



NAAFA Newsletter

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Introducing the Activism Column

by Sandy Schaffer
NAAFA Chapter Chair

In October of 2004, the studio I work for presented a workshop on size sensitivity at the IDEA fitness conference. Since becoming certified to teach group fitness in 1999, I have attended many fitness conferences. This was the first time this type of workshop was ever presented at a fitness conference geared to fitness trainers. Attending this conference with me were Andi Bray, New York

Greetings,

Here we are in January, the worst time of year for many NAAFA members. We're inundated with advertisements for quick weight loss schemes that don't work. My resolution this year is focus on spending quality time with my beautiful (and large sized) wife, Terri. No weight loss resolutions for me; I won't be fooled again by those. How about you? Drop me a line and let me know.

- **CBC Broadcasts Address from NAAFA Board Member**

by Frances White
NAAFA Treasurer

NAAFA is frequently asked for interviews by various media representatives from around the world. Sometimes these interviews can be a little daunting because NAAFA's principles come under attack. Often, one of our press contacts can expect to have to verbally stand up to people who are ready to vilify anyone who dares hold the opinion that it is possible to be fit and fat, or that the statistics about the mortality rates connected to being larger than average sized might be overstated.



I was therefore pleasantly surprised when The Current, a radio program on the Canadian Broadcasting Company originating in Toronto, was put in touch with me. The surprise was they didn't want me to be on air but to write an essay that I would get to read on air. Imagine, a block of time when one could say what one wanted to without a challenge! They only wanted a piece about 4 minutes long. But I wrote and wrote and wrote until I had said all I wanted to say on the subject. My piece ended up being 6 minutes long, but I figured since I was sending it to the editor of the program, they would edit out what they didn't want.

And so it was that on Thanksgiving morning, I was in the recording studios of KQED-FM (also my employer) reading the abbreviated version of my article. CBC promised that they would put up information on their web site on how to contact NAAFA. Here, in its entirety, is what I had to say.

In the United States, it is the day after Thanksgiving. This should be a happy time for most Americans who've shared the bounty of a wonderful harvest. Some of us are looking

NAAFA member and newly certified aerobics instructor, and the main presenter of our workshop, Rochelle Rice (former NAAFA board member).

We were nervous, not sure how we would be received.

Our workshop was part size sensitivity training and part hands on exercises.

The response to us was overwhelming. One trainer came up to me after the workshop was over and told me that we had changed the way she perceives fat people and therefore will now completely change how she trains them. The questions from the audience were straightforward. The trainers showed an interest in learning how to best assist this population in getting their fitness needs met.

When I think about activism, the first thing that comes to mind is a big event or protest. But activism comes in all sizes. Big events like the million pound march, protests like the ones against the "walk from obesity" as well as showing communities, not usually associated with being friendly with fat people (i.e. health clubs, and Doctor's offices) that one can be healthy and happy without being obsessed with size.

Editor's Note: This is the first of a regular column on activism. See Terri Weitze's article elsewhere in this issue for more ideas on fat activism.

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forward to a joyous season as Christmas and Chanukah approach.

But for the fat American like me, it has always been the worst time of the year. People look askance at what we put in our shopping carts as though we are going to eat in one evening the fixings to feed a family of 10. And when that family gathers around the table, we're told we don't need those potatoes or that cranberry sauce while everyone else just eases out another notch on their belt.

My name is Frances White and I have been fat all my life. I started out as a chunky and feisty little girl who was very athletic. I had to be athletic to fight back with older brothers who delighted in teasing and tormenting their little sister. It's the law that you must tease little sisters, isn't it?

I delighted in being a tomboy, and one summer was the tetherball champion of the schoolyard. But then my well-meaning mother decided that I wasn't losing my baby fat naturally, so that some kind of medical intervention was necessary. It started with thyroid pills and every kind of diet known to mankind. On every one, I'd lose a little weight but then gain back every bit I lost and more when I stopped dieting. Most fat people will tell you they dieted their way to their current weight. Some of the diets were very dangerous. I remember the fad for a very low calorie diet combined with HCG injections which were made from the urine of pregnant women. Later I learned that substance led to the development of fibroid tumors. Unfortunately, no one told me about that side effect until after I had a full hysterectomy at age 39.

In the 1980s, I discovered NAAFA, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance. I attended my first convention in 1986 because I was looking for a social outlet and heard that many had come to NAAFA because they were attracted to larger sized partners. There were well-attended dances and pool parties. Imagine the release for a formerly athletic person to feel free to go swimming after years of thinking I was much too fat to appear in a swim suit in public!

But it wasn't just the pool parties and dances that kept me in NAAFA. It was the uplifting workshops. I learned that I wasn't the only fat person who was being discriminated against in the workplace. I wasn't the only fat person who was told by their doctor, regardless of the symptoms presented, that what ever was wrong with me from strep throat to back problems would go away if only I lost weight. I found a cause near and dear to my heart and I became a fat activist on a small, personal level as well as in a more global arena.

