



**Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.
And Howard Jacobson, Ph.D.
Health at Any Size Discussion**

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Dr. Glenn: Hello, this is the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston with Never Binge Again and I'm here with --

Howie: Howard Jacobson from Plant Yourself and WellStart Health.

Dr. Glenn: Yes. Who is a doctor and worked really hard for it, but never says that he is, right?

Howie: Well, I figure it comes in handy if you need me to sit for a really long period of time. That was like, "Watch my stuff. I'm going away for two weeks," they're like, "Yeah, I have a doctorate. I'm good at that."


Dr. Glenn: We were made to sit for long periods of time, that's true. Well, I asked Howie here today to talk about a book and a movement that we've both were familiar with, which we don't necessarily agree with although I



think in part, there are some very good points. And when we do this kind of thing, I was just want to say that we're talking about a book with the author and it's entirely possible when you do that that we're creating a straw man argument, like maybe we're attacking a position they don't really have, so we always invite the author to come on and will give them time to rebut or articulate what position they really do have and help us correct anything that we have to say. But we thought, this is a movement that seems to be getting a little strength and we both thought it was important to talk about what we liked about it and what we don't like about it and that's why we had it.

The movement is called Health at Any Size and it's by a book of the same name. And essentially, what the book is saying is that it's possible to be healthy at any size. And that the claims of medical danger associated with obesity are either exaggerated or not really there and she's citing some new evidence that perhaps it's entirely possible to be what we would call 50 pounds or a hundred pounds overweight and not have all the health risks that people think there are.

I'm not sure that I agree with that part. The part that I do agree with is that the corresponding shame and feeling of misfit in society when people are way above their recommended weight and the overemphasis on having a supermodel kind of body; what makes people, especially young women feel like they're not worthwhile if they don't have that or they have a different body type 'cause there are a variety of different body types and some women will never look really thin and some men will never look really thin. I don't think I'll ever really look super thin. And I do believe that a lot of the work that we overeaters need to do is to accept that we're not going to be a supermodel in that way and learn to love ourselves anyway. So that said, I know that Howie has some concerns, I have some concerns.




And Howie, I want to let you talk for a little bit about what your concerns might be and then I'll say what my concerns might be and see if we can reconcile this.

Howie: Okay. So I only have one concern, which is that it's simply not scientifically accurate. I mean, when you look at the data, it's really, really clear with what the Healthy at Any Size movement is doing is torturing the data to try to find any sort of justification for what I understand is a belief the people really want to hold. There's no arguing about the science. And even just -- if you just open your eyes, like how many very, very overweight people do you see in their 80s and 90s? It just doesn't happen. So this is somebody who saw a purple sunset once and loves the color purple and would like us to believe that the sky is purple.

Dr. Glenn: Right. But there are very few very old fat people.

Howie: Right. We can say, "Well, that's anecdotal," but when you look at the actual data, the risks of obesity and even overweight are significant and comprehensive. That's simply not true and it's so easy to rebut if you know anything about statistics. In fact, you need to know an awful lot about statistics in order to construct an argument that can begin to challenge the overwhelming preponderance of evidence that overweight is unhealthy.

We're not talking about that. I want to talk about maybe what are the good and the harmful impulses behind a delusion of this magnitude. I'll start with the good part, which is you can certainly be okay with yourself at any size and this is, of course, where the cultural overlay play such a huge role. I'm as sensitive as a 53-year-old straight white male can be about gender and inequality, about fat shaming, about the



