

Gullo has his hand on a blob of plastic he uses to represent five pounds of fat. "People forget what the food looks like on them," he says.

# Behin





# d the Scenes With **Dr. Diet**

*Stephen Gullo keeps his wealthy clients happy, thin, and out of their refrigerators—for a price.*

**By Amy Clyde**



It was 11 P.M. and panic time on Park Avenue. An exceedingly wealthy oil heiress, who doesn't want to be named here, was on the verge of pigging out. Rattling around her magnificent apartment, she was carrying enough extraneous postpartum poundage to make a mockery of her Chanel suits, but all she could think of was chocolate-chip cookies and dessert. "I was starving," she says. "The only thing to do was call Stephen."

As usual, the doctor was in. Stephen Gullo, a psychologist, is her diet shrink. "He told me to go to the fridge and slice up some fruit and pour a little orange juice and cranberry juice over it and pretend it was really rich and eat it," says the heiress. "Then he sat on the phone with me until I finished. I said, 'OK, I feel great.' He said, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'Yes, it's over.'"

For several years Gullo has been ministering to the nation's chubby elite, including Donald Trump, Anna Sui, and Yasmin Aga Khan, at a cost of \$500 for an initial hour-long session and \$175 for each subsequent half-hour visit. (Last summer one fashionable New Yorker lost weight at a rate of \$103 a pound.) Somewhere along the line he became a cult figure. Talking to his patients can be bizarre. You end up listening to a lot of people whose lives sound pretty good to start with saying things like "The first meeting with Gullo was the beginning of my life."

His colleagues are equally reverent. Walter Futterweit, chief of endocrinology at Mount Sinai medical school in New York, refers as many patients as he can to Gullo. "He's the only person who treats obesity and succeeds, who consistently gets people to keep the weight off," Futter-

weit says. "I wish I could get more patients to him."

Good luck. There is a nearly one-year waiting list for an appointment. When anointed, you go to a town house in Manhattan and enter a cozy waiting room strewn with books like *Diana: Her True Story* and decorated with mismatched furnishings, including a big brass mirror engraved with flamingos. On the desk in Gullo's inner office sit cans of Health Valley 14 Garden Vegetable Soup and Swanson Chicken in Water (he recommends both) and a disgusting blob of plastic that represents five pounds of fat.

Gullo is a medium-size middle-aged man with miraculously dark hair, tanned but unwrinkled skin, and a hypnotic gaze. Warm and gentle, his voice has the heavy Bronx accent you'd expect of a guy who lifts pianos for a living. His conversational style is David Brenner on speed. "When I started this work, I thought I would meet the walking textbook examples of abnormal psychology because I had been trained to think that people were eating because they were afraid of their sexuality or there was a great emptiness in their lives," the doctor says. "But I found out you don't have to be crazy to be crazy about a cookie. For the vast majority of my clients, to paraphrase Freud, a focaccia bread is just a focaccia bread."

Just then, one of his patients, an accomplished woman named Tina, arrives for her weekly consultation. First she and Gullo discuss what she ate the previous week. Then they talk about the week to come, planning how she can work lunch into her frenetic schedule so that she won't become famished and gorge later.

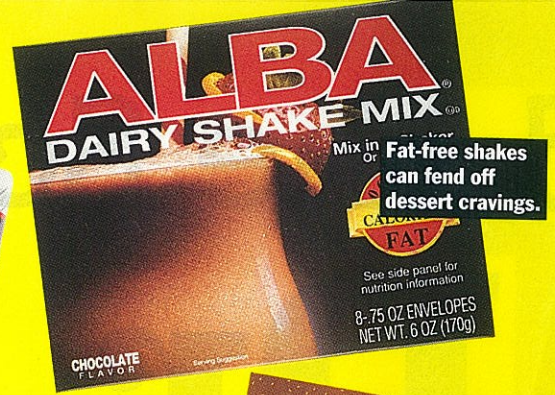
Finally, Gullo records one of his signature tapes for her, which she is to listen to every day. The tapes are designed to reprogram the plump, to help them remember how to eat properly without feeling deprived. But what the tapes really are is





# DOCTOR-RECOMMENDED

**G**ullo knows you need more than rabbit food to be happy, so he's not opposed to processed and NutraSweet-enhanced diet products in limited quantities. "They're not at the top of the nutritional scoreboard," he says, "but they're harmless. Obesity is far more threatening than a diet food."



