



## EDITORIAL

BY MARTY DAVIS

## Size sensitivity

Being overweight is no picnic, even in a community that claims to 'celebrate diversity'

**T**he weight is back. This time was supposed to be different from the time before—which was going to be different from the time before that. But it has happened again. The weight is back. With the weight gain come all the old familiar feelings of self-doubt, low self-esteem and concerns about acceptance.

I know there are overweight people who accept their size, even relish and delight in their personal power and positive self-image. There are people who embrace the notion that who you are and how you live your life is more important than what size you are. I envy them. I want to be like them, but instead I fall prey to the daily onslaught of reminders that being overweight is undesirable, unhealthy and unacceptable.

I know there will be some who will read these words without understanding how anything so trivial as body size could be worth this space. There will be those who say, "Stop whining, find something important to worry about."

But I know there also will be many others who know exactly how I feel. Each day we come face to face with reminders there is something wrong and unacceptable about being overweight.

Each day we strive to balance the obvious health benefits associated with weight loss against concerns about falling into the trap of trying to meet unrealistic and unattainable standards and expectations.

Some time ago a close friend, in a moment of her own anguish, confided that she would rather be dead than fat. These are the most stunning words I have ever heard. Even though I understand she meant only herself, I still reel at the notion that such pain could be caused by the

perceived, or actual, unwillingness of our own community to accept overweight people. She was not willing to deal ever again with the rejection and unkindness she felt when she was overweight.

Conversations with both male and female friends show clearly that no one completely recovers from the trauma of being overweight as a child. There is nothing quite equal to the unkindness shown overweight children. People with these scars, added to the confusion around sexual identity, become insecure adults, no matter how strong the facade. Often it takes only a few careless words to cause the inner crumbling of a strong-appearing exterior wall.

Political correctness deems we never knowingly make a sexist, racist or deliberately unkind remark. Yet so often, and so easily we mow down someone's self-esteem with a thoughtless remark directed towards size and appearance.

I once heard a woman make an embarrassed explanation to her friends: "She wasn't heavy when I dated her." She felt her friends would think less of her for dating an overweight woman. In our "height and weight proportionate" world, she was being teased for having stepped outside the standards.

How often have you heard or spoken the phrase "I can't eat that, I'll get fat"? Do you think about the feelings of the person listening? Being healthy is not an unworthy goal, yet these words fall hard on the ears of the overweight listener.

Even though the George Bush years are behind us, I would favor the concept of becoming a "kinder and gentler nation." Wouldn't it be a fine thing if different sizes and shapes were celebrated as part of the diversity that our community claims to hold so dear?

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## just out

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