



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

May, 2009

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Barbara Oakley: Why Rome Fell, Hitler Rose, Enron Failed, And My Sister Stole My Mother's Boyfriend!

By Dick Cousineau

For our May meeting, we will host Barbara Oakley of Oakland University (near Detroit), who comes highly recommended by some members of our Society who heard her speak at CFI-West some months ago. Barbara is an Associate Professor of Engineering at Oakland and is the critically acclaimed author of *Evil Genes; Why Rome Fell, Hitler Rose. Enron Failed, and My Sister Stole my Mother's Boyfriend*. Steven Pinker of Harvard said her book is a "...fascinating scientific and personal exploration of the roots of evil, filled with human insight and telling detail."

Our meeting starts at 3 p.m. at the Faulkner Gallery. Please arrive early, if possible, (around 2 p.m.) to help set up chairs, and stay late to help put them away.

Barbara Oakley
Saturday, May 16th, at 3 p.m.

At the Faulkner Gallery at the main branch of the
Santa Barbara Public Library, 40 E. Anapamu St.
(corner of Anapamu and Anacapa)

Join us at 2:30 p.m. for socializing.
Meeting starts promptly at 3 p.m.

Dining Out will be at Jake's Restaurant, 2911 De La
Vina. Please see page 4 for details.



Author Barbara Oakley

Contact Information

Board of Directors 2008-2009

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962-6316 drogers@cox.net

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967-5143 hsmith1923@aol.com

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- Wayne Beckman
- Dick Cousineau
- Andrew Hankin
- Diane Krohn
- Marian Shapiro
- Nancy Wahl
- Mary Wilk

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Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they don't understand, but the passages that bother me are the ones I do understand.

---Mark Twain, American writer and humorist

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 Mary Wilk and Andrew Hankin

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

Per Wehn
277 Nogal Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
451-3596

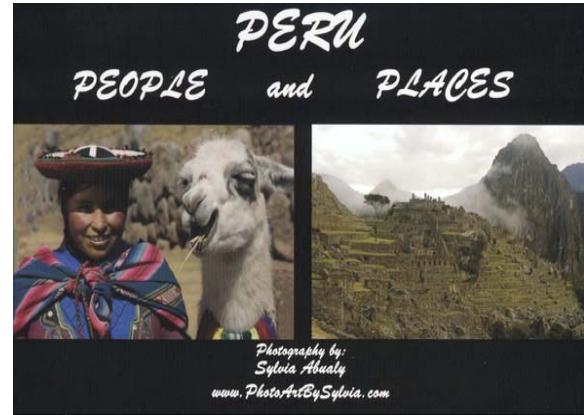
Joseph Navarro
2615 Mesa School Lane
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
963-2128

Joy Knapp
17/81 Eucalyptus Hill Rd.
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
962-4655

On Monday, April 20th, Andrew Hankin organized a protest against former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and was joined by about 30 other activists on the public sidewalk in front of the Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara. Blair, a recent convert to Catholicism, spoke inside the theatre about his beliefs in faith-based reconciliation (instead of conflict) between the major world religions. The speaking event and protest were covered by KEYT-TV News, the UCSB Daily Nexus, the front page of the SB News-Press, the SB Daily Sound, and the SB Independent on-line <http://www.independent.com/news/2009/apr/21/protesters-rally-against-blair>

On Saturday, April 18th, HSSB member Sylvia Abualy hosted a reception for her new photographic exhibit "Peru - People and Places." The exhibit will be on public display until May 29th, 2009, at the Architectural Foundation Gallery, 229 East Victoria Street (entrance on Garden Street),

downtown Santa Barbara. Gallery hours are Tuesday to Friday, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. and First Thursday, May 7th, 5-7 p.m. Phone 805-965-6307 or [website http://photoartbysylvia.com](http://photoartbysylvia.com)



Wanted: HSSB Secretary

By Diane Krohn

Hope Smith, our longtime HSSB Secretary and Board Member, will be resigning at the end of the Fiscal Year (June 30th). If you've ever wanted to find out what really happens at the super-secret Board meetings¹, and you would love to use your lap-top for non-work stuff² (because you carry it with you at all times anyway), then please talk to any Board member about this position. Wearing a tight skirt and heels are optional³, but we absolutely promise you that the president will not chase you around the desk during the Board meetings!

(Many thanks to Hope Smith for her dedicated and long-time service as Secretary.)

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Note 1: The Board meetings aren't really super-secret; they are open to any member.

Note 2: You don't really need a laptop to be Secretary. Pen and paper will work just as well.

Note 3: We're Humanists and have an equal-opportunity dress code.

Managing Our Society By Roger Schlueter

As you know, the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization incorporated in the state of California. In order to achieve and maintain this valuable status, we have established and abide by a set of by-laws which determine how the HSSB operates.

