

THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

August, 2004

Faye Girsh Returns

Our July program featured Ms. Faye Girsh, Senior Vice President of End-of-Life-Choices speaking on the politics, problems and options surrounding individual human death. Ms. Girsh had previously spoken to our group as president of the Hemlock Society in May, 2001 and we were delighted to have her back to update us on new developments within her organization and current legal, political and technical issues surrounding "voluntary death."

Girsh summarized what options are available to individuals who might want to terminate their own lives and what impediments there

One important step for individuals to take to avoid these problems, Girsh emphasized, was to make sure they have the proper "Power of Attorney" and health care directives in place. But this might not be sufficient. Girsh discussed a case where the proper paperwork was completed but the children were not informed. When it came time to implement the person's wishes, the children successfully intervened to prevent the desired process from taking place. Thus, she emphasized, paperwork is not enough; one must fully engaged the entire family in decision on how to terminate a life.



Faye Girsh and Lois Crowell

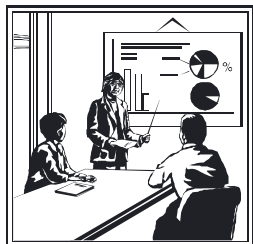
are to the exercise of these options. Of course, one option is to take one's own life (by what-ever means) but it is illegal for any other person to assist in that act. This poses a vexing problem for physically handicapped people or others too ill to take the necessary steps.



George Delury and Faye Girsh

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Humanist Society of Santa Barbara



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2004-2005

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Board meetings are scheduled on the Monday preceding the Saturday general monthly meeting of the Society and are usually held at the home of one of the Board members. HSSB members are welcome to attend these meetings. Contact any Board member for more information.

Membership Notes

by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 3 pm in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

or by contacting any of the Board members listed in the left-hand column of this page.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter mailed to a friend or someone who might be interested in our society, please send their contact information to PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130 or call Mary Wilk. Alternatively, all of our newsletters are available at the web site shown above.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join our society. Annual membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) for a sponsor. Members receive the monthly newsletter and have the option of attending meetings, outings and special events sponsored by the society.

Those unable to attend our monthly meetings may subscribe to our newsletter for an annual fee of \$20, but are not entitled to other membership privileges. When attending our meetings, a donation of \$2.00 from members and \$5.00 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complementary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our society.

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Girsh also discussed the status of Oregon, the only state that currently has a right-to-die law in place.

These laws have been under assault by the Department of Justice under John Ashcroft but remain in place. Other states are also considering such legislation.

As evidenced by the pictures on Page 1, we can note with considerable pride that a number of HSSB members have a close working relationship with Faye and her organization and have played a significant role in furthering the efforts of the End-of-Life-Choices organization. Most notable is Lois Crowell who has made the largest individual contribution to the educational efforts of the organization.



Anne Rojas, Faye Girsh, Lois Crowell and Mary Wilk

Others who have had a significant involvement include George Delury and Ann Curiel, Marian Shapiro and certainly others who deserve mention. As is often the case with other causes, the efforts and influence of

HSSB members extends well beyond the confines of our own organization and membership.

For a more detailed discussion of Faye's visit read the July 29th issue of the *Independent*.

August Program

The August program will feature one of our own, Adrian Wenner, speaking on "Scientific Process and Honey Bee Language?" Adrian notes that despite the image scientists like to portray of themselves, many may hold onto pet hypotheses in their line of research - even after evidence continues to accumulate that counters their belief system(s). A lack of instruction in scientific philosophy, methodology, psychology, and so-ciology contributes to this basic re-luctance to entertain novel ideas and conclusions.

The controversy about whether honey bees have a "language" serves as a case history of the conflict between a hypothesis which has become dogma against conflicting evidence that honey bees are more insect than human in their behavior.

Chairman's Chatter

by Dick Cousineau

Being a person who has defined for himself that existence is without some grand purpose, I struggle with the ideas of morality and usefulness during my short period of sunlight of life. I am coming to the conclusion, for me, that my existence is pure, indeterminate luck in space and time.

I have but 70 to 80 years to experience this once and only span of beauty and opportunity and only a portion of that span to develop my mind and opinions, and even less time to



develop a moral system to implement these opinions. If, as I believe, that life is without purpose then what can I do to at least make it better for me, my family, and my neighbors? Obviously I came rapidly to the conclusion that an individual's efforts to ameliorate serious suffering of others can only be minimal.

