

NAAFA Newsletter

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MAGAZINE PUBLISHER TO ADDRESS CONVENTION

Alice Ansfield, the publisher and editor of RADIANCE magazine, has accepted our invitation to give the keynote address at the 1987 national convention to be held at the Newark Airport Marriott on September 3rd through 7th.

RADIANCE, the magazine for large women, addresses the issues. "We're not just fluff," Ansfield told us in a recent interview. "We're proud of our unique editorial focus." The spring issue includes articles such as "Images of the Goddess" (featuring artists who celebrate the full female figure), "Reclaiming our Sexuality", "Ten Reasons Not To Diet", and an article about Bill Feeney, Seattle's fashion designer whose large sized line runs from size 12 to 64.

RADIANCE was first developed by Ansfield while she was part of a larger woman's exercise group. "I wanted to do a two page newsletter for the group, but it grew from 2 pages to 20 in only ten days." In the three years of its existence, RADIANCE has grown from a local newsletter to a color, glossy magazine. In the future Ansfield plans to include articles for large men, and to continue developing RADIANCE as a national publication.

The keynote address is scheduled for Saturday, September 5th, at the awards luncheon. Immediately after the luncheon, Alice Ansfield will lead a workshop on what NAAFAs would like to see in future issues of RADIANCE.

FEMINIST PAPER DEVOTES ISSUE TO FAT LIBERATION

Matrix Woman's Newsmagazine, a California based feminist publication has devoted their entire April publication to fat issues. The 24-page newspaper included articles that discussed myths about fat, resources for fat people, visions of fat liberation, fat children, an interview with Fatlip Readers Theater, and an assortment of poetry, photographs and artwork. There were also at least two articles by thin allies, discussing their perspective on size discrimination, and a focus on enlightening the mainstream feminist community.

A group of fat women and their allies collaborated on this issue: Julie Hannah Brower, Joyce C. Brown, Ruah Bull, Beth Natalie Davis, Susan Dubin, Mardi Kidwell, and Julie Sherman. Some of these women are NAAFA members.

The April Matrix is a milestone in that this marks the first time that a feminist publication is known to have focused on fat women's issues. Many fat feminists have reported feeling left out of the feminist movement. According to NAAFAn Karen-Scott Jones, who recently wrote the Newsletter, "Having recently gone through my collection of old feminist newspapers from the past 20 years, with letters I used to write in response to the all-too-frequent articles by so-called feminists that oppress fat women, the achievement represented by this issue of Matrix is all the more clear."

NAAFA has obtained several hundred copies of the April issue of Matrix. They are available on a first-come-first-served basis to any NAAFA member who requests a copy and sends \$1.00 for first class postage and handling. Copies will also be available at the convention.

A SENSE OF OUTRAGE

NAAFA members need to develop a sense of outrage at some of the questions that are asked of them and statements that are made about them. Often in public and private talks with people we tell them that we are denied our rights to life, to liberty, and to pursue happiness. After we have told them of the terrible things done to us, an insensitive person will change the whole focus of the discussion by asking "What did you eat for breakfast?" or some similar question. This question is irrelevant to the discussion. What difference does it make how much we eat? We are talking about freedom in America, and a citizen's right to freedom is not based on the number of calories consumed last week.

Not only do these insensitive questioners change the focus of the discussion, they then proceed to impugn our honor. Recently we've seen TV shows in which fat people are told that they are lying about their food intake. When someone who does not even know you says that you are not being truthful about your food intake, why sit there and try to justify yourself? Why not express your outrage at being considered a liar by someone who knows nothing about you except that you are fat?

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MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH

by Media Editor Bill Fabrey

June Bailey (OH), well-known to readers of this Newsletter, was featured in Woman's Day (March 24). June says that she was frequently misquoted in the piece, including the ending, and that she was not pleased with the photographs, including one that was not authorized by her. Just the same, the article was favorably received by many people, and has resulted in plenty of "spin-off" publicity from other media. Although NAAFA's address was not included, several good references to NAAFA did make it into print.

A flurry of publicity followed a recent event conference held in Connecticut. Sponsored by NAAFA's Feminist SIG (special interest group), with a boost from Largess (based in New Haven, CT), newspaper articles appeared in the New York Times, as well as the Bridgeport Sunday Post, the Stamford Advocate, and the New Haven Register, all of Connecticut. NAAFA women at the conference who were quoted in print included: Miriam Berg (NY), Ruby Greenwald (NY), Carrie Hemenway (MA), Aglaia Koras-Bain (NJ), Susan Mason (NJ), Lynn McAfee (PA), Vicky Reed (CT), Karen Scott-Jones (CT), Katy Dierlam Sonntag (NY), and Nancy Summer (NY).

