



***Eating Bull* Is Fiction, but the Fat-Shaming It Depicts Is Not**

by Carrie Rubin, author and physician

*"There's not a day goes by I don't know I'm fat,
because no one will let me forget it."*

I heard the above sentence from a tearful, severely overweight teenager several years ago in my clinic. The words haven't left me since. In fact, they're part of what led me to make an overweight fifteen-year-old boy the protagonist in *Eating Bull*. That, along with the research I've done over the years on overweight/obesity, went into Jeremy's characterization.

I gained further insight into the emotional toll of obesity after attending a seminar led by overweight public health practitioners.

The focus of the meeting was to highlight the frequent fat-shaming that goes on in our society—including from the healthcare industry—and to shift the onus from weight loss to size acceptance.

Though I'm not ready to write off weight loss as a goal, the seminar was eye-opening, and it made me reevaluate some of my thinking. Although I'd already written *Eating Bull* when I attended, I made some changes to my protagonist's characterization as a result, including how he is treated by a less-than-supportive ER nurse.

It is not an overstatement to say I was appalled by the tales these speakers told, tales of the shaming they experience on a regular basis (at least here in the US). The horrible things complete strangers say to them. The horrible things healthcare providers say to them. The horrible things family members say to them.

So I knew if I wanted to recreate this inescapable cloud of shaming for my hero, I'd have to make his life hell. He's fatherless with an overworked and often absent mother, verbally abused by his agoraphobic grandfather, and bullied in school for his weight. Plus, he has little in the way of coping strategies other than to get lost in his online game and eat.

As if that wasn't bad enough, I added a serial killer. Because first and foremost *Eating Bull* is a thriller, and in a thriller, horrible things must be heaped upon the protagonists, at least until they can stand up and fight on their own.

Writing about my character's pain wasn't easy. Sitting in that seminar wasn't easy either. But it got those of us who attended thinking, and it got us recognizing our own responsibilities in the issue.

So I'm sorry I put you through the ringer, Jeremy. I hope you'll forgive me. Maybe between the two of us, we can get you and your real-world peers to a happier place.

EATING BULL

By Carrie Rubin

ScienceThrillers Media

On sale date: November 12, 2015

310 pages

Paperback | 978-1-940419-10-7 | \$14.99

eBook | 978-1-940419-11-4 | \$4.99

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Amy Rogers, Publicist
ScienceThrillers Media
(916) 712-3334
Amy@ScienceThrillersMedia.com