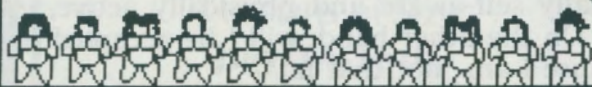


NOLOSE NEWS

**National
Organization
for
Lesbians of
Size**



**A Support, Social and
Networking Group
for women who
identify as Lesbians
and who are fat or
fat positive**



I am Fat By Heather MacCallister

Dear NOLOSE sisters,

I read with interest the letters and essays from supersize NOLOSERS in the last issue. Although I do not have that issue to reference, I offer some thoughts from this 'midsize' woman:

First: the word, the concept. The term "mid-size" is undefined. What or who is a "mid-size" person? I have been told that women my size are "mid-sized", apparently "midway" between thin and "super-size". Who draws the line, and who gets to decide? Are we talking about weight in pounds (or kilos, for our international friends)? I've heard the magic number 200 used to identify someone as "fat". But doesn't that rest on what height someone is? If I'm 200 lbs. and 6'1" tall, am I still "fat"? Conversely, if I'm 200 lbs. and 4'11", am I "supersize"? What if I constantly hear "I don't think of you as 'fat'" yet am not able to go out to lunch with that same person because the place has chairs with arms?

At the first NOLOSE conference, during our 'sharing circle', I stood up to share my story, as it were. I said that I had felt nervous about attending the conference, both as a bi woman and a so-called 'mid-size' woman. The "bisexual friendly" statement featured prominently in the NOLOSE literature helped allay some of my fears; but there was nothing but experience to counteract my concern that I would be shunned because I wasn't "fat enough". Fortunately, that did not happen. Despite the presence at the conference of someone who, in the past, has tried to make me invisible as a fat woman because I wasn't "fat enough", I experienced

moments of true solidarity with my fat sisters at the conference.

I said my piece as I stood between two other fat women who have been dear to me. They are both butch women, and they both weigh within 50 lbs. of what I do. Yet, I've never heard them say that anyone questioned their fat identity. Is it because they are butch? Does fat seem more real on a butch woman than on a femme? How ironic, considering how much more leeway a butch seems to have before she's "too fat". Furthermore, I can wear the same size pants that these two women wear, even though they weigh more than I do. It is my proportions that have caused me to experience many of the same accessibility issues as my larger sisters.

There are movie theaters that are barred to me, restaurants I cannot patronize, aisles too narrow for my bodacious hips, airline seats that cause discomfort or even pain. I have been catcalled and harassed, to the point where I don't even ride my bicycle around town anymore because I simply don't feel like working up the emotional energy needed to deal with the abuse. I was forced to diet from the age of nine until my mother's death when I was 15. I still struggle with low self-esteem, although years of working hard on loving myself despite all odds has helped tremendously. I have been rejected by potential lovers because I am fat, I have been denied jobs because I am fat, I have acted out in inappropriate and self-destructive ways because I am fat. Most of you know this litany. What I'm trying to say is that I know this litany too. I have experienced a lifetime of fat oppression, just like my larger sisters.

And this mid-sized woman has "fat issues" that many of my larger sisters don't have to face. I remember being "teased" by other fat women



because my breasts are quite "average" in size in comparison to my hips and ass. Like somehow, Mother Nature screwed up and gave me the "wrong" parts. Lord knows that's how I'm made to feel sometimes. There's nothing like having to go to two different stores to buy a bra and a pair of panties; good luck trying to get a matched set (for us femmes, this is a real conundrum)! And I have to add at least \$10 to the price of any new garment (pants, skirt, or dress) for alteration to make it fit my waist, which is 19" smaller than my hips. So maybe 240 lbs. (last time I checked, I no longer weigh myself, I find it oppressive) doesn't seem "fat" to you, but when it's collected primarily below the waist, it makes a big difference in one's quality of life.

I also wonder if people realize how much I actually weigh. Certainly folks who've seen my ID (which used to list weight), bouncers at clubs, cops, etc. have expressed surprise that I weighed "that much". I know our culture would make you believe that 200 lbs. is this 'huge' amount, when it's actually not nearly as big visually as it is for some people mentally. I'd like to think that my fat sisters would know better, but I have no reason to believe that. I feel I have to go around stating my weight so I get to be in the 'fat club'.

