

*"To stay the same weight
for 10 years,
you need to learn to eat."*



*An interview with
Nanna Franzén, 36*



Nanna Franzén



Cecilia Bergh

Cecilia Bergh in interview with Nanna, 36

Cecilia: - When did you start feeling that being overweight was a problem?

Nanna: - I started feeling really overweight in high school, but it probably wasn't as bad as all that. I don't really know. I weighed about 176 pounds and I'm 5 feet 6 inches tall.

Cecilia: - Did people say things? Were you teased in school?

Nanna: - Yes. That's how it felt. I was really conscious about my weight and how I looked.

Cecilia: - What about meeting boys?

Nanna: - I haven't had many boyfriends. I met my husband in 1995 and hadn't dated much before that. I didn't think I could get a boyfriend. I don't think it had to do with my appearance, actually. It was mainly my self-esteem.

Cecilia: - Are your parents and siblings overweight?

Nanna: - We like food in my family, and it's easy for us to gain weight. I have two siblings and we are basically all overweight.

Cecilia: - Did you continue to gain weight after high school?

Nanna: - In high school I lost 55 pounds with Weight-Watchers, but then I regained the weight just as quickly as I had lost it.

Cecilia: - How long did it take to lose 55 pounds?

Nanna: - Really fast. I lost the weight in a few months, but I quickly gained it back.

Cecilia: - What is the reason that you gained weight after doing WeightWatchers and losing 55 pounds?

Nanna: - That's because you don't learn new habits. After a while, you can't stand dieting any more. You go back to your old habits and gain even more weight.

Cecilia: - What diet are you supposed to follow?

Nanna: - You eat low-calorie products, no rich sauces, and boring, dry food.

Cecilia: - And you can do that for a while but you can't live forever eating that kind of food?

Nanna: - No. You get pretty tired of stewed tomatoes after a while (laugh).

Cecilia: - Was it common that people in the Weight-Watchers program relapsed or gained even more weight after having lost it?

Nanna: - Almost everyone who does WeightWatchers gains eventually weight. People can't keep the weight off and so they come back when they gain a few pounds; I think it's in their business plan. I've returned to WeightWatchers several times.

Cecilia: - Have you tried other methods?

Nanna: - I tried a soup diet, which was effective while I was on it, but then I gained the weight back again.

Cecilia: - You just ate soup?

Nanna: - You live on instant soup, four to five times a day, and nothing else. It was super effective those weeks I managed to follow it. But then I gained the weight back.

Cecilia: - You weren't allowed to eat anything but soup?

Nanna: - I had soup and nothing but soup for two weeks.

Cecilia: - Even for breakfast?

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - Hmm.

Nanna: - I have tried dieting on my own, but it's hard.

Cecilia: - Have you taken medicine?

Nanna: - No.

Cecilia: - What was your weight when you were 25-30 years old?

Nanna: - When I was in my thirties, before I had my daughter, I weighed 209 pounds. I gained weight during and after pregnancy.

Cecilia: - What is your daughter's name?

Nanna: - Her name is Ellen, and she is four years old.

Cecilia: - Oh, how nice!

Cecilia: - Is her weight normal?

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - When did you have the gastric bypass surgery?

Nanna: - When I was about to turn 36.

Cecilia: - How much did you weigh before the operation?

Nanna: - I weighed 269 pounds.

Cecilia: - What motivated you to find a surgeon and discuss the operation?

Nanna: - I felt I couldn't get any further on my own. I couldn't go on, I needed something else, I'd been fighting this for so many years, and I learned a lot during those years.

Cecilia: - What has been your problem all these years?

Nanna: - Basically, that we like food so much in my family, that we eat very fast, and that we snack between meals.

Cecilia: - How fast do you eat in your family?

Nanna: - Before I started at the Mandolean® Clinic, I ate dinner in five minutes.

Cecilia: - How much food would that be?

Nanna: - Enough food for a grown man - a lot of food. More than a pound of food.

Cecilia: - Did you feel full?

Nanna: - Sometimes, but usually I ate until I was stuffed, because it was so good. I couldn't stop. I just wanted more.

Nanna: - After an hour or so I'd start going back to the fridge and graze on fruit, cookies, and whatever leftovers were there.

Cecilia: - If you ate your evening meal at 6 p.m., how late in the evening would you continue eating from the refrigerator?

Nanna: - I go to bed at 11 p.m. on a typical weeknight, so I would eat until I went to bed.

Cecilia: - Were you hungry after supper?

