

Fat Underground

Why Not Just Stay Fat?

By **JUDI BLOOM**
Evening Outlook Staff Writer

If there's one thing Lynn Mabel-Lois knows about, it's dieting. Her struggle to lose weight began when she was only a few weeks old and she's spent the better part of her 26 years losing and gaining, losing and gaining, losing and gaining...

Sure, she says, she'd rather been born thin and stayed thin. But tired of starvation and tired of living for what has proved to be the impossible dream of being svelte, Lynn has given up dieting. "I finally realized that if I hadn't lost weight yet, I wasn't gonna."

There's anger in her voice when she says, as a fat woman, she's been ridiculed, rejected, starved, and made to feel guilt and self-hatred. She no longer permits diet sodas or talk of dieting in her house and it's been three years since she's allowed anyone to make a fat joke in her presence.

"I define myself as a fat woman and choose to be defined that way with a lot of respect," explains Lynn who prefers the "freedom name," Mabel-Lois, to her last name, McAfee, which she inherited from her male ancestors.

Being a "radical feminist," Lynn says, "The descent through women is the only descent that makes sense in terms of names." Mabel was Lynn's grandmother's name; Lois is her mother's.

The word "overweight," says Lynn, a West Los Angeles resident, is an absurdity and the term "obesity" smacks of the medical jargon she mistrusts. She prefers to describe herself as "fat" and says the word is beginning to take on new connotations.

Lynn credits the Fat Underground, a Santa Monica based women's collective for fat women, with giving her the support she needed to change her life. Eight women currently comprise the collective which meets Tuesday nights at 7 p.m. in the Women's Center, 237 Hill St.

While all fat people are subject to the same discrimination and ridicule, members of the collective say fat women face the most severe oppression. The Underground wants to change public ignorance and prejudice about all fat people and the women

women are also dedicated to combating discrimination and challenging medical and psychological studies that postulate being fat is necessarily unhealthy.

"My mother is a fat woman who is dying not because she's fat but because she's spent her life dieting," says Lynn.

Lynn says the medical and psychiatric professions do not understand or know how to treat fat people. "My mother took me to a doctor because of my weight at the age of 4," Lynn recalls. "By the time I was 8 I was taking rainbow pills (amphetamines) prescribed by a doctor. My mother got me the best medical care possible, took me to the best clinics in the country all because she didn't want me to lead the kind of life she had led."

Prescribing diet after diet, says Lynn, is the height of irresponsibility when research indicates that more than 95 percent of those who lose weight dieting, regain the weight within five years. Statistics show 90 per cent of this same group will regain more weight than that originally lost, she adds.

The Underground says dieting involves prolonged starvation which causes malnutrition and a host of other side effects and that diet pills contribute to the strain on the cardiovascular system.

Profit, says the Underground, is a major reason for continued oppression of fat people and they single out the "reducing" industries as "THE ENEMY." These include diet clubs, reducing salons, fat farms, diet doctors, diet books and diet foods, surgical procedures, appetite suppressants, drugs and reducing methods like body wraps.

Lynn, who has an A.A. degree in history from Harcum Junior College in Pennsylvania and three years experience working in a medical library, now does clerical work for a small company that manufactures plastic bags. She says she took the job after finding it impossible to be hired by a medium or large company that would have paid more. "Most of the firms I went to wouldn't even take my

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application. They have weight limitations--it's as simple as that."