After becoming deeply involved in Humanism during the past ten years, I now realize that as a movement Humanism needs to move beyond our parochial certitude and justifiable criticism of others, to reach out and make a difference in our community. Our recent publicity efforts have been going very well,

thanks to our Board and specifically to Marian Shapiro, and we are becoming favorably known to more and more people. This is good. I want to know the Society's wishes beyond our becoming known. While we cannot solve too many needs, we can select one charity or one good cause to receive a regular donation in such a manner to really make a difference.

Do we wish to support a philosophical or political position such as the First Amendment Defense Fund to further the separation of church and state, or do we wish to support a more local grass roots effort such as Domestic Violence Solutions (Women's Shelter)? Or both? In either case I would think we could do a lot more that we are doing, even with the "Jim Alexander Monthly Canned Food Collection" and the individual coupon efforts by Pat and John Coppejans to actually purchase food..

Shall we go national with the FADF, or shall we actually commit time and money for projects and fund raisers for the 'Shelter'? Are there any other non-profits, such as the Library, or Language Mentoring, that could benefit from our society's efforts? Or shall we remain exclusively an active discussion and educational society? I elicit your thoughts and suggestions – please call me at 687-2371 to let me know your feelings.

Thanks — All the best to you.

Millions long for immortality who do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon.

— Susan Ertz

Book Club Notices

By Art Brody

Wednesday, August 25th

The Humanist Book Club for August will focus on *Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan* by Jamie Zeppa. Bhutan is an ancient kingdom secluded high in the Himalayas with unique customs and people unspoiled by the passage of time – a cultural and ecological preserve known as the last Shangri-La.

A magical film about Bhutan will be shown at 1 pm followed by the book discussion at the home of Aida Bullock (687-0784). Please telephone for address and directions.

Wednesday, September 22nd

The Humanist book discussion in September is *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* by Michael Lewis. Aside from being highly entertaining, this book insightfully regales what happened when rational creative thinking crosses horns with entrenched baseball ideology. Recommended by two humanists who have never been interested in baseball. (*Ed. Note: And by me! It is a spell-binding story of the conflicts between rigorous quantitative analysis, received wisdom, and powerful egos. It's a great story where American baseball only serves as the setting for an exploration of how we think and act.*)

Social Scene

by Anne Rojas

Things were rather quiet this month. We did have a nice turnout at Sizzler after the talk by Faye Girsh. Everyone seems happy at Sizzler, but variety is fun and in that spirit we will eat at the Chinese Buffet, Ming Dynasty in the K-Mart center in Goleta on Aug 21st, after

our regular meeting.

Sunday brunch at Cody's features good food and acoustics, fair prices, but zero ambiance. We are troopers and I hear no complaints about breakfasting in what may charitably be called a "supply room." Please let me know if any of you would like an occasional return to Hola Amigos for nicer surroundings, better views and higher prices.



We are still trying to line up the excursion to Ventura for an evening of Dinner and Theatre. We have the interest but I am now struggling with the dates. More later.

Suggestions for activities always welcome.

We still need volunteers to bring drinks and cookies to our regular monthly meetings. Please do your part!!! Call me at 564-6086 to volunteer. Thanks.

Book Review

by Adrian Wenner

Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism

by Susan Jacoby. Metropolitan Books (Henry Holt & Co., Inc.)

Throughout the history of the United States, one faction or another has attempted to impose its will on the body politic, efforts generally defeated by adherence to elements written into our Constitution and the Bill of

Rights. Most recently, the Religious Right has insisted that the framers of the constitution and the Bill of Rights were not only very religious but Christian. Not so, as thoroughly documented by Susan Jacoby.

Jacoby sets the record straight on that issue; the framers of the Constitution and Bill of Rights actually had been pressured by religious groups at the time to omit reference to God or Christianity in those documents. They were apparently fearful that one or another religious statement might favor one religion over others and impinge on their right to worship at they pleased without government interference.

Jacoby prefers the term "Freethinkers" to "secular" or "humanist" for those dedicated individuals who have continued efforts during the past couple of centuries to counter repeated attacks and attempted subversions of our constitutional rights. She covers the efforts of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, James Madison, and Abraham Lincoln in that context. The influence of Robert Green Ingersoll commands special attention, as does her treatment of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Clarence Darrow. Emma Goldman, her contributions covered extensively in the book, also served as mentor to Roger Nash Baldwin, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union (1920).

