

We Are  
**Foie**

And We Are  
**Legion**



**Benjamin Duffy**

We are Fat  
and  
We are Legion

by

Benjamin Duffy



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*To Ai-Ya, my wife, for showing patience with my passion*

# Part One: February 2010

## Chapter One: The Fat Majority

Nutter needs to lose weight. That's what Dr. Strickland says. He's the vet.

Nutter's too fat, he says. Nutter's my dog, a mutt I picked out from the shelter when he was just a puppy. That must have been almost ten years ago now. I named him after my favorite cookie—the rich, tasty Nutter Butter. I thought the color of his mangy coat was similar to that of the world's most delicious cookie. Over time, I've noticed that he's started to take on the shape of a Nutter Butter as well.

Dr. Strickland told me that I should start feeding Nutter a special formula of dog food from Eukanuba. He even had a bag of it right there to sell me. Very convenient. Just fifty-two dollars for a thirty pound bag. Taking a look at that bag, I know that Nutter would go through it in about two weeks. Then I'd have to lay out another fifty-two bucks.

It seems that Eukanuba and Dr. Strickland are making a killing. The inhuman diet industry has expanded into the dog world. Apparently, it wasn't enough to make millions of women feel like crap, they had to go and make the women's dogs hate themselves too.

I mumble under my breath as I lead Nutter back to the parking lot by his leash. I'm cursing Dr. Strickland. If he knew that I was the queen of fat empowerment, I doubt he would have made such fatphobic comments about my dog. I wanted to let the veterinarian have a piece of my mind, but I didn't. In fact, I told him I'd "consider it". Consider buying his ridiculously over-priced diet dog food, that is. It was a lie. I wasn't "considering" buying it. I was "considering" shoving it up his ass.

I open the back door of my Nissan Sentra. Nutter hops in. Well, it's more like a flop than a hop. He's a bit heavy to do much hopping but he tries.

I'm in a hurry. I've got to get this dog back to my house in South Hadley before my radio show starts in a few hours. I also have to grab some dinner. I'm pressed for time.

On the way home, I stop at Nick's Nest in Holyoke. Nick's Nest has been around since anyone can remember, a regular landmark in the Paper City. I leave Nutter in the car and go inside. The restaurant is small, a modest enterprise that serves only a few menu items—hot dogs, baked beans, popcorn, and the soup of the day. The hot dogs are spinning on greasy rollers inside a plastic case on the counter.

I order five hot dogs with kraut to go. I don't want the girl at the counter to think that I plan to eat them all by myself. I sense a hint of disapproval cross her face. Skinny bitch. She says nothing but I can sense the waves of fatphobia radiating off of her. She thinks they're all for me and she's repulsed by it. She's judging me. This skinny bitch, who probably isn't even old enough to drink yet, is judging *me*.

I tell myself to calm down. I could be wrong. I don't have ESP and I can't say for sure what she's really thinking. It's possible that my old food-related guilt is creeping in again.

In a few minutes, the girl hands me a brown bag full of hot dogs and sauerkraut. The skinny bitch with the quietly judgmental eyes. I snatch it from her hand and get out of there as quickly as possible.

In all truthfulness, I *am* sharing the hot dogs. I'm sharing them with Nutter. Together, we drive just a few yards up the street and park at the Rite Aid drug store. Nutter is nuzzling me

behind the ear with his wet nose.

I open the brown sack to the pungent smell of cabbage and vinegar. I gaze in. The hot dogs are small. Pathetic, really. Limp. It occurs to me that they probably resemble Dr. Strickland's penis. I put the thought out of my mind, but not before snickering.

I tear off a gooey piece of frank and bun then offer it to my loyal companion. He chokes it down, leaving his drool on my fingers. I give him another chunk, and then another. Nutter has consumed the first of five hot dogs.

Dr. Strickland will not starve my dog. Nutter will eat delicious, all-beef franks if Nutter damned well pleases. Nutter will eat buns consisting of refined flour and high fructose corn syrup. Nutter will not eat overpriced dog food. Not if I have anything to say about it.

I grab a hot dog for myself and enjoy.

\* \* \*

I'm fast approaching the second anniversary of my radio show. I can hardly believe it's been two years. My, how time flies when you're having fun. The idea came to me slowly, building itself gradually in chunks. It all came together in June of 2008, I recall.

