FINDING FOOD FREEDOM

What fourteen years of fighting chocolate taught me about control, addiction, systems, identity and freedom

A few days ago, I bought two tiny bars of Swedish chocolate. That sentence is entirely unremarkable. Except that for me, it wasn't. For much of my life, chocolate was never just chocolate. It was pleasure, comfort, reward and emotional regulation. Later, it became something I understood as an addiction - something I believed I could never safely eat in moderation. For years, I thought food freedom meant never eating it again. This time, I ate 30 grams. And then I stopped. I didn't feel as though I'd failed. I didn't spend the rest of the day fighting the urge to buy more. I didn't wake the next morning thinking about chocolate. I didn't need to launch a rescue operation to get myself "back on track". I simply carried on.

The remarkable thing wasn't that I stopped at 30 grams. It was that nothing psychologically significant happened afterwards. And that is when I realised how profoundly my understanding of food freedom had changed. Today, food freedom means being able to eat almost anything while being capable of choosing whether I will. My decisions are now made primarily in the context of my health, strength and fitness goals rather than psychological or biological compulsion. I no longer consider myself a sugar addict. I consider myself an ex-chocolate addict. It has taken me more than a decade to be able to say that. And I didn't arrive here because I finally developed enough willpower, found the perfect diet, discovered the ultimate psychological hack or learned to moderate through sheer discipline. I arrived here through layers of understanding.

CONTROL -> UNDERSTANDING -> IDENTITY -> FREEDOM

But these weren't four diets or four neatly separated periods of my life. They were four different ways of understanding the problem. And perhaps the most important thing I learned was this: Freedom is not necessarily the absence of boundaries. It is the absence of battle. To explain why, I need to go back.

PART I - CONTROL

When the problem doesn't look like a problem

I loved sweet things for as long as I can remember. My mother told me that when I was only three or four, I would climb into the top cupboard in my bedroom, or camp under my bed, with a tin of Actavite - a sweet chocolate drink powder - and spoon it straight from the tin. At around nine, I remember lying under Mum's bed where she kept bags of sweets and chocolates "hidden". I would take two or three from each bag, hoping she wouldn't notice. Around the same age, I sometimes took money from her purse and bought three or four lemon gelati at school. As a teenager, I bought glucose tablets supposedly for energy during sport. Instead of taking one or two, I could eat the packet. None of this seemed particularly important. I was skinny and athletic. There was no visible consequence, so there appeared to be no problem.

That distinction matters. We often recognise problematic eating only when it changes our body. But behaviour can exist long before its consequences become visible. As I grew older, sweet food acquired another function. As a shy young student teacher, I would sometimes stop at the shops on the way to school and eat two or three chocolate bars before walking into the classroom. Chocolate gave me courage. Later it gave me comfort. And still later, it became my profession.

When moderation becomes the problem

By my early thirties, I had begun gaining some excess weight and tried to reduce my chocolate intake. My partner at the time was a psychologist. He could moderate chocolate, so quite reasonably he thought I could learn to do the same. He tried an elegant strategy: if I was going to eat chocolate, eat exquisite chocolate. Surely a small amount of something wonderful would be more satisfying than large amounts of ordinary chocolate. Unfortunately, he introduced me to Belgian chocolate. It was wonderful. I did not eat less. We marked chocolate-free days on a calendar and tried to create a run of successful days. We ate chocolate together so it would become social rather than something I largely consumed shamefully in private. Nothing worked. Moderation meant repeated decisions.

Could I have some today?

Had I been "good" yesterday?

How much was enough?

Should I stop now?

Abstinence hadn't yet occurred to me as a strategy, so every encounter with chocolate required negotiation. Ironically, being introduced to beautiful chocolate eventually led me to learn to make it myself. I attended a chocolate-making masterclass in Belgium, visited chocolatiers across Europe and began making chocolates for friends, family and university colleagues. Eventually, chocolate became my business. It was pleasure, craft, creativity, generosity and livelihood. Then my partner died. I left academia, fell into deep grief and poured myself into my chocolate business. I renovated my home and built a purpose-designed chocolate kitchen separated from my living area by a single door. On the other side of that door were hundreds of kilograms of exquisite Belgian chocolate. I was teaching chocolate-making classes, supplying guests at my Bed and Breakfast with homemade chocolate and sourdough bread, and creating things people loved. It was creative and joyful.