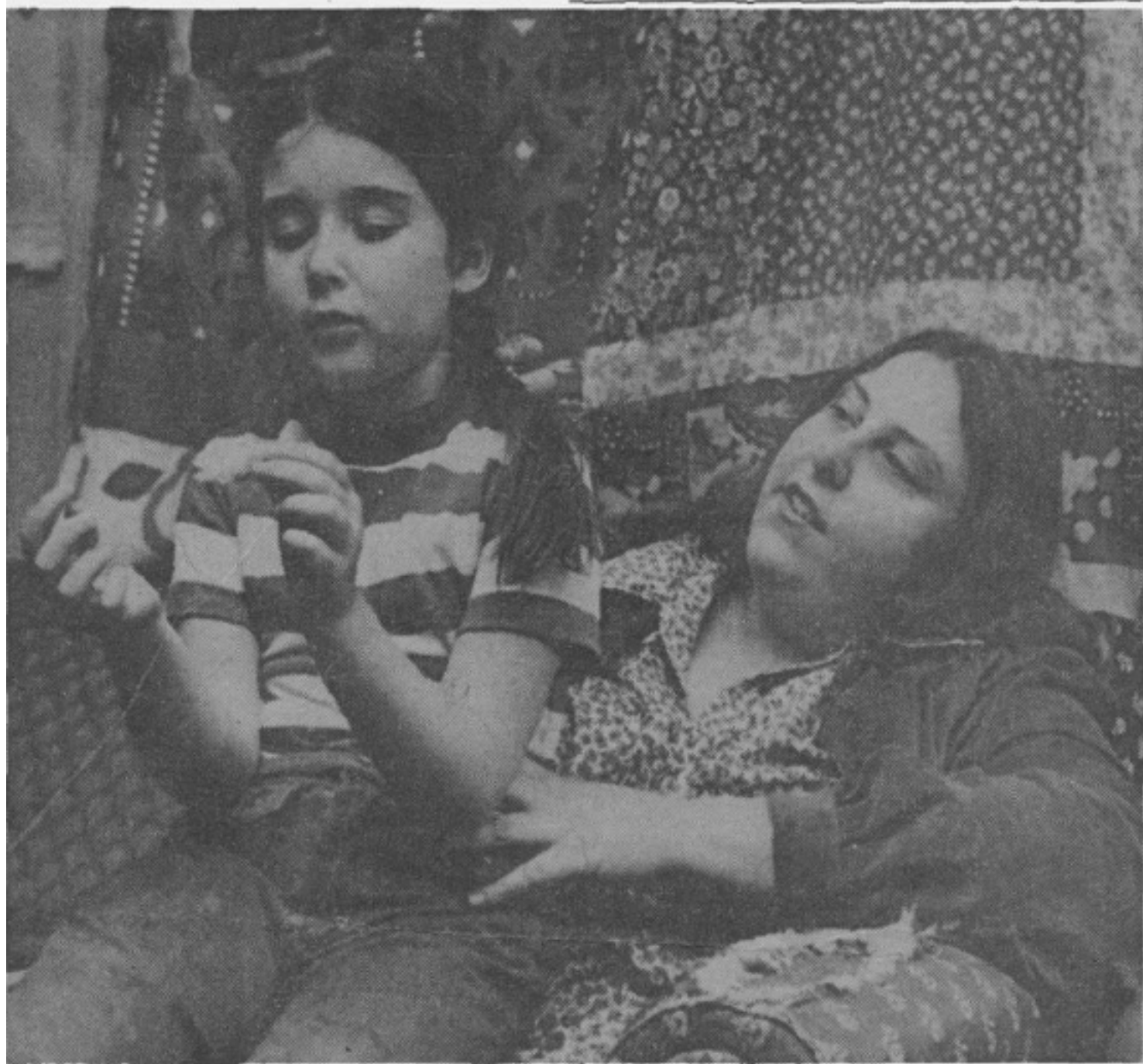
Fat people face countless other problems besides job discrimination. Theater chairs, turnstiles, seat belts, public transportation and even medical equipment are not designed to accommodate them.

Lynn believes obesity is essentially hereditary but says the problem is worsened by a society that forces fat people to diet. "Our bodies are different," she explains. "A body moves toward some sort of stasis and when you're constantly dieting you throw the body way out of whack. I was thin for about two years but I finally couldn't stand being hungry all the time."

"Nutritionists have found, and this has been well documented, that the average fat person eats the same or even less than the average thin person. We DON'T eat more and certainly not ENOUGH more to explain what goes on.

"But when you live in a society where people are constantly telling you not to eat, when food is constantly being taken away, it does tend to become the most important thing in your life."

Social pressure to be thin continues and Lynn admits there aren't a lot of options for fat people. "It's very hard for a woman to stop dieting without a lot of support. All fat women know that diets work but that none of them are effective for any length of time. They keep dieting because they can't give up that dream."



COLLECTIVELY SPEAKING — Lynn Mabel-Lois (right) and Raven, 7, both of West Los Angeles, talk before meeting of Fat Underground, a Santa Monica based women's collective for fat

women. Collective provides support for fat women who oppose dieting and attempt to change prejudice against fat people. Raven is the daughter of Gudrun Fonfa, another collective member.

(Evening Outlook Photo by Judi Bloom)