

# Battle Scars

In her blog post titled “[Contemplating Body Image at Half a Century Old](#),” Glenna McCarthy makes the case that despite living with HIV, lipodystrophy and aging, she is at her best right now. Below is an edited excerpt.

August 14, 2017 By [Glenna McCarthy](#)

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At the moment, I am single and plan to stay that way until I have an epiphany or someone walks into the room and I hear background music like the soundtrack of my favorite movie and I am in a magical trance and can’t help myself.

Why so cynical and/or guarded? I am not sure, but I know that some of my recent success has been the result of the fact that I am not basing my importance on someone else’s approval.

I was codependent most of my life and felt I had to have a distraction from my thoughts or someone who made me feel needed. I would rather have been in a bad relationship than be by myself. For the past five years, I have been learning to live in my own skin, and—phew—it has been one hell of a ride but long overdue.

I remember in 1980, when I was about 14 years old, Farrah Fawcett was the ideal to try to live up to. Designer jeans had just made their presence known, and everyone was trying to fit into non-stretch jeans. My mother told me that I was not pretty (in a pretty sense), so I assumed my role was that of a tomboy and strived to be athletic. As puberty hit, I lay on my back and tried to zip up the popular jeans. I also became bulimic for a short period of time.

At the time, the goal was to look anorexic and have hair that looked heavier than you. I had my can of hair spray ready for an emergency, like an officer carries a gun.

Then I came to a crossroads and found drugs. I achieved a flat stomach—which seemed very important—with drugs and put on a “live fast, die young” carefree mask.

While I was sleeping my life away on opiates, the “look” took a turn and big butts were in demand. The change from “get thin” to “get thick” was confusing. Now, mind you, I was also a tough guy by this point, so hiding behind bravado was another way I had control, and could decide who was in my life so I wouldn’t have to face rejection.

When I wake up today, I take medication for HIV and PTSD; now, I also take Egrifta for lipodystrophy. I suffer from the typical aches and pains of aging as well. Sometimes I lie in the tub

and don't know what to make of myself. One part of me loves being alive and is almost smug, but another part of me does an assessment of every part of my body and doesn't feel like explaining my issues to a person of interest.

A few men I've actually known as "associates" and have vented to about my health have said, "I don't care what you have. I would get with you." I was dumbstruck. What made them think I wanted them? I do not want to feel like I'm settling, because, to be honest, I am learning to like myself.

I am learning to undo all the negative thought patterns that I was fed by the media—and, today, am being fed by social media—and I'm also trying to deal with emotional abuse. Even without all that, it is hard to accept aging in general. I am still a seasoned tomboy who loves to throw a basketball, and I will be damned if I am going to lie down and crumble.

Although I am now half a century old and I have a few battle scars, thanks to clarity and self-understanding, I am at the best part of my life. All I can do is learn to nurture and appreciate myself and keep being a work in progress.

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