I was also, quite literally, eating the profits. Most nights I could sit on the couch with hundreds of grams of my own chocolate, usually the sweetest varieties with sugar-coated nuts or praline fillings. My weight climbed. My depression deepened. My energy disappeared. And eventually I began wondering whether food might be part of the problem.

The first great revelation: remove the substance

One day, while tempering chocolate on the marble bench in my kitchen, I heard Australian writer Sarah Wilson being interviewed on the radio about quitting sugar. As soon as I had the chocolate safely back in the melting tank, I went to my office and downloaded *I Quit Sugar*. I read it immediately. Through Wilson I encountered David Gillespie's *Sweet Poison*. That night, sitting on my couch, I remember thinking that I had done grief well. Eight years was enough. Maybe sugar was the problem. So I made myself a deal.

Thirty days.

I would quit sugar for 30 days.

Not forever.

That would have been absurd. I loved chocolate. I was a chocolatier. It was my livelihood. Within two or three days, however, my energy skyrocketed. I felt fantastic. The weight began falling and, in my memory, continued down almost in a straight line for the next 90 days. I eventually lost around 15 kilograms.

And I remember thinking:

Crap. Now what do I do?

The experiment was supposed to end. Instead, my experience seemed to provide overwhelming confirmation of the theory. I removed sugar. I felt better. My depression lifted. My weight dropped. My energy returned. What more convincing evidence could I have wanted? This was my first important lesson in control: Sometimes removing something really does make life easier. That lesson matters because restriction is often discussed as though it is inherently oppressive. My experience was the opposite. A boundary can reduce cognitive load. A clear "no" can be psychologically easier than a hundred daily decisions about "how much?" Abstinence can, at least for a time, feel remarkably like freedom.

When the substance changes but the behaviour survives

There was one problem. I was still a chocolatier. And according to the model I understood then, fructose was the villain. So I developed fructose-free chocolate. I experimented with alternative sweeteners until I created a reasonably good couverture sweetened largely with glucose. Yes, glucose. At the time, it made perfect sense. I developed fructose-free nut bark and pralines, created a niche market for them - and started eating them myself. Soon I was eating substantial quantities again. Weight returned. So did the depression. And here, looking backwards, is one of the most important principles in my entire story: the substance had changed, but the behaviour had found another route. At the time, however, I didn't interpret it that way. I concluded that I hadn't yet identified the core problem. So I went deeper.

PART II - THE ESCALATION OF CONTROL

From sugar to carbohydrate

Through Professor Tim Noakes and the *Real Meal Revolution*, I encountered a broader low-carbohydrate model. Perhaps fructose wasn't the whole problem. Perhaps carbohydrate was. I went keto. Again, the results felt compelling. I became fascinated by the science, completed a keto coaching course simply because I wanted to understand more, and worked behind the scenes with keto groups. As always, I didn't dabble. I rarely do. I go all in. Soon after going keto, I joined Karen Thomson's *Sugar Free Revolution* and encountered another idea that transformed how I understood my history:

Addiction.

Suddenly all those failed attempts at moderation made sense. Perhaps I hadn't failed to learn moderation. Perhaps moderation had been the wrong intervention. The addiction model did not make me feel defective. It did the opposite.

It shifted the explanation from ‘I am weak’ to ‘This substance has a powerful effect on me’. And abstinence was astonishingly comfortable. Moderation had been drip torture - negotiation, permission, resistance and repeated decisions. None was easier than some.

I began saying, with some pride:

I don't do moderation.

And that statement contained truth beyond food. I tend to go all in. Chocolate. Academia. Business. Writing. Sport. If something captures me, half measures aren't generally my style. For a time, addiction and abstinence fitted beautifully into that identity.

Karen's programme also included a daily gratitude practice: five things we were grateful for in our lives and five things we were grateful for about ourselves. The first five were manageable. The second five stopped me completely. For at least the first month, I could not think of one. This was not because I had done nothing with my life. By then I had several higher degrees, including a doctorate; I had served as an education officer in the military, taught in schools and higher education, interpreted for the Deaf, lectured and researched in academia and built businesses. Intellectually, I knew I was accomplished. Yet when I sat down each day and tried to identify something in myself for which I felt gratitude, I came up blank.

I remember that now as one of the most confronting discoveries of that period. My struggle with food was occurring inside a much larger relationship - not simply my relationship with chocolate, but my relationship with myself. I finally managed to identify some things about myself, in addition to those about my life in general, for which I was truly grateful and have continued the practice of written gratitudes on and off since then. Diets and theories changed. That practice remained.

