



NAAFA Newsletter

Autumn 2004

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Letters to NAAFA

Fat and Society

Dear NAAFA,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Arizona. Although I entered the Communication PhD program with a strong interest in media, during my third semester, I wrote a proposal that examined the effects of televised cosmetic surgery, in particular liposuction, on the decision to have the same procedure in one's own life.

It was during this research process that I began to develop a strong interest in obesity. While I found plenty of clinical research

Greetings!

I'm still basking in the afterglow from the NAAFA Convention two months ago. In this issue, we have a few additional items to report on from the Convention: The scholarship award winner is announced (thanks for your patience), and there is an article by Frances White giving an overview of NAAFA financials as of August. Plus, Rochelle's fitness column, a "fat girl walking," and more. Enjoy!

• **NAAFA Financials Improving**

by Frances White
NAAFA Treasurer

When we announced that it was necessary to close the NAAFA office at the end of 2003, we had many expenses that we couldn't cover and projects that we couldn't fund, due to falling donations and renewals. These included:

- Rent - \$891 per month for a total of \$26,730 on the remaining 2.5 years of the lease
- Salary - \$3,000 per month
- Health Insurance - \$313 per month
- MasterCard - approximately \$1,400
- Office Depot - approximately \$1,300
- Pitney Bowes - approximately \$800 (down from over \$7,000)
- WF Payroll collection - \$1,500
- Toll free phone number - averaging \$125 per month
- Phone bill - averaging \$150 per month
- Archival storage - averaging \$30 per month
- Web list maintenance - approximately \$30 per month
- Hard copy newsletter - about \$2,900 per issue, resulting in only 1 issued in two years

We were looking at about \$4,150 per month just to keep the office open, without doing any proactive fat liberation activities.

Our Co-Chair, Carole Cullum, was able to successfully negotiate a release from our office lease with a payment of only two weeks of rent, for a savings of \$10,700 over the course of a year. In the first half of 2004, we paid off four



on the effects of obesity, I noticed a paucity of literature on the social implications of obesity. For more than two years, I have researched the social implications of female obesity from a variety of angles. I have used your organization's website for information multiple times and have found it to be an invaluable resource.

I find the issue of female obesity to be in great need of non-clinical research. Given the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States, I believe that understanding how to live well as an overweight or obese female in an anti-fat culture is just as important as recognizing the health issues associated with obesity. I plan to make obesity research my primary focus for the duration of my career. I am currently working on my dissertation -- which examines specific strategies obese women employ to improve their social experience in a fatist culture -- and will begin interviewing for assistant professorships later this Fall.

I want to commend you and others who are working to remove the social stigma associated with overweight and obesity. One of my greatest wishes is that both the media and academic communities will begin to consider obesity as a complex issue that necessitates understanding from not only a physical viewpoint, but a psychological and more importantly, social viewpoint as well. Foremost, I believe that it is the responsibility of social scientists to begin

creditors in full: WF Payroll, FedEx, IDT (800 number), and Pitney Bowes. In September 2004, we paid off our two largest remaining creditors (\$600 total).

We incurred expenses of \$520 to move our web site to a new server. But have you noticed how fast it moves?

We've converted our newsletter to an e-mail format at a cost of \$30 per month, plus some additional cost for the remaining NAAFA members who still receive a hard copy. Have you noticed that we've issued five newsletters so far this year?

Our Membership Chair, Terri Weitze, has developed a more efficient renewal system. That, coupled with more timely renewals, has increased our revenue.

Although we closed our office, we turned around and employed Maryanne Bodolay, our former Executive Administrator, as an independent consultant to run the fabulous 2004 Convention. And, as a result of the office closure, our monthly expenses are down to about \$500, for a monthly savings of \$3,600! We still have some tax liabilities to take care of, but with our expenses in control we are now poised to work more actively on our mission of education, advocacy, and support for people all sizes of large.

• **Fitness Column: Never Underestimate the Power of Now!**

by Rochelle Rice, MA

President, In Fitness & In Health

"When I lose weight, I will . . ."

How many times have you completed that sentence or let it run incessantly through your mind? How many special moments or experiences have you missed because of this limiting thought? It's all about now, right here, in this moment. And it's the deep down, deserving, gut sensation that moves you forward. The trick is learning how to capture the moment.

As a fat person, you may put restrictions on yourself for reasons that may seem appropriate to you at that time. You may not dance at a social event for fear people are looking at you. You may not ask for a promotion at work for fear of confrontation. And lastly, you may not ask someone out for coffee for fear of rejection.

Movement has an incredible ability to help you get in touch with your body. Feelings that may have long been dormant slowly awaken and your natural sense of intuition is renewed. The key is to begin with breath. If you are disconnected from your body, stressed out or depressed, your breathing may be shallow or erratic. The more in tune you are with your breath, the more your body feels the desire to move. Moving becomes something you want to do instead of have to do. The movement creates the



conducting solid research on this topic, and it is the responsibility of the media to showcase research findings that could benefit both the obese and non-obese population's understanding of what it actually means to be overweight or obese in American culture. I am desperately tired of watching the media sensationalize the importance of weight loss (e.g., gastric bypass) while neglecting to discuss the importance of accepting oneself and others for who they are and not what they weigh. This is especially important considering that today, obese individuals seem to suffer the ill effects of the social stigma associated with their disease to a far more palpable degree than the actual physical effects of being overweight.