Sally Jessy Raphael's syndicated TV show featured NAAFA Vice-President Paula Dachis (MD) and Fat Men's Forum (SIG) leader Jerry Lamb (MI) in a show and aired in March and April in many cities. Another guest, a woman operating a chain of aerobic exercise studios for big woman, provided some agreement for Paula's and Jerry's positions; a fourth guest, a zealous formerly fat person, was extremely critical. The show provided some inspiration for viewers seeking self-acceptance, but degenerated into a stereotypical discussion of health matters. However, NAAFA's name and address was aired at the end of the show...

The Nutrition Action Health Letter, published by the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, DC, filled most of the January/February issue with information related to weight "control". The cover story, "Fated to Be Fat?" led with a portrait of NAAFAn June Bailey (OH). Coverage of the topic throughout the publication was strongly liberal and sympathetic with Bailey's position that fat people would be better off accepting themselves. The back cover of Nutrition Action concluded with a short article blasting Slim-Fast "nutrition bars" for weight loss.

June Bailey and NAAFA received excellent coverage in the newspaper tabloid Weekly World News of April 7. The paper, which admittedly also provides excellent coverage to space aliens and the Loch Ness monster, played the story in a serious manner, and did a fairly good job of quoting June on the subject of her life-long struggle with her weight, and her final discovery of inner peace after learning to accept herself. Millions of people read the tabloids, and such exposure may be helpful to educating their readers.

In fact, the same news tabloid actually printed, on March 17, a letter from a reader sounding off on the subject of putdowns of fat people by reporters. She said, "I am sick and tired of reading insulting stories about fatsos and wimps. It's time you treat humanity with a bit more respect..." The editors didn't even come back with a smart-aleck response!

NOW IN PREPARATION - Cleveland area NAAFans can watch the NBC-TV (channel 3) FITWORKS segments on the NBC NEWS AT SUNRISE show, the week of May 25th. The segments consist of 4 1/2 minute pieces on fitness, and they air at 6:15 AM. The show features Philadelphia NAAFAN Noelle E. Sewell, a certified aerobics exercise instructor who has a special program for large women. The shows were taped in Cleveland, OH.

New Woman magazine's September issue will probably carry an interview with author Nancy Roberts, NAAFA Advisory Board Chairman Paul Ernsberger, Ph.D., and NAAFA founder Bill Fabrey.

OTHER MEDIA ITEMS - Weight Watchers magazine has recognized the genetic basis of obesity in an article in their February issue. Titled "Are you Destined to be Fat?", the thrust of the article has to do with how to become thin despite a genetic tendency to be otherwise. The article does quote NAAFA Advisor Dr. Susan C. Wooley in a section on how to tell whether you are eating from true hunger or for psychological reasons...

Speaking of Weight Watchers, it looks like the media is poised to have some fun with actress Victoria Principal and Weight Watchers, Inc., which she is apparently suing for \$1.5 million, and asking for a court order barring WW from using her name or likeness again. Sounds like an inside squabble to us...

Sagging ratings are troubling "comediienne" Joan Rivers--various papers have reported on her disputes with the Fox Network, her employer. Her negativism about larger people have made us wish many times that she would take up a different occupation.

The media, which had a field day over the size of Sarah Ferguson's thighs when she married Prince Andrew, is pleased over the fact that she has apparently caved in to the adverse publicity, and has been dieting, as evidenced by her newer, streamlined form. Amazing how the world gives more press coverage to the size of someone's figure than to what kind of person she is--or to other real issues. Perhaps this is the balance in news reporting we need--to offset things like terrorism and Iranscam?

Mr. Blackwell, famous for his annual list of the 10 worst-dressed women, has revealed his true stripes. In January, after criticizing everyone on his list (about Sarah Ferguson: "there's plenty of ways to cover a full hip--one of them is to stay in bed...etc."), Mr. Blackwell stated what has been his attitude all along: "The problem is that most of the women in the world could have made the list." Sounds like Mr. Blackwell has a problem about women in general...yet, the media has been paying attention to this guy's opinions about women's fashions for the last 27 years. Amazing!

