

# Bears & Health

## Bears, Gaining and Encouragement—Part 2



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In last month's column, John Outcalt, a pioneer and activist of both the bear and Encourager/Gainer communities, talked about how he sees the two subcultures, separately and as they overlap. (cough) Here, we continue the dialogue about bears, gaining and encouragement.

**Mass:** Are you involved in convergences? [For those who don't know, convergences are gatherings of the very heavysset and their admirers that are held internationally in such cities as Brussels, Barcelona and Dallas.]

**Outcalt:** The ones I can get to. I have run gainer and encourager discussion groups at convergences. We usually get a good turnout. The bears have somewhat overtaken the Girth & Mirth communities, and that influences what is and isn't said. I think people have to be unafraid to raise their interests and concerns in whichever community they otherwise feel most at home. You don't have to go to a convergence to talk about gaining and encouraging. A bear convention can be a great forum for discussing your feelings, and to connect with other people who feel as you do. You can be a gainer and a bear, and be a lot of other things as well.

**Mass:** Do encouragers and gainers change roles, the way s-m folk do?

**Outcalt:** Yes. I think what happens is that you can be one or the other or both. I have also seen men have a change of heart and decide that they are really one instead of the other. Those of us who have been involved with this for a long time feel and see that inside many encouragers there secretly beats the heart of a gainer, and vice versa.

I think the interesting question about gainers and encouragers is who is the dominant one. Many people assume that the encourager is the dominant one, willing his lover to eat. However, I believe that no one can make you eat anything unwillingly, and

that the encourager can be the willing slave to the gaining master.

**Mass:** At the risk of sounding like the classic yahoo who asks, "what do lesbians do in bed?," let me ask you a question I know I'm not the only one to have wondered about: what exactly do encouragers and gainers do with each other sexually?

**Outcalt:** Think of what you would do with your sexual partner, – anything goes – except, ideally, there's food involved. Most people would agree that eating is a very sensual experience. Remember the refrigerator scene in the film *9 1/2 Weeks*? Or the eating scene in *Tom Jones*?

**Mass:** Or the Joan Cusack character in the Paul Rudnick film, *In and Out*. She's pursued by an encourager who feeds her cheeze twirls.

**Outcalt:** These scenes center around food as stimulating foreplay. Why stop there? There are a lot of folks who get turned on by the feeling of being fed or being full or overfed.

**Mass:** When you and I first met to work on that bear panel for the New York City Metrobears back in '99, we were in total agreement that bears and chubs are hot and that we love them, but we were in some disagreement about the health risks of being overweight. Where does your thinking now stand? I mean, you do concede, do you not, that being overweight involves established health risks, and that the greater the weight, the greater those risks?

**Outcalt:** Two people that I knew have recently died from complications of having gastric bypass surgery. I think this procedure can be more dangerous than many people are led to believe, and the wholesale expansion of this health industry moneymaker is concerning. In both cases, I believe, these friends would still be alive and reasonably healthy if they hadn't undergone this procedure.

I think we have to be wary of generalizations. Every person has to have

their health looked at on an individual basis. There are a lot of very unhealthy thin people out there and some extremely healthy large people who are leading full (cough) and wonderful lives. The diet industry would have you believe that all fat is bad, whether it's in your food or on your body, and that's just not true. I say as long as you're reasonably healthy and you enjoy your size and your body, and have weighed the benefits of being true to your preferences, to yourself, against the health risks, God Bless! Mazel Tov!

If there is a clear health problem that is directly related to weight, then I would advocate losing weight. Many men who began as gainers and had to stop for medical or professional reasons often become encouragers.

You have to be true to yourself. It can be difficult at times, but it can also be the greatest joy to be recognized for who and how you really want to be. We are divine in our differences. By the way, I think Dr. Mass would be a great moniker for someone who considers himself an expert on gaining and encouraging.

*John Outcalt, past-president of the New York City Metrobears, has directed a documentary called CHUBS & BEARS. He can be contacted at EncourageNews@aol.com. To find out more about Encouragers and Gainers, check out www.bellybuilders.com, www.GainRweb.com, or biggercity.com on the internet.*