



The American Association for Nude Recreation – Western Region

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The Pioneers:

Biographies of Nudists Leaders Who Made a Difference



Marianna Hoppe- Handler

Free Beach Advocate, “Mother” of San Onofre Beach

Marianna, forever remembered as the "beach mom" of San Onofre Beach in California, was first active in the 70's and 80's, along with her daughter, Michelle, on the East Coast defending the rights of others to go nude on **Moonstone Beach** in Rhode Island. Ultimately, after several years fight and a few compromises, the nudists lost their battle when the town council outlawed nude use of the beach. This didn't stop Marianna.

In 1985 she closed her house and moved lock, stock and beach floppy sandals to the West Coast where she eventually became an active member of Friends of San Onofre, a nude beach group in Southern California. She became known as the "Beach Mom" out there as well.

Here is an addition right from the "horse's mouth" as Marianna wrote to us recently:

"In 1995 the authorities wanted to close San Onofre to nude use. That is when I STARTED Friends of San Onofre Beach, put out a newsletter and started to negotiate with the rangers. By policing the area ourselves, and teaching visitors proper nude etiquette, we gained the ranger's and lifeguard's respect and they worked with us. Even though the nude use is not strictly "legal", by allowing it now for so long we would have a good case should they want to arrest anybody for



simple nudity. They even admit now at the gate that there is a nude area. We have come a long way.

I am now in Tennessee and have visited a couple of clubs in TN and Georgia. Miss the beach, but it was time for me to move closer to my daughters. I think it was also time for me to retire."

Her best-known contact with the general public came when the Benetton group used her nude photo taken on the beach in one of its United Colors of Benetton campaigns for the International Year of the Volunteer in 2001. It was interesting to see all the controversy generated when America and the world saw a well endowed grandmother type figure in a nude ad. The horror of it, a nude older woman— how dare she. The beauty of it, a nude older woman un-self-consciously enjoying life.

A History of the Nude Beach at San Onofre, 1976-2003

As recorded by Marianna Handler, July, 2006

San Onofre was opened as a State Park in 1976 under a directive from President Richard M. Nixon. I have heard that before that, people used the beach nude, when it was totally under the jurisdiction of Camp Pendleton. Allen Baylis, president of Friends of San Onofre, remembers being there, and Gerda Hayes says she was the first person to go to the new state park. Also Maureen Bangston was one of the early users.

I arrived in CA from my home in Massachusetts, where I had attended Moonstone Beach in Rhode Island. My daughter Michelle started NENA (New England Naturist Association) around 1982 (?), when we were having problems there with the feds. I became active with that group, defending our right to be there.

After my divorce, I left the area to move to California and eventually settled in San Juan Capistrano and started to go to San Onofre in 1988. At the time about 100 nudists gathered there, usually around the fence to Camp Pendleton. Ray Armstrong was the "mayor" of the nude beach then, and kept everybody informed about the state law and what happening, and greeted newcomers was.

I understand that just before I got there, Sheriff Duffy from San Diego sent his men there regularly to harass the nudists. Deputies would stand on the cliffs with binoculars and communicate with other sheriffs at the beach, who then would try to cite the nude bathers. I am told that people would change towels and hats when sheriffs arrived, so they could not be identified easily. Even though by that time the "Cahill Directive" had become effective, Sheriff Duffy stated, that he did not care about that. He was going to enforce the law against nudity. Even though it was a little piece of paradise, having to look over your shoulder constantly greatly diminished the pleasure of being in nature nude.

The first few years when I was there, everything was relatively quiet and the regulars there chased off the occasional pervert.

With the arrival of the Internet and its popularity, the news about San Onofre spread and more and more people started to go down there, and with it, the incidents of sexual behavior became more numerous.

At one time the whole area from the end of trail 6 to the fence was nude beach, but the lifeguards pushed us more and more towards the fence. Since beyond that it was FEDERAL property, we felt a little safer there, since there were no laws against public nudity in effect there. Slowly we started going north again, a few yards at the time, until we were established just beyond the wash 100 feet or so south of the last lifeguard station.

Around 1992 the rangers came to the beach more and more often, warning people to get dressed. Newspapers picked up complaints about sexuality at the beach, which put the State Park Dept. into a difficult position... I went and met with the superintendent and had a good meeting. He agreed to give us a chance to police the visitors there ourselves. I requested that he would come and talk with us as a group, if he had any problems, and see if we could find a mutual way to solve them. It worked for a while, and Ray and I would meet with the department once a year, especially as the top personal kept changing.

There was relative peace until the beginning of 1995, when the sexual activities increased, and more complaints came in. By that time Ray had become ill with cancer. I suggested to him, that we form a more formal group, so we had a more authoritative voice.

We passed out a typewritten newsletter at the beach, explaining to people the purpose of a group and the need to speak up and stop offenders. With it we gave them the "Free Beach Etiquette", which we copied (and slightly changed for our situation) from the Nourist Society. The group grew quickly and we earned the respect of the rangers and lifeguards. Even the maintenance people loved us and told me, that no other stretch of beach was as clean as the nude section.

Unfortunately Ray lost his battle with cancer that year, and I became the "Beach Mom". Among my helpers John Lorenze, also known as Sandman, stood out.

By the beginning of 1995 the word about San Onofre Beach has spread via the internet and more and more people came to the nude section, and with it. Problems arose. Sexual incidents were on the rise, and even though Mayor Ray and some of the regulars tried to police it, a few times complaints were lodged with the Park Rangers, and of course the press picked up every incident. The park superintendent got fed up and announced in the press, that they were going to stop allowing –or overlooking- nudity at the beach.

At that point I felt something had to be done, and I met with the superintendent and we agreed, that I would form a group and urge the regulars, to help stop sexual behavior. I was worried, since many people felt, that we had to keep a very low profile. I passed around a flyer, explaining what was going on and what I felt we had to do. The first thing was to form some kind of cohesive network, so we could communicate. In a short time I had many names on my list and different groups actively participated in keeping order. The volley ball players, which were a very tightly knit group, made sure that women and children in their area were safe, the "North Shore" group with Gerda Hayes, which was positioned at the northern end of the nude section, warned people not to go beyond the imaginary line, which we had agree on with rangers and life guards.

Very quickly there were less gawkers und perverts at the beach.

Mayor Ray, who by that time had become very ill with cancer, saw the emergence of the group, and knew that his work for many years would continue.

We earned the respect and cooperation of rangers and lifeguards alike. We also stressed to all visitors to immediately get dressed if asked by a ranger or lifeguard. In turn the rangers agreed to only enforce the nudity regulation, if someone filed a formal complaint.

The Cahill Decision had been in effect several years by then, and the park dept. was abiding by that.

Over the years it became a paradise for nudists. We formed a legal group around 2000 and Allen Baylis agreed to become president. Others served as treasurer and secretary.

In 2003 I left California and left Friends of San Onofre in capable hands.