

NAAFA CELEBRATES 18TH BIRTHDAY:

SIZE ACCEPTANCE COMES OF AGE

On June 13, NAAFA officially became 18 years old--having been founded on June 13, 1969. On that date, on a warm summer's eve, a determined group of nine people met in Staten Island, New York to approve the draft of NAAFA's Constitution and Bylaws. The group was incorporated a few months later, and achieved tax-exempt status a few months after that.

In the 18 years since its founding, NAAFA has played a very active role in the "size acceptance" movement. Those familiar with the movement and with other human rights organizations say that NAAFA's survival for 18 years is among its significant accomplishments. In most organizations devoted to changing society, the roadside is littered with groups that didn't make it--that the organizations that crumble outnumber the ones that survive ten to one.

For better or for worse, we are still here--and we have a long and colorful history, thanks to the many NAAFANS who have devoted their time, energy, and money to the cause.

The original group included Susan and William Blowers, Gilberto Granadillo, Joyce and William Fabrey, Eileen M. Lefebure, Ann and Llewellyn Louderback, and John G. Trapani. While Trapani chose not to be considered a Co-founder, one other person signed the new Constitution: Meg Gwynn (now Meg Wirk) of California.

During the first eight years, NAAFA was based in the Fabrey home. But with the addition of charter member Lisbeth Fisher Burns to the office staff, NAAFA moved into its first "official" office in 1977. Under Lisbeth's care, the membership tripled.

Since 1980, NAAFA has continued to develop and improve services and has moved from having a New York-based leadership to one spread throughout the United States. Membership growth is on the upswing. Today we employ two non-members and enjoy a network of volunteers from all parts of the country.

Many NAAFANS have made important contributions in developing the various programs that today's members enjoy. The list is too numerous to include here, but three special names come to mind: Marvin Grosswirth, Naomi Shadowitz, and Dr. Ethel Weiss-Shed, whose contributions were many, but unfortunately did not live to see the full measure of their accomplishments.

But happy birthday, NAAFA! May you have another 18 years, and may they be productive ones, helping to improve the lives of millions of larger-than-average people everywhere!

--W. Fabrey

MAJOR PROBLEM FOR MAJORETTE

Heidi Knapp, a 210 pound junior from Brooklyn High School in Ohio, was recently denied a spot on her school's majorette squad. She claims that she was told by one of the audition judges that she was being rejected to "spare her future humiliation and ridicule". "After Mr. Konicek told me I didn't make the team, he held up a picture of the uniform, which looks like a bathing suit, and asked me how I thought I'd look in it," Heidi told reporters from the Cleveland Plain Dealer. But according to Heidi, "If I want to be out there twirling a baton and risk people making fun of me because of my weight, it should be up to me."

Five girls tried out for three spots on the team. The other girl who was rejected was told it was because she did not know the steps. But Heidi alleges that she was told she was too fat for the squad. Her ability was not in question.

Heidi and her parents have been fighting the school's decision of May 20th, but school officials have been adamant that the auditions are "absolutely over". The subject was brought up at an emotional school board meeting where her father argued that there are no written guidelines to become a majorette that specify any weight requirements. The Knapps called a local television station about the problem, and that led to further media coverage.

The Knapps have also contacted the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which has agreed to pursue litigation on this matter.

Heidi has studied baton twirling for two years, and has participated in the marching band and in some school plays. Many parents and students are supportive of Heidi's right to be on the squad. Some rated her as a good baton twirler. But others supported the judges' decision and some thought that she would lower the standards of the majorette squad if allowed to participate.

According to an article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer (June 24), Heidi is fighting the school, in part, to spare other heavy girls from going through a similar ordeal. NAAFAN June Bailey (OH), Editor of the Bountiful Buckeye Bulletin, which has been devoting space to Heidi and her problem with the school, succeeded in getting a letter published in the Plain Dealer in support of Heidi and her right to be a majorette. Others have written letters--including Russell F. Williams (MD), Co-Chairperson of NAAFA's Activism Committee; Susan Tenzer, (PA); and Linda and Wayne Gehres (OH).

