

Gotopless day Aug 23 08 Miami Newstimes article

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Topless Protesters on South Beach

Well, they drew lots of onlookers.

By Natalie O'Neill

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A couple of Saturdays ago, Donna Newman was walking the Miami Beach shoreline when she noticed a pretty ponytailed gal in a tight bikini and waved at her.

South Beach "Free yourself, lady!" the tan, middle-age Newman hollered into a microphone.

On cue, a troupe of topless female protesters behind her added, "Free your breasts! Free your mind!"

As the young woman reached to untie her suit, a T-shirted boyfriend grabbed her hand.

This is just the attitude Newman hopes to fix. She is a member of a cult called the Raelians, which follows a French prophet and former racecar driver who preaches that scientists from another planet created human life. (Riptide gives him creativity points.) The group boasts about 80,000 members in more than 150 countries.

In June 2007, the Raelians founded a group called GoTopless.org — a nude advocacy group. Newman, who's the regional president, describes the injustice this way: Men in Miami can go shirtless on the street but women can't. "Men have two breasts just like we do," she says. "Some have bigger ones than me."

So, on the anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment (women's right to vote), she led her group onto the beach around noon on a sunny day. There was a fiery Venezuelan, a masseuse, a flower-child-type, and a few lucky men. At its peak, the march — or shall we say the frolic? — drew about 50 onlookers.

One of the activists held a photo of a tubby, pale gentleman going shirtless in public. Undemeath his man-boobs, it read, "Allowed?" Others wore sets of butterfly wings and explained to passersby "a woman's constitutional right to be bare-chested."

On Miami Beach, topless sunbathing is socially acceptable but not technically legal. "We basically look the other way," says city public information officer Nanette Rodriguez.

Says Miami Internet personality Glenn61, who was at the demonstration: "Tits on SoBe are like squirrels in the park: fun to look at but no big deal."

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