Mix in Fat-free shakes can fend off dessert cravings.  
See side panel for nutrition information  
8-75 OZ ENVELOPES  
NET WT. 6 OZ (170g)



Gullo likes Kraft no-fat dressing.



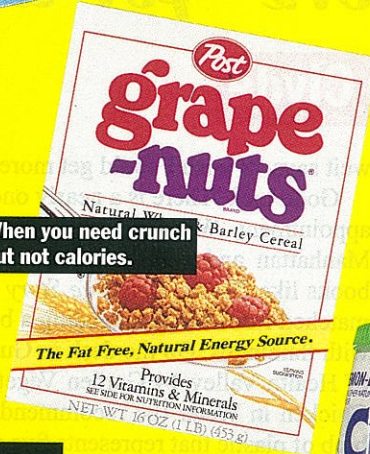
Swiss Miss has only 20 calories per cup.



These are Gullo's personal favorites.



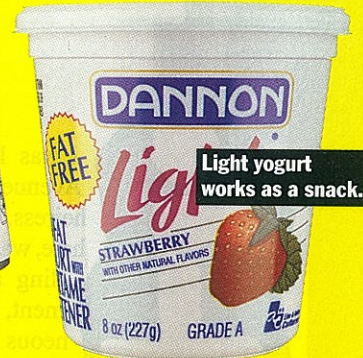
Cold drinks suppress appetite.



When you need crunch but not calories.



Fat-free soup can make a meal.



Light yogurt works as a snack.



Sugar-free lemonade is better than a soft drink.



Sugar-free Jell-O is a low-calorie dessert.



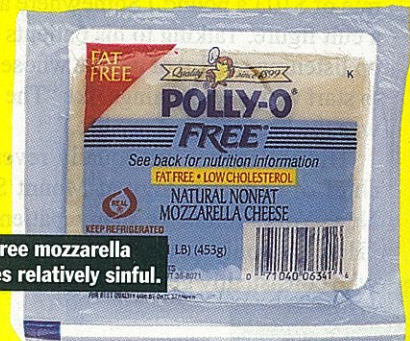
Gullo says stick to lean meats.



Waffles aren't as fattening as bagels.



Hot liquids also act as appetite suppressants.



Fat-free mozzarella tastes relatively sinful.



performance art. Gullo's voice is mesmerizing, sometimes portentous and sermonic, sometimes a haunting Peter Lorre-like whisper. In fact, to a neophyte's ear, the tapes sound melodramatic and outlandish. You just hope you don't giggle.

"Tina, up until you came here," Gullo says into the mike, "you lived in a world where food was free. Now you're asking yourself, Is this food so *important* to me that I will say that it tastes better than the taste of thin? As you feel the strength, the determination that it is *just a piece of food*, there is no contest. The quality of my life comes first. Slowly counting to three, you'll feel strong, you'll feel determined, taking one day at a time, knowing *I am in control*."

**I**t wouldn't be outrageous to argue that Gullo is an extremely sophisticated nanny for adults. He spends a lot of time "coaching," barraging his patients with slogans—"It's better to wear Armani than Ronzoni"—that, depending on your attitude, are either inspiring or silly. New patients or those having trouble receive daily pep-talk calls from Gullo; Norbert Bogner, his charming office manager (who speaks with a thick Austrian accent but who is so slim it is impossible to imagine his ever touching a Sacher torte); or Edoardo Danilan, a Calvin Klein Underwear model who moonlights as part of the coaching team. Clients who are too busy to talk fax the doctor daily food diaries. He even dropped in on one socialite while she was vacationing in the Caribbean one winter because he was in the neighborhood.

Gullo says he owes his success to his adaptation of addiction theories to people who can't control their eating habits. Pasta, sweets, and salty snacks are dangerous "trigger foods" for his patients, he says. His clients are like addicts who can't stop eating these foods once they start. Research suggests that sweets and starchy carbohydrates have a particularly strong physiological effect on the taste buds and insulin production of certain people, making them helpless to resist. Gullo instructs them to eliminate these obsessions from their diets.

"If you have many years' history of abusing a certain food, obviously you have a control problem," he explains. "People come to see me to lose weight, but it's not really about weight loss alone. In the end this work is about self-mastery, whether you will be in control of your life or whether you will allow a piece of food to be in control."

There is nothing revolutionary about the basic diet he prescribes: vegetables, fruit, seafood, poultry. What is unusual is that he tailors diets specifically to patients' lives—the times, places, and reasons they eat, and their particular downfalls. For instance, some people can control themselves around a box of cereal and others simply cannot.

