



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

June, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>



Swinging Summer Solstice Soiree!

By Anne Rojas and Andrew Hankin (with some editorial addition for auspicious alliteration)

June 22nd is drawing near! We still have room for more Humanists and friends at beautiful Stow Grove Park for our Summer Solstice Party. You must reserve by check prior to the event. Absolutely no money can be accepted at the event. Please make checks payable to HSSB for \$20 each. Culinary contribution too! Contact Anne Rojas (Activities Director) at annehrojas@cox.net or phone 805-564-6086 for full details. Bring friends, family, and neighbors of like persuasion (or just dying to come out).

Summer Solstice Picnic

Sunday, June 22, starting at 1 p.m.

Stow Grove Park, 580 N. La Patera Lane, Goleta, CA

Featuring chef-prepared chicken, steak, beans, and salad

Additional culinary contributions from HSSB members

Wonderful food, conversation, and cheesy prizes!

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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 and Andrew Hankin

Mark Hamilton (with wife Sally) was among supporters at a recent benefit for Domestic Violence Solutions at the Meadow Farm estate in Hope Ranch

For the month of May 1-31, photographer Aidan Hogge (teenage son of Michelle Rhea) had his pictures on display in the Faulkner Gallery of the downtown Santa Barbara Public Library. His exhibit was reported in the Santa Barbara Daily Sound, Santa Barbara Independent, Santa Barbara News-Press, and Casa Santa Barbara real estate magazine. The pictures have now moved on to other venues, but can be viewed on this website:

http://www.pbase.com/aidan_hogge

On Thursday, May 8th, Robert Bernstein had an article published in the Santa Barbara Daily Sound, about how an increase in fuel tax of just 46 cents per gallon would reduce American gasoline consumption by 10%. This is in contrast to a government-mandated increase in automobile fuel economy, which would cost Americans \$700 million more to achieve the same 10% reduction in gasoline consumption. Furthermore, fuel taxes can be made revenue-neutral or invested in public transit, sustainable energy or other worthwhile projects for the public good. Robert's full article can be read at this website:

http://www.viewda.com/webpaper/sbdailysond/webpapers/sbds080508/viewer_frame.html

and advance to page 7.

Robert Bernstein left on May 18 for a three-week CFI (Center for Inquiry) adventure to the Amazon.

Marian Shapiro has appeared frequently on local TV commercials, with one of the candidates for Santa Barbara County 3rd District Supervisor.

The last Sunday morning of every month offers the chance to meet socially over secular brunch, perhaps while family and friends take their religion to church. This month, it's 10 a.m. Sunday, June 29th at Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave., in the Turnpike Center, Goleta. There is no cover charge, also Humanist Society membership and reservations are not required. We meet in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant.

HSSB Bookstore By Ray Stone

Don't forget to check out the HSSB bookstore, open for business at our meetings. Books are both new and used. If you have books of interest to Humanists, and the books are in good condition, please consider donating them to the store. Just bring them to the next meeting, or alternatively, contact Ray at 682-2123.

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Those who believe in telekinetics, raise my hand.

-Kurt Vonnegut

Not knowing is much more interesting than believing an answer which might be wrong.

-Richard Feynman

Most people are bothered by those passages of scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand.

-Mark Twain

Notes from the President: Church and State Separation

By Adrian Wenner

For more than 200 years, our nation has been vexed with the church/state separation issue (what should be a non-issue, actually). Susan Jacoby's excellent 2004 book, *FREETHINKERS: A History of American Secularism*, pretty much sets the record straight — at least for those willing to examine the evidence. The framers of our constitution, alert to religious divisiveness prevalent in the colonies, drafted a document that would favor no religion.

Despite the existing clear evidence to the contrary, one religious movement or another has attempted to reverse the intent of the Constitution these past two centuries. For example, Jacoby wrote, "...the years between 1870 and the First World War constituted an era in which the historic American tension between secularizing and religious impulses fared into open warfare." We currently witness strong pressure by evangelical groups to force our nation into a theocracy. Deciding which particular form of theocracy, though, would surely only lead to the sort of divisiveness our Founding Fathers strove to avoid!

To help counter the current theocracy-prone movement, "with the goal of making church-state separation integral part of our national conversation," **Americans United for Separation of Church and State** and **The Interfaith Alliance Foundation** teamed up to sponsor and tape an event on March 26th before a live audience. The program, hosted by Peter Coyote, featured noted actors, singers, and comedians — as well as testimonials by people who have defended church-state separation in their

own communities. The event was broadcast via satellite the next day to theaters in 37 cities.

