**The Lord Bod**

**by Paul Rudnick September 15, 2008**

Lord’s Gym, a 10,000 square foot fitness center . . . meshes prayer and push-ups. The gym offers classes including “Yogod,” its take on yoga. . . . Spaghetti-strap tank tops and short shorts are not allowed. . . . Per Heistad, who travels often for business and is a self-described gym rat, said he did not feel entirely comfortable in other gyms anymore. “I don’t need anything to lead me into temptation,” Mr. Heistad said. “I can get there on my own.” Merri Bush, 42, who is a member with her daughter, Christyna Askey, 21, said [that] . . . the two of them walk on the treadmill each morning while they read and discuss the Bible. Ms. Askey said, “It’s cool to be able to do that and not have people say, ‘What are you doing?’ ”   
—*The Times*.

Amen, Christyna. I’m Kristeena Steggs, and my mom and I also really like to combine working out and Scripture, because, as my mom always says, “Jesus was right, and Jesus was toned.” Mom and I also run a Christian gift shop here in Orlando, where we sell stuffed animals whose paws can be Velcroed together in worship, and toilet paper imprinted with the names of the seven deadly sins and the celebrities who practice them most often. We used to go to a secular gym, which was, as my mom puts it, “hoo-ha central.” The most popular spandex colours for obvious adulterers, she claimed, were electric orange, aqua, and something she called “my-kids-are-in-day-care-so-come-and-get-me” fleshtone. One morning, she glanced at a blonde in a skimpy unitard and commented, “That woman looks like a pair of panty hose packed with flavoured Jell-O.”

As for the men at the gym, well, I tried not to look, but sometimes it was like a tsunami of Speedos bulging right at me. “You know what’s inside those banana hammocks?” Mom would warn me. “I call ’em Satan’s potatoes.” Sometimes a man would come over and ask me if I needed help with my workout, and Mom would jump right in and say, “Sure, if we can help you get reborn in the Holy Spirit and stop adjusting your harvest medley.” My mom said that she could always tell which of the guys were homosexuals, because “they’re always friendly, but the minute you turn your back they were paying homage to Pilates.”

For a while we tried to work out at home, using a series of instructional DVDs called “Abs, Buns, and Brimstone,” which were hosted by a bodybuilder dressed as a sleeveless pastor, who said things like “You’ll never get raptured with that big ol’ butt!” and “When God looks at you, He says, ‘Gee, I don’t remember creating all that cellulite!’ ” Mom and I tried, but we missed the camaraderie of a gym, so we decided to open our own, in a strip mall, and we called our place Jesus Christ You’re Fat. We painted the walls with colorful murals of Bible heroes exercising, like Bathsheba on the NordicTrack, and David and Goliath enjoying a jolly sit-up competition; for a chuckle, we pictured Job standing behind a woman using both a triceps machine and her cell phone.

Our opening day was incredibly fraught: would anyone show up? Our first customer was a pretty young woman who said that she’d recently moved to the area and was looking for a cheerful neighbourhood spot where she could get fit. My mom cried, “O come all ye faithful!,” until she noticed the name on the woman’s registration form: Caitlynn Weinblatt. “I’m not sure this is a good match,” my mom said. “Will you be comfortable in a spinning class when the instructor stares right at you and yells, ‘Feel the burn—in Hell!’?” Caitlynn asked my mom if she knew of any exclusively Jewish gyms nearby, and Mom cracked, “Sure—there’s a deli on the corner!” Even Caitlynn had to laugh, as I later told her attorney.

It took a few weeks, but soon business was booming. We now have a special sunup stretch session called “The Inquisition,” and there’s a Mommy-and-Me gymnastics class, where toddlers can learn which body parts are the most shameful. I myself teach a trademark program of devout aerobics called “Cardio-Chant,” where the ladies lie face down on the floor and sob quietly to tapes of liturgical wailing; no one loses any weight, but we all feel purified.

Best of all, I met my future husband, Robert (Bobby) Bobberman, at our gym. He came in one day, took the tour, and then declared, “I like this place—which ones are the women?” I blushed and he turned to me and said, “I need to see a priest, because I’ve got a confession to make: when I look at you, my heart rejoices.” That was when my mom came over and asked Bobby what his intentions were, and he told her, “I’d like to play some racquetball, take some steam, and then help your daughter to see God.”

“Oh, sweetheart,” my mom whispered to me. “He’s a keeper.”

Bobby is now a co-owner of our gym, and he’s also the personal trainer of my mom, my best friend, Erin, and my teen-age brother, Esau. Every time I walk in on one of them with Bobby and ask what’s going on, they always squeal, “We’re praying!” Bobby also wants to franchise our operation, and we’ve been brainstorming about a celebrity-makeover ad campaign, something along the lines of those recent Jenny Craig spots. I’ve noticed that Queen Latifah, in her Jenny ads, never says how much she weighs but just announces that she’s “Size Active.” Maybe she could endorse our gyms by saying that she’s “Size Sacred,” or, as my mom suggested, “Size Whoever Pays Me.” Bobby said that he was thinking more along the lines of Eva Longoria or Jennifer Aniston, and when I pointed out that they’re both already in great shape he said, “Kristeena, you really need to work on your hips if you ever want to fit into that choir robe.”

So here I am, a proud businesswoman, an adoring bride-to-be, and a blessed exercise addict. I hope that someday maybe Christyna Askey and her mom will drop by our facility, because Bobby keeps asking, “Is there really an angel out there named Merri Sort?” I bet that they would love our gym, because it’s just what I imagine Heaven to look like: a clean white space filled with happy, in-shape Christians not looking at each other.