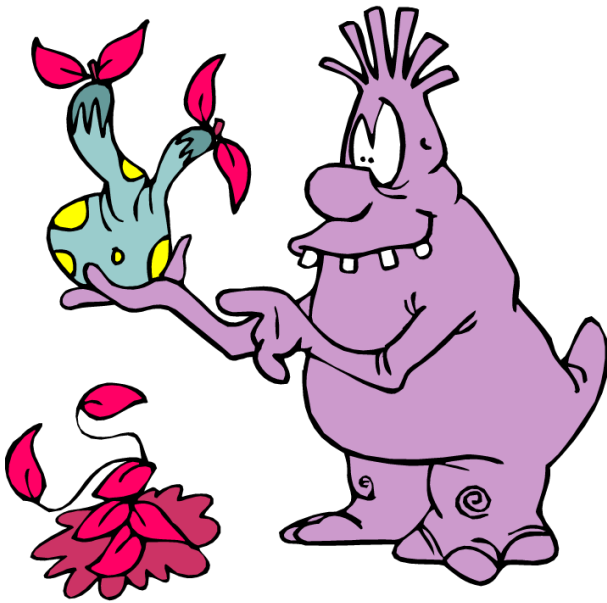


# How the Namuh learned to be content with who they were.

By Kathy J. Kater



Once upon a time in a world not really so far away, but a few light years from here I guess, there lived a people called the Namuh, who happened to be quite a lot like us. The Namuh had their share of life's ups and downs, with good days and bad, happy times and sad. But they had learned to take the good with the bad, understood what they could and could not control, and overall they were content.

Now the Namuh lived in and near cities and towns where they worked and played together. The children went to school, played games as all children do, and looked forward to growing up to do all the things that grown ups can do, like stay up late, make the rules, and raise their own families of little Namuh. The Namuh took great pride in their family heritage, and many family portraits, from many generations before, hung in collections on their walls.

One day in the world of Namuh a photographer was feeling a bit down. He had wishes of becoming a very successful photographer. He hoped to sell many portraits, so he could make a lot of money and afford to live in a big house. He was a good man, and good at his business too. Even so, he felt his business was not growing as much as he would like. He needed a new idea to attract people to his photo studio.

As he thought and thought, he decided he would show off some of his best family portraits in the front window of his store. He hoped when

passers-by saw them, they would like them so much, they would want a good looking portrait of their own family. He also thought he would try something that had not been done before. He decided to pay the newspaper--which up to that time only had words and no pictures--to print some of his best photos alongside his weekly advertisement. This way he could show his good work to all the readers of the newspaper. He hoped they might be attracted from far and wide to have their portraits taken. And so he carried out his plan, and sure enough, his business doubled in no time!

As people came from far and wide wanting a wonderful portrait for their wall, they almost always said it was NOT the portraits of the grown-up Namuh that had caught their eye in his advertisements. No, it was the portraits of cute, smiling children they "Oohed" and "Ahhed" about. Well, children are always cute, no matter what, aren't they? And so, they told the photographer they LOVED to look at his photos of Namuh children. THAT was what had attracted their eye and made them eager to have their own children's images in a portrait to hang. So the photographer continued to advertise many different kinds of photos. But more and more he was drawn to advertise photos of beautiful, young children--for that is what brought in the business.

Time went by, and the photographer was doing very well advertising his talent by displaying photos of children. Nevertheless, he wanted to do even better. He wanted more grown-up Namuhs to have their portraits taken, as well as their children's.

So again he thought. He wondered, "Why is it that Namuhs like photos of children the best?" Well, it wasn't enough for him to know that pictures of baby ANYTHINGS are ALWAYS the cutest. Of course baby animals and children HAVE to be the cutest things, don't they? That's their job, and it is why we want to pick them up and hug them and play with them and make them smile and take GOOD care of them. Right? Think about it for yourself. Baby kittens, big eyed puppies, human babies--even new young seedling plants coming through the ground--they all make us say, "Ooooh, look!" Big eyes in a little face, sweet little mouths, perfect turned up noses, soft, smooth skin or silky, fuzzy fur. Now doesn't it just make you smile to imagine it?

"That's it!," he thought. "YOUNG and CUTE are what people like to look at. And when they see what they like, they feel happy. It attracts them. Then they want to own it for themselves, or something like it. Of course! YOUNG and FRESH and DELICATE and SMOOTH and PERFECT, without any LUMPS or BUMPS or WRINKLES!