Other NAAFANS who would like to write in support of Heidi should send letters to: The Plain Dealer, 1801 Superior Ave., Cleveland, OH 44114, with copies to the Brooklyn Board of Education, 9200 Biddulph Rd., Brooklyn, OH 44144. Please also send a copy of your letter to the NAAFA office, which will distribute copies to the Activism Committee and to the Bountiful Buckeye Bulletin.

LIFE IN THE FAT LANE-- NO LAUGHING MATTER

The world is just a little safer for fat people today. Connie Chung appeared on the David Letterman show during July, and David commented that he had watched her show "Life in the Fat Lane" and now he knows that some people are fat due to genetics and not just from overeating. In fact, his usual jibes at fat people were not evident in this show. Instead he focused his humor on Connie Chung's admission that she drank a lot of beer in college. Does this mean that David Letterman has become enlightened--even a little bit? It's too soon to tell, but we can hope. □

LOSE WEIGHT WHILE YOU SLEEP-- EXCEPT IN CALIFORNIA

The National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) warns us about "Dream Away", a diet pill that claims to allow you to lose weight while you sleep. You may have seen these ads, in which a grey haired, bearded gentleman touts the product. "Dream Away" ads continue around the country despite the fact that the promoters paid a \$162,500 fine for false advertising to the Ventura County (CA) District Attorney in 1985 and were banned from airing their ads in California at that time.

NCAHF recommends that consumers file complaints with the Federal Trade Commission if they see this ad in their area, so that the other 49 states can be protected from false advertising, too.

The "Dream Away" ad is running--we've seen it a number of times in the last two months. It usually appears on national cable stations such as the USA or Nashville networks. One of the ads carries a written disclaimer stating that the product is not available in California.

If you see the "Dream Away" ad, note the day, time, and station airing it, and write the Federal Trade Commission as suggested by NCAHF. Their address is: Federal Trade Commission, Correspondence, 6th and Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. 20580. □

TO YOUR HEALTH

by Paul Ernsberger, Ph.D.,
Chairman, NAAFA's Advisory Board

Dear Dr. Ernsberger,

A part of NAAFA is devoted to those who admire and prefer the larger figure. If the presence of fat can be desirable to others can it be desirable to oneself? Can a person want to be fat in order to satisfy their inner feelings, just as someone who wants to be thin? I have a friend who has been thin most of his life and wants to be fat. He has gone to several doctors who said he looked fine and prescribed tonics that did nothing. One doctor prescribed steroids which increased his weight 35 pounds, during which he felt better and more comfortable with his body, but he lost it in time. He has tried overfeeding himself but it failed. He feels he is a fat man trapped in a thin person's body. I personally feel that if he wants to be fat, he should be allowed to be. He would look better and feel better inside. Are there any doctors who would help him to become fat in a safe and understanding manner?

Dear NAAFA,

As a medical researcher, promoting good health is my top priority. Therefore, I cannot encourage or condone deliberate weight loss or gain for the sake of appearance. Long-term "overeating" and gaining weight can be harmful to anyone's health. For example, thin prison convicts in Vermont, who were hired by scientists to overeat and gain weight, suffered from high cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar as well as other unfavorable effects. This illustrates the danger of going above your setpoint or natural weight--the weight you would maintain without going hungry but also without eating beyond the point of satisfying hunger. People who are naturally fat can be heavy and healthy, but people who are "artificially fat" due to excessive eating have a higher risk of certain serious health problems (1).

It is true that underweight people are subject to their own health risks. However, even in this case, I don't think that deliberate weight gain is the answer. Some people are just naturally thin, and I don't think these people are at risk. Other people stay thin by chronically going hungry, and many of these people also go on binges when their restraint breaks down. These may be the underweight people who are most prone to health problems. I think that the best advice to anyone, fat or thin, is to eat only enough to satisfy the body's hunger, maintain a stable weight, get regular exercise, and select foods that are low in fat, salt, and sugar but high in fiber, starch and minerals.

