

She lost the pounds I didn't

FEELING FAT

THE WAR BETWEEN my brain and my body began at 13.

I studied my ass in the mirror with dismay. It was simply too big. Why couldn't I take after my mother, I wondered. I was both blessed and cursed to be the daughter of a beautiful woman. My mother's family are all little people, with compact, proportionate bodies.

So why was my ass clearly wider than it should be? I relayed this concern to my aunt, a woman of portly proportions. She would certainly understand. Was it not her gene pool brewing within me, conspiring against my pubescent ideals of feminine perfection? I wanted the anomalous combination of boyish hips and generous breasts I saw plastered in my friends' fashion magazines. Instead I had been quite literally saddled with the shoulders of a linebacker, boobs of no great dimension and the shapely hips of my paternal ancestors

swam or dribbled a basketball, all the other girls seemed so much thinner. So much better, I thought.

Pictures of me then belie my self-concept. I look like a regular teenager, kind of dopey and angular and decidedly small. I was average. But I just couldn't see myself that way.

As a young adult, the situation worsened. I tried to avoid showing my naked backside to new lovers. This required considerable creativity executed with little grace.

I thought any woman who told me I was beautiful was a compulsive liar not to be trusted. And still, the pictures show that I wasn't big.

Then I started to gain weight. But I was happy. I was in love with a woman who said she adored my curves and I believed her. Ironically, my self-image was better

than it had been in my thinner 20s. And then came the terrible day that I couldn't find anything to wear.

My partner lay in bed watching me have a complete hissy fit.

"What about the dress pants my parents gave you last Christmas?" she calmly suggested.

"Too tight!" I screamed,

— solid, British and built for childbirth. I was appalled at how things were shaping up and turned to my Aunt for help.

"Okay," she nodded sagely when I explained my dilemma. "Stand with your back against the wall." I dutifully took up my position and held my breath. "Now, three times a day, you have to hit the wall with your bum." My Aunt didn't crack a smile.

"Like this?" I enthusiastically hammered the plaster with my ass.

"No. Move a little further forward. You really want to connect with that wall." I repositioned myself and resumed the battery of her kitchen hallway.

"Good," she nodded her approval and watched me exercise for a few minutes.

"Now what?" I asked excitedly.

"Well," she stroked her chin in deep thought. "In about three weeks, the goddamned wall will fall down." My aunt burst out laughing and turned away to continue fixing dinner.

I watched my aunt chuckle to herself and realized she had a point. I was what I was and she had no time for the small concerns of her vain niece.

"Thanks a lot," I muttered.

"Don't mention it. Now get the hell out of my kitchen, unless you're here to peel potatoes."

The enemy I had made of my body haunted me through high school. I was athletic and joined every team I could, partly in an effort to thwart my genetic blueprint. No matter how hard I ran,

vaguely guilty at taking out my frustration on the thin woman I loved. She closed her eyes in exaggerated patience.

"Then we'll get you some new clothes." Her voice was low, eminently logical.

"I don't want to shop at the fat lady stores!" I wailed. She sighed, deeply.

"You're beautiful."

"You're lying."

I started to diet. My partner predictably dropped the weight I couldn't, as starchy snacks no longer appeared in the pantry. Her ribs began to stick out and she shrugged sympathetically. "Sweetheart, it's just genes."

I started to encourage her to eat crap behind my back and bought more tasteless expensive diet foods from the grocery store for myself. Still no change.

A year ago I reluctantly conceded that diets don't work. I have since lost 30 pounds. I started to eat salads for lunch, but more importantly, I was once again happy and motivated to get off my ass. I began to use my body instead of hiding from it. No diet in the world could have helped me. I just needed to feel a part of my skin again.

My skin, as it turns out, houses a naturally chunky form that hovers between regular and plus size, like so many others. After a lifelong battle with social constructs of beauty, I finally accept that it just doesn't matter, as long as you're happy. Let the goddamned wall fall down. We are what we are.



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