



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

December, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Winter Solstice Party! Saturday, December 20th, 2008



Lake Yellowstone. Photo by Wayne Beckman

By Anne Rojas

DON'T MISS THE FABULOUS WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY!

This year's event will be for the remarkable price of \$10 for members. All inclusive at Jake's on December 20th at 5 p.m. Guests (non-members) will pay the normal fee of \$20. No entree selections necessary at this time.

Please begin sending your reservations in by check, payable to HSSB:

Anne H. Rojas
HSSB Activities Director
PO Box 41823
Santa Barbara, CA 93140

Winter Solstice Party

Jake's Cottage Cuisine Café, 2911 De La Vina St., Santa Barbara, CA
Saturday, December 20th, starting at 5 p.m.

Contact Information

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- Wayne Beckman
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- Andrew Hankin
- Anne Rojas
- Marian Shapiro
- Nancy Wahl
- Mary Wilk

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I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.
--Frank Lloyd Wright, American architect

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.

News About Members

By Hope Smith, Mary Wilk,
and Andrew Hankin

Please note change of address and telephone number for our member:

Neal Rosenthal
4017-B Otono Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
617-6188

The 2008 Annual Report of Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic lists among its volunteers the following HSSB members: Dick Cousineau, Parkie Parker, Martin Shapiro, Hope Smith and Louise Stone.

On Election Day, November 4th, HSSB member Loretta Redd wrote in her newspaper column the possibility that if Prop.8 were to be approved by California voters (to ban same-gender marriage), the next version might prohibit straight couples from divorcing! Marriages pledged before God, until death, could not be ended by a civil court. Instead, divorced couples would have to reunite with their former spouses; re-marriages to new spouses would be automatically annulled to enforce reunification without bigamy. Loretta Redd's opinion column is published every week in the *Santa Barbara Daily Sound*.

On Sunday, November 23rd, HSSB members Sandy Garcia, Andrew Hankin and Michelle Rhea read poems from Michelle's published collections of atheist poetry, at CFI Los Angeles in Hollywood, CA. Their show, including videos and music, was received with applause and will be repeated in Santa Barbara on Saturday, January 17th, 2009. Details will be published in the next Secular Circular.

HSSB Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

Seasons Greetings! In December, your Book Club will be reading less and celebrating more - getting in the holiday spirit for the Winter Solstice (our Society's party is scheduled for Dec. 20th), and all of the wonderfully varied celebrations that follow. The next Book Club meeting will not happen until January 2009. We'll be jumping on the Barak bandwagon, reading *Obama - From Promise to Power*, by David Mendell (paperback, \$15).

Here's a review from Amazon.com. by J. Ronthi: "...The author does what any self-respecting journalist would do - paint an accurate account, as well as it can be done this early in the game. This book may seem completely positive on Obama at first, but, pay attention, and you will be rewarded with unbiased reporting. Some statements that appear as digs are actually nothing more than honest observations. ...It is balanced. And what comes forth is the impression that Obama isn't nearly as good as he expresses, but is far from not being a politician. The obvious implication being, that Obama is not impervious to his own message of change. Obama has tactics, folks. He isn't a saint. Still, you do get the impression that he's a smart, intuitive, ambitious, and nice guy."

When: Wednesday, January 21st, 2009, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Ray and Louise Stone's house, 2753 Miradero Drive, Santa Barbara (just north of Alamar and State St.); 682-2123
rstone@west.net

Post Election Ponderings By Roger Schlueter

I first noted the phenomenon in 1956 as a freshman in high school in central Illinois. Adlai Stevenson was running his second campaign for the Presidency against Dwight Eisenhower and, as the Illinois ex-governor and favorite son candidate, he got a lot of media coverage. He was widely regarded as an intellectual but was derided by his opponents as an “egghead.” I remember wondering what was wrong with being smart.

We’re more than five decades on from that election and the candidates and language are different but the underlying message remains. Now “elitism” and “east-coast liberal” are used as derogatory terms to paint a candidate as “not one of us.” What seems to be important is “who would you like to have a beer with” rather than “who’s the best, smartest guy for the job.” Why does this line of attack persist in our complex, technologically sophisticated country? And what do Humanist principles have to say about the matter?

The first question is easy to answer: because it is very effective. In fact, I would argue that the more complex, technologically-based our society becomes, the more such an appeal has to ordinary people who may be overwhelmed by the degree of knowledge required to evaluate the issues. Do you understand the details of the global warming debate? Did you read the platforms of the parties and evaluate their policies against your perceptions of the real world? Do you understand the myriad of issues surrounding our economic meltdown and have a reasoned opinion regarding the best approach to get us out of the mess? And so on ad infinitum.

I don’t. Nor, I would argue, do most people. So people naturally listen to what the experts and politicians have to say about such matters. But if the discussion involves nuance, details, conflicting data, and a wide range of alternatives, most people shrug and go with the libertarian or conservative or liberal candidate that matches their preconceived notions.

