

Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover Episode 6 - Hold Me Closer Phatty Dancer

Hey y'all, I'm Brooke Hoover. A Louisiana native, actor, writer and comedian. I've lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise or shall I say "lifestyle changes". My twenty year and counting health journey has taught me that just like taking a diet pill for weight loss, body positivity doesn't magically happen overnight.

I'm working on re-gaining my self esteem and re-kindling my love affair with Cajun and Southern comfort food in a healthier way all the while juggling eating as clean as I can, re-establishing myself in the entertainment industry which, as we know, is historically fat phobic all the while showing my inner phat girl some love - that's phat with a PH - pretty hot and tempting. Let me tell y'all a tale or two...

I have to start off this episode with a little singing [to the tune of Elton John's "Rocket Man"] Blue Jean Baby. LA Lady. LA like Louisiana. Seamstress for the band. Da da da. Hold me closer Phatty Dancer. Count the head lights on the bayou.

I don't know what I'm doing y'all. I do know this. We gotta talk about growing up as a Phatty Dancer. So, I think it's a thing all over the place. It's definitely a big thing in South Louisiana. If you are a little girl, your Momma gets you into dance class as soon as you can walk. And, you usually have like two teachers and you call them "Miss" like "Miss Trish and Miss Jeannine" for example. I had Miss Nanette. So, Miss Nanette was wonderful. I loved this lady. She was my dance teacher when I started hitting that fatty pre-pubescent age. I was about 10 or 11. And, I really loved her because she believed in me. I may have been super round with skinny legs, but I could jété. I could pirouette with the best of them.

Now, the thing with dance class, I felt very exposed. Right? Because it was very strict. We had to wear leotards and a bun. I couldn't hide behind my hair like I usually always do. We had to slick our hair back because Miss Nanette told us that one time one of her dancers was doing a pirouette turn and the hair sliced her eyeball open. I don't know if that's true. I think it was mainly so we would wear a bun and again the leotards were like black you know with pink tights. It was no cute flash dance 80s off the sweat shirt off the shoulder sweatshirt and leg warmer like I really wanted to wear. So, you're basically stripped naked in a sense. You're in these uniforms if you will. They're actually cute. I mean they're cute if you're like a size 0. And, you're staring at yourself in the mirror. But, I also remember never feeling more free than I did when I was in dance class.

And, one year I remember a costume. We were electric eels. And, we had to wear unitards. Now, remember, it's the early 90s, late 80's just kind of venting off early 90's. They were all black with these bright pops of color. Shiny black at that. And, most of the girls were tall and skinny and they looked like electric eels. I just looked like a round Rubik's cube kind of. But, I just really remember how Miss Nanette would look at me in class. It wasn't pity like "Oh look at that [to the tune of Elton John's "Rocket Man"] Phatty Dancer turning turns." No. It was like I believe in this guhl. I believe in this girl.

And, she's doing it. And, she would push me like in a good way. I loved it. I really love when people push me, especially teachers. Maybe that's masochistic of me. But, I love it.

And, so I became really close with Miss Nanette, as did many of her dancers. And, one year she invited us over to a pool party over at her house. And, there were these two guys. One of them was her son and his friend and they also did dance. And, that's just so funny; I remember their names Andre and Hunter. Why do I remember their names? I didn't even really know them that well. But, I was on the diving board. And, I was fixing to do a dive. Because another thing is, besides dance, swimming, water is always where I felt free. I felt weightless. You know what I mean? Weightless in the water and weightless on the dance floor. So, I'm on the diving board, fixing to do a dive and all of a sudden, Andre and Hunter call out, "Hey. Hey. Are you Chad's girlfriend?"

And, Chad was another guy whose sister I later learned also took dance at the dance school with Miss Nanette. And, there was this guy named Chad. He was new to my school. And, maybe he did like have a little crush on me but maybe I think it was more just like friendly. And, how did they know this? And, I felt so embarrassed. Like who am I this round, fat girl on a diving board in a swimsuit with a boyfriend? Who do I think I am? How dare I have fun at dance class? Have fun at a pool party and have a boyfriend? I don't deserve this.

