

MIDWINTER FESTIVAL

Feb. 15-20 | Sunsport Gardens Loxahatchee, FL

Celebrating New Growth

Nancy Casey

REMEMBER READING the quote, "Bring me your tired, your hungry, your poor" when referring to the Statue of Liberty and the beauty of what she stood for. At the risk of sounding irreverent, I'd like to paraphrase, "Bring us your sad, your tired, your burned and stressed-out so they may experience renewal and rejuvenation."

I am referring to the Midwinter Naturist Festival at Sunsport Gardens, Florida. Most years, the weather alone is a renewal, with Florida's soft, warm, scented air bringing the promise of spring to winter-weary northerners. Sunsport is a tropical paradise, which exists in harmony with Mother Nature, from its magnificent

nature trail to its extensive recycling program. Flowering gardens and sparkling lakes always brighten my spirit and 2007 was no exception. I arrived early to walk the nature trail in sunshine. As usual, I felt like Eve in the garden of Paradise, especially enjoying the mixture of sun, shade and a profusion of dancing butterflies. How magical to be able to walk nude, alone in tranquil beauty and total safety. As a woman, this alone would have made the visit to Sunsport worthwhile.

Sunsport's nature trail is always present, but the 200+ workshops exist only during the Midwinter Naturist Festival. I was glad I arrived early enough to enjoy a couple of warm days, because weather-

wise, the 2007 festival became somewhat chilly as an uncharacteristic front from the north country invaded our warm sanctuary. The warm spirit of Sunsport allowed us to overcome this minor obstacle. Tents were invited to bring their bedding into the pavilion if they needed additional warmth. Fortunately, rain wasn't part of Mother Nature's plans, so most folks used the chill as an additional reason to take advantage of programs presented in heated environments, like the pool and hot tub, as well as the spiritually rich purification ceremony of the Native American sweat lodge, provided by Lynn and Rhonda Korpar. The usual drum circle, fire, and dance each evening became even more popular! Where else could I move to a drumbeat, share energy with others and dance up a naked sweat, regardless of the outdoor temperature?

An unusual and dramatic experience emerged as Maria Komie, Heather Foy, Karen Jasmine, Carolyn Swift and Jennifer Ward presented a spectacular fire dance show with belly dancing, fire-eating, fire fans, and spinning fire poi. I was awestruck at the beauty, which made this program well worth waiting for.

For me, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual expansion were at the core of this and every Sunsport festival. Spiritual choice abounded, ranging from a fairly traditional 12-step program provided by Ken Kushman, to the more esoteric offerings of Wicca by Barb Crumb; Reiki and Healing energies by Valerie Langley; and Kirtan, offered several times by Michelle Angel. My husband Darrell and I are most familiar with Tantra, which is a spiritual program that reaches us to choose, with increased awareness, that which brings us our greatest bliss. Those who felt inspired by the short introductory Tantra workshops were able to explore at a more advanced level during a full-day workshop, "Emotional Healing Through Sky Dancing



Mark Sadon

POOL EXERCISES always a favorite.



Kenneth Applebaum

PETER SIMON poses with Morley Schloss.



David Baum

THE WARM FLORIDA sun brings out a host of people for the closing circle at Sunsport.

Tantra" that Darrell and I offered after the closing circle.

In a wondrous combination of song and spirit, Elaine Silver sang to an overflow crowd on Friday night. Her music was uplifting, joyful and funny. It touched my inner child and I laughed, cried and laughed again. Some of the songs were "sing along" so our voices rose along with our spirits. As a woman, I appreciated that Elaine acted as an excellent role model for women who prefer to live, travel (and perform) alone.

The ideal of women as healers and teachers was ever-present at this festival, from the morning presentation of Tai Chi and Qi Gong (Ellen Scurich) to classes in meditation and movement for self healing (Donna Launikonis) and the healing energy of Patricia Grude's Reflexology (never knew feet were so important!) and Claudia Kellersch's discussion of body acceptance and breastfeeding for new and expectant mothers, to name a few of the many offerings. This enormous abundance of women as teachers made it difficult to choose which activity I most wanted to attend. Usually, there were several offerings each hour, all of which were led by women and sounded totally fascinating. Guess that means I'll need to attend several more years to experience it all!

Another wonderful experience emerged as I explored "Through the Lens—an Evening with Peter Simon." His nude art ("Decent Exposures") touched my heart and took me down memory lane as I vicariously experienced a part of our nudist past I had "barely" (pun intended) known about. What a thrill to be able to purchase a signed copy of his book!

Many women shared with me that the men at festivals are a unique group in that they are interested in increasing their relationship skills and exploring personal growth. This was reflected in the plethora of exciting workshops offered by men, ranging from the more scientific type of offering ("The Cosmos: Where Are You?" by Bob Fesmire) to the more active drumming workshops, offered by Jeff Siegel and the artistic "Clay for all Ages" workshop given by Wyatt Warren. Morley Schloss, Jonathan



CANUDERS GET ready to explore the Loxahatchee River.

Shapiro and George Winlock offered an extremely important political consciousness raising workshop, "Local Activism and the Naturist Action Committee." It's sobering to realize that the right to be naked is not one we can take for granted. During cold weather, programs indoors or in warm pools were especially popular.

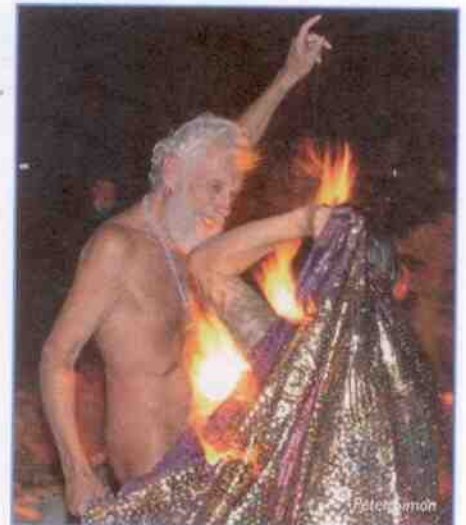
Armond and Angelina filled the pavilion to overflowing and brought me a taste of "heaven on earth" with their evening concert and their funny, yet inspirational service on Sunmorning. Angelina's soaring soprano filled my heart and soul while Armond's "bar trained" voice and jokes tickled my funny bone; more tears, more laughter and more sheer JOY! Armond and Angelina demonstrated they are indeed "Hotter Than Ever," playing everything from sublime music, set to the poetry of Kahlil Gibran, to soaring Native American flute music, and a touching, hilarious salute to Angelina as a "Menopause Girl."

Most wonderful was the realization that women and men can be naked in a spiritually uplifting, emotionally safe environment as they share nurturing touch, laughter and the challenging experience of personal growth.

As a presenter, I appreciated the ability to share knowledge and heart-centered

joy with a responsive group of folks willing to grow and learn. As a participant, I became refreshed and renewed. My heart is full with gratitude as I write this and I've already marked the dates of next year's Midwinter Naturist Festival, Feb 14-19, 2008. **N**

Nancy & Darrell Casey have been nudists for 20+ years and are Sky Dancing Tantra Teachers. They can be reached at <http://web.mac.com/becomelove> and NaturistNan@aol.com.



MORLEY SHARES his energy during the evening fire and drum circle.