

# BEACH BUZZ

March – April 2001

Volume 2, Number 2

a publication of B.E.A.C.H.E.S. Foundation and its Chapters  
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*“Keeping Our Beaches Bare”*

## Haulover's AOL Naturists

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The creation of the Internet has given the everyday individual a whole new way to be in contact with the world.

It has enabled us to buy just about anything we can think of, or to scan vast areas of knowledge and expertise that previously were available to us only in large libraries.

More importantly to many of us, though is that it has given us the chance to meet new and interesting people from around the world if we so choose to do so, without ever leaving the comforts or homes, through the thousands of “chat rooms” on the Internet.

Chat rooms came into existence in the early to mid 90's, developing naturally from bulletin boards where members posted comments and replies for others to read. America Online (AOL) made the leap forward in developing chat rooms that allowed members to talk instantly to each other (“real time”), giving birth to the online community we all know and love today.

It has never been easier to become a regular in one of the chat rooms now, especially on AOL. Once you become a member of an Internet service like AOL, you simply select a screen name, and you're on your way. Most members fill out a “profile” in which they tell something about themselves, and that information is available to other members who want to get an idea of who you are and what you're about before they chat with you.

Most members are relatively honest in those profiles, but you can actually become anything you want to be in cyberspace. This is good in some ways, because it allows people who are normally shy and introverted to open up

and meet people they may never had the nerve to say “Hi” to before. On the other hand, it can be bad because it allows people to hide behind a made-up name and create deceit and dissension within the chat rooms. But those regular visitors to the chat rooms know that any new product or invention needs some time to work the bugs out, and we learn to deal with the downside of chat in order to enjoy the very real benefits of worldwide friendship.

nothing more than fantasy worlds. I quickly grew tired of getting messages from supposed men (as I said earlier you can be anything you want) asking for my picture, or asking me if I was interested in cybersex, which is apparently some sort of 21st century mating ritual that requires no actual physical contact with another human being.

Then I got lucky. I found a room with a title that intrigued me – “Naturists” – because it was a lifestyle I enjoyed, and I



*Haulover's AOL Naturists at their monthly “Buffet in the Buff”*

The AOL “Naturist Chatroom” – my personal favorite room – was created way back in 1995. Back then, there were a handful of nudists who came together from all over the country to talk. But back then, AOL charged by the minute, and it could be quite expensive to spend any significant amount of time online. AOL eventually realized the gold mine it had on its hands and went to an unlimited usage billing rate, opening the way for the explosion of Internet and Chat use in cyberspace.

I became a user of AOL in 1998, and at first I found the chat rooms boring and obnoxious. There are thousands of rooms to choose from, but most of them are

decided to drop in. To my delight and amazement, I found the AOL Nudist Chatroom to be filled with people who were genuine and real. They weren't interested in pictures or cyber sex. Indeed, they went out of the way to gently discourage anyone who came in asking about pictures.

The chat in the Naturists Chatroom was about of everyday issues going on in the world, or revolved around something that someone needed to get off their chest or just vent about. I was leery at first, but after a short while I found myself in a conversation with a man about the pros and cons of trading in my car. His insight and ideas were wonderful. Here was a



complete stranger taking the time and interest to help me make a decision that was so important to me, yet did nothing beneficial for him.

The only real link between us: We both liked nude beaches.

As time went on I found out some of these people had even met at a nudist resort in New York called Empire Haven in 1997. I felt like I had found a room full of old friends I hadn't seen for years.

In July of 1998, I had the opportunity of attending my first "gathering" at Sunny Rest Lodge in Pocono, PA. There had been one held the prior month at Empire Haven that I was not able to attend.

I was excited at the idea of finally meeting the people who had become part of my life through the world of computers, yet I was also totally afraid. I was afraid of going into a group of strangers that I had never met before. I was a single woman and was not accustomed to going to group parties, much less to weekend gatherings without someone I knew being there.

I arranged to meet one of the other "roomies" the weekend before with friends so I would know at least one person there. After meeting Rob (Gntlfingr4), I was totally at ease. He was just as he seemed to be online. His warmth and caring were as real as the ocean we shared that day at Higbee's Beach in New Jersey.

