

# Midwinter Festival - a reunion

Mark Nielsen

**I t flies, doesn't it?** The time between the Midwinter Festival in February and fall's chilly onset this week—between your first Festival and your tenth—between your twenties and your (gulp) sixties. While it's true that we aging baby boomers are all waxing nostalgic these days, this year's Midwinter Festival provided a unique opportunity to look both forward and back. What a delightful view in both directions.

It would be a grave failure on my part to give only slight attention to the festival itself—it's the star. If you've never been, you owe it to yourself to experience it. This year's program listed over 200 events and activities of enormous breadth. When this tremendous variety of learning and sharing opportunities is available in a tropical paradise filled with friendly naturists, you can't go wrong. Add old friends you love and new friends you may come to love, and you've got an event

They say you should give graciously that which cannot be refused; a Nicky "request" is just such a thing. A theme suggested itself: This year's festival had the specific goal of introducing young people to naturism. And here were my friends and me, reveling in being together, but slightly dazed by the realization that *it's been ten years*. While blithely denying the effects of age on our still-very-cool selves, we're not blind to the predominance of people our age at TNS events. Like anyone who cares about the movement, we're eager to see



I stumbled on my first festival in 2001, where I met people who have enriched my life ever since. On our first night together this year, as we gathered around the drum circle fire, Nicky Hoffman dropped by to say hello. Upon learning that we were celebrating the tenth anniversary of our friendship, she asked—no, insisted—that one of us write about 2011's festival from that perspective. "Mark can do it", said Barb, "he wrote one for the 2004 festival." With no further discussion, Nicky pronounced me this year's chronicler.

that will bring you back again and again. My 2004 article waxed rhapsodic about the festival – about Sunsport Gardens, the tireless organizers, workers and volunteers, and the transformative power of the event on anyone who attends and opens him/herself to it. This short rumination on age, time and the bonds of friendship won't be as complete a review of the event as that was, but the festival gets all the credit—it's where the magic happens.

more young people participate.

The Florida Young Naturists booth was the perfect place to start my inter-generational research. It was staffed by two dynamic ambassadors for naturism—Robbe White and Anna Phillips. Robbe is president and founder of FYN; together they are active partners in its growth and operation. <http://www.floridayoungnaturists.com/>. Anna's poised and graceful presence



on the Haulover Beach DVD is one example of the kind of leadership these two provide. They graciously assented to an interview with me.

I thanked them for their efforts on behalf of naturism, and started by asking about FYN's origins. Robbe told me that the seed was planted at the Midwinter Festival in 2009, when he had discussions with Nicky and with Morley Schloss. They had their first Spring Bash that April at Sunsport; about 75 people attended. This year's event had around 200, Robbe said.

In addition to those clichéd questions—"How did you become a naturist? What does your family think?" etc.—I wanted to know about some of the differences in attitudes about naturism between our respective peer groups; how they recruited members; what they see as FYN's acceptance.

Turns out their age group doesn't seem to demonstrate the same

has two annual Bashes at Sunsport—one in April and one in August. These events are very successful at introducing young people to social nudity, and the organizers strive to make it easy and inviting. The group has managed to garner some good publicity—April's Bash earned an article in the *Wall Street Journal*; <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703856704576285653184636030.html>. The greying of the movement was mentioned in the article as a particular impetus for both TNS and AANR to reach out to young potential members.

Sam and Christie were another delightful young couple who I was pleased to chat with. Like Dan, a single guy who joined us in conversation, they are sure that

Melissa's tent; Kathy and Ed's trailer), we continued to celebrate old friendships as we nurtured new and evolving ones. In the years we've all been friends, life and time have continued their march—bringing grandchildren, divorces, new loves, hip replacements, presbyopia and all manner of health and vocational ups and downs. But when we are together the years really do seem to slip away. Our enduring bond was forged here at the Midwinter Festival many years ago, and is strengthened every time we are together.

I guess our boomer reality, our propensity for gentle self-delusion, and my confidence in the future of naturism are expressed by three song titles from favorite



ABOVE: Body painting for all ages.  
RIGHT: Robbe White and Anna Phillips offered up fresh-squeezed juices in the naturist marketplace.



gender-based difference in nudity acceptance that people my age do—the ratio of women to men at their events is about equal. They do much of their recruiting on college campuses and do not seem to encounter hostility. Asked what kind of response they generally receive when they suggest naturism, Anna told me that it's usually a receptive and interested one, but often accompanied by some surprise that there is a "movement." FYN

others their age would really enjoy the festival. In the closing circle, Christie talked a bit about their appreciation for the event and how much she'd like to see more of their peers attend. The energy, enthusiasm and warm personalities of these young people make them valuable additions to our naturist community and ensure its future. We should strive to engage as many of them as possible.

Back at the old folks' compound (Jim and Barb's motor home; John and

old artists: *A Touch of Grey*, *Forever Young*, *The Kids Are Alright*.

And Henry Van Dyke's words express the magic I feel with these old friends who mean so much to me: "Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice ... but for those who love, time is eternity." **N**

*Love and thanks to you all.*