

# Cheryl Haworth

ON SIZE WIZE



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## **WEIGHTLIFTING; OLYMPIC BRONZE MEDALIST AND FOUR-TIME U.S. NATIONAL CHAMPION**

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I am sure that I became aware of my body image in about second grade. The message I got from most people was that I was different. I was physically bigger, and my clothes were bigger. The kids would call me dumb names—all having to do with being chubby.

It didn't really bother me, though, because I soon found out that there was nothing I couldn't do because of my size. I could run fast and throw far and play and have fun. In fact, I was a lot stronger and more athletic than most of the kids. I was always playing sports.

My parents taught us to love sports. My dad was a wrestler and big-time college football player, and my mom played softball and basketball. We used to go to her games as kids. It was only natural that I played sports. And I loved the outdoors. I don't remember ever coming home from school and sitting in front of the television. I would ride my bike, play in the woods or go to a softball or basketball game.

In middle school, I quickly learned to make friends with the people who did not care about what you looked like or what clothes you wore. I thought that it was really sad to see the girls who

were overly concerned about losing weight. They were so caught up in an unhealthy body image.

A good sense of humor was a lifesaver for me. I loved to laugh. I found kids who became my true friends. We would laugh together and talk about real things, and they would listen. We had common interests. We wrote funny stories together and drew funny pictures.

We even developed our own comic book characters. My true friends helped me to explore my creative talents and supported me as an athlete.

I was already 190 pounds in seventh grade. I realized that I had an athletic gift—so I continued to exercise. I went to the gym. There I saw women lifting weights, and I thought, "I can do that!" So every day after school I went to the gym. The coaches would encourage me. The other weightlifters became my friends. They saw me in a different way. At school I would hear, "You're so big!" At the gym I would hear, "You're so strong!"

I started to use my strength to compete, and I became a famous athlete at school. I got to travel around the world and meet amazing people. And then, at 17, I was lucky enough to qualify for the first Olympic Games that had women's weightlifting.

**"A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR  
WAS A LIFESAVER FOR ME"**

## SIZE WIZE

Everybody wants to be cool. At school, in sports and in social groups, girls want to fit in and often feel like their looks will determine their popularity. During junior high and high school, the pressure to look like you just jumped off the set of “Dawson’s Creek” or “Real World” can get totally insane. When you’re bigger than a lot of kids your age, this pressure can freak you out and make you overly sensitive about your weight. Maybe you react by not having confidence in your body, slumping over when you walk or maybe you react by eating more—using food to help make you feel better.

Stop and think. Everything in nature comes in different shapes and sizes. Some trees are tall, others are stumpy—some dogs are sleek, others chunky. The same goes for humans. We’re supposed to look and function uniquely. Some girls are born to have bulky shoulders and others to have knobby knees—that’s just the way it goes. Differently sized girls have different strengths, especially when it comes to sports. Professional volleyball player Gabrielle Reece dominates the net, in part, because she’s super tall. Olympic weightlifter Cheryl Haworth throws more weight over her head than almost any other woman on the planet because she was born to be big and strong. Successful athletes accept the body cards they’ve been dealt. They learn to love their height, their weight, their muscles and all the little details that make them

### Deal With It!

- Take time to appreciate what your body can do—it jumps, it runs, it dances, it shimmies—it’s great!
- Escape the screen! Turn off the computer or TV, get outside, breathe fresh air and move your body.
- Use sports and fitness as social time—take a hike with your friends, go inline skating with your crush.
- Grab your favorite family recipe and figure out how to substitute ingredients to make it healthier.
- Celebrate different body shapes and sizes. Notice the strengths of people’s unique bodies—including your own!

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**Because I can post-up like a madwoman.  
Because I can endure. Because I can  
open a jar without whining for help...  
Just a few reasons why I dig being  
big and strong.**



special. They feel beautiful because their bodies enable them to do something extraordinary.

Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes. But, just as being too skinny can be unhealthy, so can being too heavy. The important thing to remember is that happy, healthy people eat healthy and exercise sensibly to make sure they are taking care of their bodies, so their bodies will take care of them. Problems arise when your body weight is a result of being unfit or unhealthy eating.

#### **NOT SURE WHERE YOU STAND? ASK YOURSELF A FEW QUESTIONS—**

**Do you** often eat to make yourself feel better when you're dealing with tough issues like sadness, self-consciousness or stress?

**Do you** spend more free time in front of a TV or computer screen than you do playing sports or moving around?

**Do you** eat lots of junk food?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it's possible that your eating habits are unhealthy. Food should be used as fuel to keep your body energized—enjoyable fuel, but never an emotional Band-Aid. In the end, unhealthy eating never solves problems; it just creates new ones. So lay off the junky stuff, play hard and play often and, above all else, learn to love what you see in the mirror—it's gotta last you a long time!

## Red Flags

### Do You ...

- Eat food (especially junk food) when you're sad, worried or bored
- Get little or no exercise/have poor fitness habits
- Get teased
- Feel sensitive about your body size
- Have low self-esteem

### You're Headed For ...

- Health issues (difficulty breathing, high blood pressure, heart and joint problems)
- Menstrual problems

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL OR SURF:**

- A **Food Addiction Hotline** 1-800-872-0088
- **www.eatright.org** American Dietetic Association
- **www.edreferral.com** Eating Disorder referral & information

*Additional resources are listed in the Resources section of this Guide.*