According to a survey by the advertising agency D'Arcy, Masius, Benton & Bowles in New York, 9 out of 10 people are unhappy about their weight. 76% of a group of 1,550 adults said they wanted to lose weight, and 10% said they would like to gain. We'll give you three guesses why an advertising agency would be interested in that kind of sociological information...

For years we have been receiving dozens of newspaper and magazine clippings each month (and an occasional videotape) from NAAFans who want to help provide news for this column, and material for the Dr. Ethel Weiss Shed memorial library. We appreciate the help--those who regularly contribute articles to NAAFA are usually mentioned at the awards ceremony, held at the annual convention. A new award solely for those who contribute such material to NAAFA's library is under consideration for this year.

THE PERFORMING ARTS - An excellent review of a theater production "The Shadow Box" in La Jolla (CA) mentioned NAAFAN Joyce Rue, playing the daughter Agnes. Rue garnered special mention by the reviewer for her performance. Of interest is the fact that the role does not specify that it has to be played by a fat woman...

An off-off Broadway musical called "Oh! Oh! Obesity" by Dr. Gerald W. Deas has been playing for several months at the Paul Robeson Theater in Brooklyn, NY. Dr. Deas, a poet and activist, apparently created the show to reveal, in an entertaining way, how fat people are exploited by the weight loss industry, and how they should help not only themselves as individuals but also each other as a group with a common problem. The show received excellent reviews by local community newspapers, and Dr. Deas made NAAFA literature available at at least some of the show's performances. However, shows like this one (whether because the performers are fat or because they are black) rarely get into the "mainstream" of American theater. "Leftovers" suffered a similar fate. The best solution to this kind of problem is probably VIDEO, so that a maximum number of people can see a production at a minimum cost...

A NAAFA Distinguished Achievement award recipient, Marcia Kimmell ("Leftovers, the Ups and Downs of a Compulsive Eater", currently teaches classes in improvisational theater, and a weekly workshop called "Sleeping Beauty", for "courageous large women". The workshops are held at The Next Stage in San Francisco.

A movie to avoid? L'Annee des Meduses is said to be a sexy film situated at a topless beach on the French Riviera. According to reviewer Stewart Klein of WNYW-TV in New York, "Everybody is nude, nobody is fat, and everyone looks MAHVELOUS!" Guess we'll skip seeing that one...

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR HEALTH?

I asked myself the other day, "Nance, if you died tomorrow, who would really care?" Okay, it's a gruesome subject, but I bring it up to make a point. I assume my family and close friends would be distressed to various degrees. I hope my husband would be brokenhearted, at least for a suitable mourning period. Some of my readers might miss me. And I suppose an enemy or two would tapdance on my grave. But outside of that, over 99.9% of the population of this continent wouldn't give a damn.

So why is it, that just about every stranger I've ever talked to has been so blasted interested in my health?! "But what about your health?" "I'm just concerned about your health." "But I'm worried that you're cutting your life short." Such caring statements! It seem to me that a lot of people hide their fat prejudice behind platitudes about our health. It lets them act concerned while in fact they're ignoring the things that we really need, like a job, education, suitable public accommodations, love and support, and a chance to walk down the street without being harassed.

Why, just last month I found out that talk show host Sally Jesse Raphael cares about my health! I don't know why. Her show's on at 3:00 AM in my home town and it's hard for me to watch her. I hope her guests Paula Daxis and Jerry Lamb were reassured by her warm and generous concern. The NAAAFans were trying to talk about fat rights, but the subject just came back over and over again to their health. Don't get me wrong. I like Sally. I think she's one of the more supportive and sincere interviewers around. But I'm sick of people discussing whether or not we're going to get hypertension someday, when we are trying to make statements about our basic human rights, and the kinds of discrimination we fat people face every day.

Fat people, (and I mean all fat people, not just the ones doing their aerobics), deserve the same basic rights as everyone else. I don't care why they are fat: heredity, damaged metabolism from pills and dieting, lack of exercise, or just sitting around eating a whole lot of Cheetos and Ring Dings. We are entitled to respect, self-respect, and all the rights listed in the Constitution.

I think health is a subject worth discussing with loved ones, because their concern may be quite sincere. But the next time a stranger tells you that they're concerned about your health, ask them to give you \$50 for your next medical checkup.