The by-laws establish an Executive Committee that consists of the President, the Treasurer and the Secretary. They also establish a Board of Directors that is responsible for the ongoing management of the Society and that consists of the Executive Committee and between 4 and 8 additional At-Large members. Members of the Board are listed on page 2 of this newsletter.

All Board members are elected annually with their term coinciding with our fiscal year, which runs from July 1st to June 30th of the following year. Any member in good standing (you've paid your membership fee) can serve on the Board.

The election process begins with nominations for Board positions. Anyone can nominate another member or herself to be on the Board by just stating that nomination to any current Board member. The nomination process ends at the end of May and voting for the new Board is conducted at the June Board meeting.

All Board positions are open and incumbents do not have any prerogatives over new candidates. In fact, our current Secretary, Hope Smith, has decided not to be a candidate for that position so at least one position will have no incumbent at all.

I am quite interested in broadening the number of members who are actively

involved in our Society. Please contact me, or any Board member, if you are at all interested in becoming involved or if you would like to nominate someone else.

In addition to the formal Board, we have a number of chairs who play a particular role in the Society's activities. These positions are also listed on page 2. There is no formal election process for these chair positions. All you have to do is express interest in working for the Society in that role. All positions are open for new members to fill. In addition, Anne Rojas has resigned effective May 1st as the Social Chair, so we are actively looking for someone to fill Anne's shoes. While that may be a daunting prospect, I have no doubt there are many of you who are capable of doing so. If you are interested, please contact any Board member.

Finally, I will be taking the initiative to contact various members to solicit your active participation in our Society. Please give serious consideration to responding positively.

Dining Out for Our May Meeting

Dining out this month is tentatively set for Jake's; the restaurant will stay open for our exclusive use. The location is tentative because final plans have not been completed (see the note by our President on this page). We have been to Jake's, at 2911 De La Vina Street, for both after-meeting dining and for one of our Winter Solstice parties. If all goes as planned, it will be buffet style dining including dessert, for one fixed price of approximately \$15. However, we will need at least 25 people to attend in order to have Jake stay open. Please contact Roger (contact info. on page 2) to make your reservations.

HSSB Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

Greetings, fellow Humanists! The next Book Club meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 13th. Our reading selection is *Evil Genes*, by Barbara Oakley, in which the author strives to understand her sister Carolyn's evil nature.

When: Wednesday, May 13th, 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

Here's a review from Amazon.com:

"Three or four times a year I come across a book so compelling that I bubble over telling friends about it and impulsively read passages aloud to my long-suffering husband. *Evil Genes* is such a book. As the book description says, Barbara Oakley began getting really interested in what makes people evil when she read her dead sister's diaries. For many people this would be the end of the story, but, being an engineer, and therefore analytically inclined, and a linguist, and therefore verbally inclined, Ms. Oakley delved into what the latest in psychology and brain science can tell us about what goes on in the brains of really evil people. And then she wrote about it in a way that laymen like me can understand.

"I probably learned more about brains and mental pathology in this book than in any single other book I have read. I can now impress my friends with terms like "polygeny" and "gaslighting." The information provided is sufficiently advanced that I even told a psychiatrist friend things he didn't know!"

New Position

By Roger Schlueter

In addition to the discussion of Board and Chair positions elsewhere in this issue, I'd like to create a new job for the Society: Newsletter Staff Writer.

Some popular features that have appeared in past newsletters include "Getting to Know You," which gave a profile of a new or longstanding member; and "Web Site of the Month," which highlighted a web site that might be of interest to the membership. I've reviewed newsletters of other groups like ours and notice there are many additional features that could enliven our newsletter. But these additions won't happen unless someone makes them happen. Being the Editor is demanding enough already so adding a Staff Writer is the obvious solution.

Would you like to be that person? Have you always dreamed of being a writer? Do you seek fame and fortune? Well, okay, the latter might not be in the offering but if you have any interest in contributing to our newsletter, please contact Diane or me to discuss the possibilities.

Finally, another feature that we have little control over is Letters to the Editor. Just like the big time papers, we want to publish your views on whatever topic you wish to expound on. If you are one of those who have contributed in the past but have slacked off, please put pen to paper again. If you haven't written before, consider adding your voice to the mix.

April Meeting: The State of the Society

By Robert Bernstein

Evaluating the Humanist Society and envisioning its future made for a lively April meeting.

President Roger Schlueter gave an introductory overview. We have 151 members, with a growth of eight times in just eight years. He estimates that there are 37,500 non-theists in our area, and if we got just one percent as members we could more than double our numbers.

HSSB committees include Social Justice, Activities, Newsletter and Book Group, with Roger considering a Skeptics Group.

Members Ron Kronenberg, Al Melkonian and Bob Perry then moderated three discussion groups. In the end we reconvened to report from each group.