So, I stopped dancing at Miss Nanette's just as I was in my prime in my 12 year old prime. I stopped dancing at Miss Nanette's and I went to another dance school. Miss Gwyn, that was her name. Miss Gwyn. And, I got really demoted. My dancing suffered and I was girls like four or five years younger than me. And, I felt like oh this is cause I suck. This is cause I'm fat. It's really when I started letting the weight weigh me down. Pun intended. And, on top of the weight, I also have issues with and I still have issues with this. My right foot is severely flat. It's a bad fallen arch. And, the kids in Miss Gwyn's class used to make fun of me. They would be like, "Oh it looks like a dead chicken foot."

And, I remember one time I was trying to do a grand plié and you need to go all the way down and your legs you know your feet, your arches are holding you up. And, Miss Gwyn comes over and she's holding my feet while I'm trying to go down into a grand plié and my foot is giving in because my foot has been so used to falling and all these girls are just watching. They're laughing, snickering, whispering, "Dead chicken foot." So, on top of being a fatty dancer, I also have a dead chicken foot.

But, aside from all that, I really just wanted to perform. I think sometimes, "Oh do I just like to make my life difficult?" Perhaps so. Do I like this difficulty like even as a teenager, even as a young kid? Maybe. But, I think honestly it's all worth it if I can entertain and perform. And, this is when I was really hell bent on being a chorus dancer on Broadway. Yes, we should go back to that. This was also back in the day when chorus girls on Broadway were not plus sized at all. But, I was still very stubborn and wanted to be on Broadway as a chorus dancer. So, I kept dancing. I kept dancing and I thought this little school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is gonna get me places, boy.

Then dance recital time came up. And, it was time for costumes and there were no electric eels, but there was one costume. I brought home the brochure and my mom's looking at the costume Miss Gwyn wanted us to wear and it had to show the dreaded midriff and you know I'm not even having a midriff. I'm just having what I'm calling second boob fat. We will talk about second boob fat on many more episodes, my friends.

But, my mom calls Miss Gwyn up and she's like, "Hey can we kind of modify the costumes? My daughter really should not be wearing this." And, I get where Momma was coming from. And, I also didn't do Momma's voice. I should have impersonated Momma. But, this was a serious moment. This was a serious moment, y'all. So, I'm not going to impersonate Momma.

And, Miss Gwyn was basically like, "No we can't but we can make Brooke's costume slightly different." And, Momma was like, "No. No. That would be even worse." So, I remember I had to wear an adult size costume so I could pull the top down and the bottoms up therefore I wouldn't be showing my midriff. And, the funny thing is I still have this costume and one of my good friends Amy wore it in a web series we did, "Pageant Pom Mom" so the costume's basically like this little hot pink halter top. Of course it's like this spandex blend, poly blend with lime green biking shorts and a little skirt that matches the halter top over it. It actually looked really good on Amy. It did not look really good on me. And, I know that sounds so against all the body positivity I try to incorporate into my life that I try to exude. But, I'm going to be honest. It didn't look good on me because I didn't feel good in it.

It felt like everything was working against me. I did not own this costume at all. And, I had to dance in it. And, that's the thing. When you're a dancer, you have to own the costume. You have to make it work for you. Mentally and physically. And, it just really didn't. But, I still didn't give up dance. I lost a lot of hope because I felt like my overweight ness, my fat ness, my body was controlling one of my passions.

And, that's utterly ridiculous. Like nowadays I would tell a young girl who is overweight, I would say, "Yo. Who cares? You love to dance. You go dance. And you're not dancing because it's good cardio and you want to try to lose weight. Yes, it is good cardio. No. You're dancing because you fricking love it. And, that is what you need to do."

So, this story or this tale or this randomness from my brain does have a bit of a happy ending at least I think it's happy. So, in college, again when I went to college, nobody, at least nobody in the theatre department, nobody my age in the theatre department, let's put it that way, made fun of me for being overweight. I just danced. I kept up tap. I did ballet. And, I did African dance. African dance was my jam because our teacher Cheryl. I love Cheryl. Actually Cheryl and I have the same birthday. July 28th, which I will always remember because, not many people have that birthday aside from Sally Struthers and Jackie O. But, Cheryl said it's not about the shape your body makes. It's about getting from Point A to Point B and that movement. And, that was really freeing to me

especially because at the time, I was about 250 pounds and I couldn't make certain shapes. I couldn't be that suprema ballerina chorus girl like I'd wanted to because I had stopped training my body and my mind to believe I could.

