
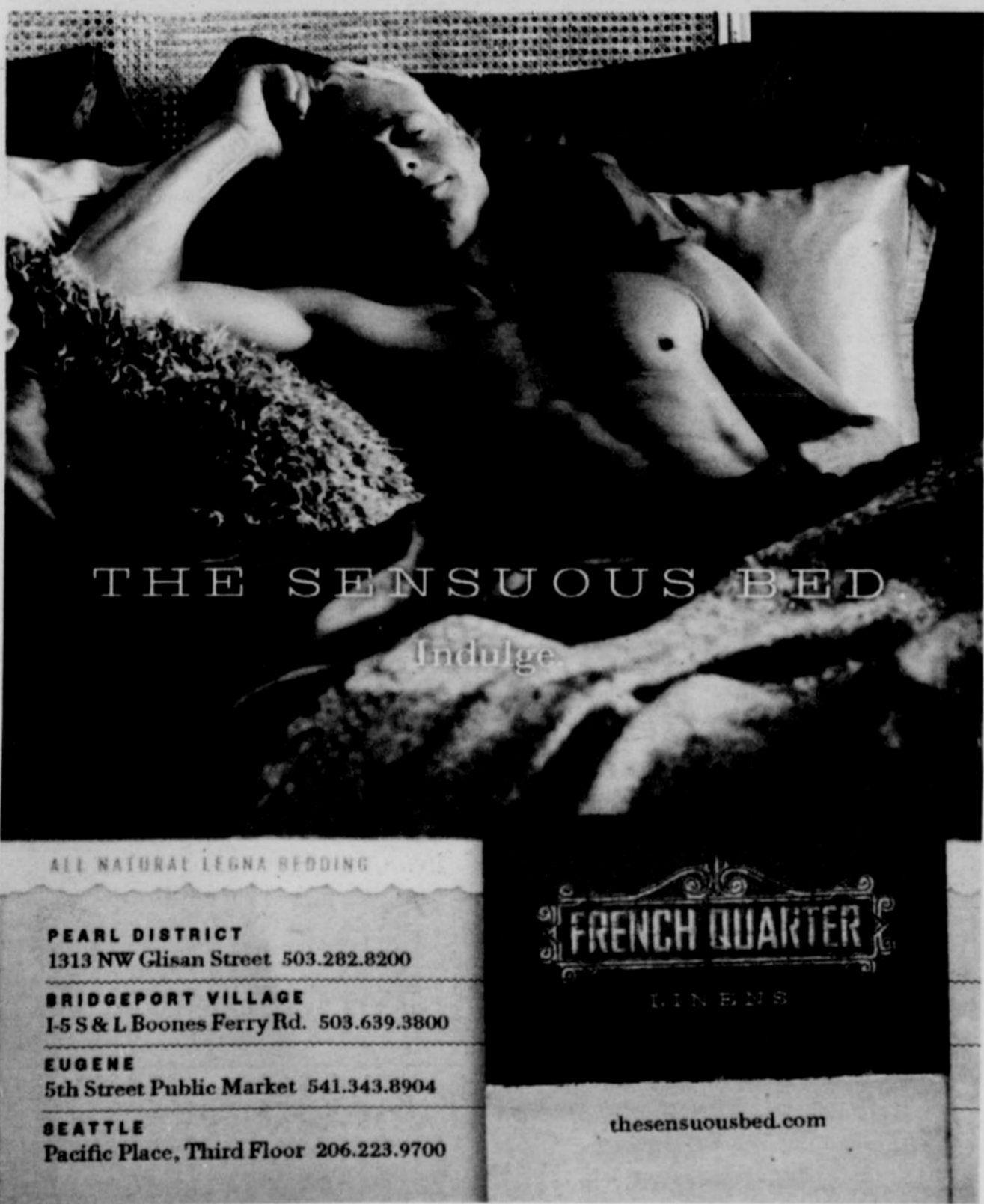


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Vacation reawakens mind-body connection

This column debuted more than two years ago, but there's a significant aspect of my past that I have yet to address publicly, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

Like many other queers, I've endured a lifelong struggle with my weight. I used to blame it on unfortunate, genetically established metabolism. Or on crappy eating habits. Or on my desk-bound career.