Laura Triplett
University of Arizona
Department of
Communication

Dear NAAFA,

Negative Convention Coverage

I did actually see some television coverage of the recent NAAFA convention. Unfortunately, though it was in my home state I was unable to attend. I wasn't as pleased with the coverage as NAAFA seems to be. It was done by a male journalist that was in better physical shape than any of the NAAFA people and the title of the report was something about "FAT CHICKS". It seemed to be written in a tone that not only mocked fat people but more importantly women that are fat. There didn't

momentum to move forward in your life and explore areas of personal growth.

The shame and guilt often associated with an inactive lifestyle can be debilitating and literally "knock the wind out of you." Harness the power of this moment with breath to begin your transforming process. The breath will help you feel whole in your body with gentleness and compassion. Let go of the "mistakes" you've made or exercise sessions you've missed and try this breathing exercise. Please read through it completely before beginning.

- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Lay your palms face down on your thighs.
- Close your eyes.
- Bring your awareness to the tip of your nose.
- Begin to slowly breathe in and out through your nose. As you inhale, your abdomen should rise. As you exhale, your abdomen should soften.
- Gently become aware of the tactile sensation of the breath as it makes its way in and out.
- Count 10 breaths (in and out = one breath).
- When finished, flutter the eyes open.

This breathing exercise can also be done in bed to help calm your mind and let you sleep.

Enjoy the sensation of your breath and have a great month!

• **Scholarship-Winning Essay: Hide or Pride?**

The winner of our NAAFA Merit Scholarship for this year is Jennifer Lynn Wehry Sewilam, Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. The scholarship amount is \$500. Jen won the award for her essay, titled "Hide or Pride", which follows.

As fat people in today's society, we are made to feel ashamed of ourselves. Because of one physical characteristic that happens to be just a part of who we are, we are made to feel as though we should hide ourselves from society. After all, we can't be happy with who we are, can we?

I consider myself a positive and happy person. I am very proud of my accomplishments, professionally, educationally and personally. However, I recently became aware of a very frustrating dilemma I face in my everyday life. As I sat on the train in the mornings reading Charlotte Cooper's *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size*, I would fold back the front cover so that no one would be able to see what I was reading! I did not want people to think that I was proud of what I had become, because after all, how could I have let myself get this way? Then I realized, I am just like them. How can I expect society to fight the prejudice when I myself have decided to hide inside the stereotype instead of being able to be proud of whom and what I am? I need to be proud of myself, my whole self, and not feel ashamed or make apologies to society.

seem to be any men in the video footage. I think it is important that NAAFA be an organization that is represented with a diverse group of people if at all possible. Though women have come a long way in recent years, the women by themselves seem to get a mocking sort of coverage that is not the same as what men or even a diverse group would get.

Though women are often the victims of this type of discrimination and ostracism, it should be the goal of NAAFA to present it as an issue that affects a large, diverse group of people and potentially young men that are in shape now, but may as they grow older have an injury, illness, or other problem that prevents them from being in peak condition. I hate to sound biased, but it seems that much of the discrimination, mocking, and even business decisions that seem discriminatory come from young, immature men that have not yet experienced any medical problems or illnesses. The women in the video footage of the convention all seemed older than the young male journalist with the attitude. NAAFA should have some young men that have been victims of sporting accidents etc. to reach the young male population.

I hope this is helpful in some way and not too time consuming.

K. McAllister

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Fat is truly the last accepted prejudice. It is evident in our society from the school system to our political system. The Centers for Disease Control have stated that we are in the midst of an obesity epidemic, but yet, nothing is being done by our political leaders and it is all because the prejudice is so prevalent in our society that it has permeated the political system. Not until we as fat people stop hiding and start fighting, will a difference ever be made.

I have become very interested in the "political battle of the bulge" as a student of politics. Because I live in this society as a fat person, I believe that it starts with me to help peel away the many layers of prejudice that exist in order to help pave the way to finding solutions not only to the obesity epidemic, but the even bigger problem of the prejudice that surrounds fat acceptance.

The more I research the topic of obesity and the more I examine my own life, the more I see the need for involvement from people at all levels of society from doctors to politicians right down to the individual; with the individual level being the most important. I am truly realizing the importance of waging my own battle with obesity and the prejudice that surrounds being a fat person. Through my educational experiences and my personal experiences, my goal is to become a stronger advocate for fat acceptance and encourage others to do so as well.