The escalation trap

But gradually keto changed. Alternative sweeteners returned. Stevia. Erythritol. Xylitol. Nut flours. Keto cookies. I had removed sugar and then reconstructed the sensory world I had supposedly left behind. Eventually I recognised that my diet had become what the keto community called "dirty keto". Once again, I didn't conclude that control itself might have limitations. I concluded that I needed better control. This pattern repeated itself for years. Sugar wasn't enough, so remove fructose. Fructose wasn't

enough, so restrict carbohydrate. Keto wasn't enough, so remove sweeteners. Then remove plants. Then tighten carnivore. Try the Lion Diet. Fast. Fast longer. Track ketones. Change the fat-to-protein ratio. Add organ meats. Remove salt. Put salt back. Watch. Measure. Test. Repeat. This is what I now think of as the escalation of control. When a strategy partly works, but doesn't completely solve the problem, it is very easy to think you need to go harder, and assume that the answer is simply a purer, stricter or more sophisticated version of the same strategy. Sometimes that is appropriate. Sometimes it simply moves the goalposts.

Carnivore and the value of simplicity

By 2018, I was hearing carnivore advocates interviewed on keto podcasts. At the same time, I had several health concerns. I had been diagnosed with osteopenia, had lifelong seasonal allergies and had experienced a frightening anaphylactic reaction around paddock grass being cut soon after I moved onto my farm. I was also experiencing persistent skin itching. I heard accounts of people experiencing improvements in various health conditions on carnivore. So I did what I do. I went all in. For four months I ate meat, fish, poultry and eggs. No vegetables. No sweeteners. Nothing else. Again, my experience was striking. My skin improved rapidly. My hay fever disappeared. My mood improved, along with many of the minor health complaints I had been tracking. And carnivore gave me something else I valued enormously: simplicity.

Few foods. Few decisions. Little negotiation. This is another reason I don't regret the more restrictive stages of my journey. They taught me that reducing choice can sometimes be enormously useful. But simplicity and freedom are not necessarily the same thing. I didn't understand that distinction yet.

The three-day rule

My plan was eventually to reintroduce low-carbohydrate foods one at a time. In January 2019, I began. Cauliflower. Sweet potato. Then berries. Within days, I was face down in chocolate again. So began another long period of carnivore experimentation. At one stage I joked that I was 90% carnivore and 10% chocolate. Emotional eating remained. Whenever I felt overwhelmed, distressed or even socially uncomfortable, chocolate could still come back. I developed a harm-minimisation rule.

Three days.

If I returned to chocolate, I gave myself three days to pull out. I believed that beyond that point I risked disappearing into the behaviour for months or years. And gradually something changed. The episodes became shorter. Then less frequent. Every few weeks became every month. Every month became every few months. Eventually I could eat chocolate at one meal and return to carnivore at the next. People in the carnivore communities told me they found this inspiring. I couldn't understand why. I saw the chocolate as evidence that I was still failing. They saw something different.

There was another uncomfortable layer to this. I was heavily involved in carnivore and sugar-addiction communities, and people increasingly saw me as someone who had this figured out. Privately, I could still return to chocolate every few weeks or months. I was honest about those episodes when they happened, but I sometimes felt disingenuous - as though the public identity had moved ahead of the private behaviour. That gap created its own kind of shame. Looking back, it taught me something important: when identity gets ahead of behaviour, maintaining the identity can itself become another source of pressure. The eventual transformation would have to bring the two back together.

I kept coming back.

Looking back, both interpretations contained truth. My strategy was working. I had developed increasingly effective harm minimisation. But psychologically, I was still at war. Food freedom still meant finally winning the fight.

PART III - UNDERSTANDING

What if the fight itself isn't the destination?

Years later, I became involved in several carnivore groups that offered support for sugar addiction. We discussed strategies, encouraged one another and talked openly about the challenges of staying sugar-free. In one of those groups, however, there was a message I found much harder to accept: once an addict, always an addict. Something in me rebelled. I accepted that I was addicted to chocolate. But always? No way.

I remember telling the coach who said those words, half joking but with absolute conviction: I'm going to prove you wrong. I had no idea how. But something important had shifted. For the first time, I wasn't merely trying to change my eating. I was challenging the permanence of the explanation. There is an important distinction here. A model can be useful without being a life sentence. The addiction model had given me enormous relief. It explained why moderation had repeatedly failed and gave me a strategy - abstinence - that was far easier. I don't regret adopting it. The addiction cost me. The model did not. The model helped me until I was ready to move beyond it.

