

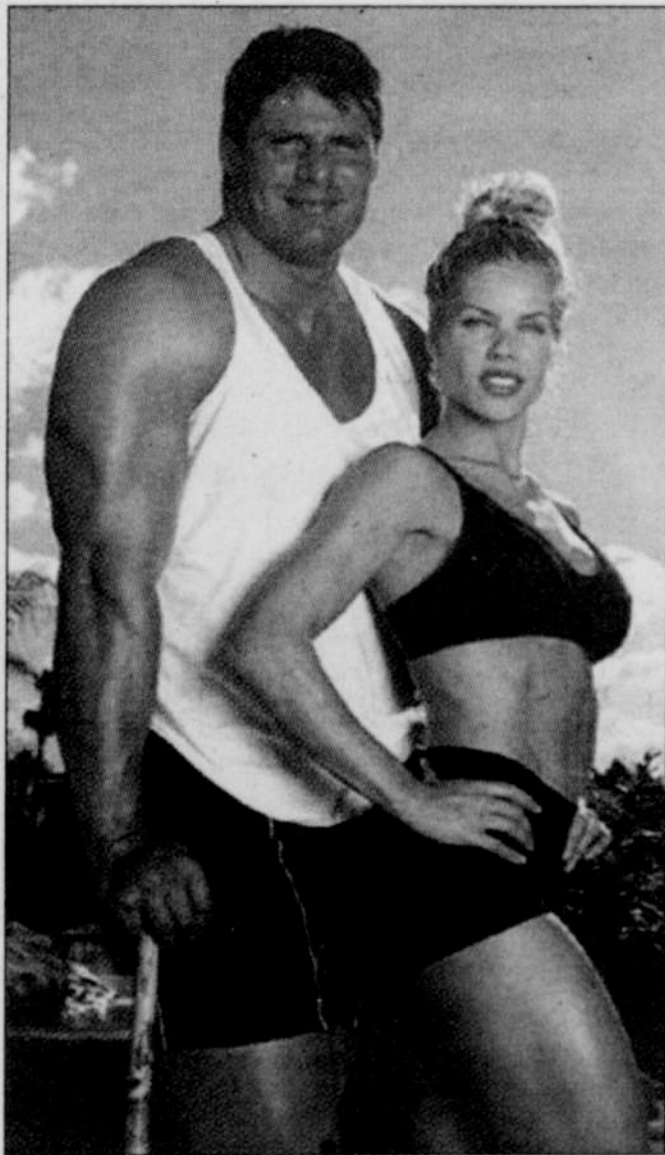
# Behind the Scenes at the Corporate Gym

Dear Ethel in deep cover

**M**any gyms are gearing up for Resolution Season—the time of year directly following holiday excesses. I've heard horror stories about sales and social pressure in corporate gyms, so I went secret shopping at a corporate gym to see if anything had changed.

As an out genderqueer, I'm used to feeling out of place in the fitness world, and walking into the corporate gym was no exception. Although gyms try to place you with a trainer of the same gender, it was apparent that the gym I had chosen for my undercover investigation didn't stock my gender. Posters of hetero-normative folks in Spandex were sprawled across the walls, showcasing petite, traditionally feminine-looking women wielding tiny weights propped against the chiseled, bulging muscles of their beefcake counterparts. Every turn of my head presented me with yet another visual glorification of heterosexual gender binaries.

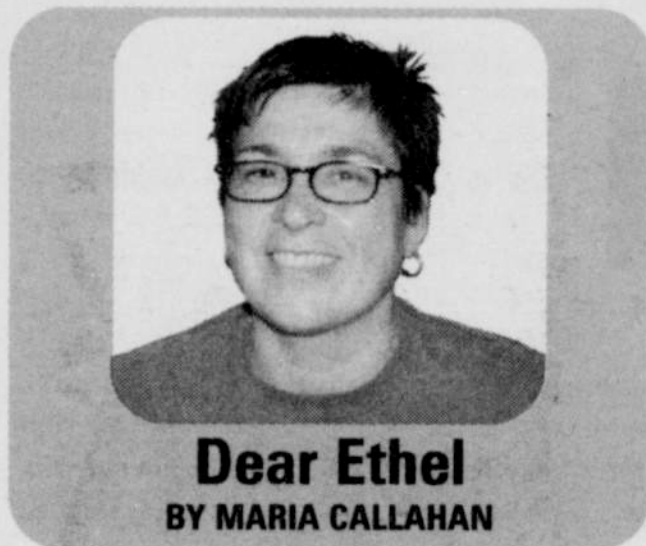
It was decided that I should speak with "Billy" (not his real name), a powerfully built personal trainer who greeted me at the front desk. We sat down and discussed my fitness goals, which consisted primarily