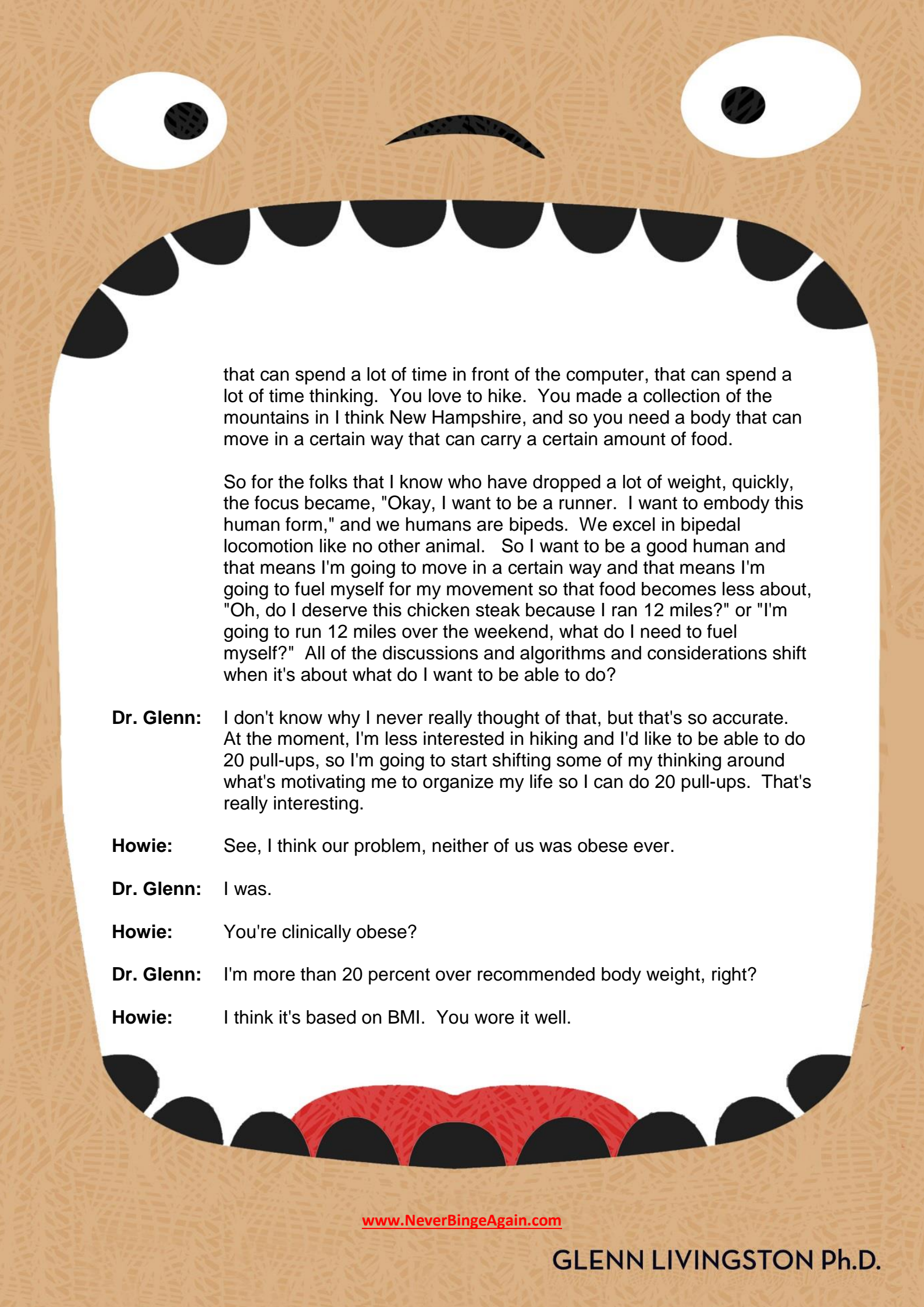
way women develop all sorts of body dysmorphia, trying to appease a perception of what a woman's body should look like, driven largely by an advertising industry that makes money off of our discomfort and unhappiness with ourselves. I believe in fighting back against that. I don't believe in fighting against it by what I would consider a rebellion in the same way that if you rebel against your parents by doing everything they don't want you to do, you're still not autonomous and authentic, you're still being defined by your rebellion.

Instead of focusing on the weight and the body image, everybody I know who's lost weight and kept it off and is happy ended up dropping their focus on weight and instead focused on performance on what they wanted their body to be able to do functionally as opposed to what they wanted their body to appear to be to themselves and others.

Dr. Glenn: Hmm, can you say a little bit more about that?

Howie: Most of us who are overeaters are not going to become supermodels or most people are not going to become supermodels. And most people, if we lived in a society in which we were driven by performance, by our desire to be of service in the world, whether it's to an idea or to a group of people or to our own authentic identity and destiny, whatever it is to be useful to be spent in some way, then what we look like are almost every case becomes secondary to that mission. Now, if you want to be a Hollywood star, then you need to have a certain type of body.

There's more than one type of body that gets to be a Hollywood star, right? But if you want to be a newscaster, there's a few industries in which there are sort of physical requirements. But for most of us in most of the things we do, you and I want a body that can stay up late,



that can spend a lot of time in front of the computer, that can spend a lot of time thinking. You love to hike. You made a collection of the mountains in I think New Hampshire, and so you need a body that can move in a certain way that can carry a certain amount of food.

So for the folks that I know who have dropped a lot of weight, quickly, the focus became, "Okay, I want to be a runner. I want to embody this human form," and we humans are bipeds. We excel in bipedal locomotion like no other animal. So I want to be a good human and that means I'm going to move in a certain way and that means I'm going to fuel myself for my movement so that food becomes less about, "Oh, do I deserve this chicken steak because I ran 12 miles?" or "I'm going to run 12 miles over the weekend, what do I need to fuel myself?" All of the discussions and algorithms and considerations shift when it's about what do I want to be able to do?