Much of our current TV and radio programming worsens the situation. It seems that if your position can’t be stated in a 30-second sound bite, it gets drowned out in a sea of noise. The worst example, in my opinion, is the McLaughlin Group. Shouting and over talking are the rhetorical tools most often employed.

What does Humanism say about this situation? Our attitude can derive from the emphasis Humanism places on critical thinking and the application of scientific principles to our daily lives leavened by the importance of empathy and compassion inherent to our world view. We can be aware of the sound-bite nature of our media and look for in-depth analysis. We can reject labels such as “conservative” and “liberal” and look for insightful discussion to inform our thinking.

Our current President-elect apparently overcame the “elitism” label to win his election. Moreover, he appears to be selecting his cabinet and staff with intellectual competence being at least one of the criteria.

Adlai would surely have a smile on his face.

I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.

---Susan B. Anthony, American suffragist

Good Gifts: Holiday Ideas For The Church-State Separationist On Your List

By Rob Boston

(Ed. Note: This is excerpted from the Wall of Separation, the Americans United for Separation of Church and State blog.)

Looking for a good book that debunks Religious Right calumny about church-state separation? Try *Piety & Politics: The Right-Wing Assault on Religious Freedom* by AU Executive Director Barry W. Lynn. Barry writes as a Christian minister, but the book is full of information and comment that any fan of church-state separation will find useful. The paperback edition features a new Afterword.

Other fine tomes along these lines include *The Godless Constitution* by Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *Under God* by Garry Wills, *The Court and the Cross* by Frederick S. Lane and *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* by Frank Lambert. (Not to toot my own horn too much, but *Why the Religious Right Is Wrong About Separation of Church & State* is still in print as well.)

Want to be inspired by the writings of a key founder? Check out *James Madison on Religious Liberty* by Robert S. Alley. To learn more about the unique religious views of another founder, try Thomas Jefferson's *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (also known as the "Jefferson Bible.") This book, along with Brooke Allen's *Moral Minority*, handily debunks Religious Right claims that our founders were fundamentalist Christians and "Christian nation" advocates who opposed separation of church and state.

Some books focus on specific church-state topics. Lauri Lebo's *The Devil in Dover* is an insider's look at the Pennsylvania

"intelligent design" trial, which was litigated in part by Americans United. Stephen D. Solomon's *Ellery's Protest: How One Young Man Defied Tradition and Sparked the Battle Over School Prayer* is a detailed account of the famous 1963 Supreme Court decision that struck down state-sponsored school prayer.

Your friends might also enjoy a special DVD Americans United makes available: "Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Separation of Church and State... But Were Afraid to Ask!" The show, a joint project of Americans United and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation, was taped last spring and includes musical appearances by the Bacon Brothers (actor Kevin Bacon and his brother Michael), Catie Curtis and satirist Roy Zimmerman.

Other celebrity guests include Peter Coyote, Michael J. Fox, Jack Klugman, James Whitmore, Wendie Malick, Dan Lauria, Catherine Dent and comedian Marc Maron. Copies are available through the AU Web site. (A companion book titled *First Freedom First* is also available.) http://www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagenam e=resources_FFF_DVD

Sunday Brunch Gathering By Andrew Hankin

To celebrate the holidays without religion, all atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, skeptics, and humanists will be welcome at our Secular Brunch. Come as a single, couple, family, with company or to make friends. Food, drinks and conversation will be at Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. (in the Turnpike Shopping Center), Goleta, on Sunday, December 28th, at 10 a.m. We meet in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. No cover charge, and membership and reservations aren't required.

November Meeting: Craig Stanford on the Brains of Dolphins and Great Apes

By Robert Bernstein

Imagine that our Mars Rover mission discovered a fossilized ape-like skeleton. We would spend billions of dollars to do whatever it took to bring it back to study it. Yet we already have close ape relatives in Africa that we spend almost nothing to study.

Thus began Dr. Craig Stanford's fascinating talk about how both apes and dolphins help us understand who we are. Cetaceans and apes share these characteristics: Large brain; complex fluid societies (fission-fusion); learned cultural traditions; male alliances used to coerce and control females; and coordinated hunting behavior. Yet with no shared ancestor for 100 million years.

Jane Goodall began studying chimpanzees about fifty years ago, spanning about four chimp generations. Why study more? Well, how many years would you need to study human families?

Chimps have learned cultures that vary across Africa: Different termite probing tools and different hunting cultures, including different uses for the meat.

Chimps' lives are a lot like ours. They are pregnant for eight months. The mother-baby bond is stronger because it is longer than ours, with four or five years between babies. And chimp males form bonds. Dr. Stanford even showed side-by-side comparisons of chimp facial expressions with a certain human's expressions.

Male and female chimps lead very separate lives. The female usually is with dependent offspring and doesn't want anyone else

around. She looks for food, mostly fruit. About 9-10 days out of 37, they get a "sexual swelling" that attracts males.