It has been very painful for me to experience rejection, and hear of other 'mid-size' women's rejection, in the fat community, especially the fat lesbian community. After years of inner work and outer consciousness raising, I have come to realize that my size influences me more than my sexual orientation, my socioeconomic class, possibly even my race and gender. So 'coming home' to fat community is crucially important. I don't go to support groups around being queer, for instance, and I don't feel compelled to hang out with other white folks specifically. But I have a deep-seated need to bond with other fat women, in a way and about issues that only other fat women can. Even about the 'embarrassing' things that supposedly only supersize women are concerned about (thigh chafing, personal hygiene, etc.).

This rejection is doubly painful considering the love and work I've put into creating a fat community (if not outright world takeover :). I founded the Venus Group, a social and support network for large women, in 1992. I give speeches in colleges about size acceptance, and have tried to educate co-workers and friends on a grassroots level. I've been

involved in actions criticizing the diet industry and have been interviewed several times in the media on size acceptance. But the doubts surface: am I "fat enough" to be a good spokesperson for the movement? Will I even be seen as fat enough, even by the media? Yes, I have a fat body, but I don't fit the prevailing stereotype of a "fat person": I dress beyond fashionably, setting my own trends (some of which I am forced to create because of my size and the lack of attractive, available, affordable clothing), I "don't apologize for my size", I am sexually self-aware and physically active, etc. etc. On the other hand, will I be accepted only because I am "not that fat"?

As I write this, I wonder if I should be making myself so vulnerable to you, the reader, many of whom are strangers to me. The fat community, is no different than any other community: there are mean-spirited people in our world too. But I feel it's important that you understand the struggle of a 'mid-sized' grll, so you know that I can relate to those of you who are larger than me. I am not attempting to whitewash the differences between a woman weighing 250 lbs. and one weighing 450 lbs or more. I am very aware that I have major privileges over my 'super-size' sisters, unearned and unwanted, but there nonetheless. I fully support safe space that is exclusively for 'supersize' women. On the other hand, I'm tired of referring to us in terms usually reserved for automobiles and fast-food meals.

I am registered to attend the NOLOSE conference again this year. I would be delighted to form a "mid-size" working group on an informal basis, and am open to talking with non-midsized women about these issues, in a loving, non judgmental way. I am also told there will be a panel discussion on these issues at the conference. We don't have to agree, but we MUST show support and love to one another, 'cause my sisters, there are few enough out there who will.

Peace.

Heather MacAllister
Founder, The Venus Group
Founder and Manager,
Ms. DeMeanor's Fat-Bottom Revue



National Conference for Lesbians of size

A festival for Fat Lesbians,
their friends and allies

Sponsored by the
National Organization for
Lesbians of Size

July 14-16th,

Ramada Inn, Kingston, NY

Featuring Performances by

C.C. Carter and
Nedra Johnson



Registration Info:

Call: (718) 622-7631

NoLoseLass@excite.com

Write: **NOLOSE**

245 Eighth Ave.

NY, NY 10011

image, to sex, to dealing with a fat and disability unfriendly world to butch/femme. But my fondest memories are not of the "business" of the conference, as important as that is; They are of the play.....

I don't dance. I've never been able to dance being too self-conscious as a teen to ever be comfortable moving my body in ways that would emphasize all that fat. But watching the other women dance last year made me wish I could achieve that freedom too. One woman in particular: a super-sized woman who can move with such grace, and such

I wish that I could do that, but since I can't, I can take my inspiration from those women who can move to a rhythm in such a way to weave a visual poetry.

And then there are the pool parties. I know of many friends who hadn't worn a swimsuit in years, perhaps not since childhood, and then they come to a conference like ours and rediscover the freedom and beauty of their bodies. I LOVE cleavage; mine and that of other women, and what better way to show it off than in a swimsuit? And what greater freedom than romping with other women in a medium that buoys the body and the spirit?

But perhaps the most moving moments of the conference are at the closing ceremony. By then, we have made friends, shared experiences, and saying goodbye is bitter, yet sweet, because the new friendships can and do outlast the conference. Last year, I got to meet an on-line friend I had known for three years, and spent a memorable couple of hours with her. I made two new friends as well, whom I am so looking forward to seeing again. And then there was the new girl-friend.....

