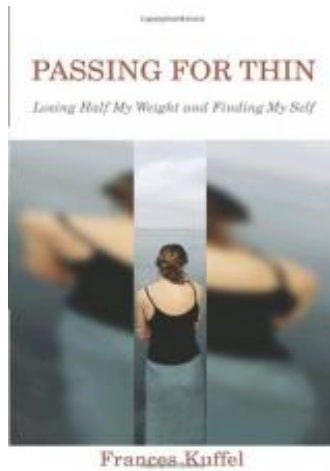


## Passing for Thin: Losing Half My Weight and Finding My Self

by Frances Kuffel



### About the Book

An intimate and darkly comic memoir of a woman who does a 180 with her body.

In the opening pages of **Passing for Thin**, Frances Kuffel waits at the airport to be picked up by her brother, Jim. He strides past her without a glimmer of recognition because she barely resembles the woman he is expecting to see. Jim had last seen her when she was 188 pounds heavier.

What follows is one of the most piercing explorations of the limits and promises of a body since Lucy Grealy's **Autobiography of a Face**. With unflinching honesty and a wickedly dark sense of humor, Frances describes her first fumbling introductions to the slender, alien body she is left with after losing half her weight, shining a light on the shared human experience of feeling, at times, uncomfortable in one's own skin.

Buoyed by support from a group of fellow compulsive eaters she deems "the Stepfords," Frances adjusts not only to her new waistline, but to a strange new world --- the Planet of Thin --- where she doesn't speak the language and doesn't know the rules. Her lifetime of obesity had robbed her of the joys of lovers, a husband, children --- and even made it impossible to enjoy a movie, when standing in line was too painful, or travel, when airplane seats were too small --- and hadn't prepared her for the unexpected attention from strangers, the deep pleasure of trying on a tailored suit, the satisfaction of a good run on a treadmill, or for the saucy fun of flirting and dating. She joyfully moves from observer to player, while struggling to enjoy the freedom her new shape has given her.

As Frances gradually comes to know --- and love --- the stranger in the mirror, she learns that this body does not define her, but enables her to become the woman she's always wanted to be.

## Discussion Guide

1. Did Frances's descriptions of eating and her relationship with food make you think about things you rely on that might be dangerous buffers or substitutions?
2. Has your body shaped your life? Why or why not, and how?
3. How much has popular culture affected your attitude toward your body?
4. Have you ever had a defining moment in which you realized something fundamental about the way you have lived your life? How did you act on the realization?
5. Why do you think a 12-step program was successful for Frances when other diets and methods had failed?
6. Frances writes criticizes "fat serenity," the philosophy that advocates accepting one's body at a larger size, as unreasonable. Why couldn't she accept her size? Should "sizism" be a civil rights movement in the way that feminism, gay rights and racial equality have been?
7. Why does Kuffel spend so little time on the actual diet she followed?
8. Frances enlists a number of advisors in the course of the book, relying on them to tell her what to eat, how to dress and wear her hair, guide her free time, how to think and feel about herself. Does this make her a weak person? On whom do you rely and for what?
9. What role does "passing" play in the author's account of her newly thin body? Have you ever felt you were only "passing" for/as something? Does the feeling of passing make you less authentic?
10. Kuffel admits that "I don't really like fat people much." Why would a formerly obese person have such a prejudice? What do you think about fat people?
11. Frances writes that "finishing is not success." Does she find success in the course of the book? Beyond finishing a project, how do you define success?
12. Which do you think is the "real" Frances Kuffel, the fat or the thin one? Do you think there are aspects of obesity she was grateful for after she lost weight? If you were to accomplish something you'd always wanted, how would it change you and what of yourself would you want to keep from "before"?
13. Frances finds an identity to inhabit from her two boyfriends' neat categorizations of why they liked her. The Boy from Connecticut found her beautiful and funny, while The Catholic Boy thought she was pretty, smart and nice. Have your romantic involvements given you a better sense of yourself? Is there anything wrong with that?
14. Why does Frances begin to eat in the last two chapters?

15. How would you describe the "note" on which the book ends?

## Author Bio

Frances Kuffel is a literary agent who has published poems and short stories in literary journals, such as *Triquarterly*, *the Georgia Review*, *Glimmer Train*, *Prairie Schooner*, and the *Massachusetts Review*. A native of Missoula, Montana, she has an M.F.A. from Cornell. She currently makes her home in Brooklyn, New York.

## Critical Praise

"This book is simply riveting. There is not a woman who's ever carried more than her share of body weight, who won't identify with every word that Frances Kuffel has written. Kuffel's journey is rich in wit and wisdom. Her book is a jewel and a must have for anyone who's ever contemplated improving their body as well as their mind."--- Pam Peeke MD, MPH, Pew Foundation Scholar in Nutrition and Metabolism, Assistant Professor of Medicine University of Maryland School of Medicine, Author of **Fight Fat After Forty**, NBC *Today Show* Medical Expert"Frances Kuffel set out on a true adventure, navigated the dangers, endured, and emerged transfigured. What makes her tale intriguing is that the terrain in question was her own body and its tyrannies. This is a story for our times from a writer with the language, courage and experience to tell it."--- Deidre McNamer, author of **Rima in the Weeds** and **My Russian**"This is a book that will grab you and hold you in its grip, and break your heart even as it inspires you. Frances Kuffel's memoir is so real, so alive with honesty and clarity, you will never forget it. It is a Pilgrim's Progress toward the holy city of thin. Kuffel is our confessional poet of fatness, and the struggle toward fitness, beauty, love. She is entertaining and tough, vivid and funny, in a story of victory that will delight every single reader."--- Robert Morgan, author of **Brave Enemies**

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