

## WIDELY PUBLICIZED TV DOCUMENTARY TREATS SUBJECT OF OBESITY

A recent show on NBC television, aired June 3rd, attempted to show a comprehensive view of weight control and being fat in America. Seen by millions, in part due to considerable advance publicity to attract viewers, the show had been in production for weeks. Although NAAFA was not mentioned on the show, the Publicity Committee did provide some leads and advice for the show's producers, which did affect the content of the actual show that was broadcast.

The show, named "Life in the Fat Lane" could well have credited the bulletin of the Los Angeles chapter, which had used the same title for years, and which may well have been seen by the show's producers. However, such credits were not forthcoming, and NAAFANS who had been involved in the broadcast had to content themselves with the educational material it presented.

Opinions on the broadcast were mixed. One non-NAAFAN, who was previously unaware of much information provided by the program, told us that he felt more content about his size after viewing the show. His main focus was on the genetic component of obesity; his weight had been high but stable for many years.

Some of the more graphic scenes on the show included surgical procedures filmed in the operating room. Both the gastric bubble implant and fat suctioning were shown being performed on actual patients.

Less graphic, but certainly as memorable, was Dr. Herbert's cat. Dr. Victor Herbert of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York enrolled his cat in a "diploma mill", a "school" offering diplomas by mail in return for a fee. His cat is now a "certified" nutritionist! Dr. Herbert said that most diet books and commercial weight loss programs are fraudulent.

The show also featured Nell Carter, Dom DeLuise, and Oprah Winfrey as well as Dr. William Bennett, and Dr. Albert J. Stunkard.

## COMMENTARY

### TWO-WAY TRAFFIC "Life in the Fat Lane" - A Review

by Karl J. Niedershuh

Science and society are at war over the nature of fat. From a scientific standpoint, we now know that fat is not simply a storage barn for excess food, but a vital, active tissue with important metabolic functions - a "fatty organ", as some have called it. We have excellent evidence that the amount of fat your body carries is largely determined by your genes, and that trying to overcome that inheritance by dieting only manages to make your body more possessive of its fat stores. At the same time, our society sees fat people as lazy, unrepentant gluttons, unworthy of even the most common of courtesies. The more difficult and dangerous dieting appears to be, the more fascinating and alluring it becomes; the less we are able to achieve slenderness, the more desperately we seem to want it.

Unfortunately, we cannot breed doctors and scientists in hothouses like prize begonias, to keep them from assimilating our cultural value judgements. Scientists are not immune to prejudice, and once established, a prejudice can rarely be eliminated by science alone. And so we've seen the development of a kind of scientific schizophrenia in the study of obesity. It's true, the doctors tell us, fat cells are forever, and there's nothing you can do to change them. Now here's my latest diet...

That double vision was much in evidence in the NBC News special "Life in the Fat Lane" hosted by Connie Chung on June 3rd. On the one hand, the program presented compelling evidence that the amount of food we eat has very little to do with what we weigh. Yet at the same time, time and time again, it insisted that fat people can lose weight by learning to eat less. One segment discussed the body's "set-point", while another claimed that minor changes in eating behavior--leaving the ketchup off your hamburgers--could result in the loss of a pound a year (a double blow to the Heinz Corporation, which also owns Weight Watchers International). The program's editors seemed unaware

that set-point theory was devised to explain why that doesn't happen: the body nearly always manages to compensate for those dietary changes and maintain its preferred weight.

"Life in the Fat Lane" gave the problem of fat discrimination impressive coverage, and decried the fact that fat people are routinely denied education and employment opportunities. Sadly, that message was undercut by the frequent use of stereotypical images of fat people, brought in to reinforce the producers' view that the subject of fat is both serious and funny. Sadly, too, the program lacked one former NBC reporter who is something of an expert on fat liberation. It was only last year that Linda Ellerbee left NBC News after her weight became an issue with management. ("One executive told me I would never anchor another broadcast at NBC until I lost enough weight to suit him," she told Newsweek. "I wasn't even allowed to do a 42-second update.") Ellerbee might have brought more genuine empathy for fat people to this report, and her talent for diagnosing "doublethink" was sorely missed.

As it stands, "Life in the Fat Lane" is not without its outstanding moments. Nell Carter puts in a splendid appearance, and Chung elicits some touching, frightening, and brutally candid comments from several fat and anorexic teenagers. Few other scenes survive the program's fidgety editing, which often made me feel that I was watching previews of a much longer program--or perhaps two different programs, as "Fat Lane" never really decides if it wants to be "60 Minutes" or "Entertainment Tonight". That indigestible blend of fact and fluff may well have been the worst of the program's many confusions, for its style may have obscured its substance, leaving the average American with the feeling that he had just watched another hour of fat jokes on NBC. ★

## NCAHF SETS WEIGHT-LOSS PROMOTION GUIDELINES

The National Council Against Health Fraud, a non-profit organization whose motto is "*Enhancing Freedom of Choice Through Reliable Information*" has published a set of guidelines for evaluating commercial weight loss promotions. The 11 points were adopted by NCAHF on February 6, 1987. Their statement reads as follows:

NCAHF disparages commercial weight loss or control programs which:

1. Promise or imply dramatic, rapid weight loss (i.e. substantially more than one percent of total body weight per week.)
2. Promote diets that are extremely low in Calories (i.e. below 800 Calories per day; 1200 Calories per day diets are preferred) unless under the supervision of competent medical experts.