But Gullo's greatest dieting tool may be flattery. He often tells his clients how wonderful they are and becomes an ally they love to visit. "Gullo puts you up on a pedestal," according to one successful businesswoman. "He says, 'After all you've achieved,

## OUT TO LUNCH

**Certain situations bring out the pig in people. Gullo offers the following survival strategies to his patients.**

**IN A RESTAURANT:** "Avoid the ten-minute problem—the first ten minutes with the bread basket and the second ten minutes with dessert. Have fish or chicken grilled with no butter or oil, or sautéed in wine and garlic. Ask for a balsamic-vinegar-and-mustard salad dressing. Have sorbet, fruit, or cappuccino with skim milk for dessert."

**AT A COCKTAIL PARTY:** "Load up on fruit or a light soup beforehand so you don't plunge into the pâté. Devote yourself to crudités and shrimp. A Virgin Mary is a great appetite suppressant."

**AT A DINNER PARTY:** "Never go hungry to a dinner party. Have a salad or some asparagus before you arrive. During drinks have tomato juice or a wine spritzer. Eat the salad, the vegetable, and the entrée, scraping off the sauce discreetly. It's not what you eat at the dinner but what you eat every day that makes you heavy."

**ON VACATION:** "If you must have dessert, save it for the last day. If you have dessert earlier, you might start a pattern for the entire trip. With all that sitting around on holiday, you'll need to practice finger control. If you start with the pretzels and peanuts, every day will be a day of weight gain. Beware tropical drinks. They are dessert in a glass."

**IN AN AIRPORT:** "Steer clear of newsstands. More people go for snacks than news. Travel with fruit or go to a frozen-yogurt stand and buy a small serving."

**IN A HOTEL:** "Don't accept the key for the minibar, or if you do, have the bar stocked only with nonalcoholic drinks. If a complimentary bowl of fruit arrives, remember that most women have trouble losing weight on more than two pieces of fruit a day. When you're ordering room service, you can't do better than an egg-white omelette with vegetables."

**WATCHING TV AT HOME:** "Don't snack. It could become a habit—turn the TV on, turn the mouth on. Sip hot or cold liquids to keep your appetite at bay."

**AT THE MOVIES:** "Have fat-free popcorn or bring fruit or three rice cakes."

**VISITING RELATIVES:** "Pray. No, really, there's nothing wrong with telling them not to go to any trouble and that you'll be very happy with some simply cooked fish or chicken. Make it sound as if you're being considerate, not demanding."

**DURING THE HOLIDAYS:** "Don't make a New Year's resolution to eat right. That's just tomorrowism. If you do gain weight, get straight back to eating right. Remember white is 'lite,' and green is lean."

*"Will you be in control of your life, or will a piece of food be?"*



how can you let a piece of bread get the better of this fabulous person?"

His advice is logical. Following his instructions, for instance, a publishing executive with a weakness for hotel minibars now calls ahead and has them stripped of all food. "You have to remove yourself from the problem," explains Gullo. As for cravings, he first suggests trying a diversion, like calling a friend. If that doesn't work, Gullo recommends resisting the temptation—just for ten minutes. "Cravings are feelings; they are not commands," he says. "Feelings pass."

Richard Rubenstein, a member of the family that owns the legendary Peter Luger steak house in New York and a senior vice president of the Howard Rubenstein and Associates public relations empire, once reached 300 pounds because of his huge appetite. Gullo taught him to fill up on non-fattening food. "I eat enough roughage when I'm out that it scares people," says Rubenstein, who has lost 120 pounds. "I'll go to a four-star restaurant and eat three salads for an appetizer and then two vegetable plates. People smirk, but better they should smirk than I should be fat."



he amazing thing about Gullo is that he makes his strict pronouncements—no more pasta, ever—without sounding like a total body Nazi. The reason is his liberal application of kindness and humor. Yasmin Aga Khan, who dropped 15 pounds under Gullo's influence, says, "He's deep and sensitive, and he really takes the time to get to know you."

Another client, the wife of a prominent Park Avenue doctor, went to him after suffering a serious illness. She had gained 50 pounds from the anxiety and was so depressed about it that she had stopped leaving her house. "After my first appointment with Dr. Gullo, I was weeping," she recalls. "The first thing I said to my husband was 'You couldn't get me to eat the wrong foods ever again.' Gullo just touched my soul. He said, 'You deserve not to be ashamed to walk in the street. I wish I could take away your pain, but I can't."

## TALKING BACK TO FOOD

GULLO HAS A HELPFUL RESPONSE FOR EVERY DIETING WOE.