Some people have rejected the arbitrary and unhealthy standards of our culture that say "the thinner the better", but have adopted equally arbitrary and unhealthy standards that say "the fatter the better". Over the years NAAFA has accepted a wide variety of viewpoints, including this one. However, I believe it's best to accept yourself as you are, and then go on to maximize your personal health and happiness.

1) P. Ernsberger & P. Haskew: News about obesity. New England Journal of Medicine 315:130-1, 1986. □

EDITORIAL: SO WHO ARE WE ANYWAY?

by Nancy Summer

I'm disturbed by several recent issues that are brewing within our membership. It seems that there are groups of people who feel that other groups don't belong in NAAFA--or perhaps just shouldn't be encouraged all that much. This scares me.

Experts tell me that people who have suffered discrimination, who have been oppressed and left out of the mainstream, often imitate their oppressors within their own community. In other words, perhaps it's only natural that some "mainstream" NAAFAs might be discriminating against others within our own movement. Well, it might be natural, but it certainly can't be right!

For example, some people feel that NAAFA should not encourage F.A.'s to be part of our group. They argue that some F.A.'s have less than acceptable behavior, and that perhaps this might damage NAAFA's credibility.

Other people feel that NAAFA should not encourage radical feminists to be part of our group. After all, some feminists are lesbians--and that might be too controversial.

Another faction in NAAFA feels that some leaders "should be exposed...as enemies of the movement" and rooted out. Move over, Joe McCarthy!

And there is always the perennial complaint of some "mid-sized" and smaller women in NAAFA who are made to feel less than wanted because they're "not fat enough for NAAFA".

I think we need to give some serious consideration to who we are as a group. Are we a middle-of-the-road, middle-class, exclusionary organization--or are we really a human rights organization of diverse people who are held together by one common bond--the bond of fighting size discrimination on all fronts.

I'd like to think that NAAFA is an umbrella organization that brings together all people who are fat, or who support equal treatment for fat people. I'd like to think that NAAFA welcomes people of all sizes, races, creeds, colors, physical abilities, sexes, and sexual preferences. I'd like to think that this concept is more than just some words in NAAFA's Constitution and is actually being put into practice by all the members of our group.

If we condone the exclusion or suppression of any special interest group, we risk the chance that the day will arrive when our special interest group is the next victim.

As we continue to succeed and our numbers grow, the day will come when so many people are part of the size acceptance movement that we might work better in compartmentalized groups. But until that day comes, we should always be on guard against losing our concept of NAAFA as an umbrella organization, embracing a widely diverse membership. Our diversity is one of our major strengths! □

NAAFA'S 18TH BIRTHDAY: AN F.A.'s PERSPECTIVE

by Neil Osbourn

Eighteen years ago there was a wild and crazy guy running around New York City by the name of Ralph Ginsburg; and at that time, he was nurturing a very young offspring which he called Avant Garde. Avant Garde was a publication in which Mr. Ginsburg printed anything and everything controversial, unconventional, and timely for 1969.

Just to give you an idea of what the paper contained--there were anti-war essays and poster contests; cartoons from the likes of Muhammed Ali, (would you believe?); an artist's concept of Marilyn Monroe achieved by smearing paint on nude photographs of that famous actress; stories and artworks by the late Andy Warhol; articles by the well-known M.D., Karl Menninger; a short story by the talented playwright Arthur Miller; exposes on voodoo, the Sears and Roebuck catalog, and John and Yoko; never-before-published erotic drawings by none other than Pablo Picasso; and a wonderful portfolio of photographs entitled "Portraits of the American People". That gives you some idea of the eclectic nature of this contemporary periodical produced at the end of the 60's.

In Issue #10 of this interesting conglomeration of left wing reader's delights, Papa Ginsburg published what he probably thought was the most far out thing that had ever come across his desk. That story was written by Max Hess, entitled "The Bigger They Are, the Harder I Fall". This is a story about a man who was, to say the least, enamored of fat women. Can you imagine anything as far out as that? I suspect Ralph said those very words to his editorial staff.