**Heteronormativity and Spandex made Dear Ethel in deep cover feel somewhat out of place in the corporate gym.**

of weight loss, with a secondary focus on strengthening an injured knee. We weighed and measured, then out came the calipers. Billy explained that we needed to measure over my clothing; as you can guess, the additional three points of my winter clothing placed me firmly in the "unacceptable" category on the chart located at eye level above his desk.

Billy explained that I could expect to lose one to two pounds a week by training three times a week and by adhering to a 1,400-calorie-a-day diet. He estimat-



ed that I would need 75 to 150 personal training sessions (\$50 each) to reach my goal. Tack on one year's worth of time, \$30-\$90 worth of supplements each month and a membership that would run \$320 for one year. When I hedged, Billy motioned and the manager came in to tell me he could make me a "deal" by setting up an initial two-month program for \$620 if, that is, I purchased no later than the following day at 4 p.m.

During my complimentary workout we didn't check my heart rate and I barely broke a sweat. This should not have gone unnoticed: Certified trainers are taught to use an intensity scale called Rating of Perceived Exertion, or RPE. On a scale of 1 to 10, I was exercising at about 2, using the RPE system. A healthy athletic adult can and should be exercising between 6 and 9. There was no core exercise in my routine and no exercises that would specifically strengthen the muscles around my knee. Billy taught good basic form, but he was evasive when asked about his training and certifications.

In my initial interview with Billy, I mentioned that I wanted to be challenged, that I was an athlete and that I wanted to use free weights. Because of our low-intensity use of basic circuit training machines, what I was presented with was no challenge at all. By the end of our workout, it was clear to me that I had been both size- and age-profiled. As a result of these assumptions, I had been grossly underestimated.

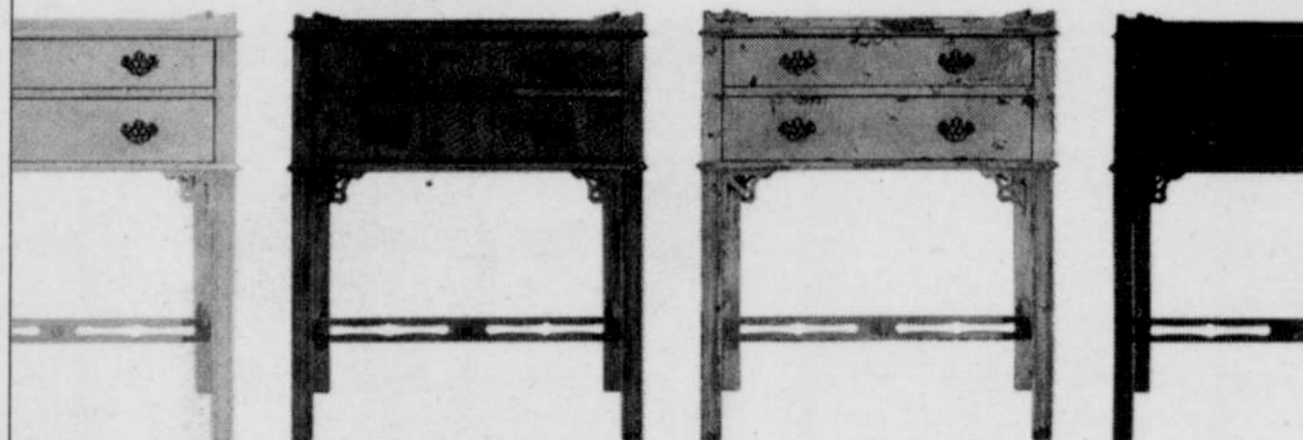
The experience led me to wonder if I, too, had been guilty of profiling myself in a similar fashion. Had I internalized the messages we are all constantly bombarded with that suggest there is only one way to be fit and healthy? This experience inspired me to question the expectations I was placing on myself in terms of what I was capable of physically. The realization that I was underestimating myself as an athlete motivated me to increase the target heart rate range at which I'd been exercising.