When the photographer realized this, smart man that he was, he had a new idea. "What if I take photos of grown-ups to advertise my business, but look for only those rare grown-ups who still have the youngest looking faces, with fine, delicate features, and turned up noses--as most little girls and boys do?"

But then he wondered, "I wonder if people would like grown-up Namuh men to appear cute, like little boys? Hmmm..." He wasn't completely sure why, but he decided to concentrate only on photos of grown up young and cute Namuh FEMALES. He was confident this would succeed.

"I'll search until I find grown up females who still have those young, straight up and down bodies--even though they've grown tall. Tall, but not really rounded out the way most Namuh women are. Yes, the best would have slim, little girl-like bodies--but tall. Then they will look even more slim! And with fresh, young, delicate, beautiful faces, with no lines or wrinkles! In my studio I can make them look perfect with special lights and cosmetics and photo tricks!"

The photographer was not sure if it would work, but he decided to try his idea. He paid the newspaper to print his advertisements, and settled back to wait. Sure enough, people came in masses to his business. They "Oohed" and "Ahhed" about the beautiful photos of grown up Namuh females in his advertisements. They wanted their OWN portraits to look that way.

The photographer was doing very, very well. He bought a big, big house and a different car for every day of the week, and he was happy.

Now, one day the photographer's neighbor, who had a toothpaste factory, met him on the street. "How do you do it?" he asked--for he

knew the photographer had great success, and wished he could do as well with his toothpaste sales. Since the photographer was a good man, he decided to share his idea with the toothpaste maker. "CUTE," he said. "You've got to make your toothpaste CUTE! That's what I did!"

Now the toothpaste maker had his doubts, but he didn't think the photographer would try to lead him the wrong way. So he went back to his factory and set to work. In no time at all, he had the cutest package for his toothpaste you can imagine. Not yet satisfied, he had the photographer take PICTURES of his toothpaste tube all dressed up, with little legs and arms sticking out and a big toothy smiling face on the front! Oh it was CUTE! He advertised his toothpaste in all the newspapers and magazines and on the TV too. Then he wrote a cute little song that went along with the advertisements. He even had the TV people make it APPEAR that his little toothpaste tube was singing and dancing to the song. Sure enough, his sales increased. But not as much as he had hoped.

Time went by. One day the toothpaste maker was having lunch with some friends who were also in business. There was a car manufacturer, a clothing designer, a lawn furniture maker, and an orange juice salesperson. Who should walk into the restaurant but the photographer! The toothpaste maker had just been telling his friends how the photographer had helped him--although his business had not grown quite as much as he had wished. "Join our table," he said to the photographer, hoping to ask for more advice. "I've had success with my cute packaging, but not as much good fortune as you. What do you think I should do?"

The photographer was a good man and was happy to help if he could. So he thought and he thought. Finally he said, "Maybe it's not cute packaging or cute songs so much as cute, young children or beautiful young looking women that attract people to buy. Maybe you need to have photos of CUTE children or young, perfectly beautiful smiling women holding your toothpaste in your advertisement. Then people will feel if they buy your toothpaste, their smiles will look forever young and fresh, like the images of the models in the pictures!"

Well the photographer couldn't have imagined what he would start!

ALL the business people showed up at his studio the very next day. They asked to have pictures taken of their products with one of the young, rare models with the girlish shapes and looks. And so, he took pictures of toothpaste with delicate young smiling mouths, orange juice, cars, tennis rackets, and lawn furniture, all arranged with lovely young women who had that special childlike appeal--which he made even more appealing and perfect with his special effects. For selling fashions and face lotions he choose the most beautiful and tall, straight up and down women's bodies to show off the products. Even though these models were the hardest to find, he searched until he found enough women he could make appear perfect. That way, different ads could have different models, even though they all had almost exactly the same beautiful looks. But it was what happened next that the photographer never, ever could have imagined.

With his idea working so well, by now the advertisements with the special girls were used for just about any product you could think of. Those unusual models were EVERYWHERE: on TV, in newspapers, in magazines, billboards, on the product labels themselves. Some had cute songs to go with the ads, some had words saying how great the product was, some just had the name of the product and the smiling young model--as if to say, "Look at me! If you buy this product, you'll be as appealing and special as I am!"

