

Discrimination Suit Won in North Dakota

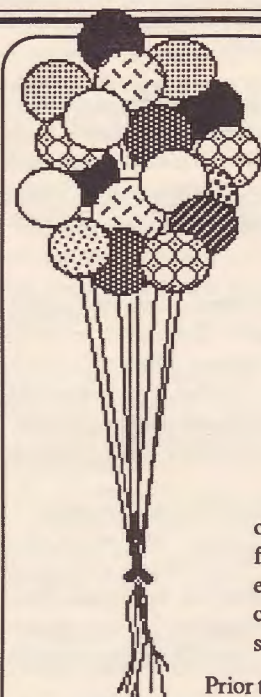
by Sally E. Smith (CA)

On July 31, 1988, Melvin Hansen of Wahpeton, North Dakota was fired from his job as a weight inspector for the North Dakota Highway Patrol on the basis of his weight. The reasons cited included an inference that his (over 450 pound) weight reflected a lack of self-control, that he had an offensive body odor, and that he failed to wear the regulation uniform. Hansen filed a complaint with the State Personnel Board, who recently ruled in his favor.

Colonel Brian Berg, Highway Patrol Superintendent stated that his original concern was "to enable (Hansen) to wear a uniform". Berg said that the State should not be required to pay for Hansen's uniforms when "he kept growing out of them".

Bonnie Fetch, an Analyst with the Department of Personnel, and who investigated the case, found that Hansen's firing was based on his physical appearance, and that the other complaints were unjustified. The North Dakota State Personnel Board voted unanimously to reinstate Hansen to his former position, with no loss of benefits or seniority, and award his back pay. Referring to the Board's decision, Fetch said, "It is a precedent setting case. This ruling underscores that state employees cannot be fired because of obesity if (their weight) does not interfere with job performance."

Fetch's investigation found that the Highway Patrol demonstrated a discriminatory policy, in that they had a weight standard for no bona fide reason. She stated, "The Highway Patrol's attitude is biased and prejudicial towards obese people." Further, the Highway Patrol weighed Hansen on an outdoor truck scale, when a scale which



Balloon Launch Planned for Convention

An activism event, focusing on employment issues, will be concluded with a balloon launching on Friday, September 2nd at the 1988 NAAFA Convention. Participants in the event will be asked to wear their normal business/work clothing or uniforms, and will be given signs indicating their work or profession. All convention attendees will be encouraged to participate.

The theme of the morning event, to which the press will be invited, is "We're in the Work Force". We'll be proving that fat people are part of the work force—in a wide variety of jobs—and that we're demanding equal pay, equal chance for advancement, and equal opportunities in employment and education. Several guest speakers will be featured. To conclude the event, helium balloons will be launched into the skies of Baltimore.

Prior to the convention, NAAFA members will be asked to participate in a special fundraising project. For each \$5.00 donated—by our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors, our family members and ourselves--one balloon will be launched in the donor's name. The balloons will represent the donors' support and hope that size discrimination will end.

All NAAFA members will soon receive further information and materials for this special fundraising campaign. Your participation in this fundraiser is encouraged, whether you can attend the convention or not. (Members who prefer not to receive the balloon campaign materials should contact the NAAFA office by May 10th. XØ)

could accurately record his weight was available at a local community hospital. Fetch referred to this incident as an example of the Highway Patrol's "shocking lack of sensitivity and crass attitude."

In response to a question about this incident, Berg said that the Highway Patrol had paid for a physical exam for Hansen, at which time the doctor recommended that he lose weight. Berg stated that Hansen had agreed to be weighed on the truck scale, since neither the doctor nor the Patrol had scales that could accurately measure his weight. When asked why they thought it important to weigh Hansen, Berg replied, "When the

doctor recommends that someone lose weight, you have to know where you're starting from."

The North Dakota Highway Patrol has fifteen days to ask for a second hearing appealing the decision. Berg indicated that they are giving strong consideration to appeal. If the Board refuses to reverse the ruling, the Highway Patrol has the option of filing in District Court.

Commentary

If it stands, this administration ruling will be a benchmark for weight-related discrimination cases in North Dakota. It is the most

Suit Won in N.D.

(cont. from pg.1)

progressive, straightforward ruling that has surfaced in the recent past.

While the ruling is limited to North Dakota state employees, and does not encompass the private sector, it is still a giant leap forward for the size acceptance movement.

If it is true that the Highway Patrol's concern was simply that Mr. Hansen fit into a regulation uniform, it is a sad commentary on society to see this concern result in the firing of an employee whose ability or performance was never in question. Employers should realize that requiring an employee to wear a uniform implies that the employer will provide the employee with one that fits. One can only wonder if this incident would have escalated to a firing if the employee in question was extraordinarily tall, or had some other physical attribute that prevented him from wearing a regulation uniform.

