

BEACH BUZZ

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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

Nudist Youth Camps: A Wedge Issue

By Michael Kush

This issue of the Beach Buzz is largely devoted to the controversy over the AANR Youth Leadership Camps for naturist youth, and its larger repercussions. Some naturists and skinny-dippers have wondered if this really is a significant issue for our concern. Those who don't intend to send their kids to such a camp often presume a law against a nudist camp for kids won't affect their right to bring their own kids to a nudist resort or a naturist beach. Others whose kids have grown and left the nest sometimes aren't even concerned if children were to be banned from participation in all naturist activities. After all, this won't affect their right to visit a nudist resort or naturist beach, will it? Those making these assumptions fail to recognize how this issue can be used as a wedge to bring naturism into disrepute and to broaden the legislative attack on nude recreation. They also are perhaps unaware of how difficult it is to influence the wording and scope of legislation if naturists do not maintain strong public relations and lobbying efforts.

For while most of the critics paid lip service to the right of individuals to practice naturism, and of naturist parents to raise their children according to their own values, they simultaneously implied that the Youth Leadership Camp posed a special risk – even though the Florida Youth Leadership Camp has operated for twelve years without incident, and the alleged risk has not been substantiated. American parents are free to raise their kids as fundamentalist Christians, Muslims, or agnostics. They sometimes encourage their kids to participate in sports with some proven statistical risk of personal injury and even death, or,

conversely, sometimes don't provide proper nutrition or encourage enough physical activity to maintain good health. Unfortunately, some American parents provide inadequate moral guidance and supervision for their children, turning a blind eye to drug use and anti-social behavior. The state certainly has an interest in protecting children where a substantial risk has been proven. Yet there is no proof that nudist children's participation in a structured and supervised nudist Youth Leadership Camp warrants a blanket ban by the state. The frequent reports of abuse at kid's camps and activities where social nudity is NOT practiced shows that we shouldn't turn a blind eye to this concern, but it is un-American to condemn any group for the actions of a few individuals acting contrary to the intent of that group. If the state wants to make rules and regulations for kid's camps, make them universal for ALL camps and supervised kid's activities. Investigations of camps and camp leaders are appropriate at ALL camps, where a report of abuse has been received. This is essentially the naturist position; unfortunately, it is still poorly understood by the public.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

It was clear at the outset of this controversy that many Americans assumed that a naturist environment was a potentially dangerous one for children. Unfortunately, gone are the idyllic visions of innocent skinny-dipping portrayed by Mark Twain and Norman Rockwell, replaced by nightmares of rampant pedophilia. (See "Topless 3 Year Old" article on page 15.) This is hardly surprising in a culture that is steeped in pornography and is often obsessed with sex. Americans are constantly bombarded

with the intentional sexual titillation of the media – something that is largely absent in naturist environments. This doesn't mean that naturists are asexual beings, simply that they can differentiate between mere nudity and sexual provocation (for which nudity is neither a necessary nor sufficient pre-requisite). Having no knowledge of naturism except for sensational presentations in the media and misrepresentations by those opposed to nudity on sectarian religious or other personal grounds, many Americans don't understand that naturism is a non-sexual activity, and so naturists prove an easy target for politicians seeking a so-called "family-values" issue.

America is today a nation of fear and alienation: fear of outsiders, and alienation from our neighbors. Is that guy who just bought the house down the street who said hello to my daughter yesterday a possible pedophile? Is the new tenant with the middle-east look a possible terrorist? "What's with this woman with the head scarf or sari", says the third-generation American, forgetting the "outlandish" dress of his immigrant grandmother in the treasured family photo. It's good to be alert and aware, but we needn't be paranoid about different cultures we don't understand, and haven't taken the time to learn about. Organized naturism, just as a church, social club, or cultural group, can foster a sense of community and encourage social and moral standards within the group. Naturism opposes, and seeks to prevent, sexual predation and child abuse. It believes that the acceptance of the body as neutral and natural, rather than encouraging promiscuity, pornography and abuse, acts as a tonic to promote a healthy and normal psychological adjustment. A day at a naturist beach or nudist resort is usually



enough to convince the skeptical, but unfortunately most have not had the opportunity to experience this. Therefore, it's important that we as naturists assure this message gets presented to the public.

B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation, in alliance with like-minded naturist organizations, is firmly committed to advancing the public understanding and acceptance of naturism through the truthful and unbiased presentation of the facts in appropriate public forums.

THE LEGISLATURE

Maybe we could live with a law that just forbids kids being at nudist venues without their parents. Never mind that this is an intrusion of the state upon parents' rights where no substantive documentation of harm has been presented. Never mind that this calls into question the most fundamental presumptions of naturism. But will it really stop there?

