

NAAFA Newsletter

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SPECIAL ISSUE: LETTERS WRITTEN BY NAAFA MEMBERS

NAAFA members often write letters of praise or protest to media, retailers, authors, etc. We encourage you, our members, to do so, and to send copies of your letters to the NAAFA office. One way of effecting change in society is to express your opinions through letters. Such changes are not usually immediate or dramatic, but every letter helps chip away at the prejudice against fat. It's also important to compliment those who have been supportive or positive toward fat people.

NAAFA's Activism Committee tries, whenever possible, to match your letter with one of their own. Activism letters mailed to NAAFA are forwarded to the Activism Committee and to the **Newsletter**.

In this special issue, we are featuring letters written by members, as well as some letters to the **Newsletter**. We thank all those people who have written, or sent us copies of their activism letters--whether we were able to include them in this issue or not. We hope you find some of the letters in our mailbag as interesting as we found them!--Ed.

TO: Jane E. Brody
The New York Times, 229 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10036
FROM: Lynn Meletiche (NY)
RE: March 24th article "Research lifts blame from many of the obese."

"I would like to personally thank you for your coverage of this subject. We at NAAFA have been trying for eighteen years to convince the public of the very theories you have so succinctly presented in your article. But because our numbers are still relatively small and our credentials may be viewed as unimpressive compared to "experts" in the field, our views have largely been discounted. It is certainly refreshing to learn that the scientific community is finally beginning to realize what we have known all along--diets don't work for the majority of people and that diets can be dangerous.

As you know, NAAFA is an organization devoted to fighting fat discrimination and promoting self acceptance, regardless of size or shape. I believe I saw you on an Oprah Winfrey show and feel that you are sympathetic to our cause. It would give me great pleasure to see our name and address mentioned in your future articles if at all possible. There are many people who would benefit from our organization. All we need is more media exposure to let them know we are here."

TO: John Mack Carter, Editor-in-Chief of GOOD HOUSEKEEPING magazine
959 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019
FROM: Suzanne Keyes (VA)
RE: Photo illustration used with article "My co-worker didn't do any work" published in the April 1987 issue. Photo was of thin worker looking with dismay at her fat co-worker who is doing her nails while chatting on the phone.

"I believe GOOD HOUSEKEEPING is helping to keep a prejudice alive and it is something you are probably not aware of at all--it is so common and accepted in the media.

I sat down to read your April 1987 issue after a long work day...I soon came to the article on page 40. There was a picture of a fatter model reared back in her chair as a thinner model looked on with a hurt expression. I read the story, which I wouldn't have ordinarily read, because the unassertive woman is victimized as much by her own behavior as she is by her co-worker's. She never comes to that realization. I read the story only to see if the co-worker was described as overweight--which she wasn't. (Her size was never mentioned in the article.) I was terribly disappointed in GH for stooping to such a stereotype (in choosing a fat model for the photo) and I was angry, too..."

"I thought perhaps I was being too sensitive about the picture and I looked through the issue to see if you represent large women positively in other places... The only really positive representation was the "Just My Size" pantyhose ad which is terrific as usual. (A NAAFA award-winning ad--Ed.)

Mr. Carter, a large percentage of people in this country are overweight. I am one of them. I have a masters degree, have been married twenty years and am quite healthy and happy. You wouldn't believe the prejudice I experience in every little activity I participate in--including reading a magazine that is supposed to be entertainment...

I am writing to you because I believe you are serious about helping others and being a positive resource for women. I am not asking you to go overboard, but I would like to see some balance...

I am enclosing some literature from an organization called NAAFA...They have a great deal of information about fat acceptance and health and some very articulate members...I really hope something positive can come of this."

(Suzanne also sent a letter to Good Housekeeping columnist Jane Keely, "Speaker of the House" whose April column was about equality of pay for women. Suzanne sent copies of two NAAFA Newsletter articles on size discrimination in employment to help inform the columnist.)

TO: Ann Landers
PO Box 11995, Chicago, IL 60611
FROM: Carolyn Schmidt (IL)
RE: Ann Landers' column of April 10th, promoting weight loss surgery.

"I was deeply disappointed to read the letters you printed about stomach stapling surgery for morbid obesity. You said 'the operation apparently has very little risk and can be enormously successful.'

A long term follow up study done at the University of Iowa Hospital found that after 10 years 18% of stapling patients had died. How many would have died anyway from obesity? The Framingham Heart Study can be used for comparison (Health, Education and Welfare No. 74-599). The death rate of the women who were extremely fat was 6% over 10 years. That's a 3-fold increase in the number of deaths. Obesity carries many dangers but treatment should lower the death rate, not increase it. It's pretty awful in our society to be fat, but are we better off dead? Other complications of stapling surgery include leaking digestive juices, respiratory failure, spleen damage, brain damage, heart failure, osteoporosis, gallstones, liver damage and more. That sounds like a lot of risk to me!