Certified personal trainers can help you reach your goals, but be sure to find someone who listens and trains accordingly. Always ask for current certifications and experience—there is no substitute. 10

*Information in this column should not be used in place of advice from a licensed health care professional. If you have a health or fitness question, e-mail DEAR ETHEL at maria@etbeldjesels.com or visit www.etbeldjesels.com.*

HICKORY CHAIR

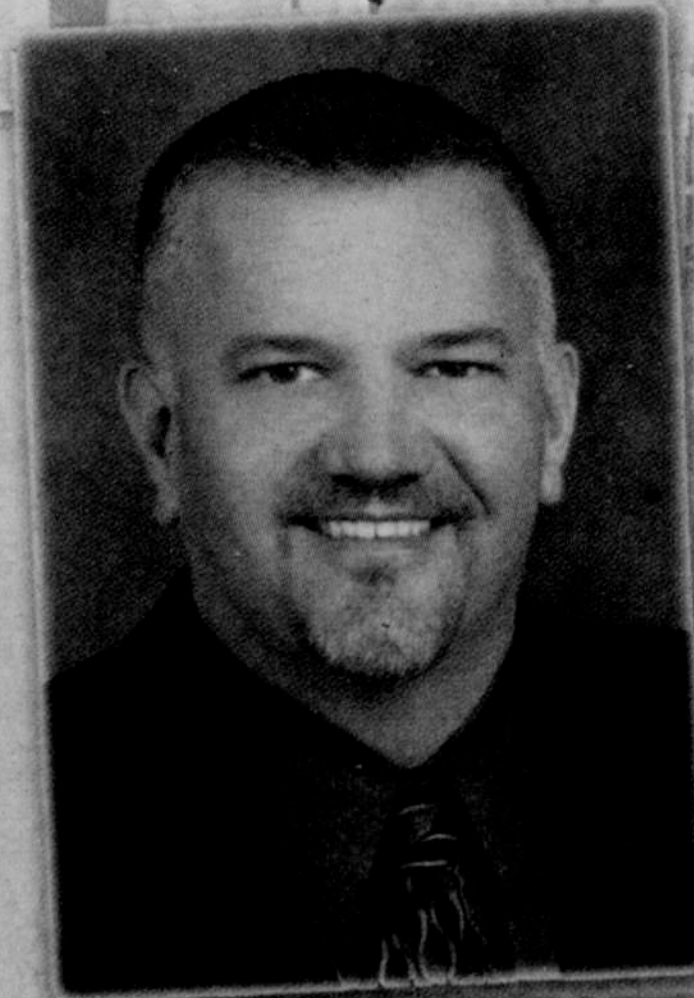
CLASSIC DESIGNS PERSONALIZED BY YOU  
IN MORE THAN 35 CUSTOM FINISHES



MADE-TO-ORDER. MADE TO LAST.  
MADE FOR YOU IN JUST A FEW WEEKS.

studioG11

1100 NW Glisan in the Pearl District • www.studioG11.com  
Mon-Sat 10-6, Sun 12-5 • 503.943.3411



**17 Years of  
Mortgage  
Lending  
Experience**

Service where  
"Family" matters!

**Jay Mortensen**  
Home Loan Consultant

**Call Jay today.**



(503) 274-0140 Direct  
(503) 973-5626 Office  
(503) 274-7654 Fax

jay\_mortensen@countrywide.com

**Pearl Office:**  
831 NW 14th Street • Portland



**Countrywide®**  
HOME LOANS