



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

MAY 2010

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

May Program

15th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

5pm Saturday, May 15th, 2010 at the Holiday Inn, 5650 Calle Real, Goleta
Information phone 805-259-6432

- » \$30.00 per person includes dinner, and:
- » A talk by the Official Secular Lobbyist, from the Corridors of Power in Washington, DC, and:
- » Musical entertainment from “Your Friendly Neighborhood Atheist.”

This is sure to be an event to remember!

* **Sean Faircloth is the Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America.** He was elected for a



decade in the state legislature of Maine, including his last term chosen as Majority Whip by his colleagues. He has taught courses of Law at the University of Maine, and been published as a contributor to Bangor Metro magazine and Bangor Daily News. As an attorney, he has worked in private law practice, served as Assistant Attorney General, and as Legal Counsel to the Maine State Senate. He will speak about lobbying in our nation’s Capital for Separation of Church and State, “One Nation Under The Constitution,” and other issues. <http://www.secular.org>

* **Dan Barker is Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.** He was a teenage evangelist

by age 15, and a preacher for nineteen years, including eight years of cross-country touring with a musical ministry. After five years of reading, Dan outgrew his religious beliefs, announcing his atheism in 1984; in 1992 he published his story in *Losing Faith In Faith*, with a 2008 follow-up book *Godless*. Dan will sing some of his free-thought songs, with titles such as *Nothing Fails Like Prayer*, *Beware of Dogma*, and *God-Less America*. FFRF recently won a case in Federal District Court, finding that proclamation of a National Day Of Prayer by the POTUS is unconstitutional. <http://www.ffrf.org>



* **To attend this event, please RSVP now. Phone 805-967-3045 or e-**

mail Membership@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org, and mail a check to: Humanist Society 15th Anniversary, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. You and your guests don't need to be Humanist Society members, but you do need reservations for seating and dinner.

Contact Information

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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 Rd., 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 (967-3045 mwilk@cox.net or any member of our Society.

News About Members

by Mary Wilk & Andrew Hankin

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

- » Judy Cousineau – Santa Barbara
- » Grace Moffitt – Santa Barbara



HSSB Book Club

Greetings, fellow Humanists. For the lovely month of May, your Book Club will be reading *Godless*, by **Dan Barker**. Dan's roots are in the Evangelical (Christian) church, and we'll learn of his amazing journey from Evangelist to Atheist **twice** next month – once by reading his recent book *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*, and then in person, as a guest speaker at our big **15th Anniversary Dinner** on May 15th.

The essentials: the Book Club will be meeting on **Wednesday, May 19** (shortly after Dan's talk) at **1:30 p.m.**, at my home, **249 Savona Ave.**, a stone's throw from Dos Pueblo H.S. and Costco. Please call or E-mail me for driving instructions.

Here are some reviews of *Godless*, courtesy of Amazon.com.

Marty Shapiro, Book Club Liaison
(805) 968-0478
martinshapiro@cox.net

Editorial Review:

Conversions on the road to Damascus are for those who hear voices and fall prey to delusions and who would be better off seeking professional help. Much more valuable in the human story are the reflections of intelligent and ethical people who listen to the voice of reason and who allow it to vanquish bigotry and superstition. This book is a classic example of the latter.

— **Christopher Hitchens**, author of *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*

More about the Ingersoll Lecture

by Ray Stone

Some details about the upcoming Ingersoll Lecture have been finalized. The lecture will take place at our usual October meeting, October 16, 2010 at the Faulkner Gallery of the Public Library.

The current plan is to have two presenters, one a student (either a high school senior or a college student), the other a non-student member of the community. HSSB members are eligible to participate.



Each will deliver one half of the Ingersoll presentation, about 45 minutes each. Prizes will be awarded to the two presenters and two alternates.

If you'd like to try your hand being "Ingersoll for a Day," please consider entering the competition. Auditions will be held in September, and a panel of judges will determine who the winners are.

We are also looking for two or three HSSB members who would like to be on the organizing committee for the lecture. Decisions about publicity, judging, and auditions still remain to be made. If you are interested in being on the committee and/or applying to participate as a candidate speaker, please contact Ray Stone at 682-2123, or by email at rstone@west.net.

For more information about the event, check our website at santabarbarahumanists.org/ingersoll.



Whoever imagines himself a favorite with God holds others in contempt.

