

# NAAF Newsletter

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## THE RIGHT TO BE DIFFERENT

by Nancy Summer

For 100 years, the Statue of Liberty has held up her lantern in welcome to ships entering New York Harbor. She stands on Liberty Island, only a short distance from Ellis Island where millions of immigrants on their way to a new life in America were "processed" by government immigration officials. If any of your ancestors arrived from Europe during the huge waves of immigration in the late 1800's or early 1900's, they probably were greeted by Lady Liberty.

But whether your ancestors arrived through New York, Hawaii, San Francisco, New Orleans, Miami, or across the Rio Grande, if they came willingly and eagerly to America, they came looking for a better life.

What made them leave their homelands? There are many reasons: Poverty, religious and/or political differences, famine, and lack of employment are some of the more driving reasons that caused, and still cause, people to flock to America.

It is rather odd, then, to think about some of the ideals held sacred by second, third, fourth, etc. generation Americans. Isn't it amazing that people whose parents and grandparents fled famine, today are choosing voluntary famine: (i.e. crash dieting)! The very same genetic coding that helped some immigrants survive food shortages in their homelands, today cause so much unhappiness to millions of Americans.

Consider another amazing fact. America is a nation which has prided itself on being the melting pot, a nation where ideally all differences are tolerated, even welcomed. Many of the immigrants that fled to America came because they were "different" in their homelands. Their political or religious beliefs were different, unpopular, and even illegal.

In the case of some minority groups, their ethnic heritage was different than the majority.

But once again, so many of the second, third and fourth generation American have lost sight of this ideal. Some differences are not tolerated. We can go to different places of worship, we can express our political views, but we dare not look different.

And for those of us who do look different, we experience the same type of oppression that drove many of our forefathers to come to America. Of course, we are not jailed for being larger-than-average. But all too often fat people today feel that they only have two choices: Starvation or life-threatening weight-loss surgery; or else a life of being ostracized and limited in opportunity.

It doesn't sound much like the life our grandparents wanted for us.

Perhaps this centennial celebration of Lady Liberty can serve to remind us that we have **the right to be different**. It is part of our heritage as Americans and as human beings.

As NAAFAn artist Susan Mason said on the base of her Statue of Liberty drawing:

**WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, REGARDLESS OF SHAPE OR SIZE**

**MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH** - The really big news this month was the mention of NAAFA in the Dear Abby column, authored by Abigail Van Buren. Read by millions, her column has mentioned NAAFA four times in the last 10 years. And Abby herself has been receiving complimentary copies of NAAFA Newsletters since 1980. Her latest and best "plug" appeared (May 23) in the following way:

Her reader wrote to say, "I am an overweight lady. I do not want to lose weight because I like myself the way I am. I've been skinny, I've been "normal," and for the last two years I've been heavy. I prefer heavy. I meet a better class of men this way. I would like to meet another man like my deceased husband. He relished every ounce of me.

"You once mentioned an organization of fat people who are not ashamed of being heavy. They carry themselves with dignity and confidence and don't care what other people think. I didn't keep the information when I read it because I never thought I'd need it. Please put it in your column. There must be other people who would like to join.--Heavy and Happy"

Abby responded as follows: "Write to NAAFA (National Association to Aid Fat Americans), PO Box 43, Bellerose, NY 11426, and enclose a long, stamped, self-addressed envelope for a reply. I have seen the organization's newsletter and think it performs a much needed service in these times when thin is so in that fat people are made to feel guilty and ashamed." (The Abby column is copyright © 1986, Universal Press Syndicate).

Because of the positive statement in her column, and the impact that Abby carries with her readers, an estimated 2,500 pieces of mail were received in the office, more than double the response to a similar mention two years ago. At this writing, all requests for literature have been filled, most of them within two weeks of receipt. NAAFans who would like to give a "pat on the back" to Abby can write to her at 9200 Sunset Blvd. No. 1003, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

NAAFans Conrad Blickenstorfer and Bill Fabrey (and photographs of their wives) appeared as scheduled on two TV talk shows in June (in Boston and Pittsburgh, as mentioned last month). They report that, except for severe disruptions in their flights between cities caused by scheduling snafos and bad weather, the trips went well and their comments seemed to be well received. Both shows were able to find members of the studio audience and other panelists who were agreeable to Blickenstorfer's and Fabrey's basic premise: That FA's (fat admirers) have the right to their taste, and it is no stranger than anyone else's. (The stated purpose of the shows was to discuss the "phenomenon" of men who have a sexual preference for plus-figured women...) The Pittsburgh show audience also included four NAAFans from the Western PA chapter, one of whom (Clare Skeehan) was able to add her comments to the telecast.

Also in June, NAAFans Bob Bain (NJ) and Lynn McAfee (PA) were guests on a TV talk show taped in Philadelphia.

