



NAAFA Newsletter

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NAAFA Hires Student Intern



Tina Mahle, a student at Antioch College, is currently interning with NAAFA. She is working on projects related to health insurance, and classroom accessibility for

Calling this the "Late Fall 2005" issue is my attempt to ignore the holiday season, but I can't resist saying Happy Holidays, whatever that may mean to you personally. In this issue, we've got several articles on weight loss surgery, and how NAAFA members are fighting to halt the spread of this dangerous and unhealthy practice. We also have Mary Ray Worley's personal exploration of comfort, a book review, a call for images, and more!

• **Weight Loss Surgery Deadlier Than Previously Thought**

The chances of dying within a year of having weight loss surgery (WLS) are 4.6%, says a new study published in October 2005 in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). The study's lead author, University of Washington surgeon Dr. David Flum, was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, "The risk of death is much higher than has been reported. It's a reality check for those patients who are considering these operations."

The study involved 16,155 Medicare patients who underwent WLS between 1997 and 2002. Men fared worse than women across the board, and death rates increased with age:

- 35 to 44 years old: 5% deaths for men, 3% for women
- 65 to 74 years old: 13% deaths for men, 6% for women
- 75 years and older: 50% deaths for men, 40% for women

A related JAMA study, by Dr. David Zingmond of the University of California at Los Angeles and others, found a hospitalization rate of 20% in the year after WLS, mostly for WLS-related complications.

Responding to arguments by weight loss surgeons that typical WLS patients are immobilized by fat and would have died anyway of "obesity", Case Western Reserve University nutrition researcher (and NAAFA Board of Advisors member) Dr. Paul Ernsberger says, "This is an argument the surgeons always advance in their defense. They'll talk about the fattest and sickest patients they ever operated on as if they were a typical case. The average patient in most published series is a 35-year-old

the large-size college and university student.

Letters to NAAFA

Just wanted to say thanks to

ALL of you out there who sent clothing and toiletries through San Antonio for the benefit of our friends of size in their time of need. From the return address labels, I wasn't always able to put a name with an email address, but I did want you to know that your shipments were received and distributed among three different shelters here in San Antonio, and that they were received with MUCH gratitude and appreciation!

I echo the sentiment I've read here so many times: we are a formidable group when we act together!

Best wishes to everyone,
Joni, Austin/San Antonio,
Texas NAAFA chapter

NAAFA on TV

NAAFA's own Marilyn Wann recently appeared on CNN to comment on Tyra Banks' dressing up in a fat suit and discovering fat prejudice, something that should have come as no surprise. Marilyn's stirring comment at the end of the program follows: "My confidence comes from the fact that I refuse to buy a system that treats me badly. And the system of fat prejudice is treating thin people badly, too. It's judging them based on their appearance and it's making them fit into narrow little boxes that they have to worry about."

"So I say to all of us that we have to demand respect. When I was a kid growing

woman who just barely meets the weight requirement and has very mild risk factors (vague joint pain that does not limit mobility and high blood pressure, probably taken with a too-small cuff). Carnie Wilson is one such example -- she had no risk factors at all."

• **ACTION: Tell Medicare What You Think**

The U.S. government is considering expanding Medicare coverage of gastric bypass surgery, a type of weight loss surgery (WLS), for those under age 65, despite the chilling results of the studies published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) in October 2005. (See article above.) On the positive side, they also propose eliminating coverage for those 65 years and older.

The public has 30 days (starting from November 23, 2005) to comment. You can let the government know how you feel by going to http://www.cms.hhs.gov/mcd/index_list.asp?list_type=ncacomment and clicking on "Bariatric Surgery for the Treatment of Morbid Obesity".

NAAFA's official policy, which can be found at <http://www.naafa.org/documents/policies/wls.html>, condemns gastrointestinal surgery for weight loss under any circumstances, due to its severe risks and lack of proven health benefits. If you agree, tell the people at Medicare!