An article in the May issue of *Church and State* describes the simulcast and its distribution ("Nationwide 'First Freedom First' Theater Simulcast Brings Together Celebrities, Citizen Activists to Promote /church-State Separation"). You can access that article at:

http://www.au.org/site/News2?abbr=cs_&page=NewsArticle&id=9781

A DVD of that event is now available by accessing:

http://www.au.org/site/PageServer?pagename=resources_FFF_DVD

I already ordered that DVD as a donation to our society. If the production matches the testimonials, it could serve well as a program at one of our monthly meetings — perhaps followed by some spirited discussion afterwards.

There is an unconscious selection and magnifying of the phenomena that fall into harmony with the theory and support it, and an unconscious neglect of those that fail of coincidence. The mind lingers with pleasure upon the facts that fall happily into the embrace of the theory, and feels a natural coldness toward those that seem [not compatible with the theory]. Instinctively there is a special searching-out of phenomena that support it, for the mind is led by its desires. There springs up, also, an unconscious pressing of the theory to make it fit the facts to make them fit the theory.

-Thomas C. Chamberlin
American geologist and educator

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

Don't forget the Summer Solstice Party on Sunday, June 22nd at Stow Grove Park, starting at 1 p.m. We have the best area reserved (enough shade), and we will have our on-site BBQ chefs cooking tri-tip and chicken. The all-inclusive meal (with wine!) is only \$20. Please bring a side dish (that doesn't require refrigeration) to share. Your check, payable to HSSB for \$20 per person, is your reservation. Mark culinary contribution on check. Appetizer people must be on time, por favor.

Friends and neighbors (pre-paid) are welcome. Games are optional. Prizes and fun!

Please send check to:

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

Our Dining Out to Jake's was a big success. Even the music worked for us. I think he will be a regular. We now have Ming Dynasty, Palapa (needs some fine tuning as did Jake's), Sizzler, and Jake's.

I am still seeing if there is any interest in going to the Chumash Casino for Seafood Night Buffet. Let me know so we can arrange car pools.

RE: Reservations for Dining Out: I need accurate counts for this so that I may set up tables for maximum conversational interaction. People sometimes complain about my firmness with reservations, but no one likes to be stuck alone or in an isolated area. Just 2 "no shows" can throw things off. Thanks for your cooperation in this matter.

Your help, suggestions, and comments are always welcome. Does anyone want to make suggestions re: Summer Solstice Party Activities? Or run an activity? Stand-up?

News From the Program Committee

By Dick Cousineau

At our next regular meeting, Saturday, July 19th, our President, Adrian Wenner, has arranged for us to see a DVD of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Separation of Church and State... But Were Afraid to Ask!* Hosted by First Freedom First, a joint project of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation.

From the website: This DVD is a lively, informative and entertaining celebration of individual freedom and some of the citizens who have boldly taken public stands to protect the separation of church and state. Peter Coyote, a celebrated Hollywood actor and filmmaker, emcees the program. Co-hosted by Rev. Barry W. Lynn, AU, Executive Director, and Rev. Dr. Welton Gaddy, TIAF, President. Includes performances by special guests, The Bacon Brothers, singer Catie Curtis and singer/satirist Roy Zimmerman.

I am no Platonist. I am nothing at all; but I would sooner be a Paulician, Manichaen, Spinozist, Gentile, Pyrrhonian, Zoroastrian, than one of the seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord and hatred of each other.

-George Gordon, Lord Byron

May Meeting: Starshine Roshell and Newspaper Columns That Got Her Into Trouble

By Jim Balter

In May, local award-winning writer, professor of journalism, parent, loner, non-believer, and occasional trouble-maker Starshine Roshell treated us to her wit, charm, and rational approach to life.

Family played an important role in shaping Starshine, starting with her father (a Bronx Jew in culture only) naming her after a song from the musical “Hair,” in which he starred. Her mother was a lapsed Catholic, scared away by threats of hell. Her grandfather drilled her in the phrase “observationally corroborable,” which she could pronounce perfectly at a young age, long before she had any idea of what it meant – but it later became very important to her. He also taught her that it’s the condition that matters, not the naming of it. She illustrated this with an anecdote: he had called a Hughes Aircraft co-worker “stupid” and was called to the carpet by his boss. He argued that he didn’t make the co-worker stupid, that person was stupid long before he got there. The moral being that it’s cowardly not to tell it like it is. Ms. Roshell has integrated this notion into her work, but she takes the edge off with humor and a bit more grace and tact -- yet she still gets into trouble.

In one of her columns, “Floss This,” she said that she doesn’t floss (this was in the context of a common theme, the demands on working mothers). That got her in trouble with oral hygienists all across town, and even with her own dentist.

