



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

February, 2005

## Zisser Zizzles!

By Nancy Wahl

Our January speaker was Dr. Howard Zisser, Director of Clinical Research at Santa Barbara's Sansum Diabetes Research Institute. Dr. Zisser related the latest findings and research on diabetes.

While not a technically a humanist topic, diabetes is becoming more and more prevalent especially in developed countries, making it a universal concern.



*Zisser researches the lottery. Photo: Nancy Wahl*

According to Dr. Zisser, a constellation of characteristics has turned out to be a very

reliable indicator of people at risk for diabetes. This "Syndrome X" or "Metabolic Syndrome" has helped give those at risk a heads up in managing their condition and guidelines for the prevention of the onset of diabetes.

Syndrome X signs includes a top blood pressure reading over 135, a triglyceride level over 150, a 40"+ waist (men) or 35+" waist (women), and low levels of "good" cholesterol.

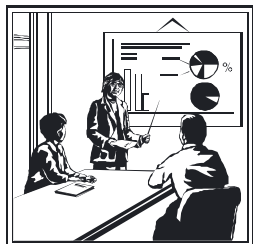
Highest risk groups are Latinos, blacks and Asians. Heredity is key – in fact, Puma Indians have virtually a 100% chance of developing diabetes in their lives. Least at risk are probably Scandinavians.

Dr. Zisser discussed promising new insulin delivery systems now being tested:

- Pump implants which could measure blood sugar levels and deliver the exact amount of insulin needed for 3 months;
- Capsule implants which contains insulin-secreting cells that borrow nutrients from the body; and,
- Inhalers which are sprayed and inhaled into the mouth where the insulin can pass quickly into the bloodstream.

*(Continued, Page 5)*

## 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](http://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.

*(Continued, Page 3)*

(Continued from Page 2)

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

Arthur Benkaim  
645-C Costa del Mar  
Santa Barbara, CA 93103  
965-4850

Betty Dickman  
623 Pilgrim Terrace Drive  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
687-0132  
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Gilbert Rochlin  
233 Placer Drive  
Goleta, CA 93117  
685-2434  
[bostonwhaler194@aol.com](mailto:bostonwhaler194@aol.com)

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## Social Scene

by Anne H. Rojas

By now the last Sunday brunch on January 30<sup>th</sup> will have taken place and hopefully we had a good turnout. We are researching other restaurants, however Sunday mornings are busy and without a specific head count we cannot get a private room, nor a table set up. That is an ongoing problem with all of our restaurant excursions.

The Biltmore Buffet drew nine gourmets for a fine meal. The only problem is the Biltmore's inability (or unwillingness) to issue separate checks. When they bill us as a group they lump all dinners together then tack on a hefty tip. I believe cash payment by individuals is the only way around this problem. But the

food is worth the hassle and the service is attentive.



Anne H. Rojas

Even with our new small group discussion format which made its debut at the January meeting, by member request we will still have our dining out feature after the February meeting. On February 19<sup>th</sup> we have reserved the two large, round tables at Ming Dynasty Mongolian Bar-B-Que. This is a complete buffet and Mongolian meal for only \$12.95, which includes the tea, but not tax and tip. Please let me know if you plan to attend. I had to commit to 16 guests to get the tables reserved. I hope you will support this activity.

One of our new members is looking for fishing companions to go out on his Boston Whaler. Contact me if interested.

As you may know, our annual Summer Solstice Party this year will be combined with our Tenth Anniversary Celebration to be held in May.

Your comments, suggestions and help are always welcome.

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The Old Testament is responsible for more atheism, agnosticism, disbelief — call it what you will — than any book ever written; it has emptied more churches than all the counterattractions of cinema, motor bicycle and golf course

— A. A. Milne

## Chairmans Chat

### by Dick Cousineau

Inscribed on the Temple facade of Apollo in Delphi, and attributed to the presocratic



*Dick Cousineau*

philosopher and mathematician Thales, are these three guidelines to a value-laden, rich and rewarding life. I believe they are as valid today as they were two thousand seven hundred years ago.

- **"E"** Thou art - You are! You are present here and now and no other time or place. You are a full member of this world society and subject to all its responsibilities and freedoms, with all its possible joys, grief, opportunities, successes, and failures. Look to thyself for your ambitions and your boredoms.
- **"Meden agan"** Nothing in excess, all things in moderation. Your exuberance, your desires, your hates, your celebrations, your passions, your advice to others, your exclusivity, your savings and spendings, your concentrations on the body and beauty, your tidiness, and your disorder, even your tolerance for others' lack of tolerance has its limits, but not your honest unstifling love.
- **"Gnothi sauton"** Know thyself. Who knows you better? Who knows better your honest center where no games are played, where your loving traits and irrational fears abide, where your excuses for non-action

and numerous reasons for kidding yourself live and thrive, and where the true self lives with its limits and wanderings, its inner beauty, its caring for others, its shyness, its enthusiasm for living and the complete person resides. It is where we all realize that we all are on the same freeway, just different cars. To develop and listen to the critical thought that truth demands.