• **NAAFAs and Friends Frolic for Fat!**

by Marilyn Wann
Fat Activist and
NAAFA Board
Member

On a sunny morning in September 2005, a baker's dozen or so of Rad Fatties gathered at Crissy Field in San



Francisco to Frolic For Fat, our response to the Walk from "Obesity," which also happened there that morning. The Walk is an annual event to promote weight loss surgery (WLS), and the bariatric surgeons who perform it.

Crissy Field is a long, narrow strip along the waterfront just east of the Golden Gate Bridge. In the middle of the mile-long field is the free-speech zone, authorized by permit by the bureaucrat/rangers of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Walk participants, i.e., walkers -- or, as they might be more accurately described, trudgers -- start at the far east end of the field and walk long circuits around its perimeters until they tire of raising money for the surgeons; then they convene for a barbecue (kid you not) at the west end of the field. Frolickers hang out on a

up, I was inspired by the civil rights movement. There was a piece of graffiti near my house that had a big fist and it said black is beautiful.

What a silly thing to even have to say; it should be obvious! I am raising my pudgy little fist and I'm saying, fat is beautiful. Fat people are people. And we need to start acting that way. All of us."

Chicago NAAFA Honors its Own

At its holiday dinner on December 11, 2005, the Chicago Chapter of NAAFA honored its fat-tastic officers, chairs and volunteers:

Lisa Breisch
Sandy Dixon
Becky Jedlicka
Dave Jedlicka
Kathleen Madigan
Elyse Nowak
Carolyn Schmidt
Ron Schmidt
Loretta Tevis

Calendar of Events

December 16, 2005, 6:30 PM, New York NAAFA Chapter meeting,
<http://www.nynaafa.org/>

December 17, 2005, 7 PM, Wisconsin Public Radio Show "Higher Ground", featuring Chicago NAAFA Chapter members Lisa Breisch, Desda Ravanesi, and Mary Ray Worley,
<http://www.wpr.org/>

December 31, 2005, 9 PM, Capital NAAFA Chapter New Year's Eve Party,
<http://www.capitalnaafa.org/> •

January 1, 2006, 3 PM, SF Bay Area Chapter annual gift exchange, games party, and

grassy promontory overlooking the bay and the northerly length of path. They are prevented, as part of their free speech permit, from any truck with food (or amplified sound).

So that morning we waved pompoms and held signs that said, "Yes to survivors, no to surgery!" or, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" or, "Bypass the bypass!" or, "Chris, Jason, Sharon, Jennifer, Lisa...[long list of names of people who've died from WLS]...We miss you!" We positioned a Yay! Scale on the path and one of us stood nearby to invite passersby to find out what they Yay! and to take literature, should they be curious. Handouts listed risks of surgery on one side and local, health at every size (HAES), and fat-positive resources on the other.

We talked to dozens of passers-by for whom the Walk from "Obesity" and our alternative vision was just so much festive gravy on their morning constitutional. It's delightful to see just how many runners have, as their first, instantaneous, vigorous reaction to Rad Fatties cheering and waving glittering signs about Fat Lib, the simple raised/pumped fist and broad grin of encouragement.

The trudgers, well, some of them Yay!ed themselves. Some of them said they were beautiful, too, and we agreed. One trudger said, "You're not healthy." I said, "Good thing I don't need your permission." One woman angrily admonished us to get off our asses and walk, as she was doing. Never mind the high and gleeful kicks we were doing, the arm-waving, the generally aerobic and effervescent entertainment we offered...for two hours, long after they'd stopped trudging.

We even got a chance to confront some surgeons from Pacific Laparoscopy, the sponsors of San Francisco's Walk from "Obesity". Curious and perhaps attracted by our line of sassy young fat cheer vixens, three oddly grinning men joined our lineup. After I found out who they were, I said, "Keep your knives away from my stomach! I think human beings have a stomach for a reason. No one **needs** to have a healthy, normal internal organ cut off." They kind of goggled at me. I continued, "This walkathon is shameless self-promotion. Don't tell me you're against discrimination. Your business model is based on fat discrimination. You profit from it!" They said their work is about helping people. I said, "We're here to give people an option to your mutilations. This is my work. I'm getting back to it." As they shuffled off, they muttered (toward a BBC camera crew, which caught the whole thing, of course), "Some people just don't want to be helped." I certainly don't want to be helped into an early grave.