**"I blew it with the French fries, so the day is lost. I was very bad."**

**"Never say 'I blew it.' No one gets fat from one mistake. The goal is to contain the mistake and move forward."**

**"I don't have the willpower to resist."**

**"Did I come this far in my life to take orders from a cookie?"**

**"I bought it for company, but I ate most of it."**

**"If I don't buy it, I don't have to wear it. If you've abused it in the past, don't buy it in the present."**

**"It's so hard to say no."**

**"Only the thin say 'No, thank you.' Every time you say 'No, thank you' to those foods, you say yes to being thin."**

**"I want to eat all those goodies."**

**"What's so good about them? They've given me obesity, larger sizes, and misery."**

**"I'll have just one."**

**"If I could have just one, why have I had a weight problem for years?"**

**"I'll feel deprived if I don't have desserts."**

**"The only real deprivation is never being thin."**

**"The food looks tempting."**

**"Do I like it enough to wear it?"**

What happened to you shouldn't have happened, but it did. Now we change your life."

With more fortunate patients he sometimes teases and cajoles, saying things like "You don't get it: You won the lottery ticket of life, and you're screwing it up. A third of the world is starving to death. You have to come here to pay me to make sure you don't eat, and then you have the chutzpah to say 'I'm deprived because I can't have chocolate!'"

Although Gullo is discreet, it is not beyond him to mention casually that (1) a royal patient knighted him in 1986, (2) another client is a princess with a severe pizza and take-out food problem ("I told her to instruct the armed guards in the palace not to let the delivery boys in," he says), and (3) the world would be more impressed by the people he has refused to treat. "A producer in L.A. begged me to work with the star of a television show there and offered me all kinds of money, but I don't like her," he explains. "She should stay fat."

Stephen Gullo grew up in a big Italian family. His father was in the food business, and ironically, his grandfather helped develop a pasta-making machine. At 19 Gullo almost died of cancer (a melanoma that had spread). Because of his illness, he never finished college, but he

managed to enter the clinical psychology graduate program at Columbia University, which he found boring. "I was more interested in motivational psychology," he says. "What is it that enables a person, through all kinds of obstacles, to go forward in his life?"

Starting to work with weight patients was an odd professional leap, since Gullo concentrated on grief and terminal illness in school, but he believes the move was quite natural. Although many of his patients are embarrassed to spend so much money on something so superficial, he considers his work as crucial as treating the grief stricken. "A lot of my patients have suffered a profound loss—of a sense of themselves, the body they once knew, youth," he says. "I never think of myself as a diet doctor. I think of myself as a health professional who helps people push forward the boundaries (continued on page 158)

# One fashionable New Yorker lost



Gullo says that thin starts in the supermarket: "If you don't buy it and don't bring it home, then you won't have a problem."



*weight at a rate of \$103 a pound.*



## Dr. Diet

(continued from page 122) of human freedom in their lives."

Gullo has also pushed forward the financial boundaries of his own life. A bachelor, he now has to work only four days a week and spends his free time at one of his three houses, which include a waterfront place in the Virgin Islands, where he kayaks and parasails on many long weekends. (He considered buying a house in Florida, but so many of his patients have houses there he figured he'd end up "doing group therapy on the plane.")

Now Gullo is branching out to the masses. In February he will start appearing in infomercials, selling a generic version of his tapes, and he is also planning to launch Diet 911, a hot line for bingers. In April he will publish his first diet book, *Thin Tastes Better*. But it remains to be seen if his ideas will work without the individual attention he gives his patients.

One evening at 11:15 Gullo is sitting in his office when the telephone rings. It is one of his patients, a newspaper mogul in the Midwest, who has just come back from a holiday to find that her employees have started bringing gourmet cakes to the office regularly. She is tempted. Gullo begins a tape (which he will FedEx to her the next day). "Phoebe, are you for real?" he says. "You know more about chocolate cake than anyone else on that staff of yours. You've had enough cake. You need to taste thin."

He later explains how closely he identifies with Phoebe, and for that matter, with all his clients. "I'm narcissistic," he says. "I always feel pain if I gain three or four pounds." In fact, Bogner stocks the office freezer with only two Weight Watchers Chocolate Mousse ice cream bars at a time because if a whole package were available, Gullo would devour every last bar. But he doesn't agonize over his occasionally flimsy backbone and doesn't want his clients to torture themselves either. Over the years he has learned that dieting doesn't have to be misery. "The greatest surprise of my professional life is threefold," he says. "One, how many people are really happy. Two, how many good people have made it to the top. And three, how many people like cottage cheese." ●

## Nan Kempner

(continued from page 154) Valiant tunic from the 60s," she says, mentally riffling through her closets to find the iridescent colors and odd fabrics of lost decades. "I can still wear it with a shirt and a pair of pants under it. That's the thing about couture: It never goes out of style."