I went to the "gathering" the following weekend and was welcomed with hugs and laughter by people who had become my friends online and now stood before me. We shared a weekend of laughter, dancing, and friendship. In fact, because of that weekend there is a couple happily married today. They had been friends online and met for the first time at Sunny Rest. They have since married and live in Arkansas. They would have never met had it not been for the Nudist Chatroom and the gatherings created from it.

I missed the next "gathering" held a few weeks later in at the Carolina Foothills Resort in South Carolina, but I did arrange to be at the Lake Como gathering in October 1998. Lake Como has become the largest gathering of all. That year we had people from as far away as England fly in for the weekend to meet the people they share so much time with

via the Chatroom. It was like no other experience I had ever had. The count for that gathering was somewhere around 80 and has continued to stay at that level each year since. It is known to be sold out within a few days of the announcement of the dates for the next October gathering, and it has even evolved into a mini-gathering in April, which draws almost as many people as October and continues to grow every year.

What makes the Nudist Chatroom any different then the other thousands out there?

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I truly believe it is the people who have come together because of their love and mutual respect for nudism and for one another. I have had the pleasure of meeting more than 300 different people from this room, coming from all walks of life. We have everything from children to seniors, from blue collar to white collar. We have fat, thin, tall, short, gay, straight, bisexual – and the common thread between us all that brought us to AOL Nudist Chatroom is our love of a lifestyle.

It doesn't matter what the person does for a living or what he or she looks like. What does matter is that they are real, meaning a person with feelings, thoughts, and dreams. The chatroom has enabled us to reach out to others who truly care for us as we care for them. We have become an extended family, a family that allows to be who we are and accepts us for what we are.

Yes, we have had our squabbles as any family does but we have also had our times of support. We have shared laughter and tears, we have shared dreams gone astray, and we have celebrated the success

of others.

Sure, you're thinking, this sounds wonderful, but can it be real? Well, let me just touch on a few of the things shared in this room, and then you can decide.

At Christmas a couple of years ago, one of the chatroom members cared enough to start a gift exchange among anyone who was interested. This will be the third year we've done this and, YES! I have signed up to participate. It's a wonderful way to share the holidays with so many.

In October of 1999, my sister committed suicide while I was attending the Lake Como Gathering. I can't tell you how wonderful it felt to walk up back to the pool area after getting the news to hugs and shared tears from all that were present. The word of her death had reached them before my return.

In the Summer of 2000, one of our "roomies" lost her son in a tragic accident. As the news of this tragic event went out, many tears were shed. Then we found out there was no insurance to cover his funeral. One of the roomies sent out an E-mail telling anyone who wanted to donate to send it to her. Several thousand dollars were sent to help her and to let her know "she is loved by all."

This October we had the pleasure of helping a couple celebrate their engagement at Lake Como. There was cake and champagne for all at the lakeside on Friday night, and a couple who had met us for the first time the previous October found themselves encircled with the love of all present. As they were being toasted, fireworks (brought by one of our Northern roomies) were being set off. It was nothing elaborate, just our way of saying, "We're all so very happy you have found such happiness in your lives."

We have shared times of illness, and we have celebrated births. And as with any family, we have been there for each other through good and bad. As one roomie said, "It's kind of like a neighborhood bar you'd go to after work to talk about the days events, except it's better because you know the people you're sharing your frustrations and successes with truly care."

I got responses from a number of roomies about why they love the chatroom, and as I read those replies, I



can picture their faces and hear their laughter, the Strong southern drawls and English accents. They are as real to me as if they were sitting there in my living room, except when they leave and I'm ready to go to bed I don't have to clean up after them (that's just a joke).

But the best thing about the Nudists chatroom is, if I have had a lousy day, I can go into the room for five minutes and know – just KNOW – that someone will say something to make me smile and laugh and brighten up my day.

I know I am grateful to AOL for creating the concept of chat rooms. Without them, I would have never met many of the people who have become a very important part of my life. It has allowed me to open up and share more of myself than ever before. I can travel almost anywhere in the U.S., as well as several other countries and know I have people there who care for me that I can call upon if needed.

And, they know they can count on me when they visit south Florida and

Haulover beach (which is another wonderful article I will have to write).

If you haven't tried going into a chatroom, do yourself a favor and go. If you have tried them and didn't find what you were looking for, don't give up. As I said, there are thousands of chat rooms out there. Some are cyber (fantasy), but there are rooms that are truly real.

They're worth seeking out, because the lifetime friendships that develop are worth the effort. ☆