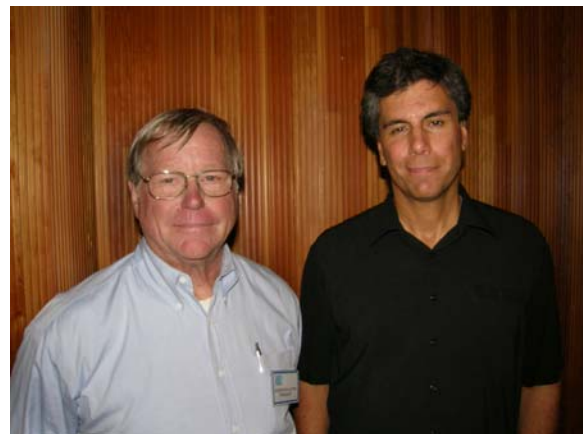
Chimps live in a fluid community, not a group. "Fission-fusion" describes how individuals join and leave the community.

The males tend to be social and also stay where they were born. Chimps are the only apes other than humans who will attack and kill not just for food. They watch neighboring communities like a military patrol. They will kill a mother and baby or a male straggler. Dr. Stanford showed a male who had been held down and viciously murdered, including having his testicles torn off. Notably, the testicles were nearly as large as the brain.

Male chimps crave and relish meat. They share the meat ritualistically with allies and with females they want to mate with.

Gorillas, orangutans and bonobos were the other apes discussed. Bonobos are called the "make love, not war" ape, but much of this is a myth based on limited observations at the San Diego Zoo!

(See *Bernstein*, page 7)



Left to right: HSSB president Roger Schlueter and Dr. Craig Stanford, at our November meeting.

Photo by Robert Bernstein

(Bernstein, continued from page 6)

Studying dolphins in their native murky water makes jungle study of apes seem easy. Yet there are some dolphin habitats that are warmer and clearer such as in Shark Bay near Perth, Australia.

Male bottlenose dolphins kill competing babies. They form alliances to herd and catch fish. And to herd a female for gang rape, just as chimps do.

Chimps and dolphins evolved in parallel environments with similar evolutionary rewards for large brains: Scattered food resources; group predation; male alliances; culture; fission-fusion communities.

For example, fruit for chimps parallels fish for dolphins as a scattered resource requiring a large brain with which to keep track.

“Conditions mold creatures,” in Dr. Stanford’s words.

How I Became an Atheist

By John Coppejans

Note by John: I was born and went to school in the Netherlands and attended a Catholic school until my 12th birthday, even though my father was a freethinker.

“It is God’s will” was the reply
on questions that some kids and I
would ask the nuns who ran the school.
“He is the King and set the rule
we live by and we should obey
His sacred words and never stray.”
We were expected to accept as truth
These teachings because as youth
we thought that they be in the know
when even priests would tell us so.
But a lot of things sounded so odd
Like a man who came as the son of God
and walked on water and raised the dead,
fed many people with few loaves of bread.
A talking snake, a woman and man,
the two who started the human clan.

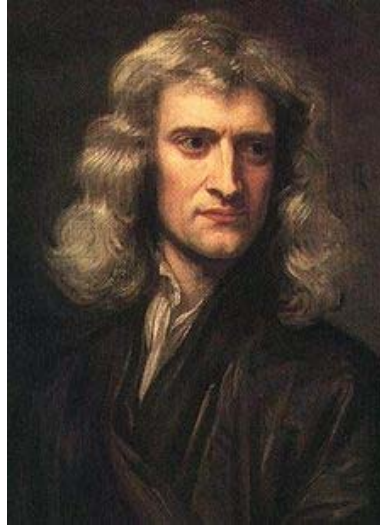
About a man who built a boat
To keep thousands of animals afloat.
There was another crazy tale
about a man inside a whale.
But I was lucky, ‘cause I had a dad
who told “don’t take for granted what is
said,
Read books that tell a different story
and you’ll appreciate the glory
of nature evolving through the ages
and made life go through different stages.”
And so I did and it cleared my mind
Of superstition’s fog that made me blind
to what is real and I felt free
of dogmas and I could see
that the book of life is so much better
than stated in any religious letter.
I wish that everyone on this globe
could throw away this binding robe
of superstition that narrows their thought
so they can’t see the damage these creeds
have brought.

Atheist Poetry Reading By Michelle Rhea

Our January program will be readings from a collection of atheist poetry published by Incarnate Muse Press, 2008. Michelle Rhea and Anita Barnard have edited and published their second atheist poetry collection containing poems from atheist poets around the country. Michelle will be presenting poems from both the first and second collection with the help of a couple of volunteer readers and HSSB members Sandy Garcia and Andrew Hankin. The books will be available for purchase. www.IncarnateMuse.com

In addition to Michelle, two other HSSB members also have their poetry included in the book: Helen Gordon and Mary Wilk.

He was born on December 25th ...
He changed the way we look at the world...
His influence is still felt today...



Sir Isaac Newton

English physicist, mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher
1642-1726



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Santa Barbara
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Santa Barbara, CA 93130