We always end the conference with one particular song, and many of us always cry. The words are: "Don't let anyone ever tell you that your anything less then beautiful." And then it's time to go home. Until next year.

NOLOSE

By Diana Lee

The NOLOSE conference is coming up fast. Only about a month left, and we will again be meeting in Kingston, New York to celebrate our sisterhood and rejoice in being the big, beautiful women that we are. So I ask myself, what was it that made last year so special? And what is it that I am so looking forward to this year?

For those of you who have never been to a fat conference, I have to tell you that being surrounded by so many women who UNDERSTAND and share the experience of growing up and/or being fat is perhaps the most validating experience I've ever had. Just to feel normal when surrounded by other fat women is a wonderful feeling. But being able to see how wonderful these woman are and being part of them, made me feel wonderful as well.

There is the opportunity to learn and share at workshops that span topics from body





VIEW / REVIEW

By Miriam Berg

I have a sign on my kitchen wall. It says: Thank You for Not Talking About Your Diet. It continues: Please be considerate of other people. Please do not obsess about your weight in this area. I would like to see signs like this posted all over. It's time we all stopped treating ourselves and other people as if we were morally obliged to criticize and demean ourselves because of our body size.

Let me tell you a little about the group I work with. The Council on Size & Weight Discrimination is a not-for profit advocacy group that works to end discrimination based on body size, weight, or shape. We provide information and referral to those who are victims of weight discrimination on the job, we work with the medical and scientific communities to ensure fair and unbiased research and treatment, and we do public education to change our society's prejudiced attitudes towards larger people.

Fatphobia and weight discrimination are based on the false assumption that a person could lose weight if they would simply "use will power and stop being so self-indulgent". The scientific fact, confirmed over and over in rigorous, controlled studies, and published in peer-reviewed journals, is that there is no currently known method of weight loss that is effective and permanent.

In 1992, the National Institutes of Health convened a Technology Assessment Conference to study which weight-loss methods were most effective. They reviewed more than 1,000 research papers on dieting and came to two major conclusions. They said that although heavier people do have greater risk for health problems, there was no evidence to prove that weight loss reduces that increased risk. Their second conclusion was that there are no diets that can be considered to be effective treatment

in the long run. (NIH Technology Assessment Conference Panel, "Methods for Voluntary Weight Loss and Control," *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 116: 943-949.)

Since there is currently no known method of weight loss that is safe, effective, and permanent, it is irresponsible for doctors to tell their patients that weight is their problem, that failure to maintain a weight loss is their own fault, or that they themselves are to blame for any and all of their health problems. It is obviously time for a paradigm shift. Doctors and other health professionals should be teaching their clients how to achieve better health at their current body weight. Nutrition education should replace calorie restriction, and making physical activity part of one's lifestyle should replace exercise whose sole purpose is weight loss. And these programs need to be broad based, since they would improve everyone's health. People must not be singled out for healthy lifestyle education simply because they are larger than average.

How did our culture become so obsessed with thinness? Some say it started with the advent of the motion picture, since film makes people look heavier. Some say it was the advent of ready-to-wear clothing. Before 1900, all clothing was homemade or custom made, so differences in size were basically irrelevant. Once clothing came in standard sizes, anything outside the standard was a problem. Some say the medical community is to blame, since they have continued to stand behind the prescription of diets and diet drugs even in the face of the abysmal failure of those medical treatments. Some say it started as a backlash to feminism. As women became empowered, the male power structure insisted that women be petite, dainty, and concerned mostly with their appearance, so as not to threaten the men's position of authority. Some say the fashion industry is behind it. Some think it is the media, who even if they did not start the craze are definitely guilty of exploiting it. Oprah's battles with weight have sold millions of copies of tabloids. Women's magazines tout new diets in every issue, right alongside recipes for rich desserts.

When you look for the origin of a cultural ideal in the United States, you must always ask one simple question: Who profits? Who profits from weight obsession, chronic and yo-yo dieting, and the social stigma against larger people? There is one culprit that earns



the lion's share of the blame for our culture's hatred of fat people and glorification of thinness. And that culprit is the weight-loss industry.

