



**national association
to advance
fat acceptance**

NAAFA Newsletter

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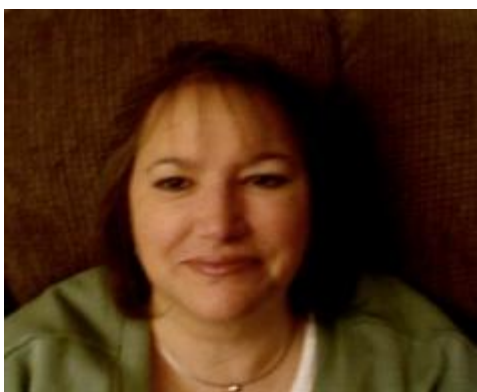
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Surviving the Holidays; Acting Sanely During Insane Times



by *Kathleen Ohtola*

I'm settled in for the flight from California making the annual Christmas trek back to Ohio where my family lives. I have boarded the plane as a well-balanced 50 yr. old woman. As we fly east I regress in age. By the time I disembark in Ohio I am the emotional age of 10. I have reverted to the good girl who is trying to please mommy and daddy.

So begins another holiday ripe with family tensions, obligations, and expectations. Holidays can be filled with intense emotions. Feelings of loneliness, anxiety, grief, joy, love, disappointment, anger, shame, and/or guilt can be overwhelming. As a grief counselor I often found myself advising clients on how to survive the holidays. I'd like to share with you some of the things that I told them.

Control expectations. During the holidays we often have heightened expectations about how the holidays, family members, and friends should be. My therapist recently reminded me that nobody's family is normal! The media fills us with visions of sugarplums and perfect social gatherings. We can hope for many things, but expecting them gets us in trouble.

**Official Publication of
the National
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Acceptance**
December 2010

Festive Holiday Videos

[December Videos of the
Month](#)

NAAFA members and supporters are a diverse group of people; people from all races, ethnicities, and religions. In celebration of our diversity and this joyous season, we are featuring fun, rocking videos; something that will appeal to everyone!

Mariah Carey gets the crowd moving with her video rendition of "Oh Santa":
<http://new.music.yahoo.com/mariah-carey/videos/view/oh-santa-218724301>

You will love this Hanukkah music video by an cappella group from Yeshiva University in New York performing "Candlelight," set to the beat of the Taio Cruz pop hit "Dynamite":
<http://youtube.com/watch?v=qSJCsr4MuhU>

This joyous Kwanzaa celebration is narrated by a young boy who describes his family's celebration:
<http://youtube.com/watch?v=0kV-6qVp98Q>

Your Participation Still Appreciated!

If you missed HAES researcher Eileen Pitpitan at the NAAFA Convention, you have another opportunity. Eileen and her fellow researchers at the University of Connecticut would appreciate your participation in a

Take care of yourself. Think in terms of body, mind, and spirit. *Take care of your body.* Feed it nutritious food and give it the rest and sleep that it needs. Arrange in advance for any special health considerations that you need. *Take care of your mind.* Remind yourself that you are responsible for yourself and let others be responsible for them. Remember that your feelings are valid and honor them. Set boundaries with others and do not give more of yourself than you can without being resentful. Do not engage in discussions with anybody you don't trust about areas that you deem personal or highly sensitive, whether it is your size, your sexuality, your chosen scent, or your religious beliefs. Just excuse yourself politely. *Take care of your spirit.* Practice self-nurturing. Engage in activities and thoughts that feed your soul and spirit. It could be anything such as taking a long bath, listening to music, getting a massage or going to church. In advance, prepare some note cards with phrases that a supportive friend might supply. For example, "I know that you are feeling angry. Remember that most peoples' reactions are based on their stuff and not yours," or "Remember that you are a good, valuable, and lovable person." When you find yourself getting overwhelmed, take a moment away and read these cards.

Suspend judgment of yourself and others. When you find someone judging you (including yourself) use this phrase that Carol Munter taught me: "Isn't it interesting that...." "Isn't it interesting that my father doesn't think I'm successful." (What does that say about him?) "Isn't it interesting that the fat of my upper arms waves back and forth when I raise them?" It's not good or bad it's just interesting.

Make choices. Look at your priorities and determine what is meaningful about the holiday for you. Arrange to meet that priority. Be realistic about resources such as time, money, and energy. Choose what you can do and stay within your own limits.

Remember, no matter how stressful your holiday might be you will survive. Try to find the golden moments amid the chaos and celebrate those. If all else fails, watch "It's a Wonderful Life" with Jimmy Stewart and bawl your eyes out. The world will keep turning . . . and by the way, Happy Holidays!