We in NAAFA should applaud Mr. Hansen's courage in challenging his firing. We hope that his perseverance inspires other victims of size bigotry and discrimination to fight back. ◇◇

Patient Voices Fear

Seeking proper preventive medical care and treatment is difficult for most fat people. The fear of an unpleasant experience, complete with a diet lecture and unsympathetic care, keeps people away from their doctors—even when they suspect something might be wrong. NAAFA's Advisory Board Chairman Paul Emsberger, Ph.D. suggests that lack of preventive medical examinations might be a strong factor in the overall health problems of fat people.

An important part of preventive medicine for women is the gynecological examination. Depending on the age of the patient, examinations are recommended from once a year to one every few years. But unless a problem is suspected (and even then in many cases), many fat women will not make an appointment. Some large women report not seeking medical care even when their menstrual cycle is disrupted or stops completely!

The following is an excerpt from a letter written to American Medical News and printed in the September 12, 1986 issue. The article was sent to us by Karl Nieder-shuh (PA).

(continued next column)

Cancer Patient Voices Fear, Plea

by Denise Ann Tiffany

I walked out of my doctor's office a few weeks ago with a diagnosis of cancer of the cervix. My tumor might have been there for a long time, or maybe it's a recent development. I don't know which and I won't know which—it has been at least five years since my last Pap smear.

It wasn't that I didn't understand the importance of a Pap smear. I understood. Since I was 18 years old (almost 20 years ago) I have been reminded in magazine articles, by women friends, by my mother, and by my husband.

So why haven't I been in for a Pap smear for such a long time? Don't think me overly vain. I am not so very different from other patients. I am a teacher, a part-time writer; I read war history and romance novels; I love chocolate. I think I'm fairly typical.

I did not go in for a Pap smear because I was afraid my doctor would "yell at me" about losing weight. What's wrong with this picture? A multi-degreed, intelligent, literate (witty, warm) woman teacher risks cancer in order to avoid being told she is overweight.

Yes, I was overweight. At 5'7", I weighed about 160 pounds. Before I could force myself to face a doctor, I felt I needed to lose 30 pounds. It took me five years. I have tormented myself: I should have gone in earlier. I should not have cared what the doctor would say. I should have never gotten fat. I should have lost weight faster.

I did not save myself the trauma of cancer, so now I want to save the world—if not the world, then at least my little corner of it. Since being diagnosed, I have begged my women friends to make appointments with their doctors. The universal response from these college-educated, upper-class, pencil thin women is 'I can't. I'm too fat. S/he will tell me to lose weight,' or, 'Every time I walk into a doctor's office, I get a lecture about losing weight.'

The author of the letter then went on to ask doctors and health professionals (the readers of American Health News) to be more aware of this problem, and not to berate larger patients about losing weight.

Regular check-ups are important; and especially if you suspect a problem, don't let your size keep you from seeking the medical care you need. ◇◇

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Celebrating Our Fat Culture

by Carrie Hemenway (MA)

Whenever two or more "liberated" fat people gather, we celebrate our culture, creating a common language, a common dream of a world without fat oppression, and share a history and a belief system. While we haven't formalized this culture, we have begun to create traditions, rituals and passage rites.

When I attended my first NAAFA Convention in 1983, I felt I had truly come home. For the first time in my life I was surrounded by a veritable nation of fat people. I didn't have to explain or defend myself from their biases or ignorance. Here I was "normal". I could be myself—freed from the stigma and pain of fat bigotry. Everyone was a fat person or a friend of a fat person. There was an acceptance, a gaiety, a letting down of defenses rarely encountered outside of this protected circle. Here I realized that indeed we are a People. And a People creates a culture.

Every culture has traditions and rituals. The people of a culture share a common belief system. While our fat culture has not been expressed in words, it has been defined by our actions, spontaneously and naturally. This culture reflects our newly found freedom from the limitations society imposes on us as we celebrate ourselves.

We share a common belief system which emerges as we debunk the many myths surrounding fat oppression. Some of these myths include the concepts that we could lose weight if we wanted to, and that fat isn't healthy or attractive. We know differently, and the information that diets don't work, that one can be fat and healthy, and that fat people are attractive, arms us. This information is power.

We share a common language. "I've reached my setpoint," we tell a friend. The word "setpoint" is ours. The word "fat" is ours—we have reclaimed it. The words "abundant", "ample", "supersized", "fatphobia", "fatist", and "sizist" are ours.

