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TROPICAL LIFE, 10E

## ADDICTED TO CANDY

HOW A S. FLORIDA  
NATIVE GAVE UP  
SUGAR AND GOT HER  
GROOVE BACK



SPORTS, 10D

## ALL-COUNTY

SCHOOLS

## Strict uniform rules back for debate

■ The Broward school district has some of the strictest school uniform rules around - and now the School Board may reconsider.

BY NIRVI SHAH  
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For principal Mark Kaplan, there is something comforting about the sea of yellow, white and navy shirts flowing through the halls at Escob

TECHNOLOGY



C.W. GRIFFIN / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

GUANTANAMO BAY

## Terror inmates endure solitary routine

■ With most detainees living in windowless, steel and cement cells, life at the prison camps at Guantánamo has turned into a lockdown routine.

BY CAROL ROSENBERG  
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GUANTANAMO BAY  
NAVAL BASE, Cuba —  
AstroTurf for captives' soccer

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**HEALTH**  
SECTION E

# TROPICAL LIFE



Confessions of a recovering candy addict

How I gave up sugar  
and got my  
groove back, 10

**ALSO INSIDE** 'PRISONER OF TEHRAN' LENDS A VOICE TO THE SUFFERING, 12

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# confessions of a recovering candy addict

BY ANNETTE RACOND

Special to The Miami Herald

Nothing was more comforting than hopping into my '78 red Celica and heading to Denny's on Miami Gardens Drive to meet my friend Nancy for a cup of hot chocolate and a slice of Mother Butler's chocolate cream pie. It soothed my soul.

Recent headlines that the flavonoids in chocolate appear to lower blood pressure came as no surprise to me. I was onto the concept 30 years ago. The problem was that when it came to sugar, the concept of moderation never entered my mind.

Death by Chocolate at Jaxson's Ice Cream Parlor, flan at Versailles, chocolate-chip pancakes at IHOP — whether I was happy, sad, glad or mad, I reached for those white granules. Sweet cravings became the norm for me.

My sugar obsession began when I bonded with Cap 'n Crunch at age 6. I'd eat those crunchy heavenly delights right from the big box, interrupted only by sips from a tall, cold glass of milk mixed with a triple dose of Nestles Quick.

At 13, working behind the counter at Skylake Mall's Skylake Pastries, I loved snitching chocolate shavings off the Black Forest cakes and taking home leftovers to gorge on at the end of the week. A few years later, as a "candy girl!" at the chic Sunny Isles Theater, I picked out the red Juicy Fruits from the boxes. (In the late '70s, they weren't sealed for your protection.)

My girlfriends wondered how I could down bowls of M&Ms and packs of Moon Pies and Little Debbies without becoming grossly obese. (I'm five feet tall and my weight has never climbed above 125 pounds.) Studies have shown that fidgeting burns calories, and it must be true. I never stopped moving.

Life remained sweet. After earning a journalism degree from Boston University, I moved to New York City, where I landed a job as a candy reporter with a trade magazine. I traveled the Kit Kat circuit and was queen of the Lemonheads. I'd go to any lengths to fund my Jujubes habit. Every trade show I attended provided me with another opportunity to indulge in my passion for sweets.

"Hey, Annette, sample our peanut butter cups. You'll fall in love with the new improved taste," a vendor shouted, as I wobbled down the aisle compulsively picking small dots of colored candy off a long white-paper strip.

I had been warned about the 40s but never bought into the hype, and then, about four years ago, my seemingly fine-tuned engine began giving out. I was getting constant sinus infections and lingering colds. My energy was depleted. I knew it was time to part ways with both Ben and Jerry, but it seemed like an insurmountable task.

Then my boyfriend, Richard, persuaded me to sign up for a week-long stay at a macrobiotic institute in Massa-

chusetts. Richard had gone macrobiotic about eight years before, but refined sugar had slipped back into his diet, so he decided to join me.