Kathleen Ohtola worked as a grief counselor and the Adult Services Coordinator for the Centre for Living with Dying, a non-profit organization in Santa Clara, CA. She provided both individual and group support for those who had experienced the death of a loved one, had a terminal illness, suffered a trauma, were HIV+, were students in schools where there was a death, and in critical incidences such as those that first responders would experience. The agency was dismantled in 2004. Kathleen sees a few clients privately. To find a grief counselor near you, contact your local United Way.

Wrong Turn in Arizona!

NAAFA strongly urges the Unified School District of Flagstaff, AZ to reconsider stigmatizing the entire student segment of the Arizona population that they have determined to be overweight or obese or at risk of becoming so.

By sending letters targeted at specific individuals and families, the Flagstaff's medical community are moving down a path that will create an atmosphere of fear and self-loathing. These letters contain dire warnings that the current generation of children will be the first generation in history to have a shorter life span than their parents. This position is not supported by statistical evidence and goes against US government statistics. The Unified School District of Flagstaff approach is short-sighted and will have negative long term efforts for all concerned.

The Academy of Eating Disorders (AED) has developed extensive guidelines for Childhood Obesity Prevention programs. Some of those recommendations include:

- Avoiding using the language of overweight and obesity as this promotes weight-based stigma. Measures should be taken to exclude language with implicit or explicit anti-fat messages, like "fat is bad" or "fat people eat too much."

- Interventions should provide diversity training for parents, teachers and school staff for the purpose of recognizing and addressing weight stigma, and decreasing weight based bullying and harassment.

- Representatives from that community should be included in any planning process to ensure that interventions are sensitive to cultural norms, traditions and practices.

confidential online survey called, "Attitudes, Behaviors, and Identity."

If you complete the online survey, you will receive \$15 in cash or an Amazon.com gift card. Your participation will remain confidential. Results of this study will be shared with anyone who is interested.

Please contact Eileen Pitpitan at eileen.pitpitan@uconn.edu if you are interested.

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-Interventions should have an integrated approach that encourages mindful eating, increased activity, promotion of self-esteem, and respect for body diversity.

NAAFA supports the AED guidelines, as well as the Health at Every Size (HAES) tenets, which promote that healthy habits are good for EVERYONE, no matter what their size.

NAAFA urges the Flagstaff Unified School District to embrace a HAES approach, adopt some the AED's guidelines, and stop targeting one group of children in a way that objectifies them and makes them the targets of more harassment and bullying.

A Good Resource for People with Diabetes

Linda Bacon and Judith Matz have recently co-authored an article for the magazine *Diabetes Self-Management* that appears in the Nov/Dec issue. They hope this will be a valuable resource for people who have diabetes and are looking for ways to care for themselves without a weight loss focus - the article is called "Intuitive Eating: Enjoy Your Food, Respect Your Body". It has a strong HAES perspective, with great information about ASDAH at the end. Feel free to share this article with family and friends who might need it. The beautifully designed PDF can easily be printed for people without computer access.

The PDF of the article is available on each of their websites:
www.lindabacon.org/pdf/BaconMatz_Diabetes_EnjoyingFood.pdf
www.dietsurvivors.com/BaconMatz_Diabetes_EnjoyingFood.pdf

Still looking for a Holiday Gift?

by Lisa Tealer

Are you having challenges finding that special gift for that special someone? Give a gift that keeps giving all year round, either through a membership and/or donation to NAAFA.

A membership is only \$15.00. Or consider a tax deductible donation. Your gift says how much you care and also supports NAAFA's advocacy and educational efforts. Visit our website at www.naafa.org

Happy Holidays and all the best to you and yours in 2011!

And Then They Shrank and Lived Happily Ever After in Skinnyland!



by Dr. Lenny Husen

Last August I gave a talk at the NAAFA Convention about "Being Your Own Medical Advocate." The main focus was on how to find a doctor who can treat a fat person like . . . a human being. I was worried that I might not be fat enough to credibly speak on this subject, but I was welcomed much more graciously than I usually am by "non-fat" people. The talk was well received. It was an uplifting experience for me.

After the talk, I asked for any comments from the audience and said that I hoped there wasn't anything in my talk that was offensive. A young woman had a constructive criticism. "I hesitate to mention this because there was so much in your talk that was great. But, I noticed that you told several stories about people who got healthier after they changed something, and at the end came 'And THEN they lost weight!'" She went on to explain that any story that ended with weight loss made it seem as if that was the whole point.