However, one cannot do justice to the book by singling out only a few names. Jacoby provides many examples of the manner in a relatively few individuals have managed to initiate, ensure, and preserve freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution and Bill of Rights - including women's suffrage, abortion rights, conscientious objection, and resistance during the McCarthy era.

One will not find the volume relaxed reading during an evening; it contains an overwhelming amount of factual material with not always a clear direction. The very long paragraphs (about a page in length) impede ready understanding.

On the other hand, every humanist, secularist, or freethinker should own a copy of this book as a reference, to be consulted on all points of the history and difficulties associated with keeping our direction throughout the history of our country. The text provides an astonishing amount of hard evidence for anyone who wishes, for instance, to write a letter to the editor to counter pronouncements by those of the religious right who have obviously not done their homework about the origins of our nation.

Web Site of the Month

By Colin Gordon

Our site for the month of August is that of the World Pantheist Movement:

<http://www.pantheism.net/>

which sounds like the exact opposite of Humanism but is in fact very much like it.

They say, "Our ethics are humanistic and green, our metaphysics naturalist and scientific, but to these we add the emotional and aesthetic dimensions which humans need to joyfully embrace their place in the universe and to motivate their concern for nature and human welfare" and what humanist would argue with that?

Continuing in the same vein, Article 2 of the Belief Statement of the WPM states "All matter, energy, and life are an interconnected

unity of which we are an inseparable part. We rejoice in our existence and seek to participate ever more deeply in this unity through knowledge, celebration, meditation, empathy, love, ethical action and art." Couldn't have put it better myself.

The site is nicely arranged, attractive to look at and easy to navigate, with plenty of content but not so much that you get lost.

To sum up, with a quote from Margaret Atwood: god is not the voice in the whirlwind, god is the whirlwind.

Membership Update

by Mary Wilk



I appreciate those of you who send in your membership dues promptly. The HSSB is also very grateful for the generous sponsorship donations this year by the following members:

- Margaret Casey
- Dick Cousineau
- John & Pat Coppenjans
- Colin Gordon
- Ralph Fontana
- Diane Freeman
- Jim & Rose Hill
- Ray Kubacki
- Don & Barbara Margerum
- Warren & Thomasine Orsburn
- Carol Palladini
- Mickey Plaut
- Sydney & Hope Smith
- Mary Wilk

The Society also extends a warm welcome to the following new members:

George Sirkin
P.O. Box 1940
Goleta, CA 93116

Hope Taylor
850 Camino Viejo
Santa Barbara, CA 93108
566-3053
tay850@aol.com

The Exercised Editor

By Roger Schlueter

Bill Edelen's July 4th column (in which he again asserted that the US founding fathers were Deists) elicited a Letter-to-the-Editor response from Nathan Post, who asserted that Bill was using a "clip-and-paste" approach to American history which left out salient facts.

Bill has noted that his periodic columns about the religious sensibilities of our founding fathers draw more fervent responses than just about any other topic he writes about. Post continued this tradition by citing "quotes" which are bogus and asserting facts which are also bogus.

My own response letter was not published so I would like to use the remaining space to highlight my key points:

Post cited "Nelly Parke Custie, who lived with George and Martha Washington for 20 years" as saying that George was not a Deist. Actually, Nellie Custus was Washington's adopted daughter and she stated that she, "...never witnessed his private devotions." Further, both Custus and Washington's pastor at the Protestant Episcopal Church of Amer-

ica, Bishop White, also noted that the President refused to take communion and would leave the service before it was served.

In fact, during his presidency and in his later life, Washington never once referred to Jesus Christ and rarely to God. In fact, Thomas Jefferson in *Jefferson's Works*, Vol. iv., p. 572 says that Washington "...never, on any occasion, said a word to the public which showed a belief in the Christian religion."

Post also asserted that Jefferson himself was a Christian. Jefferson's views are more accurately reflected in a letter he wrote to John Adams, "The day will come when the

mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter" (*Works*, Vol. iv, p. 365).

In short, the evidence that our Country's founding fathers were Christian adherents and intended that this nation, governed "by the people, for the people" should be governed as a Christian nation is entirely lacking.

Next month: the scariest legislation ever introduced in Congress. You'll be exercised too.