Dr. Glenn: I don't know why I never really thought of that, but that's so accurate. At the moment, I'm less interested in hiking and I'd like to be able to do 20 pull-ups, so I'm going to start shifting some of my thinking around what's motivating me to organize my life so I can do 20 pull-ups. That's really interesting.


Howie: See, I think our problem, neither of us was obese ever.

Dr. Glenn: I was.

Howie: You're clinically obese?

Dr. Glenn: I'm more than 20 percent over recommended body weight, right?

Howie: I think it's based on BMI. You wore it well.




Dr. Glenn: Well, you didn't see me, Howie. It was before you know me.

Howie: Okay.

Dr. Glenn: 260 was my top weight. I wasn't working out for a year and so it was all flab.

Howie: Uh-huh. Okay. So what I'm trying to say then is what really educated me was hanging out with the Missing Chins with Josh LaJaunie, with other people who had lost 200, 300 up to 350, 400 pounds and to hear what their lives were like when they were, as they describe it, the fat jolly life of the party. They are the ones going around saying, "Hey, I'm making jokes about myself. Hey, I know I'm fat but I'm happy. I'm happy with my body. I love to eat. I'm the life of the party," and hearing their actual thoughts about the daily, hourly, minute-to-minute indignities of having a body that size, of not being able to go to a movie theater, of not being able to pull up your own socks, of not being able to sit in a booth in a restaurant, of having to evaluate every chair you're about to sit in, was it going to break and embarrass the hell out of you? Not being able to wrap a towel around yourself at the gym.


One of my friends, Eric O'Grey, wrote about the indignities when he got on the plane and they didn't have a seat belt extender for him and the plane was delayed and how disgusted his seatmate was, like, "Oh, I'm going to miss my connection 'cause you're fat." That's what got me thinking about performance. About what do I want my life to be like as opposed to I want to be able to look good in this photo or look at this number on the scale?



Dr. Glenn: I think that's really valuable. I like that a lot. So what would your advice be then? We're recommending people learn to emphasize performance rather than the number on the scale. I think part of the mindset shift has to do with being okay on the journey. I talk to a lot of people that are more than a hundred pounds overweight and one of the things that really stops them is their pig says you've got too much to lose, you can't lose it fast enough so why bother? It just seems like too big a mountain to climb. And that's why I say, "Look, a hundred pounds is an enormous amount of weight to lose, but one pound isn't so why don't you lose one pound a hundred times?"

And once they start doing that, they're on a journey and they get all excited about losing that one pound and they're okay about themselves again. Not completely, but I think that we have to be okay and settle ourselves once we know the ship is pointing in the right direction. I think the terror and the panic and the kind of sense of hopeless giving up has to do with knowing that the ship is going in the wrong direction. And I think that when your ship is going the wrong direction, it's tempting to think, "Well, gee, maybe this is the right direction. Maybe people really are meant to be this heavy and maybe this is a societal problem," which it is to some extent, but it's only going to make you feel worse. So I think we're saying turn the ship around and get happy on the journey and it's okay. It's okay. So what it's going to take, a year, a year and a half to lose that weight? That's okay. And you get to live the balance of your life at the weight that let you perform what you want to perform. I think that's what our advice is.

Howie: I want to go a little bit further than that. And the insight came to me when I was interviewing a woman who was the subject of a documentary called *Unsupersize Me*, about a plant-based physical trainer who challenged this woman to lose hundreds of pounds. And



he was kind of putting her through the boot camp both in terms of exercise and in terms of diet. I can't remember exactly how long. It might have been a couple of weeks or a month. She's crying having a breakdown, "This is so hard. You don't understand. You don't know what it's like." And the trainer is like, "You're right, I don't. So let's go for a run together and I will weigh the same as you." Like he puts on like these weighted vests and extra backpacks and he puts on like 250 pounds and they go for a jog down the street, a hundred yards. And at the end, he's like, "Oh, my God. I had no idea what kind of badass you are."

Dr. Glenn: Just able to walk around.