But the worst news of all is that after two years, up to 75% of SURVIVING patients have either failed to lose any weight OR have REGAINED the weight they lost (American Journal of Surgery, 145:113, 1983). THAT IS NOT ENORMOUSLY SUCCESSFUL! Why after that kind of pain would anyone who had the surgery recommend it? Because the psychological pain of being fat may outweigh the physical pain of surgery.

An excellent report on weight loss surgery, pro and con, can be obtained from the National Association to Aid Fat Americans...(our address and a copy of the report was included.)

The advice to eat three well-balanced meals a day and get regular exercise is good for fat and thin.

I am full-figured and teach aerobic exercise classes to full-figured women and men. I know my letter is long, but I hope you will print part of it..."

TO: Woman's Day Magazine, Barbara Donnelly, Asst. to Editor/Public Relations
1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036
FROM: Jeanette L. Apprill (NM)
RE: Article about June Bailey in the March 24th issue.

"I am writing this letter to thank you, and other editors of Woman's Day for the article/interview by Jennifer Boeth Donovan about June Bailey in your March 24th issue. I am hoping that "I Weigh 220 Pounds and I'm Glad" is just the first of such articles fighting size discrimination.

By publishing an article that shows that a woman can be intelligent, witty, attractive, successful, happy, and fat, you are helping thousands of American women to accept themselves, love themselves, and get on with their lives now...not after they lose weight. So thank you, and more of the same."

Articles in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of NAAFA, Inc., unless specifically noted. Please contact the NAAFA office about specific NAAFA policies. Commentaries in this Newsletter, unless otherwise noted, were prepared by the Editor, and/or NAAFA's Founder.

TO: Ann Landers
FROM: Laura Speirs (NY)

"Again, this morning for the zillionth time, someone sat down next to me on the bus, misjudged her aim, and sat on my leg. As with almost all the people who do this to me, this person did not acknowledge she had sat on me with as much as an "excuse me". As a person who is considered by society to be "too fat", I am often the object of much cruelty and abuse by perfect strangers on the street, and I feel that the rude behavior by riders on the bus is simply an offshoot of this kind of bigotry, i.e. it is MY fault that the person sat on me because I am too fat...

I would like you to know that I am a grown woman who keeps herself clean and neat, am married to a doctor who adores me, work hard at my job and my boss respects and values me and pays me accordingly, have a master's degree, and was a Fulbright scholar. I also believe that I am a kind and compassionate person. Therefore, these things notwithstanding, I think I have reasons to be respected and cannot understand why such an irrelevant thing as being large should reduce me to less than the status of a dumb animal. You may think this analogy is too strong, but this is how I feel when the kind of treatment described above is shown to me so regularly. It is hard for me to comprehend why people judge me on my looks when this is the most superficial and meaningless way of determining my value as a human being...and I am still a human being with feelings. Being large is NOT a comment on my moral character!"

TO: Sally Jessy Raphael
1000 Market Street, St. Louis, MO 63101
FROM: Stephen Fort (CA)
RE: Sally Jessy Raphael show of March 26th, featuring NAAFAns Paula Dachis and Jerry Lamb, others.

"I wish to comment on your show, the topic being 'Fat, is it okay?'...

I was dismayed when during the audience participation segment someone asked your two fat guests how it was possible for two people that size to perform the physical act of having children? I find it incredible that you would insist that your guests answer such a question even after a third guest pointed out that it would be like asking anyone how they made love and that such matters were private.

The pursuit of this question failed to enlighten or entertain me as a viewer. It succeeded in wasting time which otherwise could have been used constructively, it angered and humiliated your guests and, in my opinion, was demeaning to you in your role of talk show host.

It seems to me your initial inclination not to "let that happen" would have been an excellent one to act on. Your initial inclination indicates a high standard of professional ethics in which you have conducted your shows, the segment in question notwithstanding. You are as keenly aware as anyone that you owe yourself and your audience the same high standards you have set in the past. I feel it is extremely important that you not allow an incident such as this one to happen again..."

TO: Sally Jessy Raphael
FROM: Geneva Chapman (OH)
RE: Sally Jesse Raphael show aired May 26, 1987

"...The prejudice issue was dealt with only briefly which, in my opinion, is like doing a show on the black experience, and focusing on bleaching creams and other methods historically used by blacks to lessen their NATURAL 'black' appearance, and devoting only a few minutes to the issue of racism.

How about doing a show on the issue of FAT DISCRIMINATION and concentrating, not on weight loss, but on the plethora of anti-fat images and messages that pervade the media, their effect on fat people, and how we can deal with and ultimately end sizeism in America.