The question I asked AI

By 2024, I was still predominantly carnivore, but chocolate had not disappeared completely. During a difficult period in a relationship, the old behaviour intensified. While travelling in the US, I found myself, yet again, buying chocolate and secretly eating it to soothe myself. What concerned me most was the sense that the old behaviour was escalating. On the flight home, despite intending not to, I ate more. Once home, I ate sweets I had supposedly bought as gifts. It was a familiar pattern in a new setting.

As a shy student teacher, chocolate had changed how I felt before entering a classroom. During grief, it had comforted me. Now, unhappy in a relationship, I was again using it to regulate my emotions. Around this time I had begun experimenting with AI and I asked ChatGPT this question: “How does a woman in her 60s, strongly addicted to sugar and chocolate, break that addiction?” I don't remember the answer as being especially useful. Go for a walk. Ring a friend. Breathe. Distract yourself. I had heard versions of these strategies before. I had tried the hacks. But the question itself is fascinating to me now. I wasn't asking: Am I addicted? I was stating: I am addicted. Tell me how to beat it. Even after everything I had learned, I was still conceptualising success as victory over an opponent.

What happened next was not another hack. It was a completely different framework.

From prohibition to blueprint

I had encountered Anthony Phaësse and *LeanSeven* several months earlier. I had experimented with his approach but without real consistency. After returning home, I made a decision. For six months I would stop tinkering and follow the programme properly. Every day. I committed to a handful of repeatable actions: sufficient protein, a step target, an eating window and regular resistance training. Track. Walk. Train. Repeat. This may sound less sophisticated than the nutritional experimentation I had been doing for years. In retrospect, that was its power.

For more than a decade, my nutritional journey had been organised largely around one question: What should I **remove**? *LeanSeven* gave me a different question: What do I need to repeatedly **do**?

That is a profound difference. One is organised around avoidance. The other is organised around construction. I finally had a blueprint.

Systems beat constant decision-making

There was another shift. I stopped constantly evaluating whether today's result proved that my latest strategy was working. I had spent years moving the goalposts. Change something. Watch the scale. Change something else. Tighten the diet. Fast. Alter the macros. Try another protocol. Now I committed to the daily actions and allowed the outcome to take however long it took. Three weeks. Three months. Three years. The timeline stopped being the measure of success. Doing the action became the win. That sounds almost trivial. It wasn't. Because a system reduces the number of decisions that need to be made emotionally. You don't need to feel motivated to follow something that has simply become what you do. And for someone who had spent decades negotiating with food, fewer negotiations mattered.

Tracking as freedom

One idea in particular reorganised my understanding of food. Anthony expressed it roughly like this: Food quality affects health. Food quantity affects body composition. For years I had treated particular foods as though they possessed an almost unique power over my body. Now I had a larger framework. Food still mattered. Nutrient density mattered. Protein mattered. My predominantly low-carbohydrate way of eating mattered to me because of how I felt eating that way. But body composition was not simply a story about "good" and "bad" foods. Energy intake mattered too. And this gave me something unexpected: permission.

If I chose to eat chocolate or another high-carbohydrate food, I could account for it. It wasn't nutritionally equivalent to a high-protein meal. It might not support my health goals as well. But eating it didn't mean the day was ruined. And this is where another apparently restrictive behaviour became, for me, liberating: tracking.

Tracking replaced emotion with information. If I ate more than intended, I knew how much. It was data. I could look at the week. I could rebalance if appropriate. There was no mysterious catastrophe requiring punishment, fasting or a brand-new diet on Monday. Tomorrow was simply tomorrow. That broke an extraordinarily powerful cycle:

Deviation -> failure -> shame -> abandonment -> restart.

Tracking allowed another possibility:

Deviation -> information -> adjustment -> continuation.

That is not merely a nutrition strategy. It is a psychological one.

The question changed from “Can I eat this?” to “Is this how I want to spend these calories?” Overwhelmingly, the answer became no. Not because chocolate was forbidden. Because I would rather use those calories on foods that satisfy me, provide protein and nutrients, support my training and help build the body I want to live in. The same "no" that once represented restriction now represented choice.

PART IV - IDENTITY

The day I noticed the silence

A couple of months into consistently following these principles, I was sitting in the window seat in my kitchen. Nothing dramatic happened. I simply noticed something. I hadn't thought about sugar or chocolate for days. No craving. No bargaining. No resistance. No head noise. For years, even during long periods when I wasn't eating chocolate, there had been mental activity around it. Wanting it. Rejecting it. Considering it. Eating something else to suppress the desire. Reminding myself why I couldn't have it. Fighting. Now there was silence.