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AS I SEE IT--by William J. Fabrey, Founder (1969)

NATURAL BEAUTY

The Rolfs Company, of West Bend, WI, makes a good-quality line of leather products: keycases, billfolds, and so forth. A recent purchase of one of their items turned up the following note, tucked in the flap of the product:

NATURAL BEAUTY

"Rolfs doesn't fool with nature when it comes to the look of genuine leather. This accessory has been handcrafted out of a full-grained aniline finished leather. Signs of insect bites, scars, fat wrinkles, variations in color, and other markings are evidence of the leather's natural beauty. These distinctive characteristics do not affect the durability of the product, but are more precisely natural 'beauty marks.'"

What I'd like to know is:

- If the above holds true for animal hide, why doesn't it also hold true for people?
- What are people so afraid of that they resist even the slightest evidence of the aging process?
- Why should we all look like we are 20 years old?
- Why can't our faces, our figures, our scars, wrinkles, sags, whatever, bear testimony that we have lived, that we have survived, and that we have "natural beauty marks"?
- And why, after this sentiment has been expressed many other times and in many other places, does our society and our industry continue to exploit the misery and torment of those who would turn back the clock and deny their age and other individual characteristics?
- And why must the individual characteristic of being plus- or super-sized carry so much terror for so many people, that life-long discontent and/or eating disorders are the result?
- Finally, what (if anything) are you going to do about making the world around you a little better place for those who don't look quite the same as other people?

INTO THE MAINSTREAM: BLESSING OR CURSE?

by David Whiteis (IL)

(Reprinted from BIG TIMES, the bulletin of the Chicago Chapter of NAAFA)

"Some men gain strength by going their lonely ways.
Let us be what we can to them." - Leonard Cohen

One of my most vivid childhood memories is running in tears from a group of tormentors and wandering for hours around a swampy marsh which we kids called "Duck Pond" and which served as a kind of retreat from the pressures of everyday childhood life. The other kids has been making fun of me for some reason (not because I was fat; I wasn't) and had made it clear that I could never, try as I might, be one of them. I was weird, I didn't fit in, and I might as well give up even attempting to be "normal".

Since I wasn't big and strong enough to fight them all, my only recourse was to run, and Duck Pond was the obvious sanctuary. I can remember sitting there, immersed in self-pity, and slowly becoming enchanted by the natural wonders all around me: the fertile, rich smell of the swamp mud, the grace with which turtles--so ungainly and clumsy on land--swam through the murky water, the musical peeps and chirps of the birds and frogs, punctuated occasionally by the "Glunnnnnngggg!" of a big bass-voiced bullfrog, the sensuous wonder of the garter snakes as they moved silently through the rushes and into the water--and by the time I left, several hours later, my face still had tears on it--but now they were tears of joy.

The lesson I began learning that day has stayed and grown within me ever since. I discovered a wonderful world of natural beauty which has kept me in awe and remained a source of inspiration for years. But the real lesson was that my so-called enemies, in ostracizing me from their little in-group, had done me perhaps the greatest favor of my life; they'd made it possible for me to explore on my own, to go out and find something of meaning (greater meaning, it turned out, than their children's games and nonsense talk) which I could study, think about, and make my own.

I think of this often when I hear people in NAAFA express their desire to become "accepted" by the cultural mainstream which has hurt and ignored them for so long, or when I hear NAAFAs rejoice that even though they're fat, they can still be "normal" in this society. When we look at what passes for "normal" in society--intolerance, cruelty towards those who are different, labelling of people as "ugly" and then hurting and oppressing them for being so--it makes me wonder why anyone would want to be a "normal" and accepted member of such a mean-spirited majority. But apparently, a lot of us do.

In my opinion, many of us have been taught for so long, by so many people, that there's somehow something wrong with being different and not "fitting in", that we've failed to accept what may be society's greatest gift: the ability and freedom to grow as individuals. The stereotype of the loner as a neurotic loser may apply to some, but there are also an awful lot of people--start with Albert Einstein and go from there--who were laughed at because of their "different-ness", only to use all those hours alone to think, dream, and come up with ideas and accomplishments that literally changed the world.

Think about it: The people we admire for being "exceptional" are, by definition, somehow different from the rest; that's what makes them such exceptions! The great baseball player, Ty Cobb, was harassed and humiliated by his teammates when he first joined the Detroit Tigers in the early 1900's. While the other players hung out together, young Ty sat in his room or walked the streets alone. Rather than feel sorry for himself, however, he used this time to think about his baseball skills. Within a year to two, he became the greatest player the game has ever known. In his autobiography, Cobb attributed much of his success to those lonely hours spent thinking, devising strategies, and honing his intellectual appreciation of his game. "Without knowing it," he wrote, "They (his tormentors) did me a great favor."