When fat people gather, we break bread together. It is richly important that we eat together, enjoying both food and company. Eating with others is an exquisitely intimate act—taking nourishment from the same source together. It says we are no longer oppressed by diets and restricted, secretive eating. Sharing a meal symbolizes and reclaims this freedom. Eating no longer

connotes shame. It brings joy, company, sensuality and aesthetics. Eating together is a political act.

We share rituals. When fat women gather, they exchange and try on clothes. How many of us missed the adolescent rituals of trading clothes with girl friends because our thin friends' clothes were always too small for us? This is an intimacy most fat women are denied—a passage rite, a puberty ritual. But at NAAFA events, fat women can share this intimacy in a sisterly relaxed atmosphere, with an acceptance of a 200 or 400 pound body with all the folds and roundness.

We share memories, a common history. We all remember scanty, ill-fitting gym suits. We swap diet horror stories. We remember being weighed at school and being treated like outcasts.

Many fat people remember the death of singer Cass Elliot. Her death, and the way the media reported it, profoundly affected us (they assumed her size was the cause of her death). We know the truth; she didn't die from obesity but from dieting. Cass Elliot lives inside most of us, and we carry her with us as we dare to be ourselves.

We create our own support system. In most oppressed cultures, the family unit usually provides a sense of safety and support. But many fat people cannot get their support from their families. *Our* fat culture nurtures us by encouraging and enabling us to love and accept ourselves. We hug each other a lot, offering generous praise and support. We recreate family—the pain as well as the joy. Sometimes we act out our internalized oppression by unintentionally hurting or competing unfairly with one another. It's hard to unlearn old ways.

We redefine holidays. Many of us define new holidays by our NAAFA calendar. The annual convention and certain annual regional events have taken their place as special "fat" holidays in *our* culture.

Christmas, Chanukah, Thanksgiving—these holidays can be devastating for fat people. Old family issues surface; weight is often discussed. I propose that we define alternative holiday traditions for those who find the holidays lonely, painful, and alienating. This would allow us to simply be, eat naturally, and enjoy the family who truly loves and accepts us—the fat community! Why not create our own Christmas, Chanukah, or Thanksgiving traditions? Why not relax in good company, surrounded by happy round faces, creating new symbols, new rituals, new mores.

Some of us have sons and daughters. Are we handing our culture down to them? Do we initiate our plump daughters into fat women's circles? Do we share our knowledge with our sons? There are countless ancient and modern ceremonies and traditions we can adapt, or we can write our own. It is time to begin. ◊

Excerpts from an article originally published in *New Attitude*, the publication of the Feminist SIG.

--ACTIVISM LETTER--

Time Author Behind the Times

As we reported in our last issue, two new studies have indicated that obesity is an inherited trait. That news was reported in many publications nationwide. The March 7th issue of Time magazine carried a story entitled "Is Losing Weight a Losing Battle?" in which the author covered the studies, but concluded with, "The new findings may lift some of the blame for being fat from the obese, but not the responsibility. In certain people, the tendency to put on fat never wanes, and only a life of dieting and exercise can thwart it." NAAFA's Christine Cook Applegate (CA) sent the following response to Time magazine, Time Life Building, New York, NY 10020:

"I was frustrated and saddened to see Denise Grady end a good article on obesity and heredity by succumbing to society's mantra of the thinner the better. After producing a well researched article explaining medical studies that have shown a hereditary reason for being overweight, Ms. Grady ends by saying that the obese still have the "responsibility" for their size even if they don't have the "blame". This sounds a lot like saying that Blacks and Orientals can't be blamed for their race, but they are responsible for changing it!

Why can't the media finally accept that people come in all shapes and sizes and that's life—not everyone can or wants to be pencil thin. You can be fit and fat, and fitness is everyone's responsibility. But the guilt trip Ms. Grady lays on fat people once again is getting really old and totally out of line with research she herself has reported. Wake up! Not everyone can "fix" themselves with a "life of dieting and exercise" to "thwart" who they are. Isn't it time that the media takes some "responsibility" for perpetuating an unrealistic body image on the American public?

Sincerely, Christine Cook Applegate" ◊

Aglaia Koras-Bain Piano Recital at Alice Tully Hall

by Mike Gordon (NJ)

Those many NAAFAs who went to Lincoln Center on March 10 to hear fellow member Aglaia Koras-Bain's piano recital, enjoyed an evening of classical music beautifully performed. Aglaia has all the talent it takes to make a fine musical career. One can only wish her good luck, a much needed ingredient in this profession. She already possesses a big technical equipment, is very musical, and knows how to make the piano sing.

