

Feeling comfortable in (only) my skin

by Klaus Huber

Cycling without any clothes through the City of Bristol as part of the World Naked Bike Ride was a truly exhilarating experience (although a bit chilly). It made me wonder why the dress code 'nothing at all' isn't usually acceptable at other times. As I write, summer has finally arrived, and it's a great feeling to be lying in the sun, surrounded by a gentle breeze. Unfortunately, if I want that gentle breeze to cool my *entire* body, I have to find myself a hiding place, without really understanding why. I can't think of any rational explanation why a certain part of my body ought to be covered from other people's sight. Surely the sight of several dozen naked people doesn't appear to have done any harm to the thousands of onlookers during the Naked Bike Ride, most of whom kept cheering and found it great fun.

I must confess that earlier on in my life, the mere idea of my cycling naked through a city would have been unimaginable. Indoctrinated by our Roman Catholic village priest, at the age of 9 I forbade my parents to enter the bathroom while I was having a bath. Ten years later, I turned down an invitation to enter a (German) sauna, considering it a place of immorality - and besides, I felt very uncomfortable about exposing my 'inadequate' body to anyone else.

German Young Friends soon set me off on a rapid journey from prude to naturist: inspired by their non-prudish attitudes and safeguarded by mutual trust, respect, and friendship, my inhibitions gradually crumbled, and the last remainder of the village priest's indoctrination vanished when I stripped off at a naturist beach for the first time at the age of 24.

I have since found naturism to offer a good reflection of the Quaker testimonies. Our birthday suit is the simplest outfit, it comes for free and is easier to clean than clothes. When we remove our clothes, most differences in social status, profession and wealth become invisible. Being naked gives us a sense of integrity, as we don't cover up, disguise or mask any part of ourselves. It also prevents us from hiding any weapons. The vulnerability that comes with a state of nakedness is one of the reasons why naturists don't pass judgment on their own or other people's bodies: everyone is accepted exactly the way they are - an attitude that, in my experience, often extends to non-physical aspects as well.

Leaving body shame behind felt to me like being cured from a deep-rooted mental illness (known as a social norm because the majority of society are still suffering from it). I just wished more people could be cured from it.

PS. A video of the Bristol Naked Bike Ride 2012 is at <http://bristolwnbr.blogspot.co.uk/>