

THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

August, 2005

Is God Missing?

By Nancy Wahl

On Saturday, August 20 at 3 pm in the Vista del Monte Patio Room, we will be featuring the Santa Barbara premiere of the controversial 60-minute documentary, *The God Who Wasn't There*.

This contentious, Michael Moore-style film presents evidence that Jesus was a fictional character and delivers a no-holds-barred criticism of fundamentalist Christianity. It premiered in San Francisco to standing room-only audiences in May, and is playing in commercial theaters in major cities throughout America.

The *Los Angeles Times* has called *The God Who Wasn't There*, "Provocative -- to put it mildly."



Richard Carrier

Among the scholars interviewed in this documentary are neuroscientist Sam Harris (the very same Sam Harris who spoke to us last November at SBCC!), and Columbia University historian Richard Carrier. One particular incentive to

come to the meeting is the fact that Mr. Carrier will be attending our Santa Barbara event to offer additional insight and commentary, answer questions and sign copies of his new book *Sense and Goodness without God*.

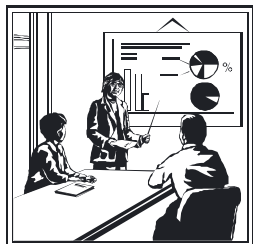
A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Richard Carrier has also published several articles for the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and served as Editor and Editor in Chief of the *Secular Web* for many years.

Warning



Some words of warning. This film includes some of the most violent clips from Mel Gibson's Christian blockbuster, *The Passion of the Christ*. You may literally want to close your eyes during these scenes.

It also, as mentioned, "takes no prisoners" with regard to the question of the existence of Jesus. If such a program seriously conflicts with your own Humanist perspective, you may not want to attend.

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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 usually 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 address 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 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our Society.

(See **Membership**, Page 3)

(Membership, continued from Page 2)

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society:

Lex and Ginny Crane
1038B Calle Sastre
Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Peter and Ruth Pocock
1101-D Sende Verde
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
687-8459
pocock2@cox.net

The Society sends out reminders when membership renewals are due. We would like to thank all of you who have responded promptly and appeal to the others who have not yet done so to mail in your checks without delay.

Board Notes by Hope Smith



Hope Smith

Some items of interest from the July board meeting are:

- We have printed 500 copies of the HSSB brochures and business cards. These materials are available to all members.

The brochure is a tri-fold, double-sided page that explains Humanism in a very few words and provides information on how to contact us. You have probably seen them on the free literature table at our meetings.

The business cards are in the form of a standard business card and contain information about Humanism and our local Society in an even more condensed format. They are designed to be easily carried in your wallet or purse for distribution to anyone who might be interested.

- We still need some members to volunteer to help set up the Patio Room prior to our meetings. If you can help, please show up shortly after 2 pm to help with room preparation.
- Help still needed from members with cars for transporting non-driving members to our events. Offering to help does not constitute a permanent commitment but just indicates a willingness to help as needed. Please contact Dick (687-2371) if you can help.
- Ballot results for the 2005-2006 HSSB Board: 98% of those attending the June general meeting voted for the slate. Therefore the new board will be the same as the previous board leaving two at-large memberships still open.

(Ed. Note: At the July board meeting, the board was happy to welcome Diane Freeman and Adrian Wenner to fill the two At-Large positions. Welcome aboard, Diane and Adrian)

Chairman's Chat by Dick Cousineau

What is this obligation to stifle any criticism of irrational belief systems and to actually pay deference to religious belief? It seems that some believe that ignorance and mythic regard is beyond the bounds of scathing satire.



Dick Cousineau

While it is common and accepted practice for "heartily, red-faced, well-fed ministers and theologians" to denigrate the non-believer and equate us with a form of Satanism, and to state that most of the ills of society are the result of our pressure on the government to tolerate all peoples and beliefs or non-beliefs, we hesitate to call attention to a "body of mysteries that is called truth" by those who "disseminate blather, not innocently like a philosopher, but maliciously like a politician".

I recall conversations with religionists who were taken aback when I laughed at their suppositions of revealed truth and its righteousness. Wendy Kaminer points this out in her marvelous book *Sleeping with Extraterrestrials* where she quotes Menken as saying "a presupposition exists that religious opinions should be respected for their own sake, even though they tend to run to the peculiarly puerile and tedious kind of nonsense." Even politicians such as Hillary Clinton lament the "spiritual vacuum and sickness in the American soul" appealing to Americans to immerse themselves in a belief

in a saving grace beyond our knowledge and experience.