Nanna: - I was trying to satisfy a craving. I wasn't hungry, but I wanted more of a certain taste. I couldn't



Nanna before the treatment

stop thinking about it. I've always had a soft spot for cake and cookies, but it could just as well have been leftovers, whatever was there.

Cecilia: - Have you ever felt embarrassed going to the refrigerator?

Nanna: - You get good at sneaking, so no one notices, or you do it in passing, to make it seem normal.

Cecilia: - Did anyone else in your family behave the same way?

Nanna: - I don't know if they did it to the extent that I did, but sure, they've gone and raided the refrigerator.

Cecilia: - And when you've gone and raided the refrigerator, were you satisfied, or did you feel guilty, or did you feel it was unnecessary, or did you think it didn't matter?

Nanna: - Right when you eat, you feel satisfied. But when you go to bed, you feel dissatisfied. You feel that you failed to do what you had planned to do that morning. You always wake up intending to be good that day. Ever since high school, my first thought every morning was, "Today, I will manage eating right." Well, maybe not every day, but almost.

Cecilia: - So you have thought a lot about food and weight and why you can't manage it.

Nanna: - Yes (sigh)! It has consumed hours, days.

Cecilia: - How would you describe the way you eat?

Nanna: - I've eaten all kinds of food in large bites, a lot and fast. I consumed a lot of food in a short amount of time.

Cecilia: - Do you usually swallow the food and chew it one more time?

Nanna: - Yes. I call it ruminating. You regurgitate the food and chew it once more.

Cecilia: - But isn't that disgusting?

Nanna: - Well, not if you do it just after eating, because the taste is still there.

Cecilia: - How often did you ruminate?

Nanna: - After supper and right after any time you eat, basically. That's when you do it.

Cecilia: - How did you figure out it was possible to ruminate?

Nanna: - When you've eaten so much that you're completely stuffed, it comes back up easily.

Cecilia: - So it was never at the beginning of a meal?

Nanna: - No. It was at the end of a meal.

Cecilia: - Did it ever happen that you rechewed the food more than once? Could you regurgitate two or three times?

Nanna: - Sure. It tasted like the food. If you wait too long it gets disgusting, but if you do it right after eating, before you've digested it in your stomach, it's okay.

Cecilia: - Did you have to practice this rumination mechanism?

Nanna: - It worked from the start. It was never difficult (laugh). It didn't take any great effort. It's not like I need to go the bathroom or press my stomach.

Cecilia: - Have you ever gone looking for food in waste containers?

Nanna: - No. I've never done that.

Cecilia: - When you shop for food, have you started eating in the store, out of packages you've put in your cart?

Nanna: - No, I've never done that.

Cecilia: - Have you had stomach aches after meals?

Nanna: - Um, no.

Cecilia: - Have you experienced compulsive overeating or bulimia?

Nanna: - I did before I started at the Mandolean® Clinic.

Cecilia: - Did you vomit?

Nanna: - I vomited. I realized it wasn't normal.

Cecilia: - Is there any food that is off limits for you?

Nanna: - Pizza.

Cecilia: - Before you had the gastric bypass operation, you went to the Mandolean® Clinic to learn how to eat and stop compulsive overeating and ruminating. How did that work?

Nanna: - I learned to eat at regular intervals. That is second nature to me now, regular times every day, breakfast, lunch, supper, snack.

Nanna: - The bingeing and vomiting are completely gone, and so is the rumination. That disappeared after about two or three months at the Mandolean® Clinic. I am still struggling with grazing between meals and eating too fast.

Cecilia: - How fast do you eat now, after your operation?



*Nanna with
her daughter
before the
treatment*

Nanna: - I eat a lunch or dinner in 10 minutes. I try to think it should take 12-15 minutes. That is what I learned at the Mandolean® Clinic.

Cecilia: - And how often do you succeed?

Nanna: - Half the time.

Cecilia: - Were you shocked by how little you could eat after the operation, or were you prepared for that?

Nanna: - I was very poorly prepared for the consequences of the surgery. A few hours with a dietician and the doctors, and that was it. It was a shock for me to realize there was just as much work after the operation as before. I thought somehow it would be automatic, just fall into place. But the problems with candy cravings and wanting to graze don't disappear because you've been operated on.

If I hadn't gone to the Mandolean® Clinic, I would have easily gained 25 pounds after the surgery by eating constantly, since I can eat just about anything if I don't eat too much at a time. By eating unhealthy food and eating nonstop, I would have gained 25 pounds and I didn't want to do that.