Gas prices were astronomically high. People were begging for mercy but the oil companies just kept jacking them up. It was Saturday when Denny and I pulled into the Shell station in South Hadley. Denny is my boyfriend of almost five years, an enormous bear of a man with a good heart. He went into the little store to pay for his gas in cash. Denny's so old fashioned. I got out and waited for the cashier to switch the pump on. When I heard a click, I started pumping.

I could tell that something was wrong when Denny came back to the car. He was quiet, his eyes were glazed over, his head was hanging low like a defeated man.

"What's a matter, Denny?"

"You really want to know?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Someone in there just called me a fat slob," he replied. "A fat *fucking* slob, actually."

My jaw dropped open. I cannot understand how people can be so vicious. "How old?"

"I dunno. Sixteen, maybe."

"Boy or girl?"

"Boy."

I released the handle, allowing the pump to come to a thudding halt. "Come pump the rest of this gas, Denny. I'm going in there."

"No!" Denny objected. "Leave it alone."

Just then, I saw a teenage boy emerge from the store, his hat turned backwards, sipping from a bottle of Mountain Dew. He looked like kind of a smartass, but not mean or dangerous. It had to be him. I couldn't allow him to walk away without having a word with him.

"Hey!" I shouted. "Hey you! Kid!"

He took one look at me and flinched. His eyes flashed with fear. I can be very intimidating.

"Gabby!" Denny barked at me.

I ignored him completely. I approached the kid with the Mountain Dew. He stared at me like a deer in the headlights. "I wanna talk to you a second."

The kid turned his back to me and took off in a dead sprint. He flashed out of the gas station and into the supermarket parking lot, dodging in and out between cars. There was no

way I was ever going to catch a sprinting teenager and I didn't try.

"Gabby, what are you doing?"

"I just wanted to talk to him," I replied. "Apparently, his mother didn't raise him right. I thought it might help him if another adult took him aside and taught him some manners."

Denny's forehead creased. "You can't just keep beating up everyone who makes fat jokes. When you're as big as we are, it kind of defines you. People are just going to make rude comments. There are too many assholes in the world to physically assault all of them."

Those words stuck with me. I rolled them over for a few days in my head. He was right, of course. Denny has a habit of being right most of the time. There had to be a better way of teaching my fellow citizens that fat people are not legitimate punching bags. We are the last acceptable targets for ridicule and torture. We don't appreciate it any more than blacks or gays.

I had been studying fat acceptance for about thirteen years at that point. I had done everything I could in my interpersonal relationships to combat and eliminate fat hatred. I had written letters to the editor, read books and magazines, attended conferences, and joined every fat positive organization I could find. It all seemed pretty futile. My best efforts had made virtually no headway in changing attitudes. I felt like a fool.

There was something else taking place in the historical backdrop of 2008 that shaped my thinking. Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were just wrapping up the most suspenseful political horserace of my lifetime. Obama, the outsider, defeated the most influential, most connected, most politically savvy woman in America, Hillary Clinton. It was a stunning upset. All across the land, people were singing "Yes we can!"

I sang right along with them. I don't hate Hillary Clinton, but she didn't inspire me the way Obama did. "Be the change you want to see in the world," he told us. Sure, he borrowed that slogan from Gandhi, but that didn't diminish it in the least. I took it to heart. I believed in the man and I believed that a time was coming when change would be realized through my own hard work.

I've certainly been disappointed with Mr. Obama between then and now. Expectations were set so high for him that it has been nearly impossible for him to deliver. The only time I hear anything about fat issues coming from his White House is when his wife is fanning the flames of paranoia about the coming "obesity epidemic". She's on the warpath against fat kids and she doesn't seem the least bit ashamed of it.

I expected more out of this administration. I must sometimes remind myself that he never specifically promised anything about fat civil rights. If he's like most Americans, he's probably never even heard the term. Even so, I had imagined the new, post-Bush America to be something refreshing—a more just and equitable society for everyone, fat people included. The euphoria got the best of me, I suppose. He promised us a lot of "hope" and "change", but both seem to be in short supply these days.

