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YOUR GUIDE TO LIFELONG HEALTH AND LEARNING : NOVEMBER 2006

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Simple Tests that Can **Save Your Life**

Living With Grief during the Holidays

Follow the **Chocolate Brick** Road

Putting on the **Ritz**



follow the Chocolate Brick Road

by Marci Johnson, Ed.M.

I love my body, every delectable dimple, every juicy jiggle. It is strong, healthy, vibrant and sexy. It is also not what we deem the ideal body in this day and age. My shape would have been ideal in the 1950's when Jane Russell was a bombshell. Of course I do not have her tiny waist, so my body would have been considered even more suitable in prehistoric times when the Venus of Willendorf and other fertility goddess images were the ideal with abundant breasts, belly, hips and thighs. It is funny how images of the perfect body change over the decades. For example, rounder women were held to be ideal in the 1950's, but as women moved out of the home and into the workplace they became more threatening to men. Suddenly, little pre-pubescent looking waifs, ala Kate Moss, became the desired body type--the thinner and smaller the better. Well, I say to hell with that; bring on the cream puffs. It is time to change the standard of beauty to one that is strong, vital, and more realistic.

One of my best friends is a fitness guru. She is the star of The Goddess Workout and has a so-called ideal body for our decade--tan, toned, beautiful...you get the idea. I told her I would like to add a DVD to her collection on how to maintain curves. Instead of Buns of Steel I would call it Buns of Marshmallow. Who wants buns that make them want to weld? Why not strive for buns that make one's mouth water? In my fitness DVD, I would teach feats of strength and daring like how to reach a box of Godiva chocolates while in the bathtub without straining the abs, or how to drink champagne while reclining.

When I first met my husband he noticed I ate a chocolate truffle every day. I had a specific routine. I would buy one Lindt chocolate truffle and place it near my heart until the inner chocolate softened. Then I would put it in my mouth and let it melt over my tongue. "I have to eat a chocolate truffle every day to maintain my curves." I told him. "Otherwise I'd waste away to skin and bones." He saw



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right through me, but it made him laugh. He says it was one of the comments that made him fall in love with me.

Do not get me wrong. I am not immune to our culture's obsession with being as thin as possible. I have been dieting since I was twelve along with the rest of my family. Every Sunday my Dad had his "farewell to fat feast" and every Monday he started a new diet. I have tried many of the fad diets available. I spent exactly 24 hours on the soup diet, on which a person is supposed to lose 20 pounds in one week. After I hallucinated that a rock in my nephew's aquarium was a brownie, I gave up and headed straight for my favorite Italian restaurant where I gorged on rolls and cheese and pasta to make up for my deprivation. I tried the Atkins diet as a vegetarian. I may never eat another piece of cheese again. And forget about the Zone. If it requires scales and measuring, that is just too much effort.

I finally decided that I had enough of trying to fit into the vision of beauty created by some entity I could not name. I refused to take part in it. Reading "Leaves of Grass" by Walt Whitman hit me like a ton of molten chocolate cake. In his poem "One Hour to Madness and Joy," one line stopped me in my tracks; my hand stopped in midair holding a chip loaded with guacamole: "I am sufficient as I am." "Wow!" I thought. Could it be possible for someone really to be sufficient just as is? Not trying to lose ten pounds; not trying to tone those rebellious thighs. This was good, I thought, letting the chip enter my mouth. I pondered the sentence while savoring the avocado and cilantro. Yes, I decided there and then, this would be my mantra from now on. "I am sufficient as I am." So simple, and yet so powerful.

I had this epiphany about fifteen years ago and it is a daily battle to affirm this is true and to believe it. I have to be very careful what I allow myself to read, see and hear. One could say I am on a positive body image diet. I read books that celebrate women in any form like *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, or writings by Eve Ensler, Carol Gilligan or Gloria Steinem. I look for role models among women who have made their names with their minds and not their looks. I choose

activities that celebrate my form: Samba dancing, African dancing, belly dancing, and dancing with reckless abandon with my two year old to the out-of-tune violinist in the park. I exercise when I feel like it and because it makes me feel good, not because I am trying to slim down. It is so tiresome to hear a constant barrage from people about how they need to lose weight. So many more important things await attention. Naomi Wolf states in *The Beauty Myth* that an incredibly high percentage of women would rather lose ten pounds than achieve any other goal. We could expend our energy on so many more important things.

Yet, when I gained more than 50 pounds with my last pregnancy, I sat down and cried. My dear friend, Courtney, gave me some very wise advice. "Transcend the physical," she said. "You can choose to rise above, or you can succumb to the petty." I felt better immediately. Yes, I could transcend the physical. And I did. I chose to focus on the ever-expanding earth goddess aspects of my body. I wanted to paint the words "Luscious," "Juicy" and "Buddha Belly" on each of my shirts. That said, the current obesity epidemic in our country is no laughing matter. We can be luscious, curvy, juicy, as well as healthy, strong and energetic. We must feel great and revel in looking healthy, all the while redefining what looking healthy means. Sounds exhausting, I know, but think of the world we are creating for our children. Also remember, dark chocolate is filled with antioxidants so take one or two Godivas into the tub and relax into body bliss. Take tiny nibbles and really savor every bite. Give yourself permission to maintain your curves. You are beautiful just as you are this very moment. ♦

Marci Johnson graduated with top honors from the creative writing program at UCLA and from Harvard School of Education. She has taught and performed in Egypt, Africa, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Mexico and Panama. She has danced with many top performers, most recently with Paul McCartney and Placido Domingo.