As our level of weight obsession rises, so do the profits of the weight-loss industry. Diet programs, diet foods, diet soft drinks, and the highly profitable diet drug portion of the pharmaceutical industry, bilk the American public out of somewhere between 30 and 60 billion dollars each year.

They thrive on the fact that most people trying to achieve a smaller body size will become chronic or yo-yo dieters. In fact, in one ad for a weight-loss franchise for sale, potential investors were told that they could count on "guaranteed repeat business". In other words, they know their programs don't work. They vigorously promote the false notions that dieting is easy, that dieting is effective, that weight loss is permanent, that one's body size is within one's total control, and that becoming thin is the only way to be happy, healthy, attractive, popular, or successful.

American culture is protective of business and its profits. Our protest movement won't be likely to get supportive coverage from the media, because the media depends on the diet industry's advertising dollars. The Council has had some success working with regulatory agencies, but the resulting guidelines for responsible business practices were not mandatory but merely suggested. There have been some minor victories. You may have noticed on TV ads for diet programs that they now have fine print at the bottom of the screen. The image is of a woman whose "before" picture is not only fat, but also unsmiling, wearing ill-fitting clothes, and looking haggard and lifeless. After joining the weight-loss program, the same woman is shown as 50 pounds thinner, active, fashionably dressed, and surrounded by friends and admirers. If you look carefully, there are words at the bottom of the screen. They say: "Results not typical". So far, that is the extent to which the government is willing to regulate the advertising claims of weight loss companies. Results not typical. Boy is that an understatement. If these programs had to state their actual long-term results, they would be revealed as the consumer frauds they are.

It's not easy to fight a Goliath like the weight-loss industry. But we have no choice. Our health, our lives, and our well-being depend on it. We need to challenge diet programs to disclose

their rates of successful and long-term weight loss. We need to interrupt fatphobia and weight discrimination wherever and whenever we see them. We need to take action in our personal lives by getting off the diet roller coaster, and by encouraging others to stop their obsession with weight. We need to educate doctors, teachers, and the general public about the scientific facts. And we need to teach our children that they are beautiful, capable, and lovable at whatever size they happen to be.

This is an important struggle. It won't be easy. But we can do it. We are fighting for our lives, for our health, and for our well-being. In the words of the great anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Excerpted from a speech given March 4, 2000
Rally Against Fat Hatred
Northampton, MA
Website: www.cswd.org



What My Hair Has Taught Me by Amy E. Winter

Last week I shaved my head. So what, you say? Well, I found out that hair can mean more than you might think. It was a drastic change; I had long hair, halfway to my waist, and now it's half-inch hair sticking out all over my head. It's gotten me a lot of attention, but I have to tell you, other people's responses have paled next to the rush of power I got from what I thought would be simply a cosmetic change.

Since I cut my hair, I've been re-experiencing in an even stronger way the heady freedom of indifference to social (i.e., male) approval. When I first became involved with my partner almost four years ago, I remember noticing my automatic habit of smiling ingratiatingly at men on the street, in the halls at work, in the grocery store. I finally noticed because I didn't have to smile anymore; I realized I was no longer hoping that the next



man I passed might be THE ONE who would see beyond my fat and love me for who I am. I stopped smiling. I started walking stronger, letting my whole foot strike the ground with my whole body weight behind it on each step. It was fascinating and empowering to watch the reactions of men who used to walk by me without a glance.

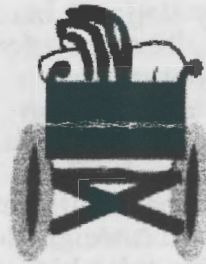
My long hair was camouflage; it was drag. It was a palliative for the feeling that my body was wrong, too big, too clumsy, not female enough. My long hair, I thought, helped me look attractive, despite my weight. People would like me better, I thought, because my hair would let them know I cared about looking good, looking feminine, looking socially appropriate. I needed long hair, I thought, to balance my too-large body and my too-small head.

Since I cut my hair, I walk strong and I smile whenever I feel like it. When I see my shadow or my reflection in a window, I see a round head that's not too small for the round body it rides on. I've taken back the job of defining what is attractive and deciding whether or not I need to look 'feminine.'