This was true. I told stories about Bob and Ginny, two people who got healthier. Bob found a supportive physician after trial and error. Ginny started jogging despite being yelled at by idiots in cars. Both people were healthier and more active after months of hard work. And both were still fat.

But it was true, in the anecdotes there was an emphasis on the fact that they lost some weight in the process.

I asked the question, "What if the story ended and they went from a Size 24 to a Size 20 but weighed the same?" The answer, "NO, we don't want to hear about people shrinking in size and living happily ever after! Leave numbers out of it!"

While I felt chagrined, I realized that she was totally right. I was still carrying around a huge baggage of fantasies involved with "Getting Smaller" translating into Health, Joy, Self-Love, and yes, Beauty. I also realized at that moment how hypocritical I still was. I love all my patients and think it is definitely okay to be any size you need to be in this world. Still, deep down, I had bought into the fantasy of Shrinkage being the Ideal. If weight loss were possible, wouldn't that be the best thing? Wouldn't my fat patients be happier, at least because people wouldn't be hateful to them? Wouldn't they be more likely to find a mate? And healthier too?

For a moment I felt disgusted with myself, but then I felt the top of my skull blowing off and the contents of my mind whirling about and getting rearranged. I looked closely for the first time at where my attitudes about "Fat is Ugly" and "Smaller is Better" came from. Like most of us, I have had a dearth of positive role models of any size other than twig-like. Everyone on TV is fat-free, athletic and trim and with perfectly symmetric facial features, big eyes, big lips, and shampoo commercial hair.

As a young kid growing up I spent a lot of time hiding in the school library from bullies. I loved reading fiction. If I found a book I liked, I'd read my favorite parts over and over. I particularly liked fairy tales about the underdog triumphing in the end, or the main character becoming successful by being a kind person and working hard.

I liked a story called "Green Snake" about a princess, "Dorugly," who is cursed by an evil fairy with being hideous at her birth. A prince enchanted into being an ugly snake falls in love with her because of her truly good heart. After many miseries, she is told about a spring where she can wash to become beautiful. Dorugly chooses first to drink the water in hopes that she will become wise. Her new-found wisdom gives her the courage to break the terrible curse and set free her lover who is imprisoned. Her name is changed to "Queen Discreet."

There is no story that I've come across that is about a fat princess who becomes thin and therefore beautiful. The weight or body type of princesses is not considered relevant in Fairy Tale Lore, for which we can all be profoundly grateful. However, there is a delightful Turkish tale about a fat Sultan who throws every doctor in jail who promises him a diet that doesn't work.

Because in our culture, Fat is Ugly and Evil and Thin is Adorable, as in the Disney characters of Ursula and Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*, we were force-fed the myth of Magical Shrinkage. Let's look at a few of my favorite books growing up.

In *Dinah and the Green Fat Kingdom* by Isabelle Holland, the little fat girl is urged to lose weight by her parents to such a point that she has to invent an imaginary world where she is accepted by kind, welcoming fat royalty (sounds a bit like NAAFA). In the end, Dinah meets a super duper nice therapist and comes to realize that she should lose weight to be happier and like herself so she agrees to go on a diet. (Great!)

When I was a teenager, one of my favorite books was *The Island Keeper* by Harry Mazer. It is about a fat girl, Cleo, who runs away from home and is stranded on an island in the dead of winter. She has good reasons for being a runaway. Her mother and sister are dead, and her rich father and grandmother are unloving. In the end, Cleo becomes wise, and learns to take care of herself. She comes back to civilization and boys admire her because she is now beautiful. She is transformed . . . and thin.

The book *Hostage* by James Hamilton-Paterson is about a fat boy, Wayne, who is kidnapped by terrorists. Wayne is a terrific kid who feels he is not as good as his handsome, thin best friend. He is starved and beaten up by the terrorists. Wayne has to bond with the leader of the gang in order to survive. After much trauma, he is rescued. During the week Wayne is a hostage, he loses 15 pounds. The story ends with Wayne several months later looking "brown and fit" and "very much thinner." Well gee, how about the Kidnapped by Terrorists Diet?

One Fat Summer by Robert Lipsyte, is about a fat boy, Bobby, possibly named after the author himself. Bobby struggles with teenage angst and mean peers

and gets a job doing yard work for an awful narcissist, Dr. Khan, who is even meaner than the local bully. Bobby gets paid a ridiculously low wage but since he is only 16 he can't get a better job. But that's okay, because even though he is still husky at the end of the book, he is now muscular and thinner after all that mowing.