So, African dance is where I just felt really free. And, one day I had a theatre review with two heads of our department. And, I go in and they're telling me great things about my production lab. Production lab is basically this binder you have to do for your annual play. It was a lot of work. A lot, lot, lot of work. [Sappy sad voice] Acting is a lot of work. Oh whoa is me. Acting is rough. It is. When you're in theatre school, it's really rough. I'm not going to lie.

But, it could be a lot more ruff ruff. I'm so glad my dog Annie's not going [barks] ruff right now because usually she would be barking. Needless to say, see I'm deflecting; I'm trying to take away from this tough moment. One of the people who's in there, one of our department heads says to me [squeaky mousy department chair voice] "Brooke. I've seen you in African Dance class..." and I'm thinking she's going to say, "and you're awesome. You are moving from Point A to Point B like nobody's business." But, instead she says, "You're a big girl. And, you're not using it. You need to use it. You need to own it. And, I felt like I was back to being that girl on the diving board in South Louisiana where Andre and Hunter are making fun of me for having a boyfriend. I felt like I was that girl where Miss Gwyn is holding up my fallen arches as I try to do a grand plié. I felt really defeated.

Because I thought I was just doing a great job and having fun. And, I was. And, why did I let this person of authority make me feel otherwise? And, she continues on, "You're a big girl. You need to use it. You need to own it. You need to make it work to your advantage." And, not only is she calling me out for my size - which newsflash: people who are overweight are very well aware of their size, okay? And, we are allowed to just be free and do our thing and why does somebody need to point out our size like we're not aware of it? And, why does it matter what size we are? Because, our souls are where we really exist. I didn't say any of that to her. I just kind of nodded. And, who is she telling me how to "use it" how to "own it"? It's like you're calling me out for being big, for having something "other" for being different but then you're telling me to "use it and to "own it". Like you're double chastising me. And, I didn't want to use it. I didn't want to own it. I wanted to be a skinny, tiny dancer and I wasn't. I was a fatty dancer.

And, African dance was the first time where I felt like I was embraced for being the size that I was. And, how dare you, lady - I don't want to say her name. I don't want to call her out. But, how dare you make me feel otherwise. And how dare myself, how dare you Brooke for letting this person make you feel other. But, at the very end, we have our recital. And, I'm wearing a black leotard but on top of it it's all these wonderful drapings and kind of vibrant colors, right? And, I'm just doing my thing. We're in the Tilles Center, which is a huge performing arts center [Long Island accent] on Long Island. I went to college there. So, we're doing our performance and John. Djembe. Sorry that's what the drum's called. Djembe John is drumming away and I'm just feeling it and we start going off into the audience, doing our dance.

And, I hear two of my best friends, Tom and Josh screaming, "Go Hoover! Go Hoover! Go Brooke!" and they're screaming at me all excited kind of like in that movie "I Know What You Did Last Summer" when Sarah Michele Gellar's character is doing the Sea Queen pageant and that's right before the - Matthew Lillard gets killed, I think. But, I digress. I remember feeling free and proud and happy. Because, those two friends of mine were yelling and screaming and making me feel good but because I was also allowing myself to feel good despite all that past. Despite all that baggage. Despite all that weight.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you with this Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast. So, if you're HUNGRY for more, you can book me to speak or perform my solo show that inspired this podcast Phat Girl Costumes written by yours truly and directed by my best bud Brian Lady at your virtual or in person event. Please visit Brookehoover.com/fluffybuttproductions or email me at contactbrookehoover@gmail.com for more information. And, let's follow each other on instagram - I'm @Br00keH00ver and those 0's are not the letter O but they're ZEROS. Not because I want to be a size 0 but because I guess I'm just so clever with my late 90s Yahoo! self

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