I learned that yo-yo dieting does more harm to a body than staying at a stable, larger weight. I learned that we all, no matter what our size, profit by making good food choices worked out with your healthcare professional and getting some movement back into our lives. I learned to question or fight back when there is an automatic assumption about your health based on your size. You

can't possibly look at me and know what the critical measures of good health are. My blood pressure? Normal, thank you. My cholesterol? Low enough to be the envy of many of my thinner friends, thank you.

I learned that regardless of what you read about in the paper, there is no safe, long-term effective diet pill or drug. I learned that frequently diet researchers have their research funded by the pharmaceutical companies. It isn't just me as a fat person saying this; it is the editorial of the latest issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association saying this. In the U.S., we've been led to believe we are protected from dangerous drugs by our Food and Drug Administration. In the news recently, it has been reported that members of the FDA are in the hip pocket of the pharmaceutical industry and have approved drugs that have later been proven to be dangerous. Most people think of the recent recall of Vioxx, an arthritis pain reliever. Five other drugs, including a so-called weight loss drug Meridia, are now under investigation. But has everyone forgotten about the real killer, Fen-Phen? Back in 1996, NAAFA presented a friend of the court brief against the acceptance of the drug because we knew from research primarily from France that the drug caused pulmonary hypertension and brain damage. It took 18 months and evidence from the Mayo Clinic that it also caused heart valve damage before it was removed from the market.

With other NAAFAnS, I worked to get size and weight entered into the protected classes in the City and County Charter of San Francisco. It has been illegal to discriminate in employment, housing, adoption, college admission based on height and weight in San Francisco since the year 2000. We join the state of Michigan, the county of Santa Cruz, California and the City of Washington D.C. in that regard. It may seem daunting to confront discrimination as an individual, but it is amazing what strength you can gather by joining a group of like-minded people.

But I'm feeling more positive this year than I thought possible about the automatic assumptions made about size. It feels as though the news media is questioning blanket statements about size and health. For example, take the Body Mass Index. The BMI is a ratio that compares weight to height without regard for percent of body fat. When a weight loss guru announced that to be healthy, one had to have a BMI under 25, the media pointed out that certain action hero movie figures like Tom Cruise and Arnold Schwarzenegger have BMIs over 25. It seems that finally notice is being taken of increases in diseases like diabetes have been linked to the lowering of the standards of diagnosis to a point that is impossible to reach without medication.

Best of all was an announcement on Tuesday, November 23rd. It was reported that the study quoted last March by our Secretary of Human Health Services, Tommie Thompson when he said that diseases and deaths due to

obesity had increased over 30% was seriously flawed. Yes, for a fat person that is a cause for Thanksgiving afterall.

- **Fitness Column: A NAAFA New Year**

by Rochelle Rice, MA

President, In Fitness & In Health



Happy New Year!

I believe there is a definition of "insanity" out there that goes something like this - "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again but expecting different results." This really resonated with me as I welcomed the New Year.

We get very comfortable living our lives - structure, routine, family, friends, and our jobs. Change is not always welcomed, but we do our best to adapt and continue along. But what would it feel like to do something completely out of the norm for you? For some, this could mean getting up on the "other" side of the bed, versus the wrong side - just to experience the change. For others it could mean wearing a different color, throwing rose petals on your bed, or setting out on a movement project. Our entire sensory system shifts to experience the sensations and the entire body comes alive with new feelings.

When people begin to move their bodies, there can be a great deal of emotion that emerges. Relief, joy, confusion, sadness. The exciting part is that you are feeling the body versus thinking from the head. I call this the "Inside/Out" approach - listening to your body and allowing your breath to bring victory over your mind.

Try it! What is something slightly different from your norm? Start with a small project and observe how your body feels. Wearing a different color could change your mood one way or another. Rose petals on your bed could make you feel more pampered or insane if you hate to clean up. And movement in your daily life could make you feel more decisive or more agitated. The secret is to observe how your BODY is reacting and how your BODY feels without any judgment. This action step outside the norm or "out of the box" if you prefer, will certainly lead you to "different results!"

Happy New Year!

- **Changes to the NAAFA Board of Directors**

Peggy Howell was sworn in as the new NAAFA Board member December 27, 2004. She joins Kara Brewer Allen, Carole Cullum, Frances White, Marilyn Wann, Mary Ray Worley and Sandy Schafer.

Many of you have seen Peggy at bashes and NAAFA Trunk Shows as the co-owner, along with her sister Darliene, of chunkEbusiness.com. Her business acumen will be put to good use by NAAFA.

The current lineup of Board members and the responsibilities they hold are:

- Co-Chairs - Kara Brewer Allen and Carole Cullum
- Treasurer - Frances White
- Activism Chair - Marilyn Wann
- Chapter Chair - Sandy Schafer
- Web Chair - Mary Ray Worley
- PR Chair - Peggy Howell

Since the Convention, two Board members have left, Laura Wills and Carla den Hartog. We thank them for their contributions and wish them well in future endeavors.

• **Spreading the Word - What Can I Do?**

by Terri L. Weitze

NAAFA Membership Chair



Many NAAFA Members want to know what they can do to help NAAFA. One idea is to try to bring NAAFA to other parts of your life.