I found a picture of myself taken ten years ago, when I weighed about 200 pounds. Looking now at myself then, I realize with some shock that I looked fine; I looked pretty much like everyone else, maybe a little bigger around the middle, but certainly well within the normal range. I thought about how I felt at that time; conditioned by endless slurs from my family and schoolmates, I hated myself, believed myself hideous, and was continually astonished when I received positive attention from anyone about anything.

Now, I weigh about 400 pounds. I would love to look like I did in that photo, but I'm learning that my subjective beliefs about my body from the inside and objective opinions about my body from the outside can be completely different and unrelated. My level of self-confidence can be completely unrelated to how I actually look. That 200-pound twenty-year-old would NEVER have shaved her head. Her hair was the one feature that redeemed her to herself. If I can feel light-years better about myself now that I weigh twice as much and have no hair, maybe I can begin to understand that fat is just fat, hair is just hair, a body is just a body, food is just food. None of them are love or liberty or oppression or happiness or obsession or redemption.

My long hair used to say, Don't worry, I'm not threatening. Even though I'm fat and I talk tough about feminism, there's no need to be afraid. I'd really prefer to be just like you. Now, my hair says, Wrong. I don't believe what you believe; in fact, I advocate its radical transformation. I am fat; I don't feel the need to conform to any standard of beauty. I love myself and I love women, and I'm not hiding any more. I am a threat to this culture's most treasured conventions. Be very afraid.



SHAPING OUR SITUATION

by Alison Dubois

Our community has always been one of refuge, change and diversity. Over the years we have adopted others into our fold that we originally rejected, such as transgendered persons, bisexuals and even those in politically sensitive areas like Christian lesbians. Our ability to change and continue to evolve is perhaps one of our greatest gifts to each other as a community. But like all groups, our good intentions sometimes go askew with the end result being some people get overlooked along the way. Specifically, I am talking about the disabled fat lesbians within our community. While fat is not a new issue and neither is able-bodiedness, the combination together is still a quagmire within our group. It seems that many lesbians either want to clump us into one or the other of the categories, which of course does not work. Anymore than it would work putting a Native American disabled dyke in with just Native Americans while overlooking her disability that's every bit as much a part of her as her heritage.

For me the situation has an additional twist, because in addition to my physical struggles and size issues, I am also going with a woman who is height/weight proportionate and isn't disabled. It has been a challenge at times, especially initially, adjusting to my limitations, our respective feelings on it, feelings about fat (weight and the whole montage of issues that go along with it) her size, able-bodiedness and how



M 001 111 664

friends/the community receive us, and how we respond to their reception has been a mixed bag within the community. Some women of varying sizes (including h/w proportionate) have been accepting, positive, etc., etc. While others have been completely negative, unaccepting, etc. We get the "looks" from thinner women who look at me with a range of emotions from disapproval to disdain. Some of them treat my partner with pity that she has to deal with that or with praise, as if she were a saint to do so. My sweetie is not a saint; she is however a wonderful woman who loves me and has come to this place after years of interpersonal struggles, to accept me and my limitations unconditionally. Besides the obvious ambiguity within the community, I get PO'ed with women who treat me as if I should feel lucky to have someone like her. I do feel lucky that she loves me but not because I am a large, physically challenged dyke but rather that we have found each other in a world that is not kind to lesbians in the first place and certainly doesn't make it easy for two women to live and love each other in a committed relationship in general. The thing is, why should my woman be perceived as being so wonderful just because she accepts my physical state of being? Why is it so hard for so many to acknowledge that in spite of any physical/size limitations I may have, I am a good catch too? It reinforces the prejudice that just because of my size and physical challenges, I am less attractive, desirable, and ultimately less valuable

By continuing to endorse negative stereotypes we perpetuate the very system that has restricted and oppressed women for centuries. As a community the ultimate goal should be one of acceptance, the very preponderance behind the Hate Is Not A Family Value campaign for basic civil rights. Until we all have rights and acceptance, we will remain a community divided.

It is my profound hope that someday words like "fat", "large", and "heavy", will only be used to describe a shape instead of being a verbal weapon used to proliferate negative associations. It is equally my hope that someday I won't get those looks within our community, but will see couples of colors, sizes and degrees of ablebodiedness thriving harmoniously together. After all, haven't we been subjected to enough negative associations already by just being who we are? I think so. How about you?