**OTHER MEDIA ITEMS** - Did any NAAFans see the Cosby Show episode in which Peter, a boy of substantial girth, visited Cosby's house? It is reported that prior to filming, the script was changed to eliminate scenes in which the child's weight was an object of jokes. This is apparently due to the efforts of psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint of Harvard University, who is used by Cosby to check all scripts in advance to make sure they are in good taste, medically accurate and don't contain any racial or sexual stereotypes. According to Dr. Poussaint, who was interviewed by the National Enquirer (7/1/86), "I felt the script needed to be more careful to make certain that an overweight child wasn't being made fun of. We changed the script." This column salutes Dr. Poussaint for his sensitivity and perception!

The improved attitude of columnist Ann Landers, reported in the April Newsletter has revealed itself again in a column circulated on June 1, and submitted by Leonard Phillips (DC). Her reader said to Ann, "The woman who admitted she is prejudiced against fat people made my blood boil...overweight people are sensitive...what they do need is acceptance and approval. They also need to be evaluated fairly for employment. And while you are at it, please let them know they are loved and appreciated..." Ann Landers replied, "...Thanks for an intelligent, supportive letter to a segment of society that has been for too long exploited and maligned." (The column is copywrite © 1986 by the News America Syndicate.)

Anyone hear about singer Spanky McFarland in the new Mamas and Papas? Any articles on that subject would be appreciated. Also, one of the weekly tabloid newspapers mentioned in an article about the new image of singer/actress Dolly Parton that she has shed 20 "unsightly" pounds. We don't seem to recall the media or anyone else ever referring to the old Dolly Parton image as "unsightly"; except, perhaps, for those who were envious... ■

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Articles in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of NAAFA, Inc., unless specifically noted. Please contact the NAAFA office if you require information about specific NAAFA policies. Commentaries in this Newsletter were prepared by the Editor, and/or Chairman Fabrey.

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**SEAT BELT UPDATE** - The Nissan Motor Corp. has written to NAAFA, apparently as a result of NAAFA's citation of that company as "unresponsive" in a report to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration regarding seat belt problems among fat people. (Nissan's uncooperative attitude had been made clear several months ago in its letter to N. Summer about her problem with short seat belts in her Datsun.)

Nissan's latest letter, from Hali Davidson, Vehicle Safety Compliance Coordinator of the Nissan Motor Corp. (USA) in Gardena, California, read as follows: "We sympathize with your plight, and understand that your organization represents a portion of the population who find it difficult to use the standard seat belts in our vehicles. Since we were originally contacted by Ms. Summer, we now have available seat (belt) extenders or longer seat belts depending on the model application. Ms. Summer has been notified of this situation. These extenders and longer belts will soon be available to order through all our Nissan dealers. In the meantime, if any member of your organization are having difficulty with the existing seat belt in their Datsun or Nissan vehicle, please contact me for assistance."

Meanwhile, two size 52 NAAFAs recently purchased '85 Dodge sedans, both models having front wheel drive. The seat belts in the front seats were more than ample to fit them; both had great difficulty in the past in finding belts to fit them.

This **Newsletter** interviewed an engineer with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, who said that the problems with Nissan, contrasted with the ample fit encountered in the Chrysler product were typical of that agency's experience with auto manufacturers. Most domestic manufacturers have been fairly responsive to auto problems in the past, and many foreign manufacturers have been reluctant to do more than strictly comply with minimum standards in the U.S., according to Mr. Nelson of the NHTSA.

Mr. Nelson indicated that the Vehicle Research and Testing Center in Ohio, which has been under contract for safety testing, and which received a report from NAAFA last year, was continuing a program to determine the effect of increasing the seat belt length requirement by four inches, to extend the belts' usefulness to an estimated 4% of the population (those who are between the 95th and 99th percentiles in size and weight). Their main concern is that longer belts not stretch excessively during the impact of a collision. At present, manufacturers need only provide belts to fit those between the 5th and the 95th percentiles in size and weight--and there is some uncertainty as to the actual dimensions of 95th percentile people...

