



Author Stéphane with his wife Linda

Canadian naturist resort owner, a current director, and past President of the Federation of Canadian

Clothing-optional is not the answer



On the dock at Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park

Naturists Stéphane Deschênes responds to David Skinner's article ("Still a long way to go" – BN181). Stéphane is also an overseas subscriber to *British Naturism* and keen to keep up with the news from this side of the pond.

While I am over 5,000 km away, I think that Canadian and British naturism share enough similarities that I can provide an opinion.

My wife and I are the owners of Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park north of Toronto, Canada where nudity is expected and required when appropriate. We are very specific about the fact that we are a naturist club that is not clothing-optional. I am firmly convinced that a naturist club cannot be both naturist and clothing-optional at the same time. I certainly respect David Skinner's opinion and I sympathize with his situation. However, I disagree with him on several points.

There are certainly advantages to having clothing-optional venues where people can co-exist. Beaches fill that role very well. They provide an opportunity for naturists and textiles to co-exist and better understand each other. They also provide an opportunity for people interested in naturism to observe, and perhaps even try, in a non-committal manner. But naturist clubs, parks, centres and resorts are different. They represent an attempt to create a world that is different from conventional society.

I agree that our goal should be a world where nobody cares whether we are nude or clothed. I would love to live in a society where everyone is comfortable with the human body. But we do not and I am quite certain that we won't in my lifetime. In fact, I am not even sure if it will ever be possible.

I admit that I used to believe that naturism should be clothing-optional. I wanted the utopia where nobody cares

what I'm wearing or not wearing, and therefore I should not care about anyone's state of dress. But in our world that is impossible, because of constant social pressure which fosters an incredible amount of body shame and obsession with clothing. These messages are deeply embedded in most people since childhood and reinforced constantly through the way our world is built and the reactions of others. Most people's fear of nudity and their body is so deeply ingrained in their psyche that it has become completely subconscious, instinctual, and emotional.

Mr. Skinner uses a golf analogy to illustrate his point. The problem with analogies is that they don't always fit perfectly. Golf is not a life philosophy. Naturism is about values, principles and ethics. (or it once was and should be again) So I will use a different analogy. Would you bring your wife to a vegetarian restaurant and expect that she could order a steak? Of course not.

It would be very difficult to have a passion that your wife does not share. But if we agree that naturism is a life philosophy with many psychological and physical benefits, those who are most afraid of it are probably the ones who would benefit the most from it. But for those who are unable to convince their spouse, there are many other examples of

interests that are not shared. Sometimes spouses have separate interests and passions that they must practice independently. That is not my preference but it is certainly not unusual. I know that some clubs do not allow single males. But that is an entirely different discussion. At Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park we do allow single men most of the time.

I also think that going clothing-optional in many clubs has been partially responsible for the decline in naturism. Here again I disagree with Mr. Skinner. Naturism going back to a more fundamental philosophy is not a desperate attempt by "a movement that is losing support or feels it is under threat." An aspiration to be more inclusive has been the motivation behind the clothing-optional movement in recent decades. But that backfired because it has created clubs that have lost their reason for being. It has watered-down the core philosophy. People seem to have forgotten that naturism is a lot more than just taking your clothes off. It is a life philosophy with physical, psychological, environmental, social and moral benefits.

People join naturist clubs because they want to find a better way. They're looking for much more than just a place where they don't have to wear a bathing suit. And that's not just a theory. We took over a

park that was clothing-optional and in less than 3 years, membership has grown from 136 to over 400. Most of the new members have never belonged to any naturist club before and about half are young people in the 30's. On top of that, the rate of growth is increasing every year.

So in my opinion, naturism at Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park cannot be clothing-optional, because we are:

Living a philosophy

Naturism is a philosophy of life. It's a way of thinking, acting, and looking at the rest of the world. We are fostering respect for self, for others, and for the environment. Complete nudity is fundamental to those values.

Fighting powerful social conditioning

Even the most long-time naturist still harbours some discomfort with nudity in certain situations. Whether it's dancing, eating in a restaurant, or sitting in certain positions, many of us still feel that discomfort. Because of the incessant outside influences mentioned above, nobody is making a truly free choice when they opt to stay clothed. In this social experiment we call naturism, we must help all people to become more comfortable with their bodies in all situations. There are

men in naturist clubs who wear shorts when walking because they feel it is more comfortable. Is it a physical comfort or psychological comfort? A naturist woman once asserted that she felt more feminine with a wrap on. How can she view a piece of cloth as more feminine than her own natural form? When asked why he wraps his towel tightly around his waist, a naturist young man explained that it was the most convenient way to carry it. Is wrapping really easier than throwing it over your shoulder? Is it convenience or rationalization?

In all the examples above, the individuals truly believed what they were saying. The unconscious mind is tremendously adept at rationalizing the reasons for the emotional discomforts created by nudity.

Promoting equality

Clothing is used to denote social, economic, political, or professional status. We use clothing not only to shield our bodies when we are ashamed, but to elevate ourselves socially. That leads to an endless cycle where people seek to outdo others, or at least match them. By removing our clothes, we are showing respect for others through real modesty.

As stated by Marc-Alain Descamps, the brilliant French social psychologist whose treatises on naturism are some of the best, "the reciprocal visual bestowal of complete nudity defuses the exhibitionist/voyeur relationship." If one person is dressed while others are nude, it is difficult, even for a naturist, to get away completely from voyeurism. Conversely, a nude person in front of dressed people, such as a nude model posing for photographers, comprises some elements of exhibitionism.

Making it easier on new people

While a clothing-optional policy might seem to make it easier on new people, it is our experience that it only allows them to delay, indefinitely, the reason for their visit. The more nude people are around, the easier it is for visitors to disrobe for the first time. As has been widely reported, once people finally break their social conditioning in a naturist environment, they usually become comfortable within a short period, sometimes only a few minutes.

Excluding aberrant individuals

It's an unfortunate reality that some members of our society have developed views of sexuality and the body that are inconsistent with naturist values. Since their intent in visiting a naturist environment is inappropriate, they must be excluded. When forced to be nude, they generally feel vulnerable because naturist ideals are not consistent with their attitude. Then they leave – or their intent becomes noticeable, and they're asked to leave.



In the conversations we had surrounding the publication of this article, Stéphane revealed that about half of Bare Oaks' new members are under 40. He says, "What I'm told makes the biggest difference when people visit is that our office staff is nude, young and friendly. I never expected to have teenagers want to work the front desk. To work nude and greet dressed visitors and delivery people takes self-confidence. Yet I've never even had to advertise the jobs. This year, almost all of our summer office staff was 16–22 years old. Having young people on the front desk is incredibly important in giving the club a feeling of youth, renewal and energy." He also inferred that the mandatory nudity has meant that people, including the 'youngsters' have had to try it – and then discovered (as we all know) how lovely and normal it is. Next year, he already has more applicants for jobs than he needs – partly based on this year's staff talking to friends and relatives about the fun they had working there. The picture shows Bare Oaks' staffer Nikki (22) working on reception with co-worker Sandy.

Keeping company with like-minded people

So much of the world is intolerant of our values that we spend most of our time feeling that they are under assault; so much so that many naturists are afraid to even tell others of their beliefs. A visit to a naturist club should provide a time when we feel surrounded by like-minded people who share our passion. **BN**

Useful contact details:
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 Tel: 001 905 473 6060
www.bareoaks.ca
http://www.bareoaks.ca/Bare-Oaks/Why_nudity_is_required.html
Federation of Canadian Naturists (FCN)
www.fcn.ca