The pianist presented a program of great variety of not less than nine composers from different periods of music history, her own composition included. We were treated to a rousing performance of Scriabin's most technically and musically demanding Etude in D-Sharp minor. Aglaia had all the power and drive needed for this performance and then some. The difficult and very beautiful Scherzo in B-minor by Chopin, with its famous slow lyrical middle section based on a Polish Christmas carol, was presented showing very good understanding of style and structure. Aglaia performed the famous Rachmaninoff Prelude in C-sharp minor quite beautifully, projecting the right somber mood and all the colors so characteristic of this composition. The pianist also selected four difficult excerpts from Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition". And here again, as in the Scriabin Etude, she had all the power, technique and musical temperament to bring the first half of her program to a rousing conclusion.

After intermission came the Beethoven Sonata Op. 110 in A-flat major. This is one of the most mature compositions of Beethoven's last years. To hold this varied musical material together and make it sound coherent, to project a very deeply felt songful and expressive interpretation of the slow movement, and to outline the different voices and the structure of the Fugue, is no easy task for any pianist. Aglaia rose to all of these demands and gave a wonderful performance. "Isle Joyeuse" by the French composer Claude Debussy had all the colors and the impressionistic suggestive atmosphere in her fine interpretation. She finished her recital with her own charming composition Louloudi (The Flower), based on a Greek folk song. It was a beauty. ◊◊

Local Chapter Coordinators Wanted

by Dan Davis (CA)

NAAFA needs a few (more) good volunteers. For example, our Local Chapters Committee has recently been restructured to better serve members across the country. There will now be three Local Chapter Coordinators, one to cover the Eastern United States, one for the Midwest, and one for the West.

Each Coordinator's responsibilities will include recruiting new members and area facilitators, helping new chapters get started, monitoring and reporting on chapter activities, providing support to chapters, reviewing new chapters and area facilitators applications, and writing articles for Chapterlines, the special inter-chapter publication. Coordinators will report to the Executive Director.

Applicants must be residents of the region they wish to coordinate. They must be willing to devote five to ten hours per week to the position and to distribute their telephone numbers as needed. Organizing and communication skills are a must, and past or present involvement in chapter leadership is preferred.

Regional Coordinators will have a chance to improve communications both among chapters and between chapters and the national association. They can also help chapters help each other to further NAAFA's goals.

If you're interested in being considered for one of these positions, contact Dan Davis through the NAAFA Office. ◊◊

John "Wes" Beatty

Wes Beatty died on April 10, 1988 in his home in Yonkers, New York. He had been a member of NAAFA since 1982 and an active member of several metro-New York chapters.

Wes was a senior electronics engineer employed by the Department of Medical Physics at Memorial Hospital-Sloan Kettering Institute in New York. He had been active for many years in medical research and made many notable contributions to the field of radiation therapy: He developed the gamma ray camera, and in 1975 he wrote a ground-breaking article on computer tomography.

Fletcher Pence

Fletcher Pence, a long-time Patron member, passed away on April 12, 1988 at his home in St. Croix. Fletcher had long suffered from a heart condition: A heart attack was reported to be the cause of death.

Fletcher initiated the concept of service awards for NAAFA volunteers. For most years since 1978, Fletcher provided the award mementos: beautiful, hand-crafted clocks and plaques made from Croixian mahoganies and other exotic woods. In 1982, when NAAFA moved its headquarters to new office space, Fletcher donated a custom-crafted table for the new office. He will always be remembered as a free spirit and for some "unforgettable" parties at NAAFA conventions.

Fletcher lived and worked at LEAP (Life and Environmental Arts Project, Inc.), a non-profit wood-working project which he founded in St. Croix. According to his wishes, he was buried near the LEAP facilities, and a mahogany sapling will be planted on his grave.

Edward Peckham

Edward Peckham, husband of Bunny Peckham, died on March 27 in his home in Bayshore, New York after a extended fight with complications from Juvenile Diabetes.

While Eddie was not a NAAFA member, he was an active supporter of his wife's NAAFA activities, and an active volunteer for the Long Island Chapter from 1982-1984 and for the national Fundraising and Convention Committees: He provided event information and directions over the phone, and shopped for and prepared food and supplies as needed. He was always supportive of NAAFA's goals. ◊◊

**Financial
Consultant
Needed**

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A volunteer with a strong background in financial planning for non-profit organizations is needed to help with NAAFA's next level of growth. Familiarity with budgets, cash flow projections, financial analysis, short and long-term planning and control is desirable. Send resume and references to: Executive Director Sally E. Smith, PO Box 246, Herald, CA 95638. ◊◊