Well, it wasn't long before all the Namuh females began to notice that all the girls and women in the ads looked pretty much one certain way. They also noticed that everyone really liked that way to look. Those beautiful looking models were a lot like young fluffy kittens or playful, happy puppies or rosy cheeked, soft skinned children--people just couldn't get enough of looking at them. By now, the movie and TV show makers had noticed the same thing, so now almost all the actresses were chosen for that same young and perfect look. Whenever people looked at pictures of them they "Oohed" and "Ahhed," and felt happy.

At first the Namuh females enjoyed the images of the rare and beautiful Namuh women as much as anyone. They didn't really think

more about it than that. Oh, some of them thought it would be fun to look like the models in the ads and on the TV, but they knew most women don't really look like that. So they were content with who they were. They continued to grow up to enjoy the pleasure of their own special abilities, talents and interests, with their families, friends, and good work to do.

But as years went by, and the ads with the rare Namuh models were EVERYWHERE, the feelings of the young Namuh women began to change. Seeing those pictures of beautiful women smiling at them almost from the day they were born. . . well, the Namuh women began to think maybe that was the way they were supposed to look!

After a while, it got so the young Namuh girls never knew--and the older ones forgot--that there was a time when there were lots of different ways to look, and all Namuh were happy to be who they were. It began to be normal for Namuh girls to believe (since EVERY SINGLE ONE of the women in ALL the ads and on almost ALL the TV shows and movies, looked young and very thin and very beautiful)--maybe they should be able to look like these women too!

This had not really occurred to them before. But gradually this idea took hold. More and more women began to compare their own appearances to the Namuh models.

Of course almost NONE of them could look as perfect as the models. So naturally they could not help feeling a little badly about themselves in comparison. They felt they would need a lot of improvement to have the "right look" to feel attractive. Unlike normal Namuh, there was almost no variation in how the Namuh models looked. Some had different hair or eye color, or slightly different facial features, but their bodies were all exactly one way and one way only. First, they were tall. Somehow it wasn't so hard for the Namuh females to accept it certainly wasn't their FAULT if they too were not tall. But when the Namuh females compared their own bodies to how completely slim and even skinny the models were, well, right then and there the Namuh females saw an opportunity. You can't change your height, but if you eat less, you can lose weight. Isn't that right?

It wasn't long before more and more of the Namuh women were on strict diets to be thinner. In fact, everyone was so hopeful that diets would give them a slim body like the beautiful models, just about EVERY female was dieting. It became the normal thing to do. Even the women who were already thin dieted. Since the Namuh models were LESS THAN THIN--hardly anyone felt they could relax and not diet. Those Namuh women who were naturally rounder or fatter--like their parents and grandparents before them--felt they could never succeed or be good enough. Their bodies were not meant to be slim in the first place, let alone skinny! Hardly anyone felt happy anymore, because they were all trying so hard to be thinner.

Now that the Namuh women felt a need for a lot of improvement in their looks, they began to buy lots of cosmetics and other products to make-up their faces and color their hair and to try to hide the ways they felt imperfect. When they bought clothing, instead of looking for clothing they felt would be fun to wear, they tried to fit into the clothing they saw looking great on the models. Well, I wish I could say this was as bad as it got, because, things got even WORSE.

All those dieting Namuh women began to feel what any dieting person feels: HUNGRY! This is no surprise, and it shouldn't have surprised them. By now, however, they were so caught up believing they SHOULD be able to be as thin as the models, and that anything else was AWFUL, and that something MUST BE WRONG with them if they weren't really thin. . . well, they lost all their common sense. HUNGRY? They began to feel something was WRONG WITH THEM when they were hungry! Can you imagine such a thing?? When they finally became so hungry from all the dieting that they couldn't stand it, you can guess what happened. What happens to any creature who is SO HUNGRY? When they would finally let themselves eat, planning of course to eat just a little, they couldn't stop--not for a long time and not until well after they were quite STUFFED.

Now you would think they would understand this is the natural thing to do, wouldn't you? Of course anyone has to eat, and eat, and eat after getting SO HUNGRY. Isn't that right?

I wish I could say they understood this. But they did not. Instead, they

felt horrible about having eaten so much. They decided it meant they should try to diet more, and be even stricter about it. Because by now, most blamed themselves. They believed the problem was that their appetites were just TOO BIG. They believed it was that they were TOO HUNGRY, and that's why they ate TOO MUCH. They felt like pigs around food, and thought all their overeating proved it. They forgot all about common sense. They did not stop to think anyone would be extra hungry if they didn't eat enough. So, back to dieting they went.

