

# NAAFA Newsletter

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### You Can Make a Difference!



**by Joy Allen**

NAAFA, to me, means sanity. Sanity in an insane world. Especially as a woman, with all the media images of skinny women, and messages telling me I need to look like them, it can be hard to keep my head straight. NAAFA is an organization that represents the truth. Those images, those messages, are wrong. I don't need to change in order to be happy, beautiful, healthy, successful . . . insert your own

## Greetings!

Spring is here, and time to start planning for the 2004 National Convention!

### • **2004 Convention -- NAAFA Heads East**

Queen Latifah. James Gandolfini. Large people and New Jersey seem to go together. Calista Flockhart. Well, maybe not always. But large people will be coming together in New Jersey this year, because NAAFA's Annual Convention will be at the Airport Marriott in Newark, NJ, just a short drive from New York City, from August 4 through 8. Here's just a bit of what we have in store:

- Fantastic sightseeing tour of New York City (separately priced)
- Fabulous speakers including author and law professor Paul Campos
- Spectacular fashion show featuring large-size clothing on large-size people
- A two-day Trade Show with fashions, products, and services especially for fat people
- Make a splash (or a statement) at three fabulous pool parties and hospitality parties

In addition to the above, the NAAFA Body Acceptance Event will show the fat community and the world how to be healthy and happy at any size. This event will be coordinated by Fat!So? author and NAAFA Board Member Marilyn Wann.

You'll find an abbreviated convention registration form elsewhere in this newsletter; to register for individual events, call our voice mail at 916-558-6880 and leave your name and mailing address to receive a print version, or send an e-mail to [newsletter@naafa.org](mailto:newsletter@naafa.org) and ask for an electronic version.

### • **A Vacation in (Freedom) Paradise**

**by Terri Weitze**  
**A Resort Review**

In February, my husband Bill and I visited the size-friendly resort Freedom Paradise, south of Cancun on

adjective here. There is strength in numbers, and NAAFA provides these numbers. There are many other women, and men, who are willing to stand up and say to the world, "I am OK. You can't dictate to me who I should be." As a young woman, this has helped me tremendously.

Personally, I have had low self-esteem. I have a history of taking criticism to heart, and being different made me feel terrible. I know I am not alone in this. With the help of NAAFA, I grew out of this. Through the literature and workshops and friends I have made through NAAFA, I have found the support I needed to grow into the woman I am today. Today, I can hold my head up high. Today, I feel beautiful. Today, I am more confident. These gifts are priceless.

I think about these gifts, and I think about all the men and women who have not yet received them. It makes me feel sad. I feel an urgency, a great need to respond to these people. What can I do for them? How can I spread the word?

Well, the first thing I can do is show them through example. I can, to the best of my ability, present myself as a confident and happy BBW. I can talk to my fat friends and explain the purpose of NAAFA, encourage them to check out the website, take a look at the message boards, think about attending a NAAFA event. But isn't there something else I can do? I want to do MORE.

For me, that something more is volunteering for NAAFA. For you, this may be too much, or too hard to incorporate into your busy life. It's not for everyone. My point here is that we should all do as much as we can to reach out to those men and women who have not yet found NAAFA, and bring NAAFA's message to them. You can make

the Caribbean Sea.

Freedom Paradise is an all-inclusive resort, and is working to create an environment that is friendly to people of size. They have extra-wide, armless chairs available in the dining area, all the pools have shallow steps leading into the pool with guardrails. There are extra-wide sturdy lounge chairs in the pool area too. Freedom Paradise is not exclusively for large people, however, and when we visited about 90% of the guests were average size. Even so, at no time were any of the people in our group made to feel uncomfortable about their size. We participated in yoga and aerobics led by Kelly Bliss, and many of the other guests joined in on the fun!

It takes about one and a half hours to reach the resort from the Cancun airport. There are various services available to transport you from the airport to the resort. And if you haven't made prior arrangements, as you leave the airport there are numerous transportation companies offering their services.

Our room had a spectacular view of the ocean and beach; it also overlooked the beach bar, which meant there was a lot of noise going on a lot of the time. If you don't want all that excitement, there are rooms that are further down the beach from the bar area. You will also want to make sure that you ask for a room that is accessible depending on your mobility. There are no elevators, so if stairs are an issue, make sure you ask for a room on the first floor. The amenities varied from room to room - some people had deadbolts on their doors, some didn't. Some of the rooms had showers with a safety bar, some didn't. The upstairs rooms have balconies with hammocks on them, but no chairs in the rooms. The hammocks seemed sturdy and it had no problem holding my 300+ pound body. However, getting in and out of it was an adventure in flexibility. The first floor rooms have little patios and some of them have plastic chairs (with arms on them) for sitting and enjoying the view.

