



OAC
Community

Perspectives

Facing Obesity through the Eyes of a Loved One

by Dana Rosser



OAC Community Member
Dana Rosser (pictured left)

Hello everyone! I'm proud to say that I've been a member of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) for six years.

I discovered the OAC when I was doing research for a book I was writing, *Thru Thick and Thin; Facing Obesity Thru the Eyes of a Loved One*. As an advocate and supporter for those who are affected by obesity, I felt that the OAC connected me with people who shared my desire to help others without judgement. That touched my heart.

I am blessed to have attended the OAC's Annual *Your Weight Matters* Convention & EXPO in Dallas (2012), Denver (2018) and Tampa (2019)! The OAC has also graciously given me opportunities to share my unique perspective of living with and loving someone who has obesity. I've shared my story on WeightoftheWorld.com, written blog posts and led a table discussion at this year's Convention in Tampa called "Supporting Your Loved One on their Journey."

A Simple, Yet Complicated Love Story

To say I'm passionate about telling my story is an understatement. I fell in love and married an amazing southern gentleman, Dr. James "Butch" Rosser Jr. He weighed 460 pounds at that time. Butch is a world-renowned surgeon, and from the beginning of our relationship people judged me. They thought I was with him for his fame and fortune. They wondered how anyone could find a man with severe obesity attractive.

But I loved this funny, smart, caring and kind man. I fell in love with his soul. I saw beyond his outward appearance which seemed to consume others. If being judged wasn't enough, I often judged myself. Despite my deep love for Butch, I knew he needed to address his weight. Convincing myself otherwise was hopeless, but I often had conflicting feelings.

Caught between Two Worlds

On one hand, I felt that I needed to protect Butch from the cruel world of "fat haters." I was angry at the stares, snickers and obvious disrespect from total strangers. I often found myself "on guard" against those who offended him. After all, this was the person I loved!

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Yet, on the other hand, I was angry and scared. I was even embarrassed at times about how his weight affected me. I worried constantly about his health. Every day I was afraid that someone would call me to tell me that the love of my life had died of a heart attack. I feared that one day I would wake up to find he had slipped away after suffering from sleep apnea.

I became angry when Butch ate foods that were bad for him. I felt like food was slowly killing him (*and taking me down with him emotionally*). After all, we have five children that need a father. The thought of losing him was too painful to bare.

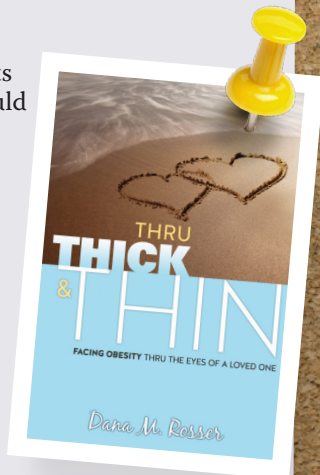
The worst feeling was the shame I felt. I remember being on an airplane one time when Butch took his seat. It broke and he ended up in the lap of the person behind him. I was humiliated for him, but at the same time, I went into my “protector mode.” I gave him my seat while I sat upright in the broken seat for the rest of the flight. Feeling mortified and ashamed that I even felt that way, I eventually became numb. I loved this man, but I didn’t know how to deal with these conflicting feelings.

A Moment of Awakening

I needed support, but I was too afraid to tell my truth. I didn’t want to be judged or to hurt Butch. I often wondered if other families were going through similar challenges. Were there support groups for family members? Books? To my surprise, there was little to help.

Obesity is a disease that affects millions of people, so how could there be no tools out there to help loved ones? Does anyone even care that supporters are longing for help and, in many cases, silently suffering?

I wanted to shout to the world, “Obesity is a family affair!” I truly believe that most family members want to help, but don’t have the tools or resources to do it. This reminded me of something author Toni Morrison once said, “If there’s a book you want to read that hasn’t been written yet, you must be the one to write it.” That is how I created my book, *Thru Thick and Thin*.



LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

We know that your health journey can be overwhelming at times and we want to be there for you. We recognize the power of support through on-going weight and health education, connecting with others who have similar concerns and ultimately, joining together to take action for ourselves and one another.

**LET US SUPPORT YOU
ON YOUR HEALTH JOURNEY AND
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And Much More



JOIN TODAY:
Go to **ObesityAction.org/Join**

“I needed support, but I was too afraid to tell my truth.”

What I Learned about Being a Supporter

In August of 2001, Butch decided to have gastric bypass surgery. I was scared to lose him, so I didn't want him to do it. However, I knew something had to be done to improve his health. He told me, “Dana, I have to risk my life to save my life. I will be okay.”

The surgery was a success. Butch lost 160 pounds and has kept it off. Our family's quality of life has drastically changed. Make no mistake – bariatric surgery is not the easy way out. Butch still needs to eat healthy and work out to maintain his weight. However, seeing him happier, healthier, mobile and enjoying life to the fullest has been a blessing that benefited all of us.

What I know for sure about being a supporter is this:

1. Acknowledge and own your feelings. They are valid and valued.
2. Make time for self-care. You can't help someone else if your cup isn't filled.
3. Ask for help from a counselor, trusted friend or clergy member.
4. Release control. This doesn't mean you don't care about someone anymore. You just have to realize that the only person you really have control over is yourself.

Finding My Voice along the Way

My passion to support families through this journey drives me to want to do more. I've been blessed to share my story in a “TedX talk”, on the “Dr. Oz Show”, on numerous (*local and national*) radio interviews and in magazine articles. With the support of my college sorority, Butch and I hosted the 2018 Akron Obesity Summit in my hometown of Akron, Ohio. It was a free two-day event held at my high school. We had speakers, exercise classes, breakout sessions, blood pressure testing, vendors and more. The OAC provided me with brochures and pamphlets to put in attendee bags. It was a dream come true to give back to my community that had so graciously given to me.



I'm grateful for the support, education and advocacy that the OAC provides for all of us. I would have truly benefited from the OAC back in the 90s when I was searching for help. We are blessed to have the information that this organization provides right at our fingertips. The least I can do is to pledge to continue spreading the word about the OAC and doing my part to change lives, too.



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Want More OAC Community perspectives?

For more from the OAC Community, including personal stories, words of wisdom and more, visit ObesityAction.org/Community and click “Find Support and Connect” on the left-hand menu of the Community home page. You can share your own perspectives and experiences too!

Want to be featured in OAC's *Weight Matters Magazine*? Contact membership@obesityaction.org with your request and to learn more.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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info@obesityaction.org

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