

On Being a Bit of a Fatty

I'm not ashamed to be fat, but I am ashamed of the behaviour that got – and keeps – me that way.

The curse of overeating is that you carry around the evidence of your crime everywhere you go. Smokers can nip out quietly for a fag, pop a mint in their mouth after the deed, and explain away the chesty cough as a bit of a cold coming on. If you indulge in an unhealthily large amount of slap and tickle with the lady next-door, just be discreet and remember to wipe the lipstick off your dog collar on your way out.

But if you're fat like me, you're like Woody Allen's overfed narrator of excess poundage, dripping with flesh "like hot fudge off a sundae." Even catalogue clothing with vertical stripes can't hide my excess poundage.

And the fact a person is fat says nothing about where they are now. How do you know that 18-stone woman you just sneered at wasn't 25 stone a year ago? The hilarious – yes, laugh-out-loud hysterical – way that man over there waddles when he walks might tell you he spent 20 years eating pie and chips, but it doesn't tell you he stopped months ago and is now in the daily habit of eating fresh tuna, three-bean salad and celery stalks for tea.

Back in the day, school chums tried to encourage me by assuring me I wasn't fat, but just "chubby." My partner doesn't like me calling myself "fat," and probably for the same reasons – he knows the sting of that word, and the cruel way it is used by bullies to manipulate the overweight into misery.

Make no mistake, I've experienced bullying. Thankfully, my genuine self-confidence robbed playground bullies of the joy of an ongoing torture campaign, but they always tried at least once. It's continued into adult life, and I am accustomed to jobs making a concerted effort to slow down their cars and wind

down the windows just so they can inform me loudly that I'm a "fat bastard." Yes, I'm aware I'm overweight, thank you. Are you aware you're a mean-spirited, antisocial freak and your friends probably only pretend to like you?

So I have no patience with bullies. Also, I have no desire to project my own failings onto other fat people. I could hazard a few guesses how you got that way, but I don't know you, so they would really would be just guesses. Maybe it is your genetics – I'm not a doctor.

But I would be foolish to deny that overeating got me this way, or at least played a main role in the lifelong Falstaffian drama of my weight increase. I would be equally silly to deny that overeating now is the major factor in keeping me this way. Frankly, to do so would be to let the bullies win. They want to rob me of my dignity, and what more pitiful way for a person to lose their dignity than to refuse to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Accepting personal responsibility is one of life's hardest yet most joyful lessons.

I'm not ashamed to be fat, but nor am I ready to deny that my own actions keep me fat and only my own actions will make me less fat. As long as the chances of a New York cheesecake staying in my fridge more than 48 hours remain slim, so do the chances of my cheeks looking less puffy any day soon.

Fat acceptance, fat pride – well, okay, if that's your thing, but some of us know that for us at least, the rather weighty fact of the matter is that cutting down on pizza, pasties and Pringles is our only hope.

David L Rattigan

August, 2010