The management of the resort is fairly new, and they seem to be still figuring things out (for example, they don't have enough pads for the lounges by the pool). There were quite a few problems communicating with the staff, many of them have little or no English; but usually we were able to get our message across it just took awhile. They are very open to suggestions and comments. The buffet meals were always varied, plentiful, and tasty. And for the less-adventuresome, they have a little side grill with omelettes for breakfast and hamburgers and hot dogs at lunchtime.

There is also a "fancy" restaurant that requires reservations, but is part of the all-inclusive price. However, you are expected to leave a tip for your server at this restaurant. Depending how busy they are, they have one or two seatings a night at the restaurant. The website for the resort claims they have four restaurants; however, as of February only the

a difference. You can help change a life.

### Attention Scholars

Will you be pursuing a college degree soon? NAAFA will be starting a scholarship program.

Leave a message on our voicemail at 916-558-6880 for more details.

### Donate to NAAFA

Wanna help NAAFA? Gotta PayPal account? NAAFA is now accepting donations via PayPal. It's the easiest and quickest way to donate to NAAFA.

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buffet and the "fancy" restaurant were open and operating. Also, if you are into snacking, you'll have to bring your own, or plan a trip into nearby Tulum; because between meals the only other option is the small gift store which does not carry much of a selection of snacks.

The resort does provide bottled water; the tap water is clean, but is also quite salty because they have seawater leaching into the treated water (not very tasty with toothpaste).

None of the four pools are heated, but the sea was warm. If you go into the sea, you will need to wear swimming shoes because there are coral and stones that will cut your feet. There is also seaweed. The seaweed cannot be removed because the area is a marine preserve. There are large patches of sand that you can walk to, or you can take one of the resort's kayaks (you sit on it, not in it) to get to the clear areas. Also, during the day, the resort takes groups out by the reef for snorkeling.

There are a lot of activities to enjoy in the area, and the resort has people who will set up day trips for you. We did not take advantage of any of these, feeling they were very overpriced. My sister and her husband took one of the trips and were disappointed. For anything nearby, I would suggest you have the front desk get you a cab; and you can take a cab back to the resort. That is what we did when we went to the Mayan ruins in Tulum. A great chance to see some wonderful ruins. There is some moderate climbing to enter the ruins; it is definitely not wheelchair accessible. There is some shopping in the area where the cabs drop you off, and they have shuttles that run from this area up to the ruins if you are not in the mood for a 1/4 mile walk.

Freedom Paradise is not a "posh" resort where your every whim catered to. But it's a good deal and a nice place to go for a relaxing vacation where you can feel comfortable sipping margaritas around the bar or sunning yourself in your bathing suit by the sea.

- **The Fight Against Weight Loss Surgery (WLS)**

San Francisco Bay Area NAAFA members and activists Laura Wills and Marilyn Wann have started a Yahoo Group called stopthesurgery, tasked to put an end to WLS. Pressure increases on fat people in America to have the surgery, to the extent that even 16-year-old children are asking to have it done.

Valid estimates of the death rates of WLS surgery are hard to come by, given the vested interests of the hospitals doing the reporting, but a recent University of Washington study found a death rate of 2% over the first thirty days post-operation, and more deaths surely occur after the thirty-day period. And, of course, there are other complications, such as diarrhea, peptic ulcers, and vitamin deficiencies, and

that's if the surgery goes well.

But WLS is big business and getting bigger in many places. There were 63,100 gastric bypasses nationally in 2002, up from 23,100 in 1997, according to the American Society for Bariatric Surgery. That number is expected to increase to 145,000 this year. For example, Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego makes so much money from WLS that they almost lost federal funding.



Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopthesurgery> and join the group.

Here's a sampling of the information there:

- The reemergence of the gastric pacemaker, a device that induces nausea and vomiting if more than a small amount of food is eaten (posted Dec 12, 2003)
- Nearly 20% of patients who undergo gastric bypass surgery will experience complications, according to Elmar Merkle, MD, who presented study findings at the 89th annual meeting of the Radiological Society of North America (posted Dec 25)
- Several reports of botched WLS (Dec 27, Jan 7, Feb 29, etc.)
- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida eliminates coverage of WLS (Feb 13)
- Los Angeles Times runs front-page article on the pros and cons of WLS, featuring interviews with NAAFAs Marilyn Wann, Laura Wills, Sandie Sabo, Sondra Solovay, Susan McAllister and many others (Feb 19)
- Massachusetts State Health Department convenes panel to examine obesity surgery risks (Feb 27)

Many of our loved ones and fellow NAAFAs are WLS survivors, and despite our efforts, more will continue to get WLS. WLS survivors are welcome in NAAFA, and our efforts to end WLS should not be seen as an attack on those who have had it. WLS is a personal choice, and we only hope that the information we provide will change society's attitudes about it, and reduce the pressure to have it.