3. Attempt to make claims dependent upon special products rather than teaching how to make good choices from the conventional food supply (this does not condemn the marketing of low-calorie convenience foods which may be chosen by consumers).

4. Do not encourage permanent, realistic lifestyle changes including regular exercise and the behavioral aspects of eating wherein food may be used as a coping device (i.e. programs should focus upon changing the CAUSES of overweight rather than simply the EFFECTS, which is the overweight itself.)

5. Misrepresent salespeople as "counselors" supposedly qualified to give guidance in nutrition and/or general health. Even if adequately trained, such "counselors" would still be objectionable because of the obvious conflict-of-interest that exists when providers profit directly from products they recommend and sell.

6. Require large sums of money at the start or require that clients sign contracts for expensive, long-term programs. Such practices too often have been abused as salespeople focus attention upon signing up new people rather than delivering continuing, satisfactory service to consumers. Programs should be on a pay-as-you-go basis.

7. Fail to inform clients about the risks associated with weight loss in general, or the specific program being promoted.

8. Promote unproven or spurious weight loss aids such as human chorionic gonadotrophin hormone (HCG), starch blockers, diuretics, sauna belts, body wraps, passive exercise, ear stapling, acupuncture, Electric Muscle Stimulating (EMS) devices, spirulina, amino acid supplements (e.g., arginine, ornithine), glucomannan, and so forth.

9. Claim that "cellulite" exists in the body.

10. Claim that use of an appetite suppressant or methylcellulose (a "bulking agent") enables a person to lose body fat without restricting accustomed calorie intake.

11. Claim that a weight-control product contains a unique ingredient or component unless it is unavailable in other weight-control products.

These guidelines were published in the March/April 1987 issue of the NCAHF Newsletter.

## COMMENTARY

These guidelines, of course, have been developed to help the dieting consumer avoid fraudulent programs and products. It is hard not to evaluate the many popular diets and find them lacking. But as long as these scams offer hope to their fat victims, the operators will continue to flourish! Hopefully, information such as the above will help educate those who are not so desperate that they ignore the evidence...

We would like to add one more guideline to this list. Perhaps we should call it the Russell Williams guideline--Russell, the Co-Chair of NAAFA's Activism Committee, has been making this point for years:

12. Avoid all diet products and programs that do not offer a money back guarantee if weight is regained within five years.

We find it amazing that diet promoters are always quite willing to take credit for a dieter's success, but when lost weight is regained, or when the dieter fails to lose, the failure is always blamed on the dieter. Perhaps we shouldn't be too amazed--after all, that's how many successful scams and hustles work! ✱

## COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS ANNOUNCED

Four new committee chairpersons were approved at recent Board meetings.

**Robert Hartenstine** (NY) was approved as the Chair of the new **Area Facilitator Committee**. He is a student majoring in history and is currently the Chairperson of the Long Island Chapter. The Area Facilitators Committee was formed to manage a network of NAAFA members who will be trained to represent NAAFA in their home areas--areas where there is currently no local chapter. It is hoped that area facilitators will be able to offer support and information to potential members, and that their activities might spur the development of more local chapters. The new Chairperson will be contacting the many NAAFAs who have expressed an interest in this program.

**Kimm Bonner** (NJ) was approved as the Chairperson of the **Fashion Committee**. Ms. Bonner has worked in the fashion field for many years--as a store manager, a buyer and a public relations representative for large-size clothing stores. Her future goals for the Fashion Committee include beauty and fashion seminars, a computerized clothing exchange, regional resource directories and large-size/ super-size lobbying with manufacturers.

**Victoria Reed, R.N.** (CT) was appointed to head NAAFA's **Health Committee**. Ms. Reed is currently employed as a charge nurse in the surgery department of a hospital in Connecticut. Also appointed to the Health Committee was **Noelle Sewell** (PA) who brings to the committee her expertise as a certified aerobics and exercise instructor. The Health Committee answers health and fitness related inquiries and correspondence, and along with NAAFA's Advisory Board, makes recommendations on health matters.

