

Is naturism more than recreation?

The author is the Past President of the FCN.

by Stéphane Deschênes

In recent years, naturism has been widely described as nude recreation.

The Naturist Society's motto is "Body acceptance is the idea, nude recreation is the way." The R in AANR stands for *recreation*. The big pan-American event of the year is Nude Recreation Week in July. Even the International Naturist Federation tells first-time visitors that "nude recreation is a great way to unwind and get back to basics." Of the associations well-known in Canada, only the FCN and FQN don't relegate naturism to mere recreation.

So, is it just recreation? Or is it a lifestyle? Granted, for most people the constraints of everyday life limit naturism to leisure time. (Although I'm fortunate as the owner of a naturist club to be able to work clothesfree, that's not a reality for most people.)

But should naturism be limited to the club, beach, or resort? If, as we're all quick to say, living nude promotes body acceptance, encourages respect for others, removes barriers to communication, and fosters an appreciation for the environment, why do we limit the opportunities?

How many of you make an effort to live nude? Do you go out of your way to find ways to shed your clothes and live naturally? Are you comfortable being nude outside your club or beach? If not, why not?



The Deschênes at la Pommerie, near Montréal

Temperature

Some use temperature as an excuse to stay clothed most of the time. There are those who are only comfortable clothesfree when it's over 26° and the sun is out. I don't doubt their discomfort in disrobing at cooler temperatures. However, that initial discomfort occurs because the body has lost its natural ability to self-regulate internal temperature. Clothing impedes the skin's ability to adjust to the current temperature. Our bodies get confused when parts are hot while others are cold.

I'm no different from most. When I take my clothes off, the ambient air always feels cool, even when it's 25°. However, when I spend my summer vacation nude, I find that by the sec-

ond day I can walk around comfortably even when the temperature dips to 20° or lower.

But beyond comfort issues, the biggest hindrance to true nude living is still society. When was the last time you were nude in a social setting outside a club event? For most naturists, the answer is probably *Never*.

Even within most clubs, we've lost the passion for clothesfree living. Many clubs have gone clothing optional. In some, eating and dancing is done clothed only. In many, the staff is required to be dressed. What are we saying when we tell the members that nudity is not appropriate for staff? What's the message to the visitor when they are

told that the staff is dressed to look more "professional"? For the sake of greater societal acceptance, we have undermined the very philosophy that began the naturist movement.

I'm a very dedicated naturist. I've been volunteering for the cause for over 15 years. I spent seven as President of the FCN. Last year, for the sake of my naturist passion, I took a big financial risk and purchased Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park. I have visited countless clubs, beaches, and resorts in North America and Europe. Yet in all my travels, I have almost never visited with naturists and been nude in their home. In



The Deschênes visit the Allison family for a few nude days.

fact, I've learned that most naturists are rarely nude there.

Two visits

What really got me thinking was a visit from some very good friends last summer. Jean-François, his wife Dominique, and their two children came to stay with us for several days. The weather was ideal for nudity and our house was at 26°. Once settled in, Jean-François asked if it was okay to be nude. I was stunned!

While I appreciated his politeness, I was troubled that he thought he needed permission. He's a very passionate naturist and knows that I'm at least as passionate as he is. But upon analysis of the situation, his question is understandable. There's generally no etiquette within naturist circles when it comes to nudity in the home. Moreover, my wife, children, and I were still dressed, having recently arrived home. We're certainly a family that's regularly nude in the house. However, we're not as quick to shed our clothes as we could be, given our naturist beliefs.

A few months later, when our equally good friends Ann and Peter decided to bring their two children to stay with us, I decided to try an experiment. Before their arrival, I proposed that we make a point of living nude the entire weekend. Everyone agreed that this would be fun and interesting. It was a great weekend,

and it generated a lot of interesting observations and conversation.

A guest might feel awkward suggesting nudity if the hosts are dressed. However, the hosts might stay dressed if they are not sure of the guests' expectations. Without advance agreement, it could be a difficult subject to broach. We all agreed that that discussion in advance was key.

But the constraints imposed by our socialization were present. My family felt odd and

**Even within most clubs,
we've lost the passion
for clothesfree living.
Many clubs have gone
clothing optional.**

slightly uncomfortable taking clothes off in anticipation of our guests' arrival. While we're regularly nude in all parts of our house, we almost never greet guests that way. Our children were a bit apprehensive, having almost never been allowed to be nude when we have guests, since most of our friends are textiles. And finally, houses are not well

designed for removing all clothing. Sure, we have places for shoes and coats. But when you come in to take all your clothes off, where does everybody put shirts, pants, socks, and underwear?

Go for it

Because all of us sleep nude, it certainly felt more natural in the morning to get up and stay nude. But even in that situation, other naturists who stayed with us often came out of the guest bedroom dressed if they weren't sure of our expectations.

Pools and hot tubs also make clothesfree living more natural. Generally, society is more tolerant of nudity in a bathing context. Ann and Peter have a hot tub at their house. They find it provides their naturist guests with the excuse they need to lose their clothing. Nude living and socializing in their house seem to happen more easily after the hot tub.

But don't let the socialization and practical implications stop you from trying to live a truly nude life. If you agree that nude living helps develop respect for self, others, and the environment, you must fight to integrate it into as many aspects of your life as possible. The nude human body is natural and wholesome. We must all fight the artificial societal constructs that have ended up deep-rooted in our subconscious. **gN**

Sommaire français. Le naturisme peut-il surtout être décrit comme une forme de loisir nu ? Ou est-ce un style de vie ? Devrait-il se limiter aux plages naturistes et aux centres ? (Et pourquoi le personnel des centres naturistes devrait-il toujours être habillé ?)

Qu'en est-il du nu chez soi ? Le problème évident est de savoir ce que l'on fait avec les invités. L'an dernier, même une famille naturiste qui nous rendait visite nous a demandé en arrivant s'il était possible d'être nu chez nous. J'ai donc décidé que la fois suivante où nous inviterions des naturistes, nous nous serions arrangés avec eux avant leur arrivée pour être tous nus.

Malgré cela, nous avons trouvé étrange de nous déshabiller pour l'arrivée de nos invités, car nous n'avions pas l'habitude de le faire pour d'autres. En tout cas, l'expérience a été concluante : les deux familles ont bien profité du week-end.

L'éthique naturiste devrait conduire à l'intégration de la nudité dans le plus d'aspects possible de la vie. Chacun devrait donc songer à commencer chez soi.