[Visit our anti-WLS Yahoo Group](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopthesurgery)

- **Volunteer Extraordinaire**

**by Frances M. White**

NAAFA started out as an all-volunteer organization in 1969. By 1995, we had established our web site. Due to a financial situation, we are again relying on volunteers to augment our web presence. We will be telling you about some of our key volunteers over the next few issues of the Newsletter.



I'm going to start by introducing you to Mandy Collado. I believe the first annual convention Mandy attended was the one in San Diego in 2000. She had heard about NAAFA from her friends in the various BBW social clubs in California and decided to see what NAAFA was all about. Isn't it great when the social clubs and NAAFA work together to promote the size-acceptance and self-esteem message? This only goes to show that advocacy can take many forms in the fat community.

When Mandy attended the University of California at Berkeley, she found she couldn't bear to leave Berkeley after graduation. She joined the Bank of America as a teller and has risen through the ranks. When she found out there was a local chapter in the San Francisco Bay Area, she became a member and wonderful supporter. Given her background with the Bank of America, is it any wonder she is now the Treasurer of the chapter?

Mandy has also become very involved with Fat Fest 2004, a women's conference being held at the Westin Hotel in Millbrae CA over the Memorial Day weekend. Her organizational skills have come in handy to keep the rest of the planners on track to provide a well-planned event. And if any of you women want to come to the event, you can download the registration form on our chapter website ([naafa-sfba.org](http://naafa-sfba.org)).

But many of you outside the Bay Area know Mandy through her involvement with the Hospitality Suite parties and being the Fashion Show coordinator at the Los Angeles Convention last year. She, Diana Morrero, and Stephen Everett had a great time making special trips out of the hotel to get all those goodies you enjoyed in the Hospitality Suite late into the night. Mandy has the most infectious grin and giggle. Hardly anyone could resist her pleas for fashion show models! And you know what? You all looked great! So thanks for accepting her request to model.

Mandy has also been very open about undergoing Weight Loss Surgery. She knew that NAAFA has a policy against the surgery. She wasn't sure she would still be accepted once people found out she had opted for the surgery. She has certainly found that NAAFA remains a place for her.

Speaking as a member of the Board of Directors, I can tell you NAAFA is very much opposed to the WLS procedure and why. I can also tell you we are very supportive of the people who are under intense pressure from the medical community, family and employers and feel there is no alternative to the surgery. There were over 900 deaths directly attributable to the surgery in 2002, the last year for which there are statistics. Many of those who survive will suffer from vitamin deficiencies the rest of their lives because of malabsorption of nutrients.

Mandy is a fighter and will beat the odds. She has the loving support of all of us who know her. And you can get to know her too at the annual Convention at the Liberty Newark Airport Marriott which will be held August 4-8, 2004. (There's more information on the 2004 Convention and a registration mini-form in this newsletter.) Everyone who volunteered at the last convention was eligible to win an all-events package for the 2004 convention. A very deserving Mandy won! And not being one to rest on her laurels, you'll see Mandy volunteering again this year.

[More info on the SFBA chapter and Fat Fest 2004](#)

- **2004 Convention Registration Mini-Form**

#### **Hotel**

NAAFA has negotiated fantastic room rates for the convention: \$89 Single/Double, \$109 Triple, and \$119 Quad (plus taxes). Call Marriott at 800-228-9290 or contact the Marriott Newark Liberty Airport Hotel directly at 973-623-0006 before July 26 to guarantee availability at the special Convention rate.

#### **Convention Rates**

##### All Events Package

Super Saver rate through May 10

\_\_\_\_\_ Members at \$225, \_\_\_\_\_ Non-members at \$255

Regular Rate (available through July 31)

\_\_\_\_\_ Members at \$255, \_\_\_\_\_ Non-members at \$275

##### Non-Meal Package

\_\_\_\_\_ Members at \$120, \_\_\_\_\_ Non-members at \$140

##### Workshops Only

\_\_\_\_\_ Members and non-members at \$65

##### Extras

NYC Sightseeing Tour (August 4, 11 AM)

\_\_\_\_\_ Members and non-members at \$35

Convention Tote Bag

\_\_\_\_\_ Members and non-members at \$15

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Non-member rates for All Events and Non-Meal Packages include a one-year NAAFA membership! Send form and payment to NAAFA, P.O. Box 188620, Sacramento, CA 95818 (must be received before July 31).

For more information, and to register for individual events, call our voice mail at 916-558-6880 and leave your name and mailing address to receive a print version, or send an e-mail to [newsletter@naafa.org](mailto:newsletter@naafa.org) and ask for an electronic version.