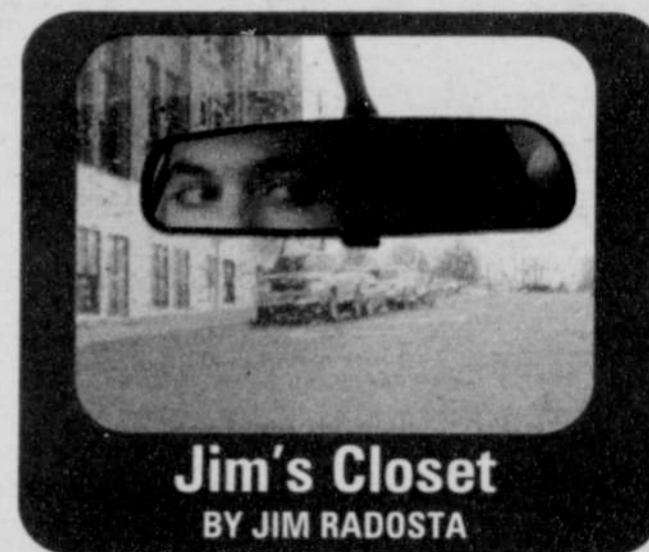
But I'm starting to put it all together: After a brief svelte period in my teen years, my weight skyrocketed just as I was becoming sexually aware toward the end of high school—and just as I was entering a conservative Christian college. Most students pack on the dreaded "Freshman 15." For me, it was more like the "Freshman 50"—and then some. Instead of addressing a growing desire to explore my sexuality, I insulated my body in a layer of blubber to keep anyone from seeing me as more than just a jolly pal.

I didn't come out of the closet until five years after graduation, when my body gave-out on me: After suffering from dull chest pains for months, I drove myself to the emergency room, convinced that I was having a heart attack. Turns out I wasn't—thank goodness—but at least I was starting to listen to my body.

It took me another four years before I finally addressed my obesity. I joined Weight Watchers, took up biking, cut back significantly on television (my greatest addiction) and dropped 65 pounds within 12 months.

That was 2003. Although I've kept the weight off, I've continued to grapple with lousy body image. I was able to contemplate this ongoing challenge during a life-changing, mind-altering vacation last month at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz. The health resort offers something for everyone—from makeup demonstrations to medical consultations to metaphysical journeys—with healthy gourmet meals included in the package.

I went on a hike, a bike ride and a bird-watching excursion (in which we spotted 15 stunning species within an hour). I experienced my first acupuncture session and pedicure. I took classes to heighten my awareness of posture, balance and breathing and to introduce myself to the magic of meditation. I learned how to make Shrimp Pad Thai at a cooking demonstration. Fitness instructors worked my ass (and gut) off with stretching exercises, water



1989: You've got to hide your love away.



2001: I am the walrus.



2006: Getting better all the time.

aerobics and a muscle-release therapy called "Yamuna Body Rolling."

Of course, no spa stay is complete without a little pampering, so I booked an appointment for the "Ultra Moisturizing Treatment," an indulgence involving full-body exfoliation and a slathering of vanilla lotion, after which you're enveloped in a sleeping bag-type cocoon and lowered into a vat of warm water. (Ah, a return to the womb.) I also tried out the "Lulur Asian Ritual," featuring a bathtub full of rose petals à la *American Beauty*.

The four-day stay ended on a calm note with a "Spirit Walk" led by a guru who offered some profound advice on how to live life in the present, taking in all of the sights, sounds and feelings that surround us. Then I had my chakras aligned by a healing touch practitioner. Since then I haven't felt better—even after returning to the stressful "real world."

I don't want all of this to come across as me bragging about my decadent vacation—I truly hope that everyone can find the time to treat their bodies well, whether it's booking a stay at Breitenbush Hot Springs, blending a smoothie or just drawing a bath. In a society that conditions queers to put their minds at odds with their bodily urges, it's an incredible feeling to actually see what happens when the two are working together. 10

CANYON RANCH has health resorts in Tucson, Ariz., and Lenox, Mass.; luxury condominiums in Tucson, Chicago and Miami Beach; and day spa facilities in Las Vegas and Kissimmee, Fla., and aboard the *Queen Mary 2*. For more information visit www.canyonranch.com.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.