

# Fat & Happy

*Everything is different now*

*Deb Lemire*



Fat & happy in Ohio! I wrote that in Christmas cards I sent to some old friends a few years ago after moving into our new house. It included a family picture with Santa Claus. Was it really true? I was fat, certainly. Was I happy? I had no complaints, not serious ones anyway. I told myself I was writing that phrase to let my friends know life was good with me. But that wasn't 100% true. I was also writing it because the last time they saw me I weighed at least 75 pounds less than I do now. I wanted to circumvent the "gee, she used to look so good" when they looked at the picture. Not that I would be there to hear it. But you hear it.

The truth is I didn't "used to look so good." At least not when *I* looked in the mirror. Growing up I was constantly told that I should lose weight. Translation: *because you're fat you are worth less than the rest of us*. I spent a lot of time hating myself, convinced I wasn't important, that I didn't have anything valuable to contribute. But it's weird. I look at pictures of myself in high school and college and they don't match the picture in my head. I expect to see a huge, ugly slob of a girl. What I actually *do* see – what is actually *there* - is a beautiful, "normal" size young woman.

Our society's obsession with thinness and the perfect body damages almost every woman in it, nearly half of the population, and yet it goes largely unquestioned and unchallenged. When a woman is valued mainly because of her looks she feels a sense of power. And why not? She feels wanted, sought after and loved. But at what cost to her personal, physical or mental self? And when she ages or gains weight and no longer fits the "ideal" image, she discovers that what she thought was love was merely pride of ownership. And it is easily transferred to someone else. She then becomes *powerless*.

Fat phobia and the quest for thinness has not brought women together, it has separated us. It's the "divide and conquer" approach at its best. The tape that runs in our heads that tells us we are fat, not lovable, that we are ugly or imperfect distracts women from important work, keeps women

from participating fully in society and traps women in abusive relationships. We owe it to ourselves and our daughters to learn the truth about fat bigotry in our society.

And it needs to be the whole truth, not just the “love yourself as you are” part. The truth about the statistics and misinformation used to manipulate how we feel about ourselves. We need to come together and learn to identify that manipulation so it no longer has power over us. Without that we are trapped in a vicious cycle. Just like the cover of any women’s magazine at the grocery check out: right next to a picture of a gooey, luscious chocolate cake, with the recipe promised inside is... “Get rid of those fat thighs forever!”

A couple of weeks ago the topic on Oprah was something like “A Day in the Life of a Fat Woman”. Several women told stories of how humiliating it was to be fat in today's society. Their pain was palpable. I was not satisfied with the way the issue was handled but there were good intentions floating around. Then, when one woman said she was mortified at the office deliveryman's inquiry "well where do you want your king size chair?" *my* first thought was..."that's *queen size* chair to you pal!" The tape in my head had changed!

Everything is different for me now. I have learned to recognize fat bigotry. And every day I get better at it. It no longer has power over me. I will pass that on to my daughter. I hope one day she will understand and appreciate the advantage she has. But for now, all she knows is she has a mama who is fat AND happy!

*Queen Bee Productions presents a seminar that explores fat bigotry in our “looks-driven” society, how to recognize it, its effects on women, and how to begin changing that tape in your head. Thursday, June 19, 7-9 p.m. The Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron, 3300 Morewood Rd. Cost, \$10. To register call 330-929-3382 or e-mail [queenb@queenbeeprod.com](mailto:queenb@queenbeeprod.com).*