It is stated by many politicians that virtue is derived exclusively from religious teachings and/or spiritual acknowledgements, neglecting the vast moral philosophy of Humanism. Respect for individuals who quote ancient, contradictory and irrelevant texts can not be gained without open and thorough critical study and discussion. Rather they demand respect because they have swallowed wholly such nonsense without thinking; in other words, they have faith! Vehement, uncritical, and non-evidential faith.

Why do we respect people who have stopped thinking and who encourage us to do likewise? Probably because they are in our families, in our workplace, and in our social life and it is easier to overlook their propensity for nonsensical admonitions than to call them on it, thereby losing them. I have found that a position arrived at through faith cannot be eliminated by rationality but I will not allow any opportunity to go by without stating my rational Humanist position, even in the face of societal rejection.

Here I stand.



I would not for my life destroy one star of human hope, but I want it so that when a poor woman rocks the cradle and sings a lullaby to the dimpled darling, she will not be compelled to believe that ninety-nine chances in a hundred she is raising kindling wood for hell.

— Robert Ingersoll

July Meeting Notes

By Robert Bernstein
and
Nancy Wahl

On July 16th at SBCC's Fe Bland Forum, about 100 members and visitors were treated to Dr. Jennifer Michael Hecht's engaging tour of history's great doubters and their contributions to intellectual progress.

Dr. Hecht began with a somewhat macabre story of a group of doctors in late 19th century France who doubted the widely-accepted belief of the existence of a soul. To test their doubts, they formed the Society of Mutual Autopsy in which members donated their bodies at their death for dissection and examination by other members.

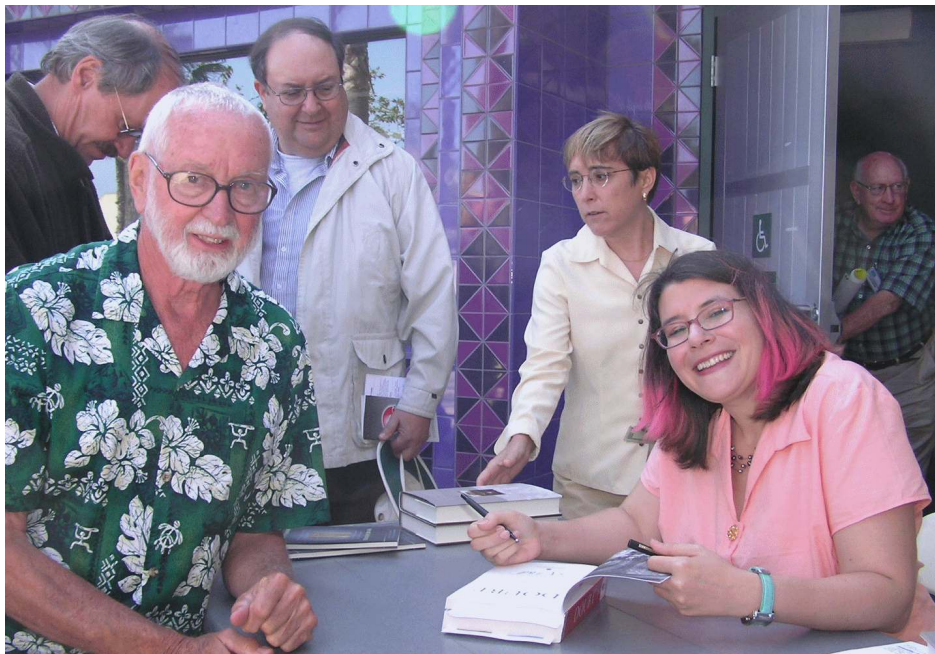
Then Dr. Hecht took us on a mental roller

coaster ride examining events that occurred during three millenia and over four continents as she portrayed mankind's relentless struggle between belief and denial.

Among the events she discussed were: 1277 Sorbonne, Paris, where Aristotle's "pagan" ideas about the universe were outlawed, 660 BC India where the Carvaka laughed at the notion of an afterlife, 13th century Spain where Maimonides rejected the idea that religious truth can exist separately from scientific truth and 1780 Berlin where Immanuel Kant expressed his peculiar skeptical beliefs.

Dr. Hecht believes even Jesus was a doubter when, as he lay dying on the cross, he asked God, "Why have you forsaken me?"

Dr. Hecht, who is also an award-winning poet, is currently writing a new book called *Modern Happiness* due out in 2006.



Jennifer signs Adrian's book.

Photo: Robert Bernstein

Getting to Know You: Josette Barsky by Diane Krohn

You've probably met Josette and her husband Louis if you've attended an HSSB meeting. They are usually helping attendees at the door before each meeting. That is, if Josette isn't out traveling all over the world. She is quite the traveler. So far this year she has been to Morocco and has gone river rafting on the Rogue River in Oregon.