Holiday Giving

by Phyllis Warr
NAAFA Board Member

potluck, contact
fwhite@kqed.org

January 20, 2006, 6:30 PM,
 New York NAAFA Chapter
 meeting,
<http://www.nynaafa.org/>

January 21, 2006, Capital
 NAAFA Dinner with The
 Sopranos, Annandale, VA,
<http://www.capitalnaafa.org/>

January 28 or 29, 2006,
 BBW Belly Dancing
 Instruction by Jennifer
 Hodson, contact
ChicagoNAAFA@aol.com

February 11, 2006, Capital
 NAAFA Hearts A-Fire Dance
 Party,
<http://www.capitalnaafa.org/>

February 17, 2006, 6:30 PM,
 New York NAAFA Chapter
 meeting,
<http://www.nynaafa.org/>

February 19, 2006, Pool
 Party/Plus Size Water
 Aerobics by Sandy Dixon,
 contact
ChicagoNAAFA@aol.com

:: newsletter@naafa.org
 :: <http://naafa.org>

:: 916-558-6880

Usually at this time of year, NAAFA comes to you hat in hand requesting your help to make ends meet or to help us keep going. This year is different. Thanks to greatly reduced operating costs, a successful convention, and terrific financial management, our survival is not in jeopardy. While we can always use money for current and future projects to support our membership, this year we'd like to suggest some alternatives for your gift giving:



Give a NAAFA membership: We all know people who could benefit from being a member, but can't afford it. Your gift would allow them to be a part of the world's largest and longest lived size acceptance organization, and know that they are connected with hundreds of others working for the same cause.

Donate your talents and time: For example, you could write a letter to your local newspaper editor regarding size acceptance, and advocate for fair treatment of people of size in your community. Write a letter to Walmart and tell them what you think of the company's plan not to hire people of size. If you do, please send a copy to NAAFA for our files. We'd like to know the ways that our members use their power.

Remember those less fortunate: The survivors of the hurricanes in the Gulf states are still recovering and still in need. Less well publicized is the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, which killed at least 87,000 people and left 3.5 million homeless. A donation to a worthy organization that helps others is a wonderful gift to give **yourself**. Your donation, no matter the size, put together with those of others can do a lot of good for a lot of people.

The NAAFA Board of Directors wishes everyone a safe and very happy holiday season.

- **Fitness: Getting Comfortable**

*by Mary Ray Worley
 NAAFA Member*

I've been struggling for a long time to figure out how to be more active. In fact, the reason I came to my first NAAFA convention was to learn about being active in a large body. I've pushed myself to walk and hike and tread the mill, to take the stairs, to climb the hill, to not park too close. You know the drill -- and the drill sergeant. I have pushed myself in every way I could

think of, sometimes to the point of hurting myself. But in the last couple of years I have run into one problem after another that has prevented me from being as active as I want. Finally, last spring, all I could do for more than two months was sit in a chair. An old injury is causing some deterioration of the spine in my neck. Yep, talk about your pain in the neck. I couldn't even hold a book, because the pain was radiating from my neck down my arm.



Happily, my doctor and a couple of wonderful physical therapists helped me learn how to manage the pain and get moving again. In the meantime, I have had lots of time to think about the whole activity puzzle, and I am beginning to think that my drill sergeant's approach was especially unhelpful.

That little drill sergeant in my head, oddly enough, always sounds like my mother. One time I proudly brought home a beautiful, near-perfect cross-stitch project to show my mother. As expected, she turned it over to examine the back. Finding nothing there to criticize, she asked, "Does it take time away from exercise?" Trust me, I come by my drill sergeant honestly.