In another column, “She’s Great. Him I Hate,” she wrote about how to deal with

friends who hook up with people you just can’t stand. That got her in trouble with many of her friends who were sure she was talking about them.

In “Going Gay: Why Should Preachers Have All the Fun?” she took a clever jab at homophobia by calling organizations that offer to turn gay people straight and asking for help in going the other way. (In this column, she outed herself as “not a person of faith.”)

In a more serious column, “My Father’s Gift,” she wrote painfully of learning that her father had been having an affair for many years and the consequences for their family. As she told us, she wrote only the truth, but truth can be troublesome -- someone sent the column to her father.

(See *Balter*, page 7)



Left to Right:
Anne Rojas (HSSB Activities Director),
Starshine Roshell (journalist and trouble-maker),
and Dick Cousineau (HSSB Programs Chair) at
the May meeting.
Photo by Robert Bernstein

(Balter, continued from page 6)

Then there was the trouble with “Dr. Laura,” whom Starshine referred to as “Santa Barbara’s own self-appointed arbiter of good taste.” Just the truth, after all, but “Dr. Laura” wasn’t happy with it and banned her from any contact. This surprised Starshine, as she had been surprised years earlier when she humorously asked on what day God had invented all the fossils, and none of her co-workers laughed. Because, it turns out, they devoutly believed in God, something Starshine found at the time to be as unexpected as if they had said they had been abducted by aliens ... or were Republicans (not common in newsrooms, apparently).

There was more trouble with the News-Press, of course, which has been covered at length in the local media. It led to her testimony in court, when she had the opportunity to repeat, apparently with pleasure, the strong words she had directed at Travis Armstrong.

Throughout her presentation, Starshine talked in some depth about integrity, rationality, seeing things as they are, dealing in the truth -- themes of interest to humanists.

In her opening remarks, she noted that writing is a solitary trade and so it was nice to be in a room with human beings. And that, while she’s not a joiner, she had a sense of belonging with our group. Considering the many positive comments about her presentation, I think it’s safe to say that the feeling was mutual, and that Starshine Roshell would be more than welcome to join our society of non-joiners.

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If you want to read more of Starshine, you can find these columns and others at her website:

<http://www.starshineroshell.com/>

My Encounter With the Jehovah’s Witnesses **By Diane Krohn**

Today, as I was diligently working on the Secular Circular newsletter, my doorbell rang, and there stood two nice ladies that wanted to hand me a pamphlet all about reading the bible. Normally, I politely say, “No thanks, I’m not interested,” but this time I thought I would engage in some conversation with them. I explained that I *had* read the Bible, and that I was an atheist. At that point, they asked what I thought about the world today, and if it seemed like things were getting worse (a common approach of JW’s – that the world is getting worse and that only the coming of Jesus will bring peace and happiness). I answered that no, the world in general is getting better – people are living longer, with healthier lives, and better quality of lives than a century ago. They questioned whether I thought that today’s problems could be solved by humans only, and, as a Humanist, I answered yes, that humans do have the potential and capacity to solve many of the world’s problems.

From here, the conversation led to evolution, the origins of life, the “privileged planet” argument, and just about every other religious apologetic with which I am familiar. All that time spent at atheist and rationalist web-sites paid off!

Our conversation ended with a discussion of what percent of the human brain is used, and they promised that they would be back with “scientific, published documentation” that we humans don’t use our entire brain capacity (they used this as an argument for creationism and divine origin). I didn’t change their minds, and they didn’t convince me, but it was nonetheless entertaining!

Some Famous (And Some Infamous) Non-Theists

Compiled by Diane Krohn

Confucius, Chinese philosopher (551-479 BCE).

The teachings of Confucius can be considered a noteworthy Chinese variant of humanism. Although Confucianism is often followed in a religious manner by the Chinese, argument continues over whether to refer to it as a religion because it makes little reference to theological or spiritual matters (God(s), the afterlife, etc.).

Simon Bolivar, Venezuelan soldier and South American liberator (1783-1830).

Atheist. Excommunicated by the Catholic Church.

Mary Ann Evans “George Eliot,” English novelist (1819-1880).

“The old religion said 'Heaven help us!' Our new one, from its very lack of that faith in a heaven, will teach us all the more to help one another.”

Thomas Hardy, English author (1840-1928).

Poem *Christmas 1924*: “After two thousand years of mass, we've got as far as poison gas.”

Marie Curie, Polish-born French chemist and physicist (1867-1934).**Frank Lloyd Wright, American architect (1869-1959).**

“I believe in God, only I spell it Nature.”

Howard Hughes, American manufacturer, film producer, and recluse (1905-1976) (You don't have to be sane to be a non-theist!)

George C. Scott, American Actor (1927-1999).

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