

# DAILY NEWS

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## HE LOST 200 POUNDS - AND A LIVING NIGHTMARE

SAMR TAYEH POST-OP WEIGHT LOSS HAS CHANGED HIS LIFE

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Unlike many of his fellow New York City residents, Samr (Rocky) Tayeh likes it when people sit right next to him on the subway. Before you ask, yes, he's Brooklyn born and bred. The 19-year-old Park Slope resident also likes walking to school - "I get there so much quicker now," he said - and bending over to tie his shoes. Mostly, though, Rocky is just enjoying life in a smaller body. He has shed more than 200 pounds since undergoing Lap-Band surgery just over a year ago, and the change in his life has been, well, life-changing. "I'm definitely happier now," he said. "It's like I'm just starting to experience life."

You can hear Rocky tell his own story - though you might as well finish reading this column since you already bought the paper - several times over the next few days (see sidebar).

At its center are two things; Rocky's journalistic courage and WNYC's Radio Rookies program, which trains young people with no radio or reporting experience how to record and produce stories about themselves and their communities.

Rocky joined the Midwood Radio Rookies in 2003 while he was a student at Edward Murrow High School. Standing 6-foot-1, he weighed nearly 400 pounds.

His radio spot, "My Struggle With Obesity," is emotionally wrenching in part because Rocky used his microphone like a camera and didn't flinch when the words it caught cut to the bone.

Like this exchange he had with twin sister, Sammie:

**She:** *My bed, the wheels are popping off.*

**Rocky:** *Why?*

**She:** *Because you're fat!*

**Rocky voiceover:** You need a sense of humor to survive in my family.



He for News

Samr (Rocky) Tayeh inside the studio at WNYC Radio.

### TV AND RADIO

Here's where you can find Samr (Rocky) Tayeh on television and radio over the next few days. You also can check his Web site and blog, [www.samrrockytayeh.com](http://www.samrrockytayeh.com).

Food Network's "Childhood Obesity: Danger Zone" Saturday at 5 p.m. and repeated Sunday at 6 p.m.

Tuesday on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" program, 4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on WNYC, 93.9FM and 820AM, and on the Web at [www.wnyc.org](http://www.wnyc.org).

PBS's "Fat: What No One is Telling You," Wednesday at 9 p.m. on Channel 13.

It goes on from there. You hear one of his seven siblings teasing that a turtle could outrun him; his mother, Rita, pleading with him to stop eating because the weight will kill him; his father, Abe, offering - to no avail - \$1,000 for every 30 pounds he loses.

There is the happiness Rocky feels when he can eat when no one else is home, and his reaction to the endless jokes and insults from strangers on the streets.

*When I am in a really good mood, the jokes don't get to me. I just try to let them motivate me to try to lose weight. But when I am sad, the jokes get to me, and make me sadder.*

*When it's jokes like you have no kneecaps, ha ha ha, its funny, but when it's jokes like Rocky, come on, who'll want to marry you, or Rocky, look at you, that makes me mad, and makes me want to eat more.*

The piece ends with a gut-wrenching monologue of an anguished Rocky, sitting up in bed at 1 in the morning, trying not to raid the refrigerator to eat some ice cream he knows is there.

"The microphone became my friend," Rocky recalled this week. "I took it with me everywhere. I felt better when I spoke into it; I could tell it things."

"My Struggle With Obesity" aired for the first time in November 2003, coincidentally around the same time health officials noticed that our country was suffering a national crisis of obesity, particularly among young people.

Nervous that he had given his tormentors more grist for their insult mill with the piece, Rocky instead found that it made him an overweight media star.

He received a flood of calls, letters and e-mails, that far from ridiculing him, applauded his determination and resolve.

Many thanked him for telling their life stories.

"One lady called our house at 1 o'clock in the morning," he said. "She said she had called all the Tayehs in the Brooklyn phone book to get our number. My mother was not thrilled."

Rocky found himself much sought after - he spoke at Harvard and other colleges, was interviewed dozens of times for radio pieces and newspaper articles, and appeared on several television shows.

His story took another turn in 2005 when he was on "The Jane Pauley Show," sandwiched between Jared, the Subway sandwich guy, Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, who lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise, and Dr. George Fielding, an Australian physician now in private practice here who pioneered and used Lap-Band surgery to lose weight.

"It was funny," Rocky recalled. "There was the governor telling me I could lose weight by diet and exercise, the doctor telling me about Lap-Band surgery and Jared telling me to eat Subway sandwiches."

In the Lap-Band technique, a fluid-filled balloon with a valve is inserted around a portion of the stomach. The valve, which is accessible from a port on the patient's skin, can be inflated or deflated to increase or decrease stomach size, regulating how much the person can eat.

A year after meeting Fielding, Rocky had the Lap-band surgery - against his father's wishes. He credits it with his weight loss, but in his followup piece, shows how even seemingly miraculous "cures" come with their own set of problems.

You have to see the piece to find out what they are.

Still, Rocky is loving his new life. Now a freshman at Borough of Manhattan Community College, he enjoys sitting at regular desks and walking up the stairs and escalators to class instead of finding the elevator.

He's looking forward to learning how to ride a bicycle and to going to Six Flags Great Adventure as soon as it opens to try the many rides he could not fit in during a high school class trip.

"My brothers and sisters like to show me off now," Rocky said. "They say, 'This is my brother Rocky - look how much weight he lost.'"

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