

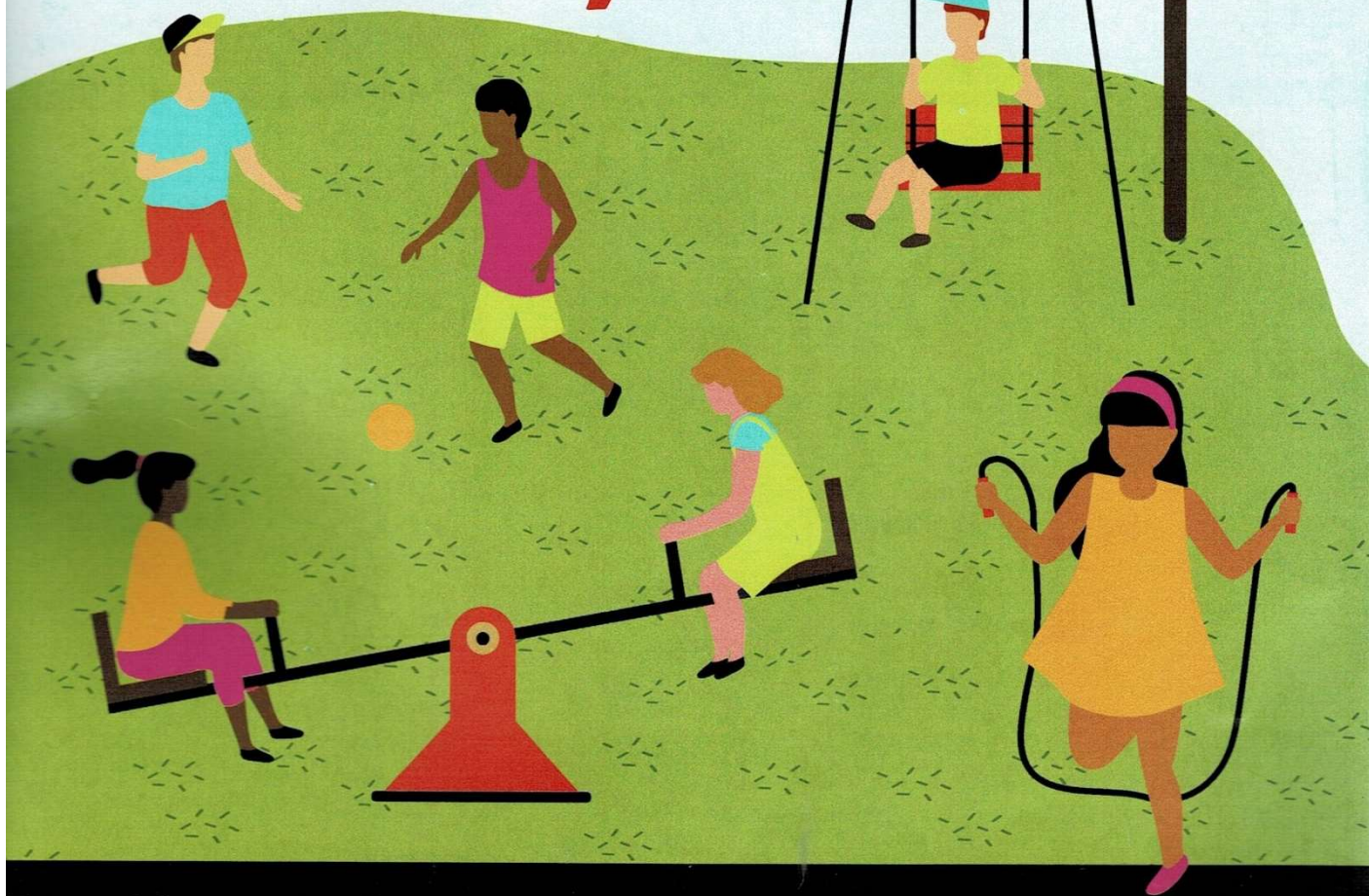
TAKE
OFF
POUNDS
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TOPS[®] News

Real People. Real Weight Loss.[®]

MAY/JUNE 2026

Fighting Childhood Obesity



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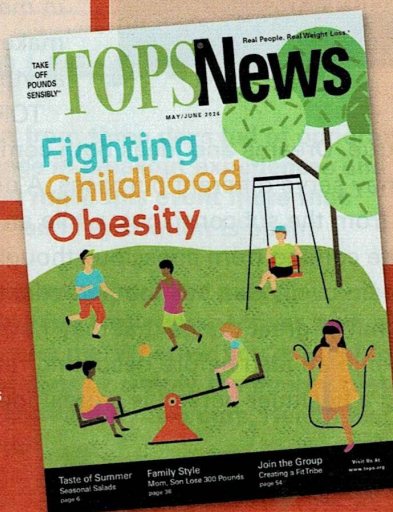
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ON the COVER

A TOPS® News Special Report examines the growing crisis of childhood obesity.