Well, guess what? They did so much dieting--and so much overeating to make up for it, many of them ate themselves right into larger and larger sizes. That's what happens, of course. Just the opposite of what they wanted to happen! The thinner they tried to be, the fatter they got! The ones that didn't get fat--well, they were still afraid food would make them get fat. Everyone was REALLY miserable. What do you think they did? What would you do?

I'll tell you what they did.

One day the Namuh women--who had been so busy feeling bad, comparing themselves to the models and sometimes to each other, that they had almost forgotten how to TALK to each other-- started talking to each other. REALLY talking I mean. Not just about their diets or how fat they felt. They started talking about how unhappy they all were with the way things were going. They asked, "Is this is how it is supposed to be when you grow up?" They missed how it was when they were children. Some could recall when they simply ate plenty of good food, and then went out to play. Then they had felt so satisfied after eating, they could go until the next meal without being hungry! That was before they worried about trying to make their bodies look just one way. They noticed the photos hanging in the houses of their parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles. They noticed that these grown-ups were all different sizes and shapes and had many, many different looks and styles.

They said, "Have you noticed that every kind of animal in the world is so CUTE when it's young? Whenever anyone looks at kittens or puppies -- even little boys -- they "Ooh and Ahh." But when little animals or



little boys grow up and their looks change, people love them, just the same. Those cute little ones don't just get taller, they get fuller; they fill out. While some are still good looking, people don't they "Ooh and Ahh" at them anymore. Most simply look average -- not beautiful or ugly. A few are even homely or funny looking. But still, we love them, not so much for how they look, but for who they are."

They asked, "Why are WE all trying to keep on looking like puppies and kittens and young monkeys? It's time for us to be all different sizes and shapes and filled out, and look like who we were meant to be. We do not even know what would happen if we just ate our fill of good food and went on with our day! Now, we diet so much, we're hungry all the time. When we do eat, we gulp down our food FAST, and eat so much more than we need.

Well the females talked and talked--all the females, all over the Namuh world. And even though it was hard, they decided to face the truth: Almost none of them were born to look very much like the models, and they were making themselves very unhappy trying! People are born to be all different sizes and shapes--big, small, round and soft, with shapes like pears, apples or carrots or willow trees; muscled or dainty, short and tall, with imperfect faces to top it all!

The female Namuhs decided it was not worth it to spend their lives feeling bad because they could not be something they were not meant to be. They had understood in an earlier time that there was no reason to feel bad about themselves. Now, just as they had never felt bad not being rich or famous--because they had not EXPECTED IT of themselves--they came to understand that to be happy, they should not EXPECT to look other than who they were born to be.

Finally they realized what they had tried to do could not work. Finally, they could stop feeling like failures! Instead they could be free to become the best they could be in ALL ways, enjoying the bodies they were born to have.

They dressed and decorated themselves their own special ways, understanding that attractive Namuhs could look lots of different ways. They bought things they needed or liked, rather than in the

hopes of looking like the models. They ate lots of different foods until they were full and then they went on to other things: play, work and school. In the end, the advertisers weren't quite so rich. But they had not meant to cause such harm. They were glad that everyone was happier, content to be who they were.

# Namuh Story Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What do you think about how the Namuh women came to feel bad about themselves? Why do you think this happened?

2. Do you think this story is something that could happen in our culture? Explain.

3. If you were in a similar situation, can you imagine starting to feel the way the Namuh women felt? Explain.

4. What did you think when you heard that the Namuh women felt there was something "wrong with them" when they became "so hungry" from dieting?

5. Have you ever known anyone who has complained that they were hungry all the time when they were on a diet?

6. How did you feel when the Namuh women realized that almost none of them were born to look like the models, and decided that they did not want to be unhappy trying anymore?

7. Have you ever become unhappy trying to do or be something that you later realized was not right or natural for you (at least not without more effort than it was worth)? What was that like? What did you decide to do? How did that feel?

8. What if only a few of the Namuh women had decided to stop trying to be something they weren't anymore--but everyone else continued? What would that have been like for the few who stopped?

9. Could the advertisers have done anything differently to increase their sales?

10. Why do you think the author called these people "the Namuh?"