One way that I find fairly easy and a lot of fun is to get a "fan table" at the science fiction conventions I attend, and hand out NAAFA pamphlets, answer questions, and sell memberships to NAAFA. This past year, I also started making and selling buttons with fat-positive sayings on them! Any money I make I send to NAAFA. I really enjoy getting to talk to people about size rights and fat issues, and it feels good to get the word out. I knew going into it that the science fiction community has a good attitude about size acceptance, so this was, to me, a fairly "safe" environment.

Depending upon where you are personally, you may want to start out in an environment where you aren't likely to attract too much hostility about size acceptance. Perhaps you belong to a church organization that has holiday bazaars - you could set up a NAAFA table there.

The gay/lesbian community has pride festivals in many places, there are health fairs, and arts and crafts festivals. All of these are places where NAAFA members might go to help get the word out.

And you don't have to do it alone. NAAFA will be happy to provide the pamphlets. Have some friends join you to help staff the table, or have your table next to someone who is willing to watch the table when you can't be there (and be sure to return the favor when you are at your table and the other person needs a break).

One trick to get people to approach your table is to have a giveaway - usually a bowl of candy. I also use the time to work on my cross-stitching. Lots of people want to see what I'm working on, and it gives me something to do during the slow times.

Use your imagination on what you want to have on your table. Maybe you can sell craft items (little fat snowmen made from pom-poms, for example), display some size positive art (your own or by someone else), or download pictures from past conventions and create a scrapbook to show people the fun NAAFA members have at their events. Just be sure that you can remove these items to a safe place at the end of the day.

When you think about it, we are part of many different communities - our families, our friends, our workplace, places where we meet with others with a common interest. If that community accepts you as you are, then that is a good place to begin joining that community with the community of NAAFA.

- **Study Supports NAAFA's Position on Dieting**

The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) established their position against dieting with the publishing of a policy against weight reduction diets in 1993. "Dieting" does not refer to attempts to lower fat, sugar, salt, or cholesterol intake, increase fiber intake, exercise or pursue a medically mandated nutritional regimen prescribed for specific medical conditions. Weight-loss diets have long been promoted as a permanent cure for "obesity," although they rarely produce long-lasting or permanent results. New studies have been released which only confirm what NAAFA has asserted for so long.

A new study published in the January 4, 2005 issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine*, found little evidence that commercial weight loss programs are effective in helping people lose extra pounds. Hardly any rigorous studies of the programs have been carried out according to the researchers. Federal officials say that companies are often unwilling to conduct such studies.

Weight Watchers is the only commercial program that has published reliable data from randomized trials showing that people who participate weighed less a few months later than people who did not participate. Even Weight Watchers' results were modest, with a 5 percent weight loss after three to six months of dieting, much of it regained.

Scientists want more. They would like to see carefully controlled studies that follow program participants over several years and compare their success with that of non-participants. About a decade ago, Dr. Wadden, director of the weight and eating disorders program at the University of Pennsylvania and the lead author of the new study, Mr. Cleland, the assistant director for advertising practices at the Federal Trade Commission, and others met with commercial weight loss companies at the Federal Trade Commission to discuss getting some solid data on the effectiveness of their programs. They could not reach a satisfactory agreement on the issue of outcomes disclosure and the F.T.C. could not force companies to do the studies.

There are experts who now say that patients might want to forgo commercial diet programs altogether. The modest and temporary weight losses with commercial diet programs are not a surprise, according to Dr. Wadden, because no one knows how to elicit permanent weight loss.

NAAFA knows that people of all sizes are misled about the extent and severity of the health risks associated with being fat. We are told that being thin is the only way to good health, and that dieting makes people thin. Many health problems traditionally attributed to "obesity," such as high blood pressure, heart problems, high cholesterol, and gallbladder problems, are often caused by the dieting process itself. Studies indicate that repeated "yo-yo" dieting may actually reduce one's life span rather than increase longevity.

Currently there are very few controls or regulations to inform and protect the dieting consumer. Weight loss "success" is only vaguely defined using short-term results and weight loss "failure" is always blamed on the consumer, and health risks are not disclosed. The few regulations that do exist are rarely, or at most, loosely enforced.

NAAFA Advocates:

- That regulations be adopted that require the diet industry to publish five-year (minimum) follow-up studies and "success" rates. All such statistics must be verifiable by objective outside researchers and clearly displayed on all diet products and advertising.
- That consumer protection agencies such as Consumers Union, conduct biannual studies on the efficacy of diet products and programs.
- That individuals considering dieting study available literature on long-term results and side effects and carefully weigh the possible benefits and risks of dieting.
- That people who diet refuse to feel guilty or blame themselves for presumed lack of willpower if a diet fails.

[See the New York Times article](#)

- **Newsletter Notes**

Legacy of Lane Bryant

The great-grandsons of Lena Himmelstein Bryant, better known as Lane Bryant, have opened a plus-sized clothing store in West Nyack, New York, generating some national press notice (www.northjersey.com, headline "Inheriting the Girth", registration required.)

Size Issues Attract Media Attention

The mainstream media are paying more attention to issues of size in society lately, as evidenced by [this article](#) in the Christian Science Monitor.