The track at my health club is around the outside of the room, a tenth-of-a-mile circle with all the treadmills and stairsteppers and exercyclists lined up in the middle. Because this setup made me feel like I had an audience, I used to hold my head up and think, "This is what an active fat person looks like." Granted, this was much better than wanting to vanish into the woodwork, but I was trying to be the poster child for active fat people, like I thought I had to justify my body, even if I didn't have to apologize for it anymore.

But during the 2-1/2 months I was stuck in a chair, I had to come to terms with who I was, and why the universe was conspiring to keep me from all those things I was pushing myself to do. Was the universe trying to tell me something?

As a result of all this rethinking, I have adopted a simple new goal: I want to be comfortable in my body. Back in the bad old days, I used to make a conscious effort to live from the neck up, to ignore my body, to live as though I didn't even have a body. Now I want to be friends with my body, to listen to it, honor it, trust its innate wisdom, and give it all it needs to heal itself from long years of neglect, abuse, and disdain.

When I first began thinking about being comfortable in my body, I thought it was so that I could be more active. But I'm beginning to see being comfortable as a worthy and excellent goal in its own right. In fact, I've started

thinking about being active as a way to become more comfortable in my body. Wouldn't that just curl the drill sergeant=92s toes?

The assumption of the weight-loss shysters (and most everybody else) is that fat people can't possibly be comfortable unless they lose weight. But thin people don't have a corner on comfort any more than they have a corner on health. In fact, they may be less comfortable in their bodies than we are in ours. It's easy to blame discomfort on our size, just as it's easy to blame our every physical ailment on being fat. In truth, comfort depends upon many factors. We fat folk may not be able to achieve perfect states of comfort (any more than thin folk), but we can certainly become more comfortable if we're creative, resourceful, and persistent.

I'm talking primarily about physical comfort, but other kinds of comfort are just as important. I want to be comfortable in a swimsuit in public; comfortable in my sleeveless t-shirts when it's hot; comfortable walking around a track that is also being used by thin, athletic runners; comfortable when I need to take the elevator because climbing too many stairs puts too much pressure on my knees; comfortable doing whatever I need to to be, well, comfortable -- without feeling self-conscious or apologetic.

To give you a few ideas, here are some things I'm doing to promote comfort in my life: I meditate first thing every day (after I've had my coffee, of course). Twice a week I do strength training at my health club. I walk with walking poles to reduce the strain on my lower body and get my upper body involved in the movement. I work hard not to do too much and try to take small strides, so as not to aggravate the bursitis in my hips or the arthritis in my knees. Other days I walk in the water and do strengthening and stretching exercises in the water. I use the private dressing room because dressing in the locker room makes me feel conspicuous. After each activity session, I do about 15 minutes of yoga and stretching. I always make sure that there's plenty of cushioning and support in my shoes. I wear orthotic inserts that help decrease the pain in my knees and lower back. I drink plenty of water. I get a professional massage once a week. I use the massage setting of my shower head on any painful areas once or twice a day. When I'm working, I get up to stretch or move around every 50 minutes or so. I sleep with three pillows on a very comfy bed. I use my CPAP machine so I can breathe comfortably while sleeping. I sleep in a satin nightgown on a satin bottom sheet so that rolling over isn't quite as difficult (nothing like reducing friction to improve the ease of movement).

Yowzer; that's a lot. With all that effort, I should be floating on air, right? Not quite. I have plenty of bad days, but the more consistent I am, the more comfortable I'm becoming. I'm learning that over time some of the small, seemingly inconsequential stretches I do are having a profound effect on my comfort and

overall sense of well-being. I'm definitely heading in the right direction. And direction is everything. It doesn't matter how much progress you're making if your drill sergeant is leading you off into the jungle of self-recriminations.

We as fat people can be more comfortable in our ample bodies if we alter our habits and our world. Comfort is not the province of the thin. Rather it is the province of those who believe they deserve it. And we do.