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Move More

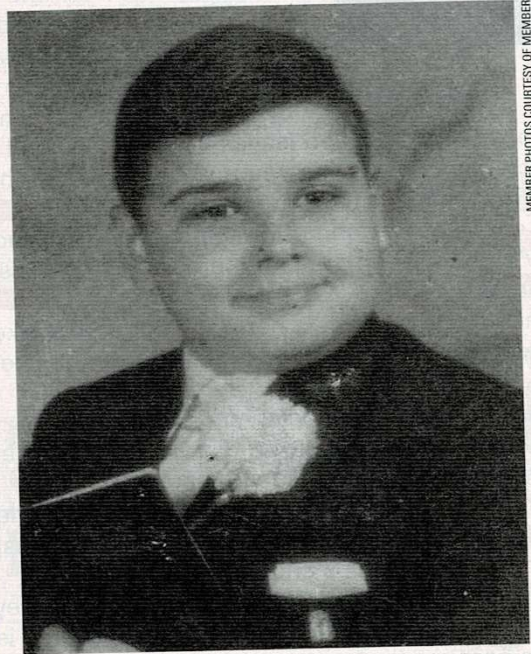
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Carrying the Weight

Cute, Little, Chubby Kid Grows Up

By Joe "Kirsch" Curcio,
TOPS online member



MEMBER PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEMBER

(left) Joe, red circle, threw the call with a lot of pop in his days as a Little League ace.
(right) Grade school Joe as the cute, little, chubby kid.

woke up so early this morning that even the annoying motivational memes regulars on Facebook hadn't posted yet.

I killed some time flipping around cable channels and realized my options were basically limited to a Tony Little Gazelle Glider infomercial, a Golden Girls marathon or a documentary on living with scabies. Instead, I settled on an episode of Bonanza while I knocked off the rest of the Papa Johns Pizza in the fridge.

By the third bite of that cold "Zesty Italian Trio" slice I realized I'd been on a diet since at least 1967—and that maybe all my endless social media ramblings and obnoxious observations—like this one—are just the byproduct of the extra baggage I've been carrying since being that cute little fat kid on the block in Brooklyn.

People don't realize how much baggage, both physical and psychological, comes with childhood obesity. From being the kid who hadn't seen much of the high side of the seesaw to spending Easter Sunday in the early '70s as the only one in a dark brown suit while my friends sported bright red blazers and avocado turtlenecks.

Even today, that little carry-on bag of fashion trauma has me sticking with the Johnny Cash "black-on-black" look. The only time I dabble with color and vogue is when I put on those snazzy Italian guy socks—which I may have disqualified myself from wearing because of being revealed here as a NY Italian who eats Papa Johns Pizza!—at 4:30 in the morning.



Living Your Truth

I know firsthand what it's like being that chubby kid. At a neighborhood festival, I once heard some carry stable hand tell my father that I was "a little too heavy" to go on the pony ride. Well, my father could have just gently rubbed my head and watched me wallow in a pool of woe is me like some tenderhearted victim. Instead, he grabbed me by the hand, took me up the block and bought us both a couple of cheese calzones and a bag of zeppoles.

Granted, it wasn't a great choice for my future with GLP-1s and ACE inhibitors. But the lesson stuck: You can either let the baggage make you retreat into silence and curl up in bed with a box of Oreos because you think you can't compete, or you can change the game and do what you do best.

In Little League, I spent most of my time on the bench pulling splinters out of my stretched-out pinstripes and popping into my mouth melted Tootsie Rolls pulled from my pockets. When it came to running, I had about as much chance of reaching first base as I did years later with 90-pound Rosemary Rizetto.

But I turned out to be a decent pitcher. The problem? When I walked to the mound, I had to put up with the other team's dugout singing the Carole King classic, "I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet." Well, that soon ended when I decided to serve up a little tune of my own. There's nothing more rockin' than the sound of a fastball whizzing by the ol' melon. A little chin music as they say.

After a few brushbacks and knuckleballs, the dugout choir went silent! We went on to win the championship that season. I was hoping that the team would hoist me onto their shoulders, but under the circumstances they opted for treating me to a few franks and a Yoo-hoo. It's all about the way you play the game!

"You can either let the baggage make you retreat into silence and curl up in bed with a box of Oreos because you think you can't compete, or you can change the game and do what you do best."

A Silver Lining

Sure, there's baggage. How could there not be? How many times can you endure the dread on an airplane passenger's face when they see you heading toward the empty seat beside them? How many times can you perform the ritual of triple-tying your shoes, or never sitting in a restaurant booth or hiding suspenders under a T-shirt so that your pants don't fall down?

But there's a silver lining.

As Brooklyn street kids, my friends and I spent summer nights playing tag. Being the slow guy, I was always "it." So, I proposed to the gang that we change the game a little: Let me be the steady "helper" to whoever was "it"—an assistant. With two taggers chasing everyone, the game suddenly became much more fun, and I didn't have to run as much—I was just the "assistant."

All's well that ends well. All these years later, I'm still enjoying life in Brooklyn. After a successful career in broadcasting, I retired as a helper—an assistant—the assistant director of engineering at a flagship broadcast station in the nation's number one market—New York City!

With weight loss or life in general, it's all about playing your game instead of playing the victim. Now, pass me another zeppole, but please hold the Papa Johns.

Joe "Kirsch" Curcio, a TOPS online member from Brooklyn, New York, is a former ABC radio and networks employee. Now retired, He is the author of "Ah-Shpet: 101 Words You'll Need to Survive the Neighborhood" and "The Welcome to Greenpoint Manuscript." See more from Joe at his website, www.greenpointmusic.com.

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