

SKINNY BITCH

A no-nonsense guide for savvy girls who want to stop eating crap and start looking fabulous!

by Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin (Running Press, 2005)

A Book Review by Melanie Reese Senn

Since most people skim the book, with good reason, I thought I'd summarize the main points for newcomers:

No smoking: "Cigarettes are for losers. They are so 1989 and totally uncool" (11).

No alcohol: "Habitual drinking equals fat-pig syndrome" (12). They do, however, make an exception for organic red wine in limited quantities: "No, you should not drink a bottle by yourself everyday" (13).

No soda, diet or otherwise, which they refer to as "liquid Satan" (13). This section includes a diatribe against aspartame: "Perhaps you have a lumpy ass because you are preserving your fat cells with diet soda" (14).

No caffeine: "Coffee is for pussies" (15). "P.S. It also makes your breath smell like ass" (16). Drink herb tea instead.

No junk food: "Candy bars, potato chips, and ice cream taste like heaven, of course. But they will pitch a tent on your hips and camp out all year" (17). And when you see the words "fat-free" or "low-fat" posted on a snack, you should think "chemical shit storm" (18). However, a section at the back lists acceptable wholesome vegan snacks.

No over-the-counter meds for colds or cramps. "Suck it up," they write (19).

No white flour, white pasta, or white rice. It's okay to eat carbs in the form of whole grains, brown rice, fruits, and vegetables.

No sugar—"Sugar is like crack" (27), and no high-fructose corn syrup. Good substitutes include evaporated cane juice, brown rice syrup, Turbinado sugar, maple syrup, and molasses. And don't eat anything with aspartame, they remind you, just in

case you “had your head up your ass” when they mentioned it earlier (32). This includes anything sweetened with Equal or NutraSweet.

No meat. No seafood. Are you a “gluttonous pig who wants to believe you can eat cheeseburgers all day and lose weight”? (39). This comes from Chapter 4, “The Dead, Rotting, Decomposing Flesh Diet,” a refutation of Atkins.

No dairy. “The perfect thing to eat if you want to be sick and have a diseased body” (59).

Oh, and work out: “You need to exercise, you lazy shit” (20). But, please, don’t over-do it! “You want to be a *Skinny Bitch*, not a scrawny bitch” (20).

Welcome to your new, skinny life! A cruelty-free, guilt-free way to eat and live—one that’s good for the planet, for animals, and for your fat ass.

You know, something doesn’t feel right about this.

“Are you sick and tired of being fat?” the *Skinny Bitch* authors, Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin, ask in the introduction. “Good. If you can’t take one more day of self-loathing, you’re ready to get skinny....It’s time to prance around in a thong like you rule the world” (10).

When I was about 19 and reading *Fit for Life*, *Diet for a Small Planet*, and *Nature’s End*—the 1980’s versions of *Fast Food Nation*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and *The Road*—I conceived my own list of rules, nearly identical to Freedman and Barnouin’s. For two miserable years I tried to adhere to it and tried to be vegan, convinced that it would be better for me, better for the animals, and certainly better for the environment. At barbeques, I’d stand on a box made of soap and exclaim, “Do you know what you’re doing? It takes 16 pounds of grains to produce one pound of meat!” Then I’d scurry off into a corner and gnaw on corn on the cob (no butter, of course). I was a lot of fun.

I was cured by moving to Argentina, the meat capital of the world. Now, you want skinny bitches? You’re talking an entire nation of skinny people subsisting on grass-fed beef and yerba mate. I lived there two years, my skinniest, and yet when I would venture into a clothing boutique, the clerks (skinny!) would scoff in Spanish and explain they didn’t carry my size. I was a size 6 then. My nickname was “Gorda.” I’ll never forget having dinner with a 6-year-old who told me, “*Gorda, no comes tanto pan. Te vas a engordar mas.*” (Fat girl, don’t eat so much bread. You’re going to get even fatter.)

The authors assure us of the following: Healthy = skinny. Unhealthy = fat.

This is a bold-faced lie. I know because of a trip I took to a little island in southern Thailand. A friend who joined us invited his supermodel girlfriend, who was 5’10 and 105 pounds. Her diet consisted of Diet Coke and Marlboro Lights. Meanwhile, I was a waddling 28 weeks pregnant, eating 4 servings of Pad Thai every day. Healthy = skinny? My ass.

Still, the book is hot. *Skinny Bitch* has spent more than 84 weeks on the *New York Times* Non-Fiction Advice Best Seller list, and their empire has expanded to include *Skinny Bitch in the Kitchen: Kick-Ass Recipes for Hungry Girls Who Want to Stop Cooking*

Crap (and Start Looking Hot!) and *Skinny Bitchin': A "Get Off Your Ass" Journal to Help You Change Your Life, Achieve Your Goals, and Rock Your World!*. There's even the unfortunate *Skinny Bitch Bun in the Oven: A Gutsy Guide to Becoming One Hot (and Healthy) Mother!* as well as a fitness DVD: *Skinny Bitch Fitness: Boot Camp*. They obviously know their audience (though I'm afraid to contemplate what that says about us). Should I worry that the *Skinny Bitch* phenomena will only end up producing even more narcissism and neuroses? Perhaps not. A neighbor, a young woman of 20, said she read the book and was so thoroughly disgusted and saddened by the graphic descriptions of factory farms and slaughter that she became a vegetarian—for two months.

She's like me; when she smells meat grilling, she thinks, Mmmmmm. Some people don't. Like my best friend, who is, well, a skinny bitch. She's been a vegetarian for centuries and is more or less a vegan, except when she eats the occasional wheel of brie. She's content with a lunch of steamed kale followed by a vegan chocolate chip cookie. Listen, I have nothing against vegetarians; they may truly hold the higher ground. And even as I was reading *Skinny Bitch*, I admit that I started thinking about my list again (even though I haven't had a day of self-loathing since I destroyed it nearly two decades ago). I thought, "Yeah! I'll DO this. I'll go vegan for a month and give up all my 'gross vices.' It'll feel good—it's time to cleanse and become more pure." But instead I started preparing Jambalaya (with chicken, shrimp, sausage *and* white rice!) Then I ate half of it, washing it down with some evil red wine. Later I realized I'm made a serving for 8. Oh well. Maybe I should write a book called "Plump and Happy."

Naaah. It would never sell. ☹

Freedman, Rory, and Kim Barnouin. *Skinny Bitch*. Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005.