Tales from the Crip

by Mary Frances Platt

CELEBRATION OF LIFE (a fat crip's affirmation/prayer)

The taunts used to ridicule roll off my tongue in celebration.

Fat. Crippled. Queer.

I scoot up and take my place at the table of life.
All creatures great and small. I, the fattest person in this room, the fattest person in the Pioneer Valley, perhaps the fattest in the state, the country, the world.

I am the reflection of life, of bounty, of difference, of loving, of desire, of wisdom.

I am beautiful, intelligent, independent and whole.

Smart as a coyote and sexy as your wildest dream.

Fat. Crippled. Queer.

This land is my land too. This planet my home. I live alongside ants and elephants, winged ones and whales, skinny folks fat folks and everything in between.

It is after all largeness that sustains us. There is room at the table for all colors, ages, abilities, ethnicities, religions and sizes. We are a diverse creation, each our own unique and individual celebration of life.

Fat Women's images adapted from
Clip Art by Susan Mason



Thanks to all the Vendors and Sponsors of the NOLOSE 1999 Conference!

Our Sponsors:

In Full Swing
5937 College Ave
Oakland, CA 94618

Spinsters Ink
32 E. First St. #330
Duluth, MN 55802
(218) 727-3222

Good Vibrations
938 Howard Street
#101
San Francisco, CA 94110
1-800-BUY-VIBE

Sumiche Jewelry
PO Box 428
Waltherville, OR 97489
(514) 896-9841
www.efn.org/sumiche

Our Vendors:

Amplestuff
PO Box 116
Bearsville, NY 12409
(914) 679-3316

K'haria rai Zen
PO Box 41836
Philadelphia, PA 19101
Babygrll@netaxs.com

Artist in the Attic
/Fat Ass Pants
3405 White Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21214
Shirrah@aol.com

Myles Ahead
6652 NW 57 St.
Tamarac, FL 33319
(954) 393-9873

Big Daddy Boxers
Bigboxers@hotmail.com

Terra Nova
PO Box 4265
Highland Park, NJ 08904
(732) 393-9873

Thunder Road Book
Club
PO Box 1203
Secaucus, NJ 07096
(201) 863-3931

**There is still time to register for the
National Conference for Lesbians of Size!!!
See the Ad on page 3 for information.**

Memberships

Membership dues are \$20 annually.
*Limited scholarships and work exchange
available.*

Send your checks payable to NOLOSE to:
**NOLOSE
245 Eighth Ave. PMB #107
New York, NY 10011**

You can contact NOLOSE by writing to the
above address or:

**E-mail: NOLOSE@aol.com
Phone: (201) 843-4629
Website: www.NOLOSE.org**

If you cannot afford to join NOLOSE at this time,
even a small donation would be appreciated. If
you join within 6 months of giving us your
donation, we will deduct your donation amount
from your membership fee!!

National Directory of Local Support Groups

This is a partial listing of fat support groups that
are either lesbian or lesbian friendly. This list
includes names of women who want to start
groups in their own area as well. You should
contact them if you are interested in helping to
start a group or join in a new group.

If you want help starting a support group,
please contact us and we will help in any way
that we can. If you have a support group that is
not listed here, please notify us so that we can
include them in our next listing.

**South Georgia/
North Florida**
Melissa S.
(850) 875-6187
Thatfatgirl@aol.com

New York, New York
Fat is a Lesbian
Issue/FLAB
c/o NOLOSE
(201) 843-4629

Southeastern Michigan
The Venus Group
234 Goodison Hall
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

**Philadelphia, PA &
South/Central New
Jersey**
Full Bloom Women
c/o Louis Rubalow
1 Tasley Ct.
Marlton, NJ 08053

San Francisco, CA
WOW
(Women of Width)
Joyce Wermont
Jwermont@sonic.net

Washington DC
Cynthia Newcomer
207 Lincoln Ave.
Takoma Park,
MD 20912
cjnewc@igc.org

Seattle, Washington
SeaFATtle
10026 51st Ave. SW
Seattle, WA 98146
www.wolfnet.com/
~marymc/seafattle.htm