Saturday meetings were discussed. People were pleased with the content of the meeting as well as the time. However, one theme arose repeatedly: Churches do a better job of building camaraderie and community. Many members belong to the Unitarian Society and have this experience.

"How much do we socialize with each other outside the meetings?" one asked. Some do at the brunches and dinners, as well as in the book club. And some are friends as well.

Recruiting younger members led to talk of more physical activities. Hiking and biking groups came up. Not meeting at a retirement home was also suggested.

Nametags help us remember each other, as do newsletter member profiles.

Volunteer burnout was a big discussion point. Volunteers should be giving because they want to support the Humanist Society and its goals, one said. Appreciation should not be important. Another pointed out that sniping is worse than lack of appreciation. Some experienced worse than sniping-- "No good deed goes unpunished."

The newsletter? Put more on-line, some thought. Effective use of the space in print was important to others. We should survey members: More space for event write-ups? For letters and opinion? Stories on members?

Our community role? Most wanted us visible for doing good work in the community. Some wanted us to focus on just one project; others favored many.

Solstice parties? Summer Solstice is more social, which people liked, and they liked Stow Grove Park.

Al Melkonian's group mostly brainstormed program ideas. Going to Sedgwick Preserve, panels with opposing sides, police chief meeting, poetry readings and theater parties were suggested.

Charging at events has been a big point of tension for some. Some see meetings as a benefit to be paid for. Others feel that meetings should be free, to encourage people to attend. HSSB has \$15,000 in the bank, which could easily offset the loss of revenue. Most agreed that admission should be seen as a donation; that people should not be harassed if they donate in a lump sum to HSSB or don't donate at all.

(See **Bernstein**, continued on page 7)

(Bernstein, continued from page 6)

Bob Perry's group suggested we video tape our programs and show them on Channel 17 or 21 to reach a wider audience.

Socializing after, versus before the talks, was discussed, as was having the dinner and the talk in the same place.

Roger closed by saying that we have a lot of good ideas and hopes that people will help.

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

Our **Summer Solstice** party will be held on Sunday, June 21st, at Stow Grove Park in Goleta, at Area No. 2, from 1:30 p.m. until dusk. Bring your garden chairs, drink and enjoy the day under the redwood trees. More detailed information will be in next month's Secular Circular.

Our July 18th meeting will bring us something different: a discussion on forensic science as applied to criminality. **Dianne Burns** of the California Department of Justice, Forensic Laboratory will be our speaker. This should prove to be an interesting afternoon.

For the August 15th meeting, our own member Nick Di Croce has arranged to have **Kate McCurdy**, Director of the Sedgwick Preserve, speak to us regarding the important and fascinating ecology and biology of the Sedgwick Land Preserve, located near Figueroa Mountain in the Santa Ynez Valley. Ms. McCurdy has, in her short career, worked on raptor research at UC Davis; grizzly bear studies in Glacier National Park; brown bear control in Yosemite National Park (which demonstrated that bears are smarter than many park visitors); and coyote and

mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains. Now at the Sedgwick Preserve, she manages the wildlife at the ranch, and is working to implement the Master Plan for the Preserve.

For the September 19th meeting, it will be our privilege to hear one of Santa Barbara's leading bloggers, **Craig Smith**, discuss local insights and his observations of the political scene in our fair city.

HSSB Needs an Activities Director!

By Diane Krohn

Okay, so you've just wrapped up the party for your parents' 50th Anniversary celebration, last week you oversaw your neighborhood's InterGalactic Welcoming Party planning session, and a month ago you organized your Alumni Association's jello sculpturing contest.

And now you feel hollow and empty inside, the unfilled pages of your Day Runner stretching ahead like the unending desert sky. You think back fondly on your days of coordinating kegger parties and other heathen celebrations from college; and besides, you've always wondered what it would be like to herd cats.

Well, you now have that opportunity! HSSB needs an Activities Director to plan and coordinate our various dining out get-togethers, summer and winter solstice parties, and other social gatherings. If you would like to support your Society in this interesting and sociable (well, duh!) aspect, please contact any Board member.

(And a Big Thanks to Anne Rojas, our Activities Director for many years!)

In Honor of Mother's Day...

My mother taught me TO APPRECIATE A JOB WELL DONE.

“If you're going to kill each other, do it outside. I just finished cleaning.”

My mother taught me RELIGION.

“You better pray that will come out of the carpet.”

My mother taught me about TIME TRAVEL.

“If you don't straighten up, I'm going to knock you into the middle of next week!”

My mother taught me LOGIC.

“Because I said so, that's why.”

My mother taught me FORESIGHT.

“Make sure you wear clean underwear, in case you're in an accident.”

My mother taught me IRONY.

“Keep crying, and I'll give you something to cry about.”

My mother taught me about the science of OSMOSIS.

“Shut your mouth and eat your supper.”



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