

Reflections on Sunsport's Midwinter Festival

Richard Rosichan

I'm sort of a casual naturist ("nudist" is so 20th-century). We drifted out of family naturism decades ago for too many reasons to go into here. Since 1992, I've been a weekend regular at Haulover, only occasionally accompanied by my wife. One of my three daughters is a longtime regular, and occasionally her young son comes as well. Visits to resorts have been rare—they're such a drive, and Haulover is just nine miles/20 minutes away. But I digress.

I found the Midwinter program online in early 2011 and was floored by all the activities. I'd otherwise be at home alone that week; why not check it out? I'd heard of Sunsport's family-friendly, green-friendly reputation, and knew from experience how friendly naturists are as well. The price was right, and I could sleep in my car.

For 2011, I arrived early morning on Friday, the second day. Eighty five miles door-to-door from Miami Beach, the last two on dusty, bumpy dirt "D Road." But the check-in was quick, and Dave led me to my parking/camping spot—right next to the Drum Circle. Strange, being here where I'd never been, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, with no one around. I tossed my clothes in my car, knowing intuitively that I needn't lock it. I'd become used to social nudity, but here I was, naked and alone—a stranger in a strange land.

I'd slept in cars, clothed, at highway rest areas, but sleeping nude in one at a resort was...different. But it helped, in the morning, to be able to just step out and into a shower and then into a pool.

I knew I'd be back in 2012, and so I was, this time as a presenter as well as a participant. I've been an active fiction and travel writer for decades, and spent two years in the University of Miami's creative writing program. Using that, and Julia Cameron's wonderful book *The Right to Write as guides*, I decided to offer a writing

workshop to the schedule, and Morley assigned me two one-hour slots. This time, I'd be there for the whole festival, and I edited my opening "Friendship Circle" speech down to two minutes.

The Midwinter Festival 2012 was different from the 2011 event in some ways, the same in others and again, very special. This time, my combo car/hotel was in a serene, wooded spot. There were five daily life drawing classes—not sessions, but classes—each with a different emphasis, taught in the beautiful Butterfly Garden by artist Keith Mueller, with four lovely female models. The late afternoon fading daylight was a challenge, but having Keith made up for it. As in past years, Jack Arnold continued his evening showings of green-centered videos, showing how environmentalism, local culture and community farming and small business can and does lead to prosperity, even in the unlikely places. There was a useful, constructive workshop on relationships, happiness, and living with those with whom you have disagreements—in this last I got some loving support from Maggie and others, because not all my family members are supportive of naturism. I managed to take in a few workshops on healthy eating and food prep. And the skin cancer screening was a must.

Later, I asked someone to take a photo of me, using my camera, standing by my car. Why a photo of me standing naked by my car in broad daylight? Because I could! Our roast of Haulover-mentor and sustainer Richard Mason was more like a celebration, but we managed a few zingers. Rich Pasco, Bay Area Naturist founder, with an A+ sense of humor, showed "nudes in the news" and Sunsport-early-years clips. We still had our music—the nightly drumming/dancing circle, Ms. Silver and Armand and Angelina, who announced their recent marriage—on my birthday!—after, a 10-year engagement. Not just a talented couple, but also smart!



photos by Steve Ziegler





Naturism is often taken way too seriously, but Kira Fleischman took care of that! This pretty, wonderfully wacky dance and exotic culture teacher, expert and enthusiast teaches you great stuff, gets you to do things you can't believe you'd do, and, mainly, makes you laugh and smile.

The bottom line for me, of course, was my own writing workshops. Would anyone even come? I'd announced I was leaving pads and pens at the hospitality tent, but none were picked up. First workshop: I sat, fearfully in the Butterfly Garden, waiting. A young woman who was also one of our drawing models showed up with her poetry. Then her sister and two other people showed up. Wow! People! We made a good little group. Two days later, the two sisters and one of the others showed up, along with a new participant. Again, a good group. My wife thought I'd been nuts to attempt this. I called her after each session. "Hey, guess what? People showed up!"

I missed some things because of conflicts—my drawing class, alas, kept me from Hillbilly Wine Making. And I'm not really into group exercise or really intense "New Age" stuff. But that was OK—there was something for everyone. A longtime Haulover friend, Bruce Frendahl, wrote me a beautiful letter about how much it meant to him to have a naturist religious service, people worshipping as they'd been created. I drove home late Monday evening so I would be on hand to greet the gang at Haulover on Tuesday. This time, the group included a dozen or so children and a couple of chaperones—that was sweet to see.

What's it like, being at a festival? For one thing, I don't exactly live in the friendliest city in America. But at this festival you are in a community, and it's one that brings friendliness and human warmth to a new dimension. I won't say that the nudity becomes irrelevant, because it isn't. But it's as natural there as breathing, and it enhances the feeling of community, and makes life so much easier. Jump in the shower, jump in the pool or hot tub, dry in minutes, no dressing for dinner—or anything else. Sure, you have to drag a towel around, but that's a pretty good tradeoff. I loved meeting people, and enjoyed both the community meals and also

my tailgate lunches and drinks, greeting people and dogs who meandered by. I made a lot of new friends from all over the US and Canada. The pleasant, rural, green setting reminds you that naturism and naturalism are really part of the same concept.

Any complaints? Uh, Morley—you know those blue outdoor restaurant tables-with-benches—the old blue ones, not the new, more solid, natural-pine ones? Well, if you weigh more than a gnat, and sit on one side, and no one's on the other side, and you lean back just a teeny bit, you're liable to end up on your back with your food on your chest! So, if you sit at one, make sure you've got a tablemate facing you!

Thanks to Morley, the staff, and everyone who showed up for a wonderful and enriching experience! **N**



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