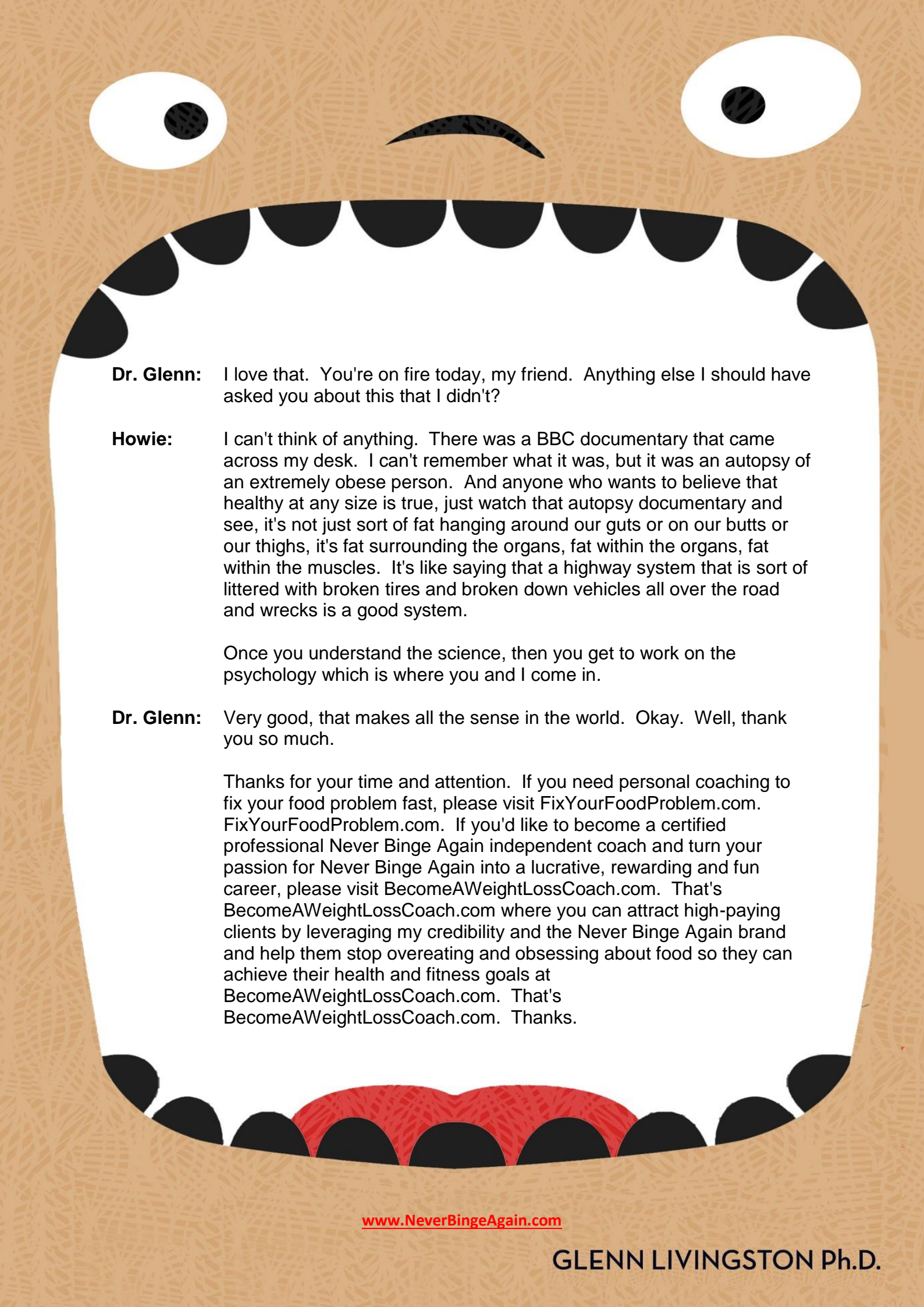
Howie: Yeah. So it's not just like, "Oh, I'm going to love myself when I'm thin," or "I've decided to love myself no matter what." When you look back, if you complete the journey, whatever complete means for you, if you drop those 200 pounds, you are going to look back at the person you were at your heaviest as a hero because that's the person who did the work.

Dr. Glenn: I see. That's really interesting.

Howie: So why not see yourself as that now?

Dr. Glenn: That is a very good paradigm shift. I really like that, Howie. That's amazing.

Howie: Not only are you not hating yourself now, but you are loving the hell out of yourself and you are so impressed with the person who decided to turn things around.



Dr. Glenn: I love that. You're on fire today, my friend. Anything else I should have asked you about this that I didn't?

Howie: I can't think of anything. There was a BBC documentary that came across my desk. I can't remember what it was, but it was an autopsy of an extremely obese person. And anyone who wants to believe that healthy at any size is true, just watch that autopsy documentary and see, it's not just sort of fat hanging around our guts or on our butts or our thighs, it's fat surrounding the organs, fat within the organs, fat within the muscles. It's like saying that a highway system that is sort of littered with broken tires and broken down vehicles all over the road and wrecks is a good system.

Once you understand the science, then you get to work on the psychology which is where you and I come in.

Dr. Glenn: Very good, that makes all the sense in the world. Okay. Well, thank you so much.

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