I started to brainstorm ideas about how better to deliver the message to society at large. Sure, I had been in the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) for more than a decade, but that wasn't progressing anywhere. There's nothing to be gained from preaching to the choir. I had to find a new tactic, a new method of reaching people who weren't already attuned to the message of fat liberation.

Millie, my friend from work, suggested that I start a fat acceptance blog. I considered the idea but decided that I was too technologically illiterate to do a blog justice. I can write an email, shop on Amazon, cruise Youtube and all of that, but I think designing my own blog might be a bit much. Luckily, the internet is already blessed with a handful of fat blogs. Joy Nash does a great one called "Fat Rant" ([fatrantblog.wordpress.com](http://fatrantblog.wordpress.com)) and Paul McAleer

has his “Big Fat Blog” ([bigfatblog.com](http://bigfatblog.com)). I decided to leave the blogging to the tech-savvy fatties and concentrate my efforts elsewhere.

A few days later, while driving home from work and listening to the radio, I stumbled upon the idea of a fat radio show. At the time, I was listening to Valley Liberated Radio when an announcement came on the air about the station’s community access mission and how it strived to meet the needs of the local area, particularly underserved communities.

If ever there was an underserved community, fat people are it. Only lepers are more ostracized than we are. At best we’re ignored, at worst we’re verbally assaulted. We’re probably the most underrepresented demographic on the television screen. We lack visibility in the local media and we have almost no political clout to speak of. We lack monetary funds, a critical component of any movement in a capitalist society. We’re outcasts, misfits, and nobodies.

I submitted a program proposal to Valley Liberated Radio through their website. I pitched the idea as a fat acceptance show that focused on fat civil rights and the weight loss obsession that corporate America has bred into us. Within a few days I received a phone call from a program director who said he really loved the idea. He invited me in to show me how to use the equipment then explained some of the station policies to me.

The first dilemma was what to call the show. The idea fell out of the sky and hit me in the head like a meteor one afternoon while I was at the Holyoke Mall.

I was people watching, one of my favorite activities. As I sat in the food court eating some of that delicious Bourbon chicken from the Cajun Café, I began to count the fatties as they walked past. The numbers were staggering—of all the people who walked past me, a solid majority was outside the range of socially acceptable weights. Fat asses were everywhere!

Not that I was surprised. I already knew the statistics about how fat Americans are. But the more I thought about, the more I realized how unjust our situation is. Why does the thin minority get to run the world? Why are we treated like we’re the weird ones? In most societies, it’s the majority that places domineering restrictions on the minority. In ours, it’s just the opposite. The thin minority makes the rules and the rest of us put up with it!

As I was driving home that night, I recalled the Feminist Majority. Noted feminist Eleanor Smeal began that organization after reading poll numbers indicating that a majority of American women identified themselves as feminists. The name of her organization spoke volumes: *There are more of us than there are of you.*

We fatties are everywhere. We are your friends and family, your co-workers and your neighbors. Not a moment longer will we stand by and allow the structure of our world to be determined by a spoiled minority. Skinny bitches, you’re on notice—*we are fat and we are legion!*

By the time I got home, I had decided that I wanted the name of my show to pack the same punch. I would call it The Fat Majority.

With a title decided upon, I began my career as an amateur radio host. At first, I was given a two hour slot every other Tuesday. It just so happened that my slot was from ten ’til midnight. Not exactly primetime. Would anyone even hear me? How many people are listening to the radio after ten o’clock on a Tuesday night?

I was so nervous my first night, worrying myself sick that I wouldn’t be able to fill two hours with intelligent conversation. Truth be told, the very first episode of The Fat Majority is best forgotten. I stumbled through it with a lot of awkward pauses. I feared that I wouldn’t be allowed to come back for second show. It isn’t as easy as you think to talk to yourself for two straight hours.

But I'm a quick learner. Each episode improved by leaps and bounds over the last. Before long, The Fat Majority was really taking off. The station got a lot of encouraging feedback from fatties and fat allies all up and down the Pioneer Valley who liked what they were hearing. Just as I had suspected, there was a huge, untapped market out there for fat-positive programming.

I got a big break when the local progressive free paper, The Valley Advocate, did a write-up about me and my show. That must have been late 2008. Before I knew it, I was on the air twice a week and they eventually gave me the coveted eight-until-ten timeslot.

Gabby Medeiros was well on her way to the big time.

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