From the get-go, I felt like a foreigner in need of a translator. There were discussions about the merits of daikons, lotus root and barley malt. I barely recognized a single word, let alone associated it with a food group.

Sara Lee was the devil here. Sitting down to eat was mandatory, and I was all but booed when I shared how I liked eating corn muffins out of brown-paper bags. All this talk about chewing. Who had the time?

But I had to admit, the food was divine. Organic, home-made dishes were a novel concept for me. I especially loved the desserts, of course. Heavenly amasake pudding, creamy tofu cheese-cake and scrumptious mochi waffles with lemon-walnut syrup — all made without refined sugar.

Once home, I headed straight for Borders to look for cookbooks offering healthier ways to satisfy my sugar cravings. I was amazed to find recipes for delicacies such as chocolate and coconut pecan tarts, chocolate truffles and cappuccino mousse, all made with brown-rice syrup, barley malt, amasake (fermented sweet or brown rice), maple syrup or fruit-juice concentrate.

I combed through the aisles of Whole Foods in search of packaged treats made without refined sweeteners (e.g., white, raw, brown or turbinado sugar; corn syrup; fructose; high-fructose corn syrup). To my surprise, there were plenty. I also discovered grain-sweetened chocolate chips (tastes like the real thing) and unsweetened chocolate almond milk (an even bigger treat when blended with bananas and ice).

The payoff? My creativity and energy have soared. I have a new passion — beading. Those colorful, eye-catching bugle, seed and crystal beads look like candies, and my mother is now elbow-high in bracelets.

My time is no longer gobbled up sitting at the Krispy Kreme counter waiting for the "Fresh Donuts" sign or scrubbing ice-cream stains off my favorite pair of jeans. Plus, they fit a lot better now. What's more, I lost priority status in my doctor's frequent-patient program.

Each time I pass one of my favorite old haunts and manage to resist temptation, I feel empowered. I'm open to new challenges. I've tackled website design, and am focused on writing a memoir. I reward myself with manicures and magazines. When I'm feeling down, I head to bead stores in lieu of bake shops.

I'm far from perfect. Giving up macaroons (especially those chocolate-covered ones) isn't easy. And I'll always have a soft spot for cream puffs. I still indulge in Denny's hot chocolate when I'm in Miami to visit Nancy. It's for health reasons, of course. I want to keep down my blood pressure. Doctors' orders.

South Florida native Annette Racond is a writer in New York.

How I gave up sugar and got my groove back



PHOTOS BY RICHARD LOGWOOD/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

## RESOURCES

Annette Racond recommends these books and websites to fellow sugar junkies:

- *The Macrobiotic Path to Total Health* by Michio Kushi and Alex Jack (Ballentine, 2003).

- *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Whole Foods but Were Afraid to Ask* by Christina Pirello (Berkeley, 2004).

- *The Candle Café Cookbook* by Joy Pierson, Bart Potenza, and Barbara Scott-Goodman (Clarkson Potter, 2003).

- *Whole Food: 300 Recipes to Restore, Nourish, and Delight* by Jude Blereau (Running Press, 2007).

- **kushinstitute.org**: Home of the Kushi Institute in Becket, Mass., where Racond was introduced to macrobiotics.

- **loveericinc.com**: Website of macrobiotic chef and cookbook author Eric Lechasseur.

## THE SWEET LIFE:

Annette Racond at Dylan's Candy Bar and at Gary Null's Whole Foods, both in New York City.

# Sweet temptations



Who hasn't craved a childhood confection?

Entenmann's crumb cake. A guava pastelito. A hot Krispy Kreme at 2 in the morning — glazed, of course.

In today's cover story, a South Florida native shares the sins of her sugar obsession — the jaunts to Jaxson's Ice Cream Parlor, to Versailles, to IHOP.

No more. She's junked the junk food in favor of macrobiotic foods and packaged treats without refined sweeteners. In the process, her weight dropped and energy soared. A sweet result.

**- JOAN CHRISSOS**  
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