When I saw that story I was amazed that Mr. Ginsburg had chosen to print something which didn't strike me as being far out at all, although perhaps not very common. Then, a second thought hit me--if this story is true, as it is reported

to be, I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE, and somehow that thought was comforting.

At the same point in time, another guy was running around New York who was also nurturing a newborn. Now this wasn't a wild and crazy guy, at least not as I know him, but he was a guy with a dream; and in issue #12 of Ginsburg's infant Avant Garde, this other fellow, the one with the dream, wrote:

"Editor: Your article on fat girls by Max Hess was great! It is time that society realized that fat can be beautiful as Max (and I) believe. By the way, some of your readers might like to know that NAAFA is a natural gathering place for those who agree that persecution of the fat must end! Signed: William J. Fabrey, President.

Bill has never wavered from that philosophy.

Seeing that letter gave me yet another jolt--THERE ARE THREE OF US!

I tried to remain calm and as soon as I had complete control of my composure, I took pen in hand and wrote. I entrusted my letter to the U.S. Postal Service and it didn't let me down. In a short time I received a reply. It was then that I began to watch Bill's baby grow. Oh, by the way, Ralph's baby didn't survive.

Now, eighteen years later, I am very proud to have been there when this organization was an infant. Bill should be very proud, too having successfully brought this child through nearly two decades of both trying and rewarding times.

In those days the total membership of NAAFA could easily have been seated at two dinner tables. Now, of course, its influence has spread throughout the United States and elsewhere--membership is well over 1000 and chapters exist in many cities.

But the heart, soul, and spirit of this eighteen year old "dream baby" are the people who work tirelessly to promote her ideals and who contribute time and money to keep her alive--but most of all--the people who tell their stories so that others may be enlightened and grow, so that they themselves may grow having shared their pain.

The support, love, and friendship which is spread through the young adult NAAFA must continue to influence and eventually change society's attitude about the last suppressed minority.

I hope none of us ever loses sight of our individual impact in the ongoing, successful fight against the oppression of fat people and their admirers, and I hope that NAAFA continues to inspire the desire in each one of us to be all we can be.

Editor's Note: This is an excerpt of a speech given by Neil Osbourn at NAAFA's 18th Birthday Party, June 13, 1987. □

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FAT FEMINISTS: A "HERSTORY"

by Karen Scott-Jones (CT)

NAAFA is 18 years old this year! As we celebrate the "coming of age" of the fat acceptance movement, it is time to take a look back at some of our collective history. Fat feminists have been active in the movement since its inception, and their contributions have been responsible for much of the progress the movement has made in the last 18 years. Herein, a brief look at some of the events along the way, and the fat women who made them happen.

Any overview of fat feminist "herstory" would have to begin with the grandma of all feminist fat activist groups, the legendary Fat Underground. Formed in Los Angeles in the early 70's by Aldebaran (Vivian Mayer), Judy Freespirit, Lynn Mabel-Lois (Lynn McAfee), and others, the F.U. was a fat liberation political action group: Armed with myth-breaking research information, painstakingly culled from medical libraries, the F.U. wrote position papers connecting fat women's oppression with other feminist issues, gave workshops, spoke at feminist rallies, and used guerrilla-theater tactics at "weight-watcher" type diet meetings to educate other fat women about the dangers of dieting and to disseminate factual information on fat and health.

The addition to the group of Judy Freespirit, a founding member of the California-based radical therapy movement, resulted in the publication of ground-breaking political articles detailing the F.U.'s findings in RT, the Journal of Radical Therapy. These writings, along with others in feminist journals, eventually made their way into the hands of Drs. Susan and O. Wayne Wooley at the University of Cincinnati. The Wooleys incorporated some of this information into their papers, which began circulating within the academic and medical research community and helped inspire others, like Bennett and Gurin and Paul Ernsberger to write more articles and books.