An old story regarding Abraham Lincoln tells of him asking an particularly self-righteous Senator, "How many legs does a dog have if you count the tail as a leg?" "Why, five of course, how obvious," said the Senator in his all-knowing manner.

"You are mistaken, Sir." said Lincoln, "The dog has four legs; no matter what you call the tail, it is still not a leg. Think, man."

Belief does not make fact.



The alternative fringe has embraced the trendy catchphrase: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." It's cute, it sounds impressively philosophical, and, in extreme absolute terms, it actually is true. But it can be deceptive, misinterpreted, and misused. The alternative fringe, which interprets lack of evidence as positive support, in effect expands the slogan into: "Absence of evidence is evidence of presence." And the peddler of homeopathic nostrums has it thus: "Absence of presence is evidence of evidence."

— Dr. Chic Schissel  
*New Age Jingoism*

(Continued from Page 1)

Dr. Zisser believes that perhaps the most exciting new development is that physicians in Canada have actually been able to cure cases of Type 1 diabetes through pancreas transplants involving islet cells injected into the liver.

## February Program

### By Marian Shapiro

#### "Do Corporations Rule the World?"

UCSB professors Richard Appelbaum and Nelson Lichtenstein will discuss this topic at our February meeting on Saturday February 19<sup>th</sup>, at 3 pm in the Vista Del Monte Patio Room, 3775 Modoc Road.

Appelbaum and Lichtenstein will address how corporations today have unprecedented power to break trade unions, globe-trot in search of cheaper labor and lighter regulations, and squeeze the middle class - while multiplying executive compensation.

A focus will be on Wal-Mart, which, as the largest corporation in the world, has revenues larger than the country of Switzerland. The competitive success and political influence of this giant corporation has enabled Wal-Mart to rezone our cities, determine the real minimum wage and conduct a kind of international diplomacy with a dozen nations. In an era of waning governmental regulation, Wal-Mart management may well have more power than any other entity to "legislate" key components of American social and industrial policy.

We had very positive comments from participants at our January meeting about the

small discussion groups. Hence, we will continue those discussion groups following the professors' talk and the Q&A session. Our speakers will join the discussion groups so we can continue to interact with them in a smaller forum.

We need a few more volunteers to bring finger food to the February meeting. If you can bring crackers, cheese or veggies, please give me a call at 968-0478.

## Future Programs

### by Nancy Wahl

Please note the different locations for all three of our next events. For detailed directions and maps, see our [web site](#) or call any Board member.

#### March

**Speaker:** Glenn Branch, Deputy Director of the National Center of Science Education (NCSE). The NCSE defends the teaching of evolution in public schools.

**Topic:** *Assaults on Evolution: From Darwin to Today*. Branch will give a historical overview of this issue.

**Location:** SBCC's Fé Bland Forum. This is the same location as our November "End of Faith" meeting featuring Sam Harris.

#### April

**Speaker:** Pulitzer Prize-winning Professor Edward J. Larson from the University of Georgia.

(Continued, Page 6)

(Continued from Page 5)

**Topic:** *Scopes Monkey Trial, Part II?* Larson will discuss the current anti-evolution revolution.

**Location:** Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

### May

**Event:** Our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

**Speakers:** Tom Flynn, Editor, Free Inquiry  
Bill Edelen, SBNP columnist  
Eddie Tabash, CFI-West

**Topic:** *The Future of Humanism*

**Location:** Holiday Inn in Goleta

## **Web Site of the Month** by Colin Gordon

Feeling a little down-in-the-dumps after the holiday celebrations? Well, maybe it's a little tactless of me to suggest as this month's web site [www.endoflifechoices.org](http://www.endoflifechoices.org) but we are sane, rational people aren't we?

This is a serious subject that we should face sometime, better sooner than later. Thanks to Marian Schapiro for suggesting it.

There seems to be a few similar sites all mixed up here but it is not too difficult to navigate to the key places and find useful information.

They seem to have a hard time finding a good name that delicately suggests the topic without giving offense. Starting out as the "Hemlock

Society", it was renamed "End-of-Life Choices", and has now merged with "Compassion in Dying", the final result being called "Compassion and Choices".

