their eyes affixed on me as though they just witnessed a 20-car pileup in which every car was destroyed by flames, yet every single person walked away from the wreckage all the while finding deserving homes for 20 baby puppies. It just didn't make sense to anyone. The scene was beyond comprehension.

Yet, there I stood at the center of everyone's attention. I looked back at my reflection and all I could think was, "If they're not laughing at me for this, then they would be laughing at me for something else." Memories flashed back from when desks

collapsed under my weight in both eighth and ninth grades. The day that my family and I had to move from the booth at our favorite Steak & Sea house to a table and chairs because I could no longer wedge myself into family-style seating. Lest we forget the go-karts.

No. No more. It ends here. I had been made fun of for killing myself for the past 16 years. I would not be made fun of for turning my life around. I was through with crumbling inside every time something embarrassing like this happened. All I was trying to do was right a body that I had wronged for so many years. No mature person could shake his or her head at that. Not one.

As time began to move forward, I handled the rest of the situation so epically that to this day I have no idea how it occurred. As I wiped the sweat from my brow, I looked up at those who were around me. Looking back at the mirror and then looking back at them, I pointed in the direction of the cardio equipment and said, "Well.... the treadmill works." Smiling as I turned away, I felt a rush of freedom that I cannot explain. Walking out of the room I felt something that I had never felt before from the eyes of my peers. Respect.

I threw my gym bag into the back of the minivan, paused, and stood there for a moment. I had to make sure that what had just occurred actually happened. I looked up at the stars and tried to hold back my emotions. Try as I might, a few tears still fell from my eyes. Nothing amazing. No sobbing. Just joy. Just the feeling as though, for once in my life, everything would turn out okay.

I got in the car and had a hard time pulling away. I honestly did not want this feeling to end. I had lived a life of

defeat for so long that I had forgotten what victory really felt like.

As I lay my head down to sleep that evening, I felt surrounded by the most euphoric peace that I had ever felt. I stared at the ceiling knowing that I had taken the first step of a journey that would define the rest of my life. When I said my goodnight prayers that evening, I remember thinking for first time, "I am truly thankful for the life that God has given me."