# Contemplating Body Image at Half a Century Old

Lipodystrophy, HIV, aging—I may have a few battle scars, but I'm still at my best right now.

June 13, 2017 By Glenna McCarthy

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

Why so cynical and/or guarded? To tell you the truth I am not sure, but I know that part of my recent success has been due to the fact that I am not basing my importance on someone else's approval. I was co-dependent most of my life and felt I had to have a distraction from my thoughts, or someone who made me feel needed. I would have rather 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 was so overdue.

I remember in 1980, when I was about 14 years old, Farrah Fawcett was the image to try and live up too. Designer jeans had just made their presence known, and everyone was trying to fit into non-stretch jeans. I was told by my mother that I was not pretty (in a pretty sense), so I assumed my role was to be a tomboy and I strived to be athletic. As puberty hit, I laid on my back and tried to zip up the popular jeans. I also became bulimic for 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. My new diet was being on drugs and putting on a "live fast die young" carefree mask. Having a flat stomach was accomplished with drugs, which seemed very important. 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 to feel that I had control and could decide who was in my life and wouldn't have to face rejection.

Okay, let me get to the point. When I wake up today, I take medication for HIV and PTSD—and now I also take Egrifta for lipodystrophy. I suffer from the typical aches and pains of aging as well. Sometimes I lay in the tub and don't know what to make of myself. I have one part of me that

loves being alive and is almost smug, but there is the other part of me that does an assessment of every part of my body and doesn't feel like explaining my issues to a person of interest. I actually had a few men who were "associates," and when I was venting about my health, a few 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 a mercy fuck or like I'm settling, because to be honest I am learning to like myself.

I am learning to undue all the negative thought patterns that I was fed by the media—and today 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. The interesting thing is that although I am now half a century old and I have a few battle scars, I am still at the best part of my life thanks to clarity and self-understanding. All I can do is learn to nurture and appreciate myself and keep being a work in progress.

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