And this distinction is crucial. I wasn't successfully resisting chocolate. I wasn't **thinking about** resisting chocolate. The internal war had simply gone quiet. That was when I began to understand that food freedom might not be measured by how successfully I controlled food. It might be measured by how little psychological space food required.

Identity can liberate - and identity can imprison

Another change had begun before *LeanSeven*. I had spent considerable time thinking about the person I wanted to be. Joyful. Content. Energetic. I started playing a lot of pickleball and I began thinking of myself as a senior athlete before I necessarily looked like my mental image of one. Initially it was aspirational. Then I began doing the behaviours. Train. Walk. Eat to support the body. Recover. Repeat. *LeanSeven* gave me the practical blueprint I had previously lacked. And eventually the direction of causality seemed to reverse. I was no longer doing athlete-like things because I wanted to become an athlete. I was doing them because that was simply who I had become. This helped me understand something else about identity.

For years, sugar addict had been a useful identity. But an identity that liberates us at one stage can constrain us at another. If I must always be an addict, then every desire for chocolate becomes evidence that the identity remains true. Every lapse confirms it. And every successful abstinent day can paradoxically reinforce it too: See? I am managing my addiction successfully. There is no obvious exit. I had already begun resisting that idea when I said I would prove that coach wrong. But I didn't escape the identity by arguing with it. I built another life until the old identity no longer described the person living it. Sugar addict simply stopped fitting.

That distinction matters because identity was not a magic phrase I repeated until it became true. Calling myself a senior athlete gave me a direction, but the identity became credible only as behaviour accumulated beneath it. Each walk, training session, protein-focused meal and ordinary day of following the plan supplied another piece of evidence. The behaviour changed first; eventually I looked up and realised the identity no longer felt aspirational. It described me. And importantly, it replaced a harsher one: “I’m weak and lack self-control”.

PART V - FREEDOM

Freedom changes meaning

This is why I don't dismiss the earlier stages of my journey. At one stage, food freedom genuinely meant: I don't eat chocolate. That boundary gave me relief.

Later, freedom meant: I know what triggers me and I can get myself back quickly. That was progress too.

Then it became: I understand how food fits within a larger system.

And finally:

I can choose.

This is not an argument that everyone should learn to moderate every food. Nor is it an argument against abstinence. For some people, with some foods, at some stages of life, abstinence may be the simplest and most peaceful strategy available. I know. I lived it. The mistake would be assuming that today's useful strategy must become tomorrow's permanent identity.

Freedom isn't dietary perfection

I still use harm minimisation. I still make compromises. I predominantly choose foods that support my health and performance. Some things I eat contain alternative sweeteners. Would an entirely unsweetened diet theoretically be "cleaner"? Perhaps. But I am no longer pursuing dietary purity. I am pursuing a sustainable life. That life contains health, strength, protein, energy balance, movement, resistance training, enjoyment, consistency and time. Food fits inside that framework. The framework no longer revolves around food. And that is why tasting Swedish chocolate carried so little psychological weight. There was no battle. Nothing to prove. Nothing to recover from.

That is a very different question from the one that governed so much of my earlier journey. Dietary purity asks: "Is this food allowed?" A sustainable system asks: "What effect does this choice have within the life I am trying to build?" The first invites endless rule refinement. The second requires context, trade-offs and responsibility. For me, that shift has made harm minimisation compatible with progress rather than evidence of failure.

I ate it.

Tracked it.

Adjusted my intake.

Carried on.

Two experiments

I have written this primarily for the person who is still in the middle of the fight. The person who already knows what to do. You may have removed sugar. Gone low carb. Gone keto. Gone carnivore. Given up trigger foods. Read the books. Listened to the podcasts. Tried the hacks. And perhaps all of those things have helped. But the head noise remains. If that's you, I am not going to tell you that everything you've done is wrong. My experience suggests something much more hopeful. Perhaps it got you this far. Perhaps the next stage is not another stricter rule but a larger framework.