– Robert Green Ingersoll, Lawyer and Orator (1833-1899)

Letter to the Editor

by Tom Scheff

As a brand new member, I have a comment on what might be a central issue for HSSB: does religion cause any of the major problems faced by our society? I am an atheist, but I don't think so. I feel that way about Marxism also. Like religion, the political/economic system is important, but might not be the key to understanding and solving our major problems.

It seems to me that the human condition is much more complex than DNA: we need an approach that goes beneath the surface, seeking fundamental causes. I have managed to convince myself that what we need to understand and change is the social-emotional system. Because it's complex, I offer only a brief sketch here.

The system has two main components: connectedness/alienation, and the management of emotions such as love, justified pride, anger, fear, grief and shame. In ordinary language all of these terms are colossally confused and confusing. To explain would take many pages, but I'll let it go for now, except to say that the two components are closely related: most emotions arise in response to social connects and disconnects.

The scourge of societies like ours, I think, is disconnection. Connectedness is like social oxygen; without it, we wither, because our emotions get screwed up. Yet most of us manage to breathe only infrequently. One small example comes from my own life. Suzanne and I have been together for 28 years. Our marital relationship is probably as good as or better than most, but we seldom have more than brief moments of deep connection.

There was one 5-day long exception. We flew to



a conference in Atlanta in August 2003, driving back in a rental car for six days. Since Suzanne had recently become a grief counselor at the local Hospice, she had been talking about death. So late the first day, I asked her what was for me an unusual question: how will you feel when I die?

She talked at surprising length about her feelings. I responded similarly when she asked me the same question about her death. Then we spoke about asking our six children. The question did NOT work with any of them, but it worked with us. We were off to the races.

That began a five-day torrent of conversation, as if the floodgates had burst. We talked, laughed, and cried our way virtually non-stop thru Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California. Open, Sesame!

After this experience, we realized that we rarely talk about anything but our immediate business. There is work outside and at home, food preparation, repairs, garden, cleaning, etc. We have the practice, for example, of watching TV or DVDs together from 8 or 9 pm until our usual bedtime at 10. This period is never devoid of talk, but only pedestrian talk. We complain about the waste of time, but often one or both are so tired that TV is all we can manage.

Once home, we vowed never again to lapse back. We agreed that if necessary, we would just drive in circles around Santa Barbara for at least one weekend a month. Nevertheless, there were too many pulls. Within two or three weeks, we were back into our shallow talk, and continue today: too many duties, distractions and habits from childhood. During the glorious five days, we were playing catch-up for some 20 years of too little connection, and the resultant back-up of unexpressed emotions.

If anyone is interested, I will go on in another letter about how disconnection plays havoc with our emotions, with yet another example from my own life: how years ago I stumbled onto my deep well of unexpressed fear and other emotions.

Don Margerum on Nuclear Power

by Jim Balter

In April, HSSB member Don Margerum presented to our society a condensed version of his two-day seminar, “A Rational Look at Nuclear Power.” He noted that both proponents and opponents of nuclear power sometimes base their views on faith, but humanists prefer to base theirs on facts, and he gave us plenty of those. Don has a Master of Engineering degree, and his background showed through in his meticulous slides and his mostly analytical approach.

Don started by laying out the state of nuclear power today, with 440 reactors worldwide. Fifty-nine in France, providing 80% of their electricity, 254 operated by the U.S. Navy, and 104 on U.S. soil, but no new U.S. reactors have started since 1973. He referred to Al Gore's recent book, *Our Choice*, that lays out the economic



Roger Schlueter, Don Margerum, Dick Cousineau

basis for this freeze. But Don said that the freeze has also been driven by negative perceptions about reactor designs, the Three Mile Island accident, the Chernobyl accident, long term waste disposal, transportation of nuclear waste, plant safety, vulnerability to terrorist attack, and proliferation of weapons-grade Uranium and Plutonium; he went into considerable detail about each of these issues.

In regard to Three Mile Island, Don repeated the official position that “No one died, no one was injured.” The recommendations made by Carter's Kemeny commission have all been adopted and have transformed plant management. Chernobyl was much more serious, due to inadequate containment structures.

Don views Yucca Mountain as a well-studied, viable long term repository for nuclear waste, but it is currently on political hold. He dismissed the objections as instances of NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) and BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything).

After going through these perceived negatives for nuclear power, Don presented his “subjective report card” for different sources of energy, rating wind and solar power as best, then biofuels as just slightly better than nuclear, then natural gas, domestic oil, and coal power distinctly in last place.

