

Fat Fears: Falling, Fairground Rides and Becoming Pat Butcher.

11 anxieties from when I was supersized.

The world felt like a scary place, and the fear was real. Well, sometimes it was just in my head but...

I spent much of my life being very large. It used to fill me with a lot of anxiety about things that might seem trivial. Having ADHD as well caused me extra difficulties. Looking back, some of it sounds bonkers, but I worked hard to overcome those fears. Here is an honest but light-hearted look back. Maybe these were just me?

1. Falling over.

I still have this worry sometimes, but my fear of stairs, mud, uneven floors, were all a constant concern that I would fall over. I was nervous about twisting my ankle, but also the embarrassment of having to shift my gargantuan frame back upright, in an ungraceful manner in front of onlookers. I suppose having small feet you can't see meant gravity was not on my side and my mental instability manifested in physical pratfalls.

2. Fitting in seats.

The terror that I would have to ask for a seatbelt extender on an aeroplane and the subsequent judgment from the intimidatingly beautiful flight attendant. I narrowly avoided this, but mostly did not fly much. Chairs with arms?! They never have chairs with arms in American obesity clinics on TV. I thought I might get up and the chair would come with me.

I once had to shamefully walk off a fairground ride at Brighton Pride, because after the worker spent several minutes using all his bodyweight to lock the over-the-shoulder restraints and I willed my breasts to shrink, he told me I was too big to ride. Humiliation central!

3. Not getting a job.

I was often worried I would be judged as stupid and incapable in an interview. My ADHD meant I found being consistent and preserving the status quo boring and unattainable, so I changed jobs frequently. As a hospitality worker, I feared they thought I would not be able to cope with the long hours, lifting and being on your feet. Or that I was just fat because I was an idiot or ate all the profits.

4. Never looking nice.

I did not feel good about myself and rarely made an effort, but even if I did, I thought it wouldn't matter how I dressed because I felt I would always look fat, ergo sloppy and unattractive. To this day, I never wear anything with elephants on it, just in case it invites comparison. I also still eschew animal print for fear of emulating Pat Butcher. If you don't know who that is, she was a legendary and garish matriarch, in the UK soap Eastenders, so not exactly a 20-something's style icon.

5. Not being able to find nice clothes.

In the 90s and early 2000s, there were not a lot of available options for larger women. As a teenager, and not very overweight, I remember clothes shops rarely carried over a (UK) size 14. There was a plus size shop called Evans, which clothed predominantly dowdy middle-aged women. All larger women had to shop there so you'd often see people in the same clothes. I died inside when I saw an unglamorous character on Coronation Street wearing the same top as me. I was 22.

6. Having to be jolly or everyone would hate me.

This one was strongly connected to my ADHD, and my attempts to mask it. I struggle with RSD (rejection sensitive dysphoria), so if you tell me you're going to get a coffee with someone else and don't invite me, my first thought is: You hate me. I cultivated a persona as the life and soul of the party, as I assumed people would be embarrassed to be seen with me, looking like a disgruntled hippo. I constantly mocked myself and told loud stories to try and integrate. I would be that woman holding court in the pub, drinking pints of ale and espousing controversial theories about sex. This was probably far more fake and annoying than if I had been myself.

7. People will shout mean abuse

I have twice had people shout 'fat c**t' at me from passing cars. Abuse is never justified, even if one time I was walking in the road and texting, but it was a road I almost never saw anyone drive on, and he was a London cabbie, known for their demure attitudes and balanced liberal views. By this time, I had started to become more accepting of myself, so I chose to feel sorry for the people who felt the need to behave like that, but of course it still hurt.

8. Any male attraction was fetishization

I never really struggled to get male attention, with age I knew I was interesting and able to engage, and I had massive breasts. However, I started to feel some of the men who liked large women were looking at me purely as fat. I was suspicious that this stemmed from some expectation you would be easy to control because you had low self-esteem. That just deeply saddened me. There was a constant conflict between whether I was attractive because of my sparkling wit, or my voluptuous bottom.

9. Doctors would give no help

I was always worried medical professionals would tell me all my problems were weight related. On the whole this was not true, although I once had my blood pressure checked by a nurse who was furious it was healthy. She said I didn't deserve it based on my revelations of an unhealthy lifestyle and it should be high. Considering my usual interactions with medical professionals, this at least left me with a sense of smugness. "I'm so sorry about my genetics," (thanks mum).

10. Death

The world was filled with how dangerous and inescapable being fat was. I would definitely die and be diseased by 30, riddled with numerous medical issues (that were all MY FAULT). I constantly read how diets didn't work, exercise was apparently fatal, being thinner won't solve my problems anyway. DOOMED!

11. Breaking the world

Similar to my fear of not fitting into seats, I was very worried my weight would break things. On a rope bridge in Africa, I kept telling people that the two-person limit meant being on the same section would doubtless cause us to plunge to our death. However, I lost a bit of weight and went on the world's fastest zipline in North Wales with my dad. He was scared of heights, and I thought I was 'too fat' for such activities. Before I set off, I asked the operatives if I was going to die. They promised me "no" and they were right. It was such a massive achievement, and that was when I started realising being fat shouldn't stop you doing anything you want.

So, there you have it! Being a big woman in the world can be a daily challenge, but there is so much more acceptance and accommodations these days, I truly encourage you to not let your fears stop you doing anything you want. Conquering something you once found unfathomable gives you a huge sense of accomplishment, and it really boosts what might be fragile self-esteem. Fight the fat fear, fight the phobias, and effing do it!

Check out my other work for more reflections on ADHD, obesity and my '*occasionally*' wild life.