The outfitting continues. "I'm a bit of a leopard freak," Nan growls, reaching for a print waistcoat. *Fake* leopard, someone kicks in. *Fake* leopard, Nan reassures. Animal-rights folks, in fact, need not fear in the realm of Kitty. This particular leopard is so synthetic that it fairly oozes 10W-40 motor oil. So is the fuzzy jacket that is the phosphorescent green of anti-freeze. So is the silver vinyl in a nearby jacket. Kitty's look is clearly at least five steps beyond fabulous.

In wander two Kitty acolytes, waifs with an edge. By this point Nan's enthusiasm knows no bounds. She considers a black vinyl evening gown with "Bitch" studded across the breasts. "This one is me!"

Lunch, ordered in from Zen Palate, is wheat gluten, soy medallions—that sort of thing. "I'll have a cranberry iced tea," states Nan primly.

The time comes to edit an issue of Chi Chi's literary-journal-cum-fanzine, *Verbal Abuse*, which is full of erotic poetry and avant-garde photos. Nan bums a cigarette. "I'm not a smoker," she says. But today she's hacking from a cold. "Cigarettes make me cough better."

The assembled dig into a loose stack of papers on the table. They're all poems, hoping to find their way into *Verbal Abuse*. Nan, meanwhile, turns a copy of the journal sideways, staring like a 13-year-old boy with a stolen copy of *Juggs*.

"Well, I don't think punk is necessarily downtown," she informs her congregation. "I just bought a new coat when I was in Paris. It's all made of feathers. They all shoot out. It's wild." Before anyone can get too excited, she adds an important detail: "It's from Saint Laurent."

Half an hour later Nan is sitting in a chair at the back of Perfidia's Hair World, a clothing boutique/wig shop/hair salon on East 8th Street, and she looks as if she's bolted there. "Red! It's fun to be a redhead!" Nan says, trying gamely to sound enthused.

"We have some good reds," assures the wig-fitting Miss Shannon, who is

shortish, roundish, and male-ish, with a cakey, made-up face. Shannon wears what looks like a green nylon angler's vest. He is positively alive with possibilities for recoinffing the woman whose name is quite obviously lost on him.

A techno-beat hints at Bangladesh. The salon's owner, Perfidia, a dark punkish guy in red plaid pants, pops in, spreads words of encouragement, and vanishes. The place is a sickly swirl of color and drowns out even the radiant bons mots of Mrs. Kempner.

Nan is asked about her most radical hairstyle. "Short," she says, lost beneath a cascade of synthetic red tresses. "My husband hated it." She declines a Merit cigarette but accepts a Parliament.

Shannon, however, is only getting started. "I've got one of those flipped rubber wigs. Those look really *ill on*," he says. He produces a bouncy, molded crash helmet of a headpiece painted the metallic blue of a mid-60s Pontiac. Shannon squeezes it on Nan's head as if it were a five-pound bathing cap. A round enameled earring plunges to the floor and clatters away. For the first time since she's been south of 14th Street, Nan flashes a look of terror.

Talk turns to the nearby Body Worship, where Nan could go if she were in the mood to check out some fetish-wear. She coughs and declines.

Just in time, Johnny Dynell arrives. Johnny is Mr. Chi Chi, Valenti's husband of 11 years. He wears a black motorcycle jacket, black jeans, conductors' boots, and one of those ubiquitous black "Meow" shirts. Behind it all, however, he flashes a boyish smile. And Nan smiles a little easier.

Johnny wants Perfidia attire for dinner. He hauls out a fuzzy midlength green coat reminiscent of sod. Nan selects a baseball jacket in orange fuzz. "This is like *Sesame Street*," she says with Waspy detachment. "Big Bird."

Nan soon regains that Mortimer's composure. "Pat Buckley would love this," she chirps. "And Kenny Lane would go wild." Johnny jauntily takes her by the arm.

"People are just as outrageous uptown," she reflects. After all, didn't she see this kind of thing in Tangiers at that Malcolm Forbes party in 1989?

Only later does Nan grab a quiet moment. She has, she says, just one more little question. "Can you tell me—who is RuPaul?" ●