



**TAKING UP SPACE**  
**How Eating Well & Exercising Regularly**  
**Changed My Life**  
by  
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with Carl Wilkerson, M.B.A.  
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## Can We Win the War on Obesity?

*A medical sociologist who dieted herself into disability calls for victory in the “war on obesity” by teaching people how to be healthy and fat.*

PHOENIX, AZ—In 1996, C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, issued a declaration of “War on Obesity,” calling on physicians to do more to treat America’s growing waistline.

Since Koop’s declaration, a number of medications have been fast tracked onto the market, leading to recalls, deaths, disabilities and lawsuits. The number of weight loss surgeries has grown astronomically, many ending with death and disabilities and many not resulting in much weight loss. There has been an explosion of over-the-counter potions that have little or no positive effect on weight and often a negative effect on health. The business of losing weight has exploded into a multi-billion-dollar industry.

**And since Koop’s declaration of a “war on obesity,” Americans have grown fatter.**

Pattie Thomas, Ph.D. is a medical sociologist who has been fat most of her life. In the past eight years, she has also had to deal with being disabled. “I believe I essentially dieted myself into disability,” she says, noting that she was until five years ago the quintessential weight-cycler—one who repeatedly loses weight only to regain it.

In her sociological memoir *Taking Up Space: How Eating Well & Exercising Regularly Changed My Life* (Pearlson Press, 2005), Thomas, with the help of her co-author and husband, Carl Wilkerson, uses her own experiences as a fat woman as a case study of the havoc the war on obesity has raised on her life and well-being.

“The problem with the war mentality is that someone becomes the enemy,” Thomas explains. “Since fat is a part of a human body, **waging a war on fat inevitably leads to waging a war on *the* fat.**”

Drawing upon sociological, cultural and political understandings of fatness, health, beauty and stigma, Thomas provides what author Kathleen LeBesco (*Revolting Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*) calls “a road map through the minefield of the ‘war on obesity.’”

**Can we win the war on obesity? Thomas suggests that indeed we can.** But not by becoming a svelte “after” picture, as depicted in so many weight-loss ads. Instead, she advocates giving up the battle of the bulge altogether, and instead **learning how to be a healthy fat person.**

“Ending the ‘war on obesity’ is conceptually simple,” Thomas writes. “Just stop fighting it. Make ‘obesity’ an antiquated ‘disease’ that gets left in the history books like ‘dropsy’ and ‘neurasthenia.’ Ending the war on obesity is not easy, however. It requires nothing less than rethinking our culture’s view of bodies, health, and beauty.