In the late 70's, several members of the F.U. moved out of Los Angeles; Aldebaran travelled east, landing in New Haven, Connecticut in 1976, where I met her. Along with Sharon Bas Hannah, another F.U. member, we founded the Fat Liberation Front (FLF). Lynn McAfee, meantime, had moved to Philadelphia, where she became active in a NAAFA chapter and currently co-chairs NAAFA's Feminist SIG. Judy Freespirit moved to San Francisco, where she became active in the disability-rights movement and founded Fat Lip Readers' Theater. In Los Angeles, the F.U.'s work was carried on by a new group of members including Sheri Fram, Melanie Osborn, and the late, great Reanne Fagan.

In New Haven, members of the FLF helped organize "The First Feminist Fat Activist Working Meeting" in April 1980. Several important things came out of that meeting which drew fat feminists from as far away as California. There were presentations of fat issues to a Women's Health Conference which was being held concurrently in New Haven. A new group, Fat Activists Together was formed which was a coalition of grassroots groups and individuals which maintained a national network and produced a series of publications over the next 3 years. The weekend also helped to change the anti-fat bias of a book which has become the "bible" of the feminist health-care movement: Judith Stein, founder of a Boston-based fat women's group participating in the weekend, was a member of the advisory board of the Boston Women's Healthbook Collective, publishers of Our Bodies, Ourselves, and she took audio tapes I had made of workshops back to Boston to document the need for a

revision of the book's position on food, fat, and dieting. The current edition now contains corrected material on fatness and health, advocates body-size acceptance, and includes a resource section on Fat Liberation.

Several other major literary events important to the movement have come out of the efforts of feminists. In 1983, the first anthology of fat women's writings on fat oppression appeared in book form with the publication of Shadow on a Tightrope. The book, based on a manuscript of essays and poetry compiled and edited by Aldebaran and Sharon Bas Hannah and published by Aunt Lute, has become a mainstay of feminist book stores across the country and is well into its second printing. Another literary milestone was the birth of Radiance, the first feminist magazine by, for, and about fat women, published by Alice Ansfield in Oakland, California. In May, 1985, a bastion of the mainstream women's movement finally acknowledged the existence of fat feminism: Ms. magazine published a definitive article by NAAFA's Carol Sternhell entitled "We'll Always Be Fat, But Fat Can Be Fit". And just this year another landmark occurred when a feminist newspaper devoted an entire issue to Fat Pride--the April, 1987 issue of Matrix from Santa Cruz, California, was edited by a coalition of women working in all areas of the fat feminist movement and is the natural successor to Shadow on a Tightrope in the quality and political consciousness of the writing included. No finer collection of fat women's writings exist, and the fact that it does exist is proof that the feminist movement is hearing what fat activists have to say.

NAAFA's own Feminist SIG is making its mark on our herstory as well. Formed in 1983 by Debra Ernsberger, the SIG publishes a newsletter and has sponsored two annual regional conferences in Connecticut. The SIG is currently headed by Lynn McAfee and Carrie Hemenway. This year's Norwalk conference, a weekend organized by Vicky Reed and Dr. Mary Boyle, drew 40-50 women from around the Northeast and was covered by four newspapers, including the New York Times. A national fat feminist conference is in the early planning stages for sometime in the coming year.

Another group working in the movement is Largess, a national network of feminist fat activists, based in Connecticut, that has taken up where Fat Activists Together left off. Largess maintains extensive files of archive and research materials; publishes a resource list; sponsors workshops, support groups, exercise classes and other activities; and works closely with NAAFA's Feminist SIG.

The activist work undertaken by fat feminists in educating society and helping to end fat oppression benefits everyone in NAAFA--fat women, fat men, F.A.'s, and our families and friends. As the saying goes, "You've come a long way, baby"--as a movement, we still have much work left to be done, but we have indeed accomplished a great deal already, thanks in large measure to the efforts of our many fat heroines. Here's to them, and to the next 18 years of progress for all of us!

(NOTE: Copies of Largess's resource list are available free to anyone who sends a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Box 3363, Fairhaven Station, New Haven, CT 06513.)

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