**Susan Tenzer, M.A., CCMHC** (PA) was appointed to head NAAFA's **Name Change Committee**. That newly-created committee has been asked to consider all the articles and letters about the possibility of changing the name of the Association, and to come up with a recommendation to the Board. Ms. Tenzer is a trained therapist who operates the Center for Personal Development in Allentown, Pa. Other NAAFAs were also appointed to sit on the committee, which will disband after its report is given. ✱

## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR...

by Nancy Summer

### A BRAND NEW LOOK

In the last year our Newsletter has received many compliments from members, supporters, and professionals in the field of publishing. We've received praise on our content and writing--and why not? NAAFA's message is certainly an interesting one, and we have been very fortunate that many skilled writers have donated their work.

The only criticism that we have heard on a regular basis has been about our overall appearance. A number of professionals have commented that our publication would look better--more professional--and would be easier to read, if we had a two or three column format.

Six months ago I had the chance to try a new computer "desk-top publishing" system. The minute I saw it, I visualized our Newsletter with columns, and crisp laser-printed type. I knew NAAFA could not afford the system, but I kept the image in my mind. I don't know if it was the positive thinking--or the fact that my husband and I decided that we just had to have one for our own business--but now we are able to produce the Newsletter in this new format.

We are also pleased to have a new masthead designed by Jim Brown (NJ). It incorporates NAAFA's new logo, which was also designed by Jim, and approved by the Board a few months ago. The new logo combines the flavor of NAAFA's old logo with a modern, professional look. You'll be seeing the new logo on NAAFA literature, stationary, etc, as supplies run out and are reprinted. (Approval of this new logo, by the way, had nothing to do with the proposals currently being considered by NAAFA's Name Change Committee. A new name for NAAFA may or may not require a change in our initials!)

Will this be the final look of the Newsletter? Probably not. The new computer system offers so many possibilities that we will be experimenting for some time to come. In the meantime, we'd love to hear your comments. Compare the look of this June issue to your May issue and tell us what you think. We're always open to constructive suggestions. ✱

# THE LATE GREAT LADIES OF BLUES AND JAZZ

A review by Harry Gossett

Six stars (count 'em) - ample adipose - big, unique voices - tons of showmanship - all on one stage! Five famous jazz singers and the greatest gospel singer of all time take turns driving the audience into a frenzy.

I just saw THE LATE GREAT LADIES OF BLUES AND JAZZ. I still find it hard to believe they were all recreated by one woman-- an award winning performer in her own right--Ms. Sandra Reaves-Phillips.

The chunky child of a share cropper, now an international singing sensation, Reaves-Phillips opens the show with two of her own compositions. She used to be self-conscious about her fat. Now when she belts out "Take Me as I Am", nobody refuses her offer.

Reaves-Phillips takes us back to the twenties and introduces us to Ma Rainey. She sings "C.C. Rider", which Ma Rainey wrote over 60 years ago. It is still regularly recorded today.

Next, we meet Bessie Smith, teaching us about human nature in five poignant numbers, the last of which is the memorable "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out".

After four moving numbers by Ethel Waters (she sings, "Shake That Thing", and does), we are totally worn out watching Reaves-Phillips work. Mercifully, she gives us a break.

Act II starts with the creation of Billie Holiday, in a staggering stupor, singing "God Bless the Child". If you've heard a recording of her singing it, you'll really appreciate the accuracy of Reaves-Phillips' rendition.

"What a Difference A Day Makes", ends Dinah Washington's set, and the bulk of the show featuring naughty ladies.

Before we leave, we must focus on purer thoughts, so Mahalia Jackson leads a revival meeting. And revived we are indeed.

THE LATE GREAT LADIES OF BLUES AND JAZZ knocked us dead in the nation's capital. The only complaint among the rave reviews was that each star portrayed deserves a show of her own, as does Ms. Reaves-Phillips. On June 16th, Reaves-Phillips' show opened in New York.

You may recognize Sandra Reaves-Phillips. Before she landed a riveting role in the Tony Award-winning

Broadway show "Raisin", she played off-Broadway in many productions. She has entertained in night spots across the country and has been in many movies and television shows including "Round Midnight", "Death Wish", "Harry and Tonto", "Marathon Man", "Serpico", and "Another World".

If you're lucky enough to be in the same town as one of her performances, don't miss it. She's a big lady, with a very big talent. ✨

## OBITUARY

**ROBERT M. WILLIAMS**, a long time NAAFA member passed away on April 16, 1987 at the age of 55. He was born, lived, and died in Rule, Texas.

Rob lived in a body bent and crippled by arthritis and was in constant pain. He never married, never had children to carry on his name--but he will live on in the memory and hearts of all who knew him. He was the best friend I ever had. He cared for others and was always quick to offer a word of cheer, encouragement, and help to his friends. All he ever wanted was for someone to accept and love him the way he was.

We will miss you Rob, and mourn your passing. Our loss is heaven's gain.

--Darlene Hazelwood (TX) ✨

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