Given sufficient government funding, such tests usually result in new manufacturing regulations within one to two years after tests begin, according to Mr. Nelson. He displayed a thorough understanding of the technical problems involved with lengthening seat belts; a discussion of these and other passive restraint factors to the extent that they effect large-size people may be included in a seat belt update in an upcoming **Newsletter**. ■

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### FATLETS

Words that should be--but aren't--in the dictionary are called SNIGLETS by comedian Rich Hall in his series of SNIGLET books. Words that should be--but aren't--in the NAAFA dictionary are call FATLETS by the editorial staff of this **Newsletter**. For example:

That soft, rounded area of flesh right above the elbow on a fat persons arm is the:

SWELBOW (1)\*

The feeling that anyone (fat or thin) might experience when confronted by a wonderful buffet table is a:

SMORGASM (1)\*

And if a fat woman agrees to be weighed by an F.A., and lots of other F.A.'s crowd around as she steps on the scale...that's called a:

GANG WEIGH (3)\*

Anyone who becomes too slender is at risk of becoming:

THINVISIBLE (2)\*

Those artificially sweetened, artificially flavored, artificially colored "diet treats" are really:

NUTRANDTHINGS (4)\*

\* FATLETS in this issue were submitted by:

- 1) Eli Langner (NY)    2) Jeanette Apprill (NM)
- 3) Joyce Maloney (NY)    4) Nancy Summer (NY)

Sorry, we don't have any fancy T-shirts to give out to our FATLET submitters...but we will send a NAAFA button to anyone who contributes any FATLETS that we use in upcoming issues of the **Newsletter**. Send your FATLETS to us in care of the NAAFA office in Bellerose, NY. ■

## TIME FOR SUMMER FUN

It's summer, and once again fat people are faced with summer activities and summer clothes that seem to be reserved for thin people. But the days of staying home and wearing a coat in hot weather are over. There are plenty of warm weather activities that larger people can enjoy...and the clothes to wear while enjoying them!

Do you like boating or sailing? It can be great fun but ask questions before casting off. Some boats are designed with narrow ladders and walkways. It can be especially difficult for large people to climb up those narrow nautical ladders so be sure you are leaving from a dock and that the boat is large enough for you. Enjoy fishing? If you're near the ocean try a charter boat. Check the size of the head if you're planning a long day. Good news! We've had several reports that some very large NAAFANS go canoeing.

Camping is another sport that can be enjoyed by people of all sizes. Campsites are available throughout the country that run the gamut from wilderness sites through well-tended ones that come equipped with bathrooms, showers, electricity, etc. If you have special needs, look for campgrounds that are handicapped accessible. But watch out. With Americans "staying home" in America this summer and with gas at lower prices, national parks and campgrounds will be packed. There are a number of campground directories that list the specs on private and public facilities. Get one at your camping store. By the way, there are extra large (or double) sleeping bags and air mattresses that can make even the largest people comfortable.

Swimming is a sport that can be very enjoyable once you get in the water. Unfortunately, wearing a bathing suit to the beach or pool has been a roadblock for many fat people. But NAAFANS who have gotten past that fear have discovered that you do sometimes (not always) attract some attention, but that people lose interest in you quickly...especially once you're in the water. Avoid very crowded situations and places that cater to children and teens if you want to cut down on some of the attention. Maybe a friend has a backyard pool or try a facility like the Y that caters to more serious swimmers who are less likely to worry about how you look. Some NAAFA chapters are planning private beach or pool parties this summer...they are a good place to take the plunge if you haven't been in a suit in a while. And don't forget the pool parties at the national convention.

With all the natural and historic sites to tour, the commercial fun parks and animal safari attractions to visit, there is a wide range of activities that can be enjoyed by people of all sizes. If you have any special physical problems, call the park and ask questions before going. Wear cool loose clothing, and take a thermos or canteen of water if you expect to be away from drinking fountains. (This is especially important if you are taking certain medications.)

Like the movies? Try the drive-in for a change of pace. We usually don't recommend or review movies but we have to plug Rodney Dangerfield's movie Back to School. It's a very funny film and Rodney deals with his own girth in a very positive way. The movie has some "fat humor" that, in context with the rest of the film, is for the most part neither mean nor insulting to fat people. Give it a try and write us your opinions.

Don't forget NAAFA chapter activities. If you're planning an out-of-town trip, call the NAAFA office at least 10 days in advance, and leave a message with your name and the areas you plan to visit. You will be mailed information on how to contact the chapters in those areas.

Finally, if you want a great summer activity...reserve now for the convention! It has everything: pool parties, dances, workshops, theater, a trip to Sea World, and more. It's also got the very best of people...your fellow NAAFANS! It's worth a trip from anywhere. ■

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**PLEASE NOTE!** When you write that letter of praise or protest regarding fat issues to newspapers, TV shows, companies, legislators, doctors, etc., please remember to send a copy to the NAAFA office for distribution to NAAFA committees. Not only do committees such as Activism and Health want to be informed, but some letters are reprinted in this **Newsletter**.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Dr. Paul Ernsberger's regular column is on "vacation" this month. His series, **RESETTING YOUR SETPOINT** will continue in an upcoming issue with his discussion of the basic food groups and their effect on body weight setpoint.

**NEXT ISSUE:** FINALLY (Thanks to several NAAFA members who donated copies of their convention photos)--**PHOTO COVERAGE OF THE 1985 CONVENTION!...AWARDS...AND MORE.**