Finally, there is *Scruples* by Judith Krantz. This novel was highly appealing to me when I was too young to know better. This is about another rich fat teen, Billie, who goes to France. She boards with a horrible French family who starve her because they are too poor to provide enough food. She is 5'10" tall and shrinks to 120-something pounds, and is praised for doing so. Billie remains at this low weight even though she has to starve herself to do it. But that's okay, because she's now skinny and fantastically beautiful.

The common thread through all these stories is that being traumatized, shunned, starved and abused is fine as long as you look better to other people at the end than the beginning. These are actually well-written tales with unforgettable characters. How sad that what was most memorable about them was that the protagonists lost so much weight that they were literally unrecognizable at the end.

I suppose I have to forgive myself for buying into Shrinkage is Good and the goal of living Happy Ever After in Skinnyland with the slender, pretty, joyful people. Wait, isn't that Hollywood? Or maybe Rivendell in the *Lord of the Rings*? Or perhaps *Solla Sollew* from Dr. Seuss, the place "Where they never have troubles except very few."

A sincere thank you goes out to the lovely young woman who spoke up at my talk and suggested I stay away from shrinkage. It is a good thing when you hear something that forces you to reevaluate your own false schemas.

Wherever Skinnyland is, it is a mirage and a place of terrible values. I doubt that anyone there can be happy for very long, especially if they have no decent food. It may be too late for my generation having bought into this nonsense, but there is hope for our children's children if we can write some new fairy tales for them that, like "Green Snake", place more value on wisdom than on appearance.

I welcome comments or suggestions for future columns. Please email me at fatlenster@gmail.com

Media and Research Roundup

by Bill and Terri Weitze

[Editor's Note: The NAAFA News RSS Feed at <http://naafa.org> has the latest news.]

October 2010: If you skip to the conclusion of this article, you will see the author admits that "the long term data are few", but the lack of supporting data did not prevent the author from writing a 5 page article claiming fat children become (unhealthy) fat adults.

<http://www.liebertonline.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1089/chi.2010.0504>

November 2010: The academic journal *Social Problems* publishes a paper by Abigail Saguy, Kjerstin Gruys, and Shanna Gong that looks at the impact of cultural differences between the United States and France on news reporting, specifically, the subjects of "overweight" and "obesity".

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/saguy/SocialProblemConstructionandNationalContext.pdf>
<http://www.jstor.org/pss/10.1525/sp.2010.57.4.586>

November 2010: Next time you see an article about a study that "proves" fat people are to blame for all of societies' woes, you might want to refer back to an article in *The Atlantic* regarding the lifetime work of Dr. John Ioannidis in exposing bad medical science and how it happens.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/11/lies-damned-lies-and-medical-science/8269>

November 5, 2010: CNBC interviews Ross Devol of Milkin Institute, who claims that if Americans lost weight it would increase the GDP by \$2 trillion. Milkin Institute believes being fat is a lifestyle choice, and the report Devol bases his numbers was published in 2007. He makes the assumption that fat people are unhealthy and therefore unproductive. He also states that somehow a slimmer populace will lead to better education.

<http://www.cnbc.com/id/15840232?play=1&video=1634539469>

November 15, 2010: Here we go again. NIH funds will be used in Cleveland to institute a program with 450 fat children who have high blood pressure to encourage better food choices and more activity. Predictably the goal is for weight reduction, although they hope to lower blood pressure as well. The programs being used are very close to HAES, but the focus remains on weight instead of health.

<http://www.cleveland.com/healthfit/index.ssf/2010/11/nih-funded-obesity-study-to-tr.html>

November 16, 2010: Dr. Joseph Majdan used to be fat and not surprisingly (at least to the fat community) he was subjected to cruelty and discrimination from his fellow practitioners. Sadly, Dr. Majdan never stood up for himself when he was fat. Now that he has lost weight (although he has only kept it off for a year), he is coming out against fatphobia by healthcare professionals. [To read his article, "Memoirs of an Obese Physician" you may need to subscribe to *Annals of Internal Medicine*.]

<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2010/nov/30/weighty-issues>
<http://www.annals.org/content/153/10/686.short>

November 16, 2010: Newly elected GOP Congressman Andy Harris is stunned that his government-provided health insurance will not kick in for 28 whole days! Even though he denounced the public option for healthcare coverage as the "gateway to socialism", he feels his free coverage should start the day he is sworn in.