But there is another reader I want to challenge. The person thinking: This isn't about me. I don't eat much sugar. Try an experiment. For seven days, track everything that goes into your mouth. Everything. Then use a nutrition app, analysis tool or AI to calculate your calories and macronutrients. Don't look only for teaspoons of table sugar. Look at the total dietary pattern: drinks, cereals, bread, pasta, rice, potatoes, snack foods, sauces, fruit, desserts and everything else. Many digestible carbohydrates are ultimately broken down into simple sugars including glucose, although different carbohydrate-containing foods differ substantially in their effects on blood glucose, satiety, nutrient value and health. The purpose isn't to prove that all carbohydrate is equivalent. It is to replace assumption with information. And if you already know you eat plenty of sweet food but are certain it has no hold over you, try another experiment. Don't eat those foods for seven days. Then observe yourself. Not as a diagnosis. Not as a moral test. As data.

Do you think about them? Bargain with yourself? Find substitutes? Count down until the experiment ends? Or is it effortless? You may discover that there is no problem whatsoever. Or you may discover that your relationship with food is more interesting than you thought.

THE LARGER LESSON

I spent more than a decade trying to solve what I thought was a chocolate problem. Along the way I learned about sugar, carbohydrate, keto, carnivore, abstinence, fasting, protein, energy balance, tracking, resistance training, habits, systems and identity. Some of my earlier explanations were incomplete. That doesn't make them useless. Sarah Wilson and David Gillespie gave me a framework when I desperately needed one. Karen Thomson gave me an addiction model that made sense of my failed attempts at moderation. Tim Noakes and the low-carbohydrate community expanded my understanding of nutrition. Keto taught me. Carnivore taught me. The communities around them taught me. Every return to chocolate taught me something too. And Anthony Phaësse and *LeanSeven* eventually gave me the blueprint that allowed those lessons to become part of a sustainable system. But underneath all of those influences was something else.

Persistence.

I kept returning. Kept experimenting. Kept learning. Kept changing. And perhaps that is why I no longer see my earlier attempts as failures. I wasn't going around in circles. I was moving through layers. Control was not the enemy of freedom. It was one stage on the way to it. Abstinence wasn't a mistake. It gave me peace when moderation couldn't. The addiction identity wasn't a mistake either. It gave me an explanation that was kinder and more useful than believing I was weak. But eventually I needed a bigger explanation. And then a bigger identity. Until finally I didn't need the fight at all.

FINDING FOOD FREEDOM

So what does food freedom mean to me now? It does not mean eating whatever I want whenever I want it. It means having the capacity to eat almost anything while retaining the ability to choose whether I will. It means making that choice according to the life and body I am building rather than an internal compulsion. It means knowing that one deviation doesn't constitute failure. It means having a system robust enough to accommodate real life. It means understanding that the strategy that saved you at one stage doesn't necessarily have to define you forever. And it means recognising that sometimes the greatest evidence of transformation is not what you do. It is what you no longer have to think about doing. Those little bars of Swedish chocolate weren't a victory because I ate chocolate. Nor because I successfully stopped at 30 grams.

If stopping at 30 grams had required a heroic internal battle, chocolate would still have been running the show. The victory was that it really didn't matter. I ate some. I enjoyed it. And then I got on with my life. For decades, I had been trying to find freedom from chocolate. Eventually I discovered something better. Freedom around food. And perhaps that's the strangest thing about finally finding food freedom: The food itself becomes the least interesting part of the story.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This journey is mine, but I did not make it alone. Since deciding more than a decade ago to give up sugar for 30 days, countless teachers, authors, researchers, coaches, communities, friends and fellow travellers have contributed ideas, frameworks and challenges that moved my understanding forward. Some approaches served me for years. Some I eventually modified or left behind. None needs to have been the final answer to have contributed something valuable. Each of these people and frameworks contributed something important, helping me understand myself, challenge old beliefs and keep moving forward.

The most profound transformation, however, has occurred during this past year with *LeanSeven*, where Anthony Phaësse's framework finally gave me something I had spent years searching for: a sustainable blueprint for health, nutrition, strength and body composition that I could actually live. Perhaps it has given me another kind of freedom too: no longer needing to disown the paths that brought me here simply because I eventually travelled beyond them.

And as I look back over this journey, there is one more person I now know how to acknowledge – and that's me. I think about the woman in Karen Thomson's programme who could list dozens of things in her life that she was grateful for but could not find one thing in herself worthy of gratitude. I can now. I am profoundly grateful for the woman who kept coming back; who tried again after every relapse; who questioned ideas that no longer fitted; who was willing to be wrong, learn something new and begin again. Other people gave me maps, knowledge, support and eventually a blueprint. But I walked every kilometre. Being able to say that without embarrassment may be part of the identity shift too.