A law against nudist youth camps is another step linking naturism in the public mind with "adult" entertainment. It calls into question the propriety of naturism, and can be a significant step toward further, more restrictive legislation in a future session. Also, once any anti-nudity bill is introduced, we can never know in advance how it may be altered prior to passage. A bill against children being at nudist venues without their parents may be modified to become a ban on all child nudity: No family nudist resorts as we know them today. Forget that nude photo of baby on the bearskin rug; the discount store photo police will likely turn you in

if you try to have the film developed. Certainly, a public naturist beach would be a virtually impossibility, if one had to restrict the presence of kids. Or, the legislators might decide to just ban all nudity: Bathing suit police with tape measures and calipers at our beaches. No backyard nude swims in your pool, for fear of being turned in by the neighbors. Increased pressure to regulate nudist

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resorts out of existence. Would we then be safer from sexual perverts, and our children safer from pedophiles? We don't think so.

Naturists in Florida should realize how hard SFFB and other naturist organizations have fought since 1994 to prevent changes to Florida statute 800.03, which addresses nudity with lewd behavior. Currently, the courts have consistently ruled that under this statute nudity is not illegal unless accompanied by lewdness. Under FS 800.04, which addresses lewd and lascivious acts performed upon or in the presence of minors, the current wording does not make non-sexual nudity an offense. It

would require only minor changes in the wording of either statute to make the current legal precedents moot, and to criminalize skinny-dipping and naturism in Florida. To preserve your rights, South Florida Free Beaches/Florida Naturist Association, in cooperation with other politically active naturist organizations, stands ready to intensive our efforts to monitor bills and lobby our state legislators through the end of the next legislative session.

We simply don't believe the answer to the problem of sexual predation and child abuse is a retreat to Victorian standards. This didn't solve the problem back then, and it won't solve it now. These are crimes of violence. These are crimes that our culture of sexual perversion and social alienation promotes. Americans are often reluctant to report such crimes, because of the stigma that unfortunately often attaches to the victims of sexual crimes in our society. This is simply wrong. Victims need to be able to step forward without fear of shame, and we need a major social adjustment that recognizes this as a fundamental necessary step in addressing this issue. Whether you believe that sexual perverts should be put in prison, or in mental institutions — whether you believe they can be rehabilitated, or not — we need to attack this problem by protecting law-abiding citizens from the criminals, not by criminalizing naturist families. Rather than allowing us unfairly to be perceived as part of the problem, responsible and socially conscious naturists stand ready to be part of the real and effective solution. ✨

YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP CONTROVERSY TIMELINE

Mid-June, 2003

Approximately two-dozen naturist youth attend AANR's Youth Leadership Camp, held this year at Lake Como Family Nudist Resort. *(For a detailed story on the camp, go to www.weeklyplanet.com/2003-07-03/cover.html, or read the article by Kyle Hofmann, a camp participant, on page 14 of the Beach Buzz.)*

June 18, 2003

New York Times article on Youth Leadership Camp appears.

June 18, 2003

U.S. Rep. Foley (R-FL) writes letter of complaint to Gov. Bush and Attorney General Crist calling for investigation and suggesting changes in Florida statutes; compares Camp to "child pornography". *(Read letter on page 4.)*

June 20, 2003

Shirley Mason, Executive Director of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation invites Rep. Foley to meet with representatives of naturist organizations.

June 27, 2003

Gov. Bush's office responds to Rep. Foley saying the Camp is legal under state law if no lewd activities are taking place. *(Read letter on page 5.)*

July 1, 2003

Florida State Representative John Quinones (Kissimmee) announces he will introduce legislation to address this issue.

July 2, 2003

Joe Glover of Family Policy Network attacks Youth Leadership Camp held at White Tail Park in Virginia; describes Camp as "stripping minors naked and throwing them together in some sort of private party".

July 7, 2003

Representatives of B.E.A.C.H.E.S., Central Florida Naturists, Naturist Christians, South Florida Free Beaches/Florida Naturist Association, Sunsport Gardens Resort, and The Naturist Society/Naturist Action Committee meet with Rep. Foley and hold media conference. *(Story on page 13.)*

July 10, 2003

Hearing in Texas House of Representative on Rep. Hughes' HB 50 to ban nudist camps for children. *(Story on page 3.)*

July 12, 2003

Rep. Foley moderates language attacking Youth Leadership Camp on his website, as promised at July 7 meeting.

July 31, 2003

Shirley Mason, Paul LeValley, Kyle & Marion Hofmann present the naturist position before the Capital Tiger Bay Club in Tallahassee. *(Story on page 16.)*

August 28, 2003

Shirley Mason, Marion Hofmann, and her grandchildren Kyle and Justine with other camp youth, their parents and a nudist resort owner present the naturist position at taping of The John Walsh Show. Show aired September 9, 2003. *(Story on page 16.)*

September, 2003 to February, 2004

Florida Pre-Legislative Session work begins. Special interest groups lobby state legislators; legislators prepare and seek co-sponsors for bills for introduction in the 2004 Session.

NOW to end of Florida Legislative Session in May 2004

Naturist leaders plan to continue public relations and lobbying campaigns to increase public understanding of this issue and to prevent the consideration or introduction of anti-nudity legislation adversely affecting the practice of naturism. *(Campaign contribution form on page 2.)*

March 2, 2004

Florida Legislature convenes for 2004 Regular Session. Updates on legal and legislative issues at www.sffb.com/lawthreats.html.