Don then worked his way through some positives for nuclear power considered against other energy sources, again going into detail: long term fuel supply, reliability and availability, greenhouse gas suppression, and life cycle costs. His report card again had wind and solar power as best, with nuclear power slightly worse, than biofuel and coal, with natural gas and domestic oil trailing.

Don's final report card for all issues: wind, 106; solar, 105; nuclear, 97; bio-fuel, 94; natural gas, 81; domestic oil, 72; coal, 68. His conclusion: some of nuclear power's negative baggage is unearned, especially compared to other sources, it is competitive with other sources, and it should be in the mix of alternatives to replace oil imports.

If you are interested in more information, talk to Don – he would be happy to email you his 32 page paper, as well as the slides for his talk. But don't take the validity of his arguments on faith; this is a controversial topic, and there is plenty of readily accessible information on the rational basis for concern about nuclear power.

Upcoming Club Events

HSSB Social Brunch...

is a secular gathering for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion, on the last Sunday morning of every month. No cover charge – pay only for your food + drink. Bring your friends, because membership and reservations aren't necessary.

10 a.m. April 25th and the last Sunday of every month, at **Cody's Cafe**, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta, in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information call 805-967-3045. (Membership Chair, Mary Wilk, is a regular attendee: e-mail Membership@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org).

15th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

5pm Saturday, May 15th, 2010 at the Holiday Inn, 5650 Calle Real, Goleta.

Information phone 805-259-6432 or web page <http://santabarbarahumanists.org/Calendar/Anniversary5-15-10.pdf>

\$30.00 per person includes dinner and a talk by the Official Secular Lobbyist, from the Corridors of Power in Washington, DC. Musical entertainment from “Your Friendly Neighborhood Atheist.” This is sure to be an event to remember!

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* Dan Barker, Co-President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation will sing some of his freethought songs, with titles such as *Nothing Fails Like Prayer*, *Beware of Dogma*, and *God-Less America*. <http://www.ffrf.org>

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PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. You and your guests don't need to be Humanist Society members, but you do need reservations for seating and dinner.

Andrew Hankin,

Publicity@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

Book Sale

If you have books you think HSSB members would be interested in reading, please consider contributing them to the **book sale** to be held at our **Solstice Party on June 19**. You can bring them to any meeting, or you can arrange to have them picked up, by calling Pat Coppejans at 967-0929.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

- » May 16: Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. Dr. John C. Avise: Inside the Human Genome: The Case for Non-Intelligent Design: <http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm>
- » May 23: Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Dr. Mark Moffett: Adventures Among the Ants: A Global Safari With a Cast of Trillions: <http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures>
- » June 4-6: San Jose. American Humanists Association, 69th Annual Conference, featuring many speakers, including Sean Faircloth, Rob Boston, Hemant Mehta, and many others! http://www.americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Annual_Conference
- » June 6: Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles. Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway: Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming: <http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm>
- » June 13: Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena. Dr. John Long: Death, Sex, and Evolution <http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures>

Religion in the News

by Andrew Hankin

» British atheists Christopher Hitchens and Professor Richard Dawkins have written articles published on both sides of the Atlantic, calling for UK authorities to arrest Joseph Ratzinger a.k.a. Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to Britain later this year. They point out that Vatican statehood was declared in Italy by the Mussolini administration and never ratified by the United Nations, so legal arguments can be made that Ratzinger should have no Head-Of-State immunity to criminal prosecution. This Dawkins article contains links to many fascinating legal, religious and societal opinions on serious troubles in the Catholic Church: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/apr/13/pope-prosecution-dawkins>

» The **Military Religious Freedom Foundation** says a cross and motto on the emblem of an Army hospital in Colorado violate the constitutional requirement for separation of church and state and should be removed. The emblem of Evans Army Community Hospital at Fort Carson, outside Colorado Springs, says “Pro deo et humanitate” or “For God and humanity.” From the story:

Lt. Col. Steve Wollman said the emblem had been approved by the Army Institute of Heraldry and has been in use since 1969; references to doctors serving God and humanity date to the time of Hippocrates, a pre-Christianity Greek physician. The cross, which has a pointed base, is both an emblem of mercy and a symbol dating to the Middle Ages, when pilgrims carried a cross with a spiked base to mark the site of a camp.



Mikey Weinstein, President of MRFF, said it's a reference to the Crusades and could embolden U.S. enemies who want to portray the