...I've seen enough people with eating disorders, both fat and formerly fat, on your show, 'Donahue,' and 'Oprah' to last me a lifetime. Why continue to showcase the disturbed (and stereotyped) among us? And how is this any different from limiting black or Hispanic guests to pimps, dope pushers, or criminals which I'm sure you would never do. Many fat people, like myself, aren't ecstatically 'happy' all the time...but we are struggling in a thin-oriented society to love ourselves JUST AS WE ARE, and to let those around us know that we are not willing to be abused because of our size any longer.

Since you've done at least two shows on the "sickness" side of the fat issue, I dare you to do another show about fat people who aren't dieting, suicidal, or gluttonous--only this time without the (medical) experts or other efforts to 'divide and conquer'. I think that if you just deal with the prejudice against fat in our society, and how some of us who have CHOSEN to remain fat are combatting that prejudice, you will have more than enough information for a half-hour show."

In April, Tamsen Cooper (MA) sent us a copy of an ad for US Trust, a bank whose headquarters are at 30 Court Street, Boston, MA 02108. The ad shows two fat men from the rear, sitting on a piano bench in front of a desk. The ad reads "Now that the big banks of Boston have twice the assets (notice assets!), will they sit on your loan twice as long?" The two fat men are supposed to represent two big banks that recently merged. Tamsen wrote us:

"I'm enclosing an ad that's been appearing almost daily in the Boston Globe Newspaper. I think it portrays fat people as lazy, greedy, and incompetent. I find it very offensive and insulting.

I called the listed number (1-800-325-3320) to complain and the woman who answered was amazed at my opinion. She said 'everyone else has found it amusing'. I told her it was demeaning to large people and promoted negative stereotypes. She asked if I was a customer of theirs. When I said no, she promptly said, 'Oh, well, I'll register your complaint' and hung up.

Worse yet, is their television commercial on the same theme. It shows these same two guys taking people's money and doing nothing with it. Finally, the bench they're sitting on breaks and sends them crashing to the floor. This 'fall', I imagine, is supposed to represent US Trust's superiority and their victory over greed, sloth, and incompetence... I do not find it amusing.

It would be great if other people would call to complain about this ad campaign. Thanks for listening, and thanks for all of your services to the fat people of America..."

(Editor's note: Writing is usually a better way of getting your point across. Telephone calls are usually handled by an operator or receptionist who has no authority over ad campaigns or corporate policy--but a letter stands a good chance of being directed to company management...

It also might help to suggest that you're thinking of becoming a customer--but that you're questioning whether or not you should deal with them considering their unsympathetic views toward fat people. Never shut the door by saying, "I'll never do business with you." It gives them no motivation to listen or act on your comments.)

OTHER LETTERS TO NAAFA

THINKS NAAFA IS TOO ACTIVIST--"After having been a member of NAAFA for four years, I have decided not to renew my membership. I have been disenchanted with NAAFA for quite some time. ...Both the orientation and tone of NAAFA appears to have an appeal to a few politically militant fat activists rather than to a broader segment of the fat population. It seems that every issue of your **Newsletter** contains articles taking political stands to the exclusion of everything else. This is akin to attending a fundamentalist church to hear still another sermon on salvation!

...I believe NAAFA should serve as a social organization, bringing together fat people and fat admirers for social activities and fellowship. However, your present orientation leaves little room for anything other than holding forums to discuss fat political issues."--Donny Woo (CA)

(We agree with Mr. Woo on some of his points. We always tried to maintain balance in our publications. But lately, we've had to give short shrift to some of the more social matters, so we could afford to publish a monthly Newsletter. And, Woo's letter refers to the old 20-page format, which had far more social emphasis than we have these days. Remember the photos of the annual convention? Some NAAFAs thought them too social!--Ed.)

THINKS NAAFA IS NOT ACTIVIST ENOUGH--"I feel 'social outings' are disproportionately the preoccupation of our leadership--perhaps a natural consequence of a (largely) female membership. If organizational development could move toward leaving such matters to local 'scions' and toward a national entity concerned more with lobbying, education and unification, a stronger and more viable organization might result.

...it doesn't seem right to have members finance dances they cannot attend or to have the leadership burdened down with running a dating service which serves only a portion of the membership. In other words, let NAAFA focus on issues affecting all fat people. Let dating services, fat outings, etc., be financed by those who actually use them at an extra fee. The whole operation might be considered with a view toward separating the essential from the desirable and the options will pay for themselves without strapping the organization."--Dr. E. Wayne Wall (SC)

(Believe it or not, Mr. Woo and Dr. Wall are talking about the same organization! Many members share Dr. Wall's perception that NAAFA is too social. Perhaps it will help when we point out that all the social events (including NAAFA-Date) are extra-fee fund-raisers, yielding a surplus, and helping to pay for all of NAAFA's non-income generating programs--like this **Newsletter**, for example.--Ed.)