

# BEACH BUZZ

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“Keeping Our Beaches Bare”

## The Fetishized Breast

By Korina R. Jochim

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Several years ago a case in New York caught my attention. *People v. Santorelli* involved a group of women who took off their shirts in the park on a hot day and bared their breasts. They were cited for public nudity and took their case all the way to the New York State Supreme Court. New York State had denied women the right to bare their breasts in public. Around that time there was also a march across the Buffalo Bridge in Buffalo. New York, with thousands of women marching topless to protest the ticketing of those women in the park.

As a feminist the case inspired me, but I didn't know at the time how closely an incident in my own life would match that of the women in New York. I've been going to Summerland Beach for almost as many years as I have lived in Santa Barbara, and before that I went to the Cove in San Simeon, near the area where I grew up. When I studied in Europe for a year in college. I went to many beaches where the sunbathers were not completely nude, but the women who were topless were as common as those who wear a top here. In many countries, being topless garners no special attention.

Contrary to popular opinion regarding nudists, I never went to these beaches to exhibit my body, but rather, because I was comfortable in my own skin and I don't find the naked body, stretched out to enjoy the sun, lewd or even sexual. It is a simple human pleasure, as uncomplicated as enjoying a warm bath, a long walk, or delicious food. At a nude beach, the field is somehow leveled. How close your body resembles the narrow cultural standards

for beauty is irrelevant there; it is an accepting community that looks out for each other.

It also is a community that is rapidly disintegrating due to law enforcement crackdowns in Santa Barbara County. Nudists are being ticketed and heavily fined right and left, while the perpetrators of sexual violence are unapprehended.

Criminalizing the nudist community is to the detriment, I believe, of women's safety on the beach and reinforces puritanical cultural attitudes that declare women's breasts as lewd, sexual, and inappropriate.

I received a ticket for public nudity and am now facing a court date or a fine. I received the citation on Saturday, April 22, while at Summerland Beach with a female friend. Around 3:30 p.m. that afternoon, we spotted two men, fully clothed, walking toward us. We were on the far right of the beach, and their course was from the far left. Bypassing several completely unclothed males, they walked directly up to us – we were topless – showed us their badges and said they were citing us for public nudity. While we were cooperative with them, I asked the officers to specify on my ticket that I was topless, not fully nude. They informed us that if our areola had been covered, they would not have ticketed us.

A helicopter roared over the cliffs, a surreal experience as there were less than 20 people on the beach and no one was acting violently. I was told my ticket would cost around \$70, and that I could go to court if I wished. The officer writing my ticket was cordial and agreed with me that he thought the laws were discriminatory against women.

When I asked why they were ticketing, the officers replied that they had received complaints of lewd conduct on the other side of the beach. I replied that I had

never witnessed this behavior myself in six years of going to this beach. Additionally, the police said that a woman had been attacked at More Mesa beach a couple weeks earlier, indicating that their actions were helping to protect women.

Familiar with the case, I told them that the woman was a jogger, not a nudist, and that the attack had more to do with the remote location of More Mesa than the presence of nudists (no doubt the attack would not have occurred were there people – clothed or nude – on the beach). At Summerland, when I have been bothered by someone, I have simply notified anyone else on the beach and they have assisted me. I always feel supported and protected there.

Besides my annoyance at having to pay such a stiff fine, this incident provoked and upset me for a couple reasons. I felt that I was being directly discriminated against as a woman. Why were men's nipples acceptable and mine considered lewd? Why do breasts have a sexual charge? Why are women's breasts, which exist on our bodies not to give pleasure to men but to nurse our children, barred from the eyes of society? I recognize that women are the sexual objects of our culture, and you have to look no further than billboards, movies, or magazines to see that.

And why should I cave in to such biases and stop an activity I enjoy (while at the same time being aware of my surroundings and paying attention to safety)? Even if it is against a county law, as it now stands, aren't we encouraged as American citizens to resist laws that we feel are unjust, that violate our Constitutional Rights, in this case, those guaranteed in the 14th Amendment? Isn't it our responsibility to change cultural attitudes if they are hurting us and limiting our activities? And I wonder how



many taxpayer dollars were spent operating that helicopter, as if we were violent criminals rather than peaceful nudists. If each ticket is approximately \$70, and I believe they cited some 15 nudists that day, the revenue generated from us forking over that money would be about \$1,050. Does the county really think that such an expenditure is justified, and that taking the money of otherwise law-abiding citizens is okay, given that there are hungry children, homeless people, and acts of violence committed in this very county?

I for one would rather the Sheriffs department work with nudists, who are regulars on the beach, and help us self-regulate the area. And why, all of the sudden, are the nude beaches (More

Mesa, Bates, and Summerland) being hit so hard? What subtle political pressure is being applied and by whom?

These questions and many more caused me to contact and become involved with Top Freedom, an organization formed in September 1999, and currently headed by Tim Geist. Top Freedom believes that the current county ordinance that bars women from exercising a right men have is unconstitutional and harmful. The group has become a regular presence during public comment at the Board of Supervisors meetings and is attempting to work with city legislators on having the ordinances re-written. If none of these channels prove fruitful, there are many women involved with Top Freedom who will take legal action as the

last recourse.

The two priorities of Top Freedom are as follows:

- 1) Establish gender equal top freedom everywhere in Santa Barbara County where it is now legal for men, and
- 2) Zone traditionally nude beaches in the coastal districts of Santa Barbara County as legally clothing optional.

If you are interested in becoming involved with Top Freedom, contact Tim Geist via e-mail at [Topfreeall@aol.com](mailto:Topfreeall@aol.com). Both men and women are welcome to join Top Freedom, as these issues as negatively affect both sexes, but women especially are encouraged to come out and let their voices be heard. ☆