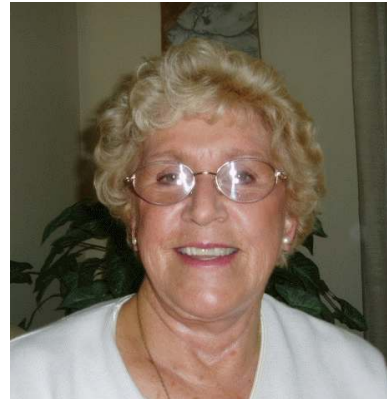
Josette was born in Brussels, Belgium and is a second-generation Humanist. After completing high school and attending the Fashion Institute in Brussels, she came to the USA in 1955 and settled in the Los Angeles area. She raised her two daughters mostly by herself and supported herself by working in the garment industry in Los Angeles as a pattern maker.

Ask Josette to describe this work and you will realize that she was a design engineer. But, as Josette explained, women did not become "engineers" at that time.

Josette and Louis met in the Sierra Club and moved to Santa Barbara in 1989 after Louis retired. Josette continued to do free-lance work for large companies, such as Patagonia and Big Dogs, and small companies until about 3 years ago.

Like many Europeans, Josette grew up in a society that is less religious and church-oriented than the US. As she said, "You are born, married, and die in church, and that's it." However, she has encountered no problems personally being non-religious in this country. She does, though, feel that the US is becoming more religious over time.

Josette and Louis became interested in the Humanist Society when William Edelen came to Santa Barbara. They could not attend his talk at that time, but an article in the newspaper about Edelen also included the HSSB phone number. They called that number and subsequently became members.



Josette Barsky

Josette travels whenever she can, and she especially enjoys trips to developing nations, frequently through Overseas Adventure Travels. She plans to go to India next spring, and is hoping to go to either China or Vietnam the following fall. She has, of course, traveled all over Europe, parts of Africa and the Middle East, and has hiked and rafted many places in the US as well.



Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man — living in the sky ... where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time! But He loves you.

— George Carlin

Social Scene

by Anne Rojas

Hello Humanists! I hope you are enjoying your summer.



Anne H. Rojas

The last dining out drew a good crowd to El Torito but the consensus was that the noise level was much too high to merit a return visit. The food and service were good, but we must scratch this venue.

This month, we will return to our old favorite, Ming Dynasty in the K-Mart shopping center. I have reserved the two large round tables in the back. Remember you get the buffet and the Mongolian Bar-B-Que for one low price. I hope that many of you will attend and we extend a special invitation for those of you who have not dined with us before. As always, we invite our speaker, and he generally comes to continue the conversation.

The last Sunday brunch drew eleven people. We were at our usual place, Crocodile, in the Lemon Tree Inn. The food was quite good, the setting very pleasant, and the service horrible. This was out of character for the Crocodile so we will give them another chance as the good generally far outweighs the bad at this location.

Your Activities Committee and the Edelen Committee are currently working on the program for Edelen on November 11th. We plan to have a reception after his talk but all

details remain to be settled. If any of you know of a restaurant that might be good for our reception of 35-50 people, please let me know. If you care to do any preliminary investigation, it should have ample parking, a nice room, good food, and be at a reasonable price per person. Thanks in advance for any help on this matter.

As always, your help and suggestions are much appreciated. We still need volunteers for cookies and drinks at the meetings. Contact Diane Freeman if you are interested in helping out. Diane will also accept a cash contribution and buy the refreshments herself in lieu of actual refreshments.



I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

– Thomas Paine

The reason our flag is different is because it stands for burning the flag. The Constitution this week is being nibbled to death by small men with press secretaries.

– Rep. Gary L. Ackerman, D-N.Y.

Upcoming Events

by Nancy Wahl

Saturday, September 17 at Vista del Monte Scientology Exposed!



Tory Christman, a former 30-year Scientologist will talk about what happens behind the closed doors of the secretive religion based on her 30 years in the Church in its Office of Special Affairs. She was recently a big hit at CFI-West in Los Angeles.

Saturday, October 15 at Vista del Monte From Capital Punishment to Gay Marriage: What Are Today's Humanist Issues?

HSSB Member Carol Palladini will lead an open forum to discuss how - or if - humanist principles lead to any positions on today's big controversial issues. Should we, as a society, take public stands on any social/political issues? What is our responsibility as individuals to work actively for a better world?



November 11 at Garvin Theater, Santa Barbara City College The ever-popular and provocative Bill Edelen returns!



That's right...Bill is baaack!

Both Bill and Randy Alcorn wrote, in part, about the myth that the founding fathers were Christians and that this is a "Christian nation" in the Sunday, August 7th NewsPress. Bill will expand upon this theme in this talk which will surely prove as topical and stirring as his last appearance in Santa Barbara.