Their mission is stated as "...we advocate for the right of terminally ill, mentally competent adults to hasten death under careful safeguards. We believe that each of us is entitled to choose within the law both how we live and how we die. As a leading resource in the choice-in-dying movement, we provide education, information, and advice about choices at the end of life and options available to the terminally ill. Through Caring Friends, we inform and advise members on an individual basis about their options at the end of life, including hastening the dying process."

## **Humanist Book Group** by Aida Bullock

The Humanist Book Group will meet March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at 1:30 pm at 3775 Lincolnwood Drive, Santa Barbara (cross street is Hope Street). All HSSB members are invited to participate.

The March book selection is *City of God* by E. L. Doctorow (available in paperback). This is a fiery and visionary novel of faith and doubt and science and religion at the end of the twentieth century. It's based in New York City, a far cry from "Saint Augustine's City of God."

I would appreciate a phone call if you plan to attend so I can plan appropriately. Please call 687-0784.

Join us for a good read and a lively discussion.

## Getting to Know You: Robert Bernstein by Diane Krohn

Robert is the "official" photographer for the HSSB, so you may have noticed him as he takes photos of the speakers during our meetings. This time, he gets his photograph taken instead (plus, the obligatory interview).

Robert was born in rural Connecticut, near the University of Connecticut, where his father was a professor, but Robert grew up mostly in the Washington, D.C. area. When he was about five, his family moved to Copenhagen for a year. That experience made Robert see a single world of people without nations. He also felt that growing up in Washington D.C., with its metropolitan influences, was a factor in some of his outlooks and philosophies.



Robert attended MIT and studied physics and philosophy. He attended UC Berkeley for a year, got spoiled by the California weather, and decided that he would eventually return to California. He obtained a degree in physics from MIT, and then

moved back to Berkeley to live. He attended UCSB, obtaining a Masters in Scientific Instrumentation degree, and has since worked for a variety of companies started by his thesis advisor, Virgil Elings, most notably the nanotechnology firm Digital Instruments. He was going to take a 6-month break from work, but is currently doing some electronic design work with a friend.

Robert has so many interests and hobbies that it's not surprising that he wanted to take a break from work! He is active in bicycling and also leads hikes for the Sierra Club. He is also involved in juggling, swing dancing, and freelance photography. He performs in the Solstice parade every year, riding a unicycle. He keeps tree frogs in his house, and was, in fact, originally planning to be a frog biologist. Robert also works with various peace groups and social justice groups. And, he runs a [website](#), and is one of the authors of the book, "Take Back Your Time," which advocates for a shorter work time.

Robert's religious and philosophical views were shaped, in part, by his parents, and by growing up in a metropolitan city. He was raised in a non-religious household, although his parents were raised Jewish, and his father even considered being a rabbi at one time. His parents grew up during the Holocaust, making them see the uselessness of religion and the need for activist vigilance.

It was the interesting speakers that attracted Robert to the HSSB. He also has felt very welcomed by the members of the HSSB, when they visited him during his recuperation after a car had hit him.

Robert has always been a questioning, introspective person. He was mostly tolerant of religion until the last election. Now he sees religion as a harmful force. While at UC Berkeley, he had an atheist housemate. Asked about the word "atheist," the housemate replied, "I go through life everyday, acting as if there is no god." Robert adopted the word "atheist," as he lives his life not relying on the supernatural.

In closing, Robert has submitted the following

article about a meeting he recently attended:

"The Amazing Meeting" is an annual convention of skeptics and debunkers of claims of the [paranormal and is hosted by the James Randi Educational Foundation](#).

January 13-16 was the third annual meeting, held in Las Vegas, and had nearly 600 attendees. James "The Amazing" Randi is a great magician who has spent decades debunking "psychics". He generally avoids talk of religion yet this year's agenda included several speakers who would be confronting religion so I decided to attend.

Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist, came from the UK to talk about a variety of relevant issues in the methodology of science and directly challenged religion. Several magicians participated including Penn (a very

vocal atheist) and Teller and Banachek, who did a series of "mind-readings" that were just scary.

Last year I read a truly fascinating book called "The Luck Factor" by Richard Wiseman about the "science of luck" that the author was developing. Wiseman spoke at the meeting and did some magic, too.

Julia Sweeney of Saturday Night Live did a performance the opening night showing her lifetime transformation from good Catholic girl to far better atheist woman. I had not heard of her before, and I was very impressed.

This is a meeting that has much to offer to Humanists and Atheists and I strongly recommend you mark your calendars for The Amazing Meeting for January, 2006