- **You're Invited to Participate in a Research Study**

*by V Natasha Wilkins
Ph.D. Candidate
Jackson State University*

I invite NAAFA members to participate in a doctoral dissertation study on weight discrimination in the workplace. It is my hope that this study will aid in informing organizations, human resource practitioners, and managers about how weight discrimination hurts employees and ultimately the organization. Additionally, I am committed to using this research to aid size rights activists in the fight to end the discrimination.

Your participation is voluntary, confidential, and anonymous; and data is stored securely. To complete the web-based survey, which takes less than 15 minutes, please click on the following URL:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp? u=677651603905>

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this study. Please e-mail me at vikki.n.wilkins@jsums.edu or call me at 601-918-9730.

- **Book Review: Fat Politics - The Real Story Behind America's Obesity Epidemic**

*Book by J. Eric Oliver
Reviewed by Frances White,
NAAFA Board Member*

There is a new star in the army of those dispelling myths about fat people and health issues. His name is J. Eric Oliver and he is a professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. You might wonder what a poli sci prof could have to say of interest as opposed to someone in the medical profession. A lot! His point of view is from the economic factors leading to increased weight and how to "fight" the obesity epidemic.



I came across this book in a unique way. Every three months or so, I'm asked to be on the Michael Medved Show, a radio talk show based in Seattle. Just before Thanksgiving, the booker called and asked if I'd like to debate the author of "Fat Politics." Since I hadn't heard

of the book, the booker had a copy sent to me. One of the jacket blurbs was a paragraph of praise by Paul Campos, who has spoken at two NAAFA conventions.

I was actually looking forward to the "debate" when the booker called me back, realizing that Dr. Oliver and I were in violent agreement, and asked me to step aside. But I kept the book!

Clearly, this is a book you need in your library. While some of you have heard many of the conclusions Dr. Oliver comes to, it never hurts to have the reinforcement. If you are new to size acceptance, the ideas in the book are stunning and you will find many of the heroines of size acceptance =96 Lynn McAfee, Marilyn Wann, and Jennifer Portnick. Consider giving it as a gift to someone who battles you about your size. It is well annotated with footnotes at the end of the book.

Dr. Oliver started to write a book about the obesity epidemic from the point of view of someone who analyzes public opinion. As he started collecting research, he found that many claims about obesity are based on very shaky evidence and questionable statistics. Imagine how surprised he was to discover something you've heard in many keynote addresses at NAAFA conventions =96 that many of the obesity researchers are on the payroll of pharmaceutical companies or weight loss companies.

But such revelations do come as a shock to the general reader, who is not as sophisticated about the false prophets of the weight loss industry as NAAFA members are. Keeping the general audience in mind, Dr. Oliver takes steps to explain society's preoccupation with weight, and why it affects women more than men (something that feminists have been talking about for years). He discusses the economic reasons for declaring an epidemic (sell more pills and develop more funding for programs to deal with weight loss). He explains the reasons why Americans are gaining weight (genes, yes; but it's also the inevitable biological response to living in a consumer-oriented democracy).

So how does Dr. Oliver suggest that we deal with the obesity epidemic? Since he systematically attacks the concept of weight being a barometer of health, he wants the medical profession to stop its preoccupation with trying to get everyone to lose weight. Then we can get to the idea of removing weight as a subject of official concern (governmental intervention). Finally, we can return to the idea of the joy of movement being the real determinant of health and well-being.

- **We Want Your Positive Images**

New NAAFA board member Jason Docherty has taken on the role of webmaster, and is looking for positive images of fat people to post on the NAAFA website. An overhaul of our website is long overdue, and while we're at it, we want to combat the prevalent image of fat people in the

media.
You've seen
them on
news
reports:
those
anonymous,
headless, fat
bodies
walking
down the
street.



Fat people are not headless beasts; we are of all ages, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. We would like real pictures of real people to post on our website. You may e-mail your photos to Jason at webmaster@naafa.org