2004 needs to be the year that the stereotypes get torn down and replaced with acceptance. We need to not stay silent when someone makes a comment about our weight or about our appearance. We need to challenge the stereotypes and educate those who freely wield comments about fat people. I used to stay silent when a passing stranger would make a comment about my weight, now I confront that person. Should we be allowed to be the targets of abuse and harassment, just because of our size? Of course not! Therefore, it starts with each individual to not just stay silent, but to be loud and proud. We need to take pride in ourselves as individuals and encourage others to not judge us for a physical characteristic, but to evaluate us based on our whole person.

As I prepared this essay and examined the possible topics, it was hard to narrow it down to one or the other, because each is so important. NAAFA and groups like NAAFA have changed my life and the life of so many other fat people, because they have taught us that it is OK to not hide anymore because of our "fatness." They have encouraged us to be proud of who we are and to let us know that we are beautiful. This individual self acceptance now needs to be segued into societal acceptance. In 2004, and beyond, we need to continue to fight the battle of breaking down fat stereotypes and be loud and proud of who we are.

• **Fat Girl Walking**

Marsha, a super size woman, is making plans for a personal project: a cross country walk from San Francisco,

to New York, ending finally at the Statue of Liberty.

Marsha may be the heaviest person ever to take a walk of this distance, and hopes it will raise interest and consciousness to the idea of being "fat and fit". While she will be at the focal point of this journey, a project of this magnitude needs a vast support system to give her places to sleep over, contacts for possible emergencies, people to join her on the road for a while, to meet her when she comes through their towns, contacting media, etc.



The partial list of cities include:

- (California) San Francisco - Vallejo - Sacramento - Truckee
- (Nevada) Reno - Lovelock - Battle Mtn - Wendover
- (Utah) Grantsville - Salt Lake City - Coalville - Evanston
- (Wyoming) Lyman - Little America - Rock Springs - Laramie - Cheyenne
- (Nebraska) Ogallala - Kearney - Lincil - Omaha
- (Iowa) Des Moines - Iowa City - Davenport
- (Illinois) Princeton - Ottawa - Joliet - Chicago
- (Indiana) Valparaiso - Plymouth - Ft Wayne - Decatur
- (Ohio) Sidney - Columbus - Zanesville - Cambridge - Wheeling
- (Pennsylvania) Pittsburgh - Bedford - Harrisburg - Hershey - Reading - Philadelphia
- (New Jersey) Trenton - Newark - Jersey City
- Destination - New York City

The walk starts on Valentine's Day 2006. Join her [Yahoo Group](#), take a look, and (if you wish) volunteer to help.

If you are interested in donating to this movement please send your donations payable to FGW to:

FGW mail room c/o Ray Grier
830 Taylor St. Port Townsend, WA 98368

• **2004 Convention Survey**

To best serve our members, NAAFA needs to know what's important to you. Please fill out this survey on our 2004 convention and feel free to add additional comments. Send your completed survey to membership@naafa.org.

Thank you,
The NAAFA Board

1. Was this convention your first?

If not how many have you attended?

2. What part of the convention did you like the most?

3. What part of the convention did you like the least?

4. Did you attend the whole convention including the workshops?

If not, why not?

5. How was the food at the convention?

6. Here is a list of the convention workshops. Please number them in order of importance to you.

- Sharing Our Words
- Orientation
- Setting Boundaries
- Shout It from the Rooftops
- Chair Dancing
- Why Join NAAFA
- Pilates Plus
- You Guys Ought To . . .
- Worth Your Weight
- Woven Wonder Purse
- Fitness Plus
- For Couples Only
- Yoga for All Sizes
- Body Painting as Body Liberation (Women Only)
- Water Aerobics
- Fitness and Justice for All
- Fat Women and the Media
- Men Who Love Fat Women (Men Only)
- Throwing Our Weight Around in the Electoral Process
- Cardiovascular Training
- Speed Mingling
- Big Girls Make It
- Dance for Joy
- Fat Beauty

7. What other workshop topics would you like to see?

8. If you don't attend the workshops, why not?

9. Did you attend the OutBodies OutSelves activism?

If not, why not?

If yes, how was it?

10. Is there another type of activism you would like to see at future conventions?

11. Do you think NAAFA convention should stay yearly?
Every 2 years? Every 3?

12. Is there a part of the convention you can't do without?

13. Is there a part of the convention you can do without?

14. Was 4 days long enough? Too long?

15. How long do you think the convention should be?

16. Are you planning on attending the next NAAFA convention?

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

17. It has been suggested that having national conventions every other year would increase attendance and participation in workshops and activism events, and would draw more vendors to the trade show. What is your opinion on this matter?

18. If smaller, regional NAAFA gatherings were held in your part of the country, how likely would you be to attend?

19. How would you prioritize NAAFA's main activities:

- a. Putting on a convention that provides the spirit and support of a family reunion.
- b. Maintaining NAAFA functions such as web site, newsletter, chapter coordination, and database maintenance.
- c. Proactively helping members meet the physical and legal challenges faced by fat people.

20. Is there any additional activism you would like to see NAAFA involved in?

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