<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1110/45181.html>

November 17, 2010: Last May, Dr. Benjamin Kendrick lost control of his rental car and caused a head-on collision that killed a fat woman. While there are other reasons why Dr. Kendrick should not go to jail because of this accident (he hit a curb and his tire blew out which caused the loss of control), for some reason the Court decided that part of his exculpation was the belief that an average-sized person would have survived the crash. It is sad that this woman lost her life in a car accident; it is unconscionable that she is being blamed for failing to survive because she was fat.

<http://www.thecourier.co.uk/News/Perthshire/article/7654c2/fatal-crash-doctor-benjamin-kendrick-avoids-prison-sentence.html>

November 18, 2010: Michael Gard says the "obesity epidemic" is over and in fact never existed. His latest book, *The End of the Obesity Epidemic*, intends to show how western countries tend to breed health panics.

<http://www.amazon.com/End-Obesity-Epidemic-Michael-Gard/dp/0415489881>

November 23, 2010: NAAFA advisor Brandon Macsata releases an open letter to Michelle Obama asking her to include fat children in her battle against bullying and discrimination of children. The letter points Mrs. Obama to studies that show fat children are more apt to be bullied than any other group regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

<http://dailycaller.com/2010/11/23/open-letter-to-first-lady-michelle-obama>

November 29, 2010: There is a disturbing trend of putting babies on diets. Yes, babies. The dangers of this trend are exemplified by an abuse case in Seattle where the mother put laxative in the infant's bottle. Parents are urged not to project their own weight-issues onto their children and let a healthcare professional monitor your child's growth.

<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/fat-babies-parents-put-fat-babies-diet/story?id=12216642>

November 29, 2010: Weight Watchers overhauls its diet - excuse me, I mean lifestyle program - to encourage the consumption of more fruits and vegetables, and focus more on food nutrients than calories.

<http://pagingdrgupta.blogs.cnn.com/2010/11/29/weight-watchers-overhauls-point-system>

November 29, 2010: A clinical report addresses a disturbing trend of an increase in eating disorders in children as well as earlier onset of the disorders. Along with genetic predisposition and neuroendocrine abnormalities, dieting is identified as a risk factor. The authors caution parents and pediatricians to avoid an unhealthy focus on weight and dieting.

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/126/6/1240>

November 30, 2010: Jack Cafferty of CNN addresses the issue of would the US elect a fat man for president - from the responses, the answer appears to be (1) yes; and (2) what a stupid question. While there a smattering of the usual "out of control" fat person posts, the responses are mostly fat-positive.

<http://caffertyfile.blogs.cnn.com/2010/11/30/can-a-fat-man-be-elected-president>

December 1, 2010: Allergan (manufacturer of a lap-band device) will be asking the FDA to lower the BMI threshold for lap-band surgery. Allergan claims the criteria used to establish the current guidelines are outdated. However, some doctors are dropping the band because of side effects (including death), or lack of long-term weight loss.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/02/business/02obese.html>

December 2, 2010: A recent number-crunching study concludes that fat people are 13% more likely to die "prematurely" than people with lower BMI.

Keep in mind that (a) the 13% is much less than the threshold for a major effect (relative risk of 2); (b) out of the 1.4 million white (only) people studied, only 9% overall died; (c) a major portion of the input is self-reported, which is notoriously unreliable; and (d) the numbers were adjusted with an estimated "hazard ratio" for all-cause mortality. We refer you to the article cited above from *The Atlantic* on bad medical science.

<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1000367>

December 2, 2010: Carnie Wilson is back in the news after being fired as the spokesperson for "Fresh Diet". The reasons given were that Carnie failed to lose weight and she was peddling her own product (cheesecake) on the side. Carnie who had WLS has put most (if not all) of her lost weight back on.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-1334845/Carnie-Wilson-loses-diet-plan-job-losing-weight.html>

December 6, 2010: A study of 3,106 American children found that fat children are often more active than their average-sized counterparts. The study also found that as children enter puberty they become less active; but boys tend to be more active than girls.

<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/study-sheds-new-light-on-childhood-obesity-epidemic-111379384.html>

http://journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Abstract/2010/03000/Increased_Physical_Activity_and_Reduced_Adiposity.10.aspx

December 8, 2010: The FDA advisory panel has recommended approval of Contrave, a weight loss pill that is both ineffective and possibly dangerous, especially to people at risk for heart disease or stroke. The FDA is not required to follow the recommendation, but usually does so.

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-504763_162-20024979-10391704.html

December 11, 2010: Marilyn Wann suggests that on January 1st we take part in a New Year's Revolution by posting **fat positive** photos, links, art, poetry, and such to our blogs and/or social network sites. As Marilyn says, "Whee!"