

Luscious and Delicious

A speech delivered at the speak-out **Resisting Fat Hatred**

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Luscious. Delicious.

Last weekend, in one of those terrific lazy in-bed-a-lot weekends that we make time for too rarely, my girlfriend and I wondered. Do luscious and delicious mean the same thing?

I mean, there we were, fabulous examples of delicious and luscious. We were both, and we knew it. You might wonder how two fat lesbians making love is relevant to resisting fat hatred, but the connection is clear to me. I no longer give any portion of my life to the bigots, the haters, the diet doctors, the people who advise me to lose weight "for my own good." I've worked too hard to become the fat-loving lesbian who can spend an afternoon pondering luscious and delicious. But then, always, something comes along that reminds me that this culture doesn't value or love me as I do.

For several weeks I've had idea after idea floating through my head as I wondered how to use my eight minutes today. Many versions of this talk started with fury – beginning with the fury I felt at learning that my friend Susan had been fat-baited by a letter sent to her home. Home-space is sacred for a fat girl. It is often the only place where we can escape the fat-hating assaults that are absolutely without fail a part of our fat lives every single day. Our homes are often the only place where we know that the furniture is not too small, the passageways not too narrow. Our homes are often the only place where we can surround ourselves with images of beautiful fat women that remind us that despite the world "out there," we do have a place in this universe. For me, for my fat lover, for many of my fat friends, our homes are the only sanctuary we have.

Trust me. You cannot imagine the fury I felt to learn that the assault on my friend was made by a letter personally addressed to her and sent to her home. It would have been easy to build this talk on rage.

Then I thought about using my eight minutes to talk about sorrow, about pain. I wondered what words could convey how much psychic energy it takes every single day to stay alive in a world that despises you. How could I convey the sorrow, the life-long damage of our common experiences? To grow up in families who hated us, who didn't feed us, or fed us diet pills at age eight. Or as adults, to live with lovers who wouldn't take us to parties with them because of their shame in who we were, or lovers who loved us despite our bodies not because of them. How to describe the pain, the self-loathing caused by remaining with those lovers because the alternative, the certain fate of fat women – “no one will love someone as fat as you” – seemed even worse. Oh, there's plenty of sorrow and pain. Eight minutes, eight days, eight months, eight years – it's a wonder the weight of that sorrow doesn't sink the world.

Then I thought that I would talk about our enemies. I am a political person, after all, and I know that much of the misery this world masks as personal problems is really the manifestation of oppression. But there are so many enemies -- the women who send us hate mail, the families who mistreat us, even other feminists who have never abandoned their diet sodas or committed themselves to a deep understanding of body-politics.

And then there are the big guns, the forces behind the individuals who do their dirty work to our faces. Let's start with the doctors – the ones who make money writing books about eating only protein or eating no protein. The doctors who sell diet pills through the mail or over the internet without even the sham of an office visit. And I can't forget to mention the weight-loss surgeons who will slice off the intestines of fat women on whom they would otherwise not operate. These doctors -- driven by that systematic arrogance that Doctor always knows best. And by the almighty dollar. Ah, money – in this case the diet industry steals 40 billion dollars a year, mostly from women, to buy cures that will fail, that the diet industry knows will fail because

their own research shows that diets are not based in the facts of human biology. Truth plays no part here; the diet industry exists for the sole purpose of making money, no matter the cost in health or well being of their victims.

By now, you must understand that the hatred of fat women is a political reality, based in an ideology intended to keep women preoccupied with what we eat and what we weigh. So here's a morsel of political subversion – fat oppression does not affect only fat women. Regardless of our size, fat oppression chains all of us to our fear that we will become fat, or become fatter. It keeps us divided and competitive with each other. Like racism, like class oppression, like homophobia, fat oppression victimizes all of us, though not in the same ways or to the same degree. Since each of us is diminished by fat oppression, then each of us must fight against it.

Part of that fight is understanding the connections. Fat oppression doesn't exist as an isolated belief system. Firmly rooted in the same poisonous swamp that feeds race hatred, xenophobia, fear of the disabled, anyone different – fat oppression is based in the power the ruling class has claimed to hate and marginalize anyone it defines as the other.

Without making these connections, without building alliances with other progressive people struggling for social justice, without struggling with those progressive people, all we fat women have is a movement for personal improvement, for individual happiness. We need so much more.

Oppressive cultures like ours are supported by actual power – guns and money — and by the weight of culture through the myths and lies perpetuated in the name of truth. Let me name three of the lies that support fat oppression and replace them with the real facts of our lives.

Here's the first lie: People get fat because we eat too much or eat the wrong foods. And here's the truth: every study that has tried to prove that fat people eat more than thin people has

failed. Fat people eat the same amounts and the same types of food as thin people – with the same huge variety in how and how much we eat.

Lie #2: Fat people could change being fat if we'd just go on a diet. The truth? Diets don't work. They have a long-term failure rate of 95-99%. All diets, period.

And our final myth for the day – being fat makes people sick. Here's another surprise – no clear causal relationship between being fat and any specific illness has ever been proven. Some fat people are very healthy, some are very ill, but it doesn't correlate with size.

I'm almost out of time, but I want to talk about two more things. First, I want to talk about the courage of fat women and how that courage feeds and nurtures me. Every day that a fat woman leaves her home, she exhibits enormous courage. Every day that a fat woman hates herself a little less or loves herself a little more, she is showing tremendous courage. Every day that a fat woman takes a bite of food in public, without excuse or apology and enjoys it, she is fueled by a courage that she has had to create molecule by molecule from the shame and self-hatred that surround her. And the fatter we are, the less we look like our culture's ideal – and believe me, every culture has its ideal woman and she's ^{short} never fat. The less we look like those ideals, the more we are targets for public ridicule and hatred. Our lives as fat women are testimonies in courage.

I want to close by telling you one last thing. Until I found my courage to live as a fat woman -- full-strength, no apologies, no tight clothes, no holding back – until I found that courage, I could not find the joy. And life is too short to live without joy. Once I stopped being afraid of becoming my worst fears, once I became the woman I was never supposed to be, I started having a rip-roaring fun time in life. I became deeply committed to confining the bigots and fat haters to the smallest possible corner of my life, and filling the rest of my life with abundant fun, enormous belly-laughs and luscious women. And this is where I came in. Is there a difference between luscious and delicious? I plan to spend the rest of my fat life finding out. Join me!