

# Events: Fat Gala- Past and Present

Review by Cynthia J. Newcomer

**FatGala '97** will be on the 4th of July weekend, at the Sheraton Taracast in **Parsippany**, New Jersey. The schedule is still being developed, but expect lots of workshops (with a special lesbian track), trunk sale, three pool parties, our annual talent show, plus lots more. FatGala '97 is open to women: lesbian, bi, and straight. For more info, email miriam@mhv.net, or call 914-679-1209, or write Willendorf Associates, PO Box 407, Bearsville, NY 12409.

## Fat Gala 1996

Having recently returned from Fat Gala '96, a gathering of fat women sponsored by the NAAFA Feminist Caucus and the Lesbian Fat Activist Network (LFAN), among others, I wanted to write and share my impressions. We missed the FaT GiRL collective at the gathering, but managed to have plenty of fat dyke fun!

The conference was packed with fat dykes, and the workshops reflected our presence. In fact, every workshop I attended was dyke-related--from "Lesbian Sex and Dating" to "Lesbian Chic" to "Fat Dyke!", there were plenty of opportunities to bond with sister queers.

But the most amazing thing about the conference was the power of being with so many fat women (around 100!). To be able to walk into a room, to reveal my body in a bathing suit, and to bare my feelings to others--all without shame and fear--is a feeling that I have not experienced before to this degree. And imagine the heat when the lifeguards at the first of the three late-night private

pool parties allowed conference participants to cavort in their birthday suits! Why did I choose that night to go to bed early?

The conference had many pluses (so to speak!), including scholarships for those of us who couldn't come otherwise. There was also lots of room to participate by creating and conducting workshops. I came away from the conference with enthusiasm to do more work in three areas: creating dialogue between fat dykes and fat straight women; developing body-based explorations for fat women; and focusing more on fat liberation theory and strategy.

I think that we could benefit from more dialogue with straight fat women about our similarities and differences and how dykes are treated in the "size acceptance" movement. How do we join together as women to challenge sexism and heterosexism in the larger movement?

During the conference I felt the need to do much more movement, body work and participatory exercises. After all, this is about our bodies. I see the reclaiming of our bodies as a prerequisite to the political work that must happen if we want to transform this society.

Speaking of social change, what about it? It often seems to me that our coming together as fat women is justifiably heavy on sharing experiences, but much too light on liberation theory and practice. And when there is discussion of the overall movement, it is often in the language of "size acceptance." What we need is beyond size acceptance, just like achieving diversity is not adequate in addressing racism. Tolerance

is not enough! We need to look at the systematic ways that fat people are oppressed on the institutional level, as well as on the personal level. The institutionalized oppression against fat people that bombards us through the media, the educational system, and the entertainment world is the problem. It must be challenged.

We need to change more than attitudes to achieve our liberation. We have to shut down the multi-billion dollar diet industry, take over the airwaves, change the standard measurements used for public seating accommodations...and on and on. We need to fight other forms of oppression, as well. It is no accident that the prevailing mainstream image of a welfare recipient is a fat, black woman who is breeding out of control. To fight for our liberation as fat lesbians and bisexual women, we need to be challenging these isms within our own fat liberation and dyke liberation movements.

If all of this seems too overwhelming, remember we need to keep our focus on our communities while we think globally.

I hope that the next Fat Gala gathering will offer us more opportunities to share strategies about how we challenge fat oppression. And I hope lots more of you participate! There is so much that we can do on our own and together--write letters, interrupt derogatory jokes by colleagues at work, spray paint fat-positive messages in front of diet centers, take over the dance floor at the lesbian club... We are starting to make the radar screen of mainstream culture, and we need to take advantage of it!