I believe that we in NAAFA, rather than attempt to buy ourselves back into the cultural mainstream which has hurt so many of us in so many ways, should take a lesson from Cobb and the countless others who have found that time spent as an "outsider" is often the most valuable, well-used time of one's life. We've learned--the hard way--how it feels to be oppressed and ostracized; this should give us a deeper understanding of others in the same position. It should also give us a genuine pity for those who can't appreciate the beauty of human diversity, and the wonder of a world in which all people are different, and thus have so much to learn from one another. When I hear "normal" women talk endlessly--obsessively--about their diets and their bodies, about how little they ate today and how little they're going to eat tomorrow, my initial reaction is honest, heartfelt sympathy. Here's this wonderful world, filled with delights and good times--music, food, friendship, natural beauty, the entire day-to-day

human cavalcade of life--and all they can think about is the self-enjoyment of self-denial.

I've always felt that the people who are "pushed out" are the people with the potential to do the most good. They can gain new insights and grow at their own individual pace. They're not encumbered by the constraints and limitations society places on "normal" members. In the words of Jamake Highwater, a Native American writer who has studied cultural diversity in our society, "I believe that in the experience of the outsider there is an important lesson to be learned. But the virtues of this lesson are not accessible to those who can only see through one cultural window--one sexuality, one mentality, one reality. It demands more than insight to see. It requires vision. And vision, by the definition of all the prophets, is the gift of those who stand in an ideal isolation...astronomers of those deepest spaces where we flash our desperate message across the infinite space that separates us."

LANE BRYANT: OUR FASHION STANDARD NO MORE

by Kimm Bonner (NJ)

Lane Bryant used to be a place of many talents. Yes, it did have the reputation for having the most bullet-proof poly, but (at least in urban areas), you could always count on finding something special or nice. You could also expect to find your size whether you were a chubby, size 16 preadolescent, or a size 56 woman. It was like a department store for fat people--coats, sportswear, shoes, children's, junior and women's sizes were all represented.

I was in a Lane Bryant's in New Jersey last month and noticed how much it has changed. The size of the stores have shrunk as well as the size of the clothes. The clothing ranged from size 14 to 28 (I could count the 26 and 28's on one hand) with heavy emphasis on size 14-20. Not only was the size range limited, but each size was scaled down to "European" lines. This translates to everything being approximately two sizes smaller than before. I'm 5'5", and usually wear a 22-24, but I couldn't fit in their 26-28 dresses! With a \$1,000 credit line and looking to buy, I ended up with a pair of sweat pants, some stockings and a headband. This was all that fit--a pitiful situation if you ask me!

The clothing styles have changed, too. Women of all ages and tastes used to find a good selection, but now most of the styles are geared to the 13-17 year old crowd. Mini skirts, wool leggings, and flowered jeans are the main stock in trade. Just fine for the high school crowd, but what about the rest of us?

Since their takeover by The Limited six years ago, Lane Bryant has moved in the direction of all the other Limited stores. At this point, LB's is a scaled up (in size) version of The Limited--same styles, same names, same attitude. Did you know that The Limited's Forenza, LB's Venezia and Lerner's (also a Limited company) brand of sportswear are all the exact same product--each with a different label sewn in. So much for The Limited's slogan of "Make sure you buy the real Forenza, not an imitation".

All in all, I would rate Lane Bryant a two--down from a seven a decade ago. Sad, that in this age of booming business in the large size industry, the industry's standard has disappeared. But don't complain: Look around--it may take more work to find what you want, but you'll find more to choose from, better quality, and end up with something twice as nice for the money.

FUNDRAISING REPORT--The annual fundraising campaign is underway. Last year, through the generosity of members, over \$6,000 was raised. It is hoped that donations to Campaign '87 will surpass that mark!

On June 13, 1987 NAAFA will be celebrating its 18th birthday. A day of festivities is planned, sponsored by the Fundraising Committee. A luncheon program will include speeches by NAAFA's Founder and Cofounders. Charter members are also invited to address the gathering.

The afternoon program includes a psychic fair and ad hoc rap sessions. The psychic fair held at the Holiday Happening was so popular, that the psychics had to be invited back--but they probably knew that in advance! Dinner and dancing will round off the evening. See Ad Supplement for details.

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