



The Dress of Christmas **YET TO COME**

by **OH member Melinda Richardson**

As a child, I watched the movie adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. It's the story of an old miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, who is visited by three spirits, Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come. They take him on a journey through his past, present and future and show him how his experiences have shaped and continue to shape his ideas.

This Christmas, I have some reflections on my own Christmases—past, present and future. I hope my story will give you hope that regardless of where you are in life, situations can change. Where darkness now dwells, the glimmer of a brighter tomorrow can shine through.

Christmas Past

My church held a formal Christmas party each year. One Christmas in the '90s, my best friend's mother made her a long red evening gown complete with a slit up the back, in a tiny size four. She wore her hair up with ringlets surrounding her face, and as always, she was radiant. I too wore a red dress that year; but it looked very different. I was spiraling upward and outward in a size 20/22, forced to choose clothes that fit me rather than helping me look and feel gorgeous. Because I was obese, I did not have many tricks with my wardrobe to make me appear thinner. That red granny dress to this day represents my life at its worst—wanting something better for myself, yet settling for what I had to.

When I started my weight loss journey, I wore a size 22-24. Two months after gastric

bypass, at Christmas, I was down to a size 18-20. My parents and I went shopping and found a beautiful red dress with a silver rhinestone-studded circle on the bodice. I looked everywhere for a larger size, but all the dresses in that style were gone. Only the one on the mannequin remained. Over my protests, my parents insisted on buying the dress. On Christmas day, they presented me with a white garment box in front of the entire family—my niece, nephews and siblings and their spouses. My mother announced that this was a special present, and though I would not be able to use it immediately, she fully anticipated me using it by Christmas of the next year.

When I pulled the red dress out of the box, my nephew said, "She'll never be able to wear that!" It didn't upset me: I wanted to shout, "It's true! I will never be able to wear this!" I did not express my doubts to anyone. I just continued the journey, one day at a time, praying, hoping and wishing to meet my goals. The red dress represented something I had always wanted. It became the ultimate vision of a goal fulfilled. Every month, I tried it on (thankfully the material was stretchy!).

In August 2007, I tried on the red dress before my plastic surgery procedure. All I could see was my large hanging pannu area; it was the only thing that prevented me from wearing my beautiful red dress. A month after plastic surgery, I tried the dress on again, but was too swollen to see any different results. I resolved in my mind that I would never be able to wear the red dress comfortably. I stuffed it to the farthest corner in the back of the closet.

Christmas Present

As I was hanging up clothes one day in December, I happened upon the dress—just in time for Christmas. I don't believe in coincidence; that red dress was neatly tucked away for a time when I needed it the most. I pulled it from the hanger and pondered whether to try it on again ... would it make me feel even more discouraged, or would it boost my spirits if it actually fit?

I pulled the dress over my head and stepped in front of the mirror. Oh my! The dress hung straight down as it was designed to do. I almost cried. Then I walked into the living room to show my boyfriend. He was unaware of the red dress's symbolism in my life and weight loss journey. I asked, "What do you think about this dress?" He said, "It's almost too big!" I was certain, however, that with a few final touches, it would fit just perfectly.

On Christmas morning, one year to the day after receiving the red dress, I took special care in getting ready for our family get-together. I had used to put on jeans and T-shirts or sweatshirts for Christmas gatherings, but this year would be different! I spent over an hour getting ready, taking special care with my hair and makeup. Then the moment I had so long anticipated: I slipped the red dress over my head, and there she was in the mirror—the little version of me that I'd always wanted to be.

I was the first to arrive at my parents' house. Although it was not cold outside, I wore a long winter coat to hide my appearance until the grand unveiling. My parents sat down on the sofa and my boyfriend stood nearby to capture their reactions with his camera. When I took the coat off, both of my parents just stared in shock. Then my mother tearfully hugged me and said, "That's exactly how I envisioned you to look when I bought the dress!" This was a Christmas filled with happy memories and a sense of accomplishment.

For Every Christmas Yet to Come

I have no idea of the future in store for me. However, I believe that it will be wonderful. I leave this thought with you today. All of us have or will have a red dress story: maybe it's the first time we move out of the plus size section to the regular women's sizes, or purchase a size 14 instead of a 24, or leave double-digit sizes for single-digit sizes—so many stories can be told by those on this weight loss journey.

I want to encourage you: don't give up! Sometimes it's hard—we hit stalls and plateaus, become frustrated when results slow down, think the weight loss journey

is at its end—but then suddenly the scales start to move once again.

There will always be negative people who offer remarks such as "I know someone who gained all their weight back," "You shouldn't have ever had that surgery," and the most famous "You took the easy way out." My nephew said that I would never fit into my beautiful red dress, which only proves the value of two lessons: don't give up and never say never. Keep reaching for your goals!

Many people take life for granted, but my life has just begun.

Visit Melinda's OH profile at www.ObesityHelp.com/member/melsreturn or learn more about her at www.RecoveringFatty.com.

