

NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS NIGHTSPOTS

NIGHTSPOTS

POWERBOYS

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HUMOR

Working out

A gay man's search for a gym

The gym. I'm not sure how it

happened, but this bastion of masculinity and muscles has been at the epicenter of gay life for a generation. The message is clear: Those who get pumped get to pump others.

As one who never liked the gym, I have only recently made my peace with this phenomenon. You see, in my somewhat chubbier past I had actually managed to convince myself that I was in reasonably good shape (hey, round is a shape), despite the fact that my relaxed-fit jeans had gotten so relaxed they were practically comatose. I achieved this deluded state by following a strenuous regimen of resistance training: I resisted training every opportunity I could.

Then, quite by accident, I caught sight of my ass in a hotel mirror and practically needed to be sedated from the shock. Somehow my butt had begun to resemble a Shar-Pei. A boneless Shar-Pei at that. Thick and tired of it, I signed up for a membership at 24 Hour Fitness, or perhaps in my case I should say 24 Hour Fatness.

Operating on the principle that if you want what someone has, do what they do, I chose a trainer with pecs so big he looked like he was wearing a life vest under his T-shirt. His name was Chuck, and he was big and stupid, and I loved him for it. (I'm not a fan of the lean, chiseled look; I just don't think there's anything remotely sexy about resembling a page in *Gray's Anatomy*.)

I wanted to impress Chuck—I was already thinking about place settings for our small, but tasteful, wedding reception in Vermont—so I kept asking him to put more weight on the bar as I bench-pressed.

"You might want to go lighter," he said as the vein on the side of my head threatened to blow. "Your form is suffering."

I told him I was more concerned with my form out of the gym, thank you very much, and that I'd bench-press Hoover Dam if I thought it would give me pecs like his.

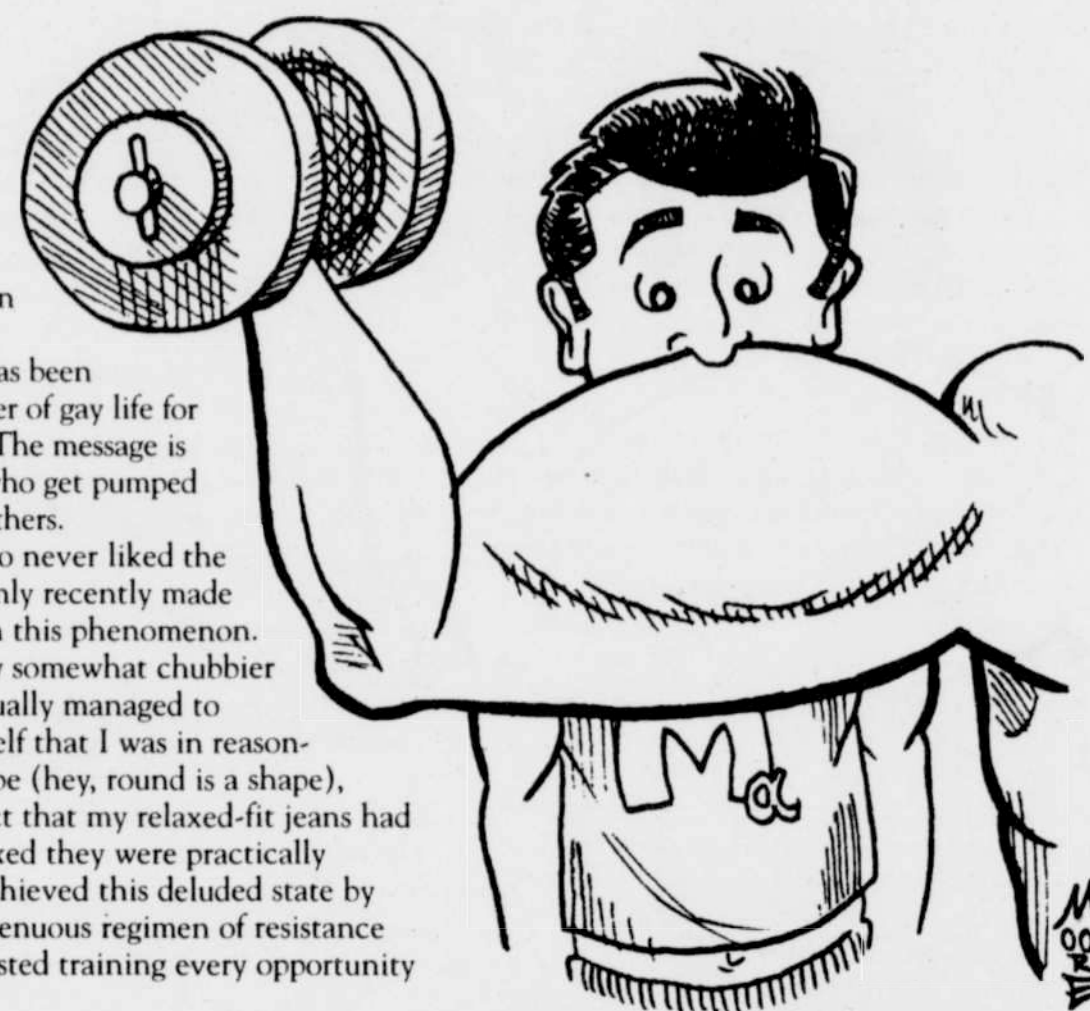
After 20 minutes I was ready for the Cardiac Care Unit. I lay back on the bench and closed my eyes.

"No resting on the equipment between sets," he said.

"I'm not resting," I replied. "I'm stretching my eyelids."

They say that exercise adds years to your life and it's true; I felt older already. I staggered into the locker room with my arms straight out in front of me like Frankenstein's Monster.

One of the cruel ironies of being in one's upper middle 30s is that at the precise moment you get your head together, your body goes to crap. So, as much as I enjoyed trying to peek up Chuckles' shorts while he spotted me, I soon grew tired of his 24 Hour Twitness. I mean, all that emphasis on warming up and stretching—what a yawn. If God meant for me to touch my toes, he would



THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING
TO MARC
by Marc Acito



have put them on my knees where I could reach 'em.

So I tried out some of the swankier places—y'know, the kind where you can play handball and get a manicure afterward. I used to joke that I didn't like going to the gym because they had such a bad selection of cakes and pies, but nowadays most upscale gyms are an excellent source of baked goods.

It's part of their marketing plan—you work out, you eat a couple of muffins, you come back to burn off the calories. It's their way of staying in business. With all that temptation, a guy could gain a dress size just passing through the lobby. I figured it was only a matter of time before you'd see me on television crying on Richard Simmons' shoulder about how I was too obese to leave the house.

I continued my search for a place to work out.

In my fantasy life, of course, I make a daily pilgrimage to the gay gym, the one where guys are always cruising each other and jerking each other off (and that's just in the reception area). A place so filled with beautiful people you need to work out before you get there.

But my better self concluded that it was more important to get fit than get off. So I finally settled for my very unglamorous local community center on the theory that, since it's less than a mile from my house, I'd go more often. It worked.

I still can't say I like going, but I love the results. On clear days I can even jog there. Fortunately I live in Oregon, and we don't have that many clear days.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*. **JM**

MARC ACITO regularly climbs stairs to nowhere. Write him at marcacito@attbi.com.