If I hadn't learned to eat regularly and didn't keep coming to the Mandolean® Clinic and exercising, it would have been extremely difficult to develop healthy eating behavior. I would have gained weight despite the operation. I'm working on eating slowly, on not grazing between meals, on eating at regular times, and exercising.

Cecilia: - What happens after the operation, what kind of follow-up is there from the surgical practice?

Nanna: - Right after the operation you meet a follow-up nurse a couple times, and you get to talk about your problems. After half a year, you meet a dietician, and after one year you meet the doctor for follow-up. That's it. I don't know how people succeed who don't get help with their eating.

Cecilia: - You didn't get to meet any other patients who also had the operation?

Nanna: - You can organize that yourself, if you want. There is a website for weight-surgery patients, but I haven't gone there. It feels a little hysterical. It is so focused on the food, what food you are allowed to eat.

Cecilia: - Were you informed by the surgeon or dietician of how to practice eating properly and how fast to eat?

Nanna: - No. They say you should eat 7 ounces in 20 minutes. Period.

Cecilia: - For how long?

Nanna: - They say to increase it gradually. I think eventually you should be able to handle 10 ounces. I eat about 7 ounces now, and that should take 20 minutes. I can't eat for 20 minutes, I can only do 10 minutes. I don't think that there are many who did the operation who can eat for 20 minutes.

Cecilia: - What happens if you can't eat 7 ounces in 20 minutes? What symptoms do you get?

Nanna: - You eat too fast, and you get tired. You sit there and yawn. You feel full, drowsy, and some people feel nauseous. I've been lucky enough to not experience any real problems. I do sit down and yawn and sometimes

I need to lie down.

Cecilia: - But isn't that a rather pleasant complication? I mean, to get a little tired and drowsy?

Nanna: - No, it is not pleasant at all. It is a nauseous feeling you just want to get over. You don't want to keep eating when you feel nauseous. Then you are satiated.

Cecilia: - That is interesting. Are you saying nausea and satiation are closely related?

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - Really?

Nanna: - You have to learn to stop eating when you feel full enough, before you get that feeling of nausea. If I eat 7 ounces in 15 minutes then I know that's enough. That's what I learned at the Mandolean® Clinic.

Cecilia: - Do you think you can differentiate between hunger and satiation, feeling a little hungry and very satiated, or feeling a little satiated and very hungry?

Nanna: - Now I can. Before I came to the Mandolean® Clinic, I couldn't. I've been using the Mandolean® to eat.

Cecilia: - Do you crave food?

Nanna: - Now I can feel the difference between craving and being hungry. I get hungry after two hours. My body feels it is getting too little food. That feeling of being hungry is not something I experienced before, because I always ate so much. I never let myself get hungry. It is okay to feel hungry, and just because you feel hungry doesn't mean you have to eat at once. It's something I still need to work on. It's hard if you're

hungry and need to make food for the family. It is very easy to stuff yourself with a lot of food and not wanting dinner later. It happens. I have learned to eat a substantial snack at 3 p.m. so I can make it to supper at 6 p.m.

Cecilia: - How many meals do you have now?

Nanna: - Breakfast at 8 a.m., snack at 10 a.m., lunch at 12 p.m., snack at 3 p.m., supper at 6 p.m., snack at 8:30 p.m.

Cecilia: - Do you feel satisfied after your meals?

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - Is anything prohibited?

Nanna: - Chocolate.

Cecilia: - What happens if you eat chocolate?

Nanna: - I feel nauseous. I think maybe because it's too rich.

Nanna: - And fruit yogurt, which is weird. Then I get tired and start yawning. Also when I eat candy. I can eat 10 pieces of candy, but not 20.

Cecilia: - How about French fries and meat?

Nanna: - I have to learn to chew meat thoroughly, and bread, too. I'm used to taking big bites, so I have to learn how to chew. A bite has to be the size of a thumbnail. I have to chew until the mouthful is a fine mash. That takes a long time. I'm not good at it.

Cecilia: - Earlier you said that when you woke up in the morning, the first thing you thought of was you were going to have a good day and eat right. When you wake up now, what is the first thing you think of?

Nanna: - Well, it isn't food. It's probably getting Ellen to daycare and everyday worries.

Cecilia: - What has changed your eating behavior? Is it the



*Nanna
before the
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Mandolean® training or the operation or both?

Nanna: - It was the "aha!" moment of understanding how to eat, not emphasizing food so much, and not eating low-calorie products, that I experienced at the Mandolean® Clinic.

I met a nutritionist, Mikael Björnström, who taught me how to eat. I realized all diets are just crap, and I am so glad I learned that before my operation. It really gets me that no one taught me about that in high school, because then I wouldn't be here today. I got the tools from the Mandolean® Clinic, and I got the right attitude. The operation helped with the rest, to feel satiated, but that is a minor part of the whole picture.

The major part is this struggle to change habits: to learn to eat at regular intervals, to exercise, to not obsess so much over food and weight. That is the major thing that should be addressed before the operation, so that the weight reduction can be maintained.

Nanna: - I weighed 269 pounds before the operation in November 2008. One year later I weigh 199 pounds. It was a major operation that took several hours. I was in the hospital for three days.

Cecilia: - If you didn't have access to Mandolean®, what do you think your weight would be today?

Nanna: - I think I still would have lost weight, maybe not exactly this much. Mainly, I think the future, what my weight will be in 10 years, will tell. I believe I will be able to weigh the same in 10 years because of the habits Mandolean® gave me. If I had not gone to the Mandolean® Clinic, I believe I would be gaining again.

Cecilia: - So you think that in the long term this change in habits has an enormous effect?

Nanna: - Yes, absolutely.

Cecilia: - That's interesting.

Nanna: - If you don't change your habits, you won't succeed in the long run. Going through a major operation and then wasting all that money, basically. Because in a few years you start gaining weight again, and you suffer the anxiety of gaining weight and falling into that behavior of wanting to be good, be disciplined, and then you're back where you started.

Cecilia: - So, in the short term, the operation would be good, but in the long term more is needed, namely a change in eating behavior and habits?

Nanna: - To succeed in the long run, a combination is best. For people who are very large, the operation helps, but you still need to change your habits, and you've got to start

with that before the operation.

Cecilia: - Have you experienced any complications from the operation?

Nanna: - No, just a little dumping syndrome from eating too much too fast and getting tired, nauseous, and having to lie down. I felt pretty good after the operation.

Cecilia: - And you attribute this simply to knowing how to eat?

Nanna: - Yes, I think so.

Cecilia: - Do you know anyone who has had the operation?

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - How have they done with their eating behavior?

Nanna: - I don't know, actually.

Cecilia: - Are they losing weight like they were supposed to?

Nanna: - Yes, they are. Eating behavior is a sensitive topic. I don't even talk about it with my friends. Just with family members and when I'm here at the Mandolean® Clinic. You can talk about losing weight, people are interested in that, in different methods. I get tired of hearing about it any more. But to talk about yourself, how you eat, and what you weigh, that is hushed up. It's a no-no.

Cecilia: - What would you recommend as a future treatment of obesity? What would it be?

Nanna: - I think we shouldn't waste our time on a lot of strange weight-loss diets, but instead practice meal habits until it becomes second nature. Eating regular square meals and exercising. You need help to do it, because you can't manage if you have a serious problem

with your weight. You think you know everything. I thought so before I came to the Mandolean@ Clinic, that there was nothing they could teach me that I didn't already know. But there was a lot I needed to learn.

Nanna: - An overweight person who exercises regularly is less likely to get sick than a normal-weight person who does not exercise. People are totally focused on the food when they diet. It isn't dangerous to eat regular food. You can eat everything, just in the right amount, so really nothing is off limits.

Cecilia: - When you were operated on, did you tell them that you were also going to the Mandolean@ Clinic?

Nanna: - Yes, I did.

Cecilia: - Did they ask what that was?

Nanna: - No. They didn't say very much.

Nanna: - I told them I was learning to eat. They thought that was good. They didn't want me to binge. It actually says in writing that patients should not have any of those kinds of illnesses or eating disorders.

Cecilia: - You can't be operated on then?

Nanna: - No. But I don't think patients really say. They want the operation so badly I think they omit the worst details.

Cecilia: - Did they ask you if you had bulimia?

Nanna: - I don't remember. I said that I had gone to the Mandolean@ Clinic and that I was healthy.

Cecilia: - So you think maybe a lot of people with bulimia get operated on?

Nanna: - Yes, I think a whole lot of people who get operated on have eating disorders. I think a very large

percentage do, but don't report it, because they want the operation so badly.

Cecilia: - How do you think they are doing?

Nanna: - In the long term, it won't work if they don't get help with their eating behavior. When I talk to people who are going to have the operation, they only ask how much weight I've lost. I try to tell them how important it is to establish good habits beforehand, but they will not



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Today*

listen. They block it out and think, yes, yes it will be better after the operation, everything will be solved. That's how you think. That's how I thought. So you are shocked afterward at how much work remains. If you don't get help, it can be overwhelming.

You can't eat enormous amounts. But you can eat a little bit all the time. And that is what you do instead, because your body is telling you there's too little food in your stomach. If you can't handle those feelings and convince yourself to wait two hours, you'll eat something. Yes, you eat all the time. That's what you can do, eat a little bit, all the time.

Cecilia: - How are the cravings you talked about earlier?

Nanna: - I still get cravings, absolutely.

Cecilia: - Is it the same feeling, or has it changed?

Nanna: - I am super aware that it is a craving now and not real hunger. Before it was difficult to tell them apart. But I have learned the difference between hunger and craving. Sometimes I can resist. You learn to do it. That's what we talk about when we come here, how to resist.

Cecilia: - Have you ever regretted having the operation?

Nanna: - No.

Cecilia: - Have you ever thought that you should have done it much sooner?

Nanna: - No. If I hadn't tried everything else and felt I had truly done everything in my power, I would have had a hard time justifying this operation. Because it is really a major operation. If you can change your habits in any other way than by surgery, you should, even if it takes time.

Cecilia: - So you would recommend it as an alternative?

Nanna: - Yes, absolutely. You should work on your habits, eat right, exercise often. If it is truly not working and you are very overweight, then I think the operation is an option.

Cecilia: - Should children and young people have the operation?

Nanna: - No, that seems crazy to me. Information and training are what is needed. If I had learned earlier to eat right and change my habits, then I wouldn't have needed the operation.

Cecilia: - So, if you had met Mikael Björnström at the Mandolean® Clinic ten years ago ...

Nanna: - Yes.

Cecilia: - What has happened with your self-esteem?

Nanna: - It is much better because I lost weight.

Nanna: - After a while, my stomach expanded so I could eat more, and I think this can be stressful. Like, should I really be able to eat this much? Shouldn't my stomach be small? Shouldn't I be full now?

Cecilia: - How much food can you eat when your stomach starts expanding?

Nanna: - You can eat 10 ounces six times a day.

Cecilia: - Without feeling nauseous?

Nanna: - Yes, I think so. You can eat a lot of food, and when you realize that, you panic. You really have to be prepared for a new lifestyle for the rest of your life.

Cecilia: - Following the operation, most people successfully lose about 30 percent of their body weight and then gain back 10 percent, so the total weight loss may be

15–20 percent. But you think that if you know how to eat and have learned new habits, much better long-term effects are possible?

Nanna: Yes. There are no shortcuts. I have to make the change. No one else can do it for me. I have even learned to like exercise.

Cecilia: - How much do you have to lose to become spontaneously active?

Nanna: - I don't know. I wanted to exercise, even when I was large, but my self-esteem kept me from it. I didn't dare go to a gym, or to a swimming pool, because I felt big and fat. The first step is to realize that people exercise for their own health and not to watch others. I started working out before the operation. Initially, I couldn't do the aerobic exercises, but I have now started to it twice a week. When you exercise regularly, you don't want to wreck it with food. I like to exercise and wear short sleeves. I have a goal of running the Midnight Run in Stockholm next year, together with my husband.

Cecilia: - Do you think your entire family has changed eating habits?

Nanna: - My husband and my daughter don't have eating problems. At home it is easier to stick to the new habits. But when I visit my parents and siblings, and it's important for me to see them, it's harder to keep the new habits. The old ways are there and make their presence known. The air is thick with them.

Cecilia: - Do you notice any difference when you invite your parental family to your home, compared to going to theirs?

Nanna: - Yes, there is a difference. In my home, I decide and I make the rules. But when I go to my parents, the old eating habits spring up. I have to be very clear and say I can't do it, but it isn't their fault.

Cecilia: - Do you experience relapses when you return to your parents or can you maintain your new eating behavior?

Nanna: - I do pretty well, it's just that I relapse more easily there. I eat too fast, get tired more often, sit down, yawn, and feel a little nauseous when I visit them.

Cecilia: - Is there anything you'd like to add?

Nanna: - I thank my lucky star I got to go to the Mandolean® Clinic.

Cecilia: - How long do you think you will go to the clinic?

Nanna: - I'm feeling now like I can do it on my own.

Cecilia: - Then you should enter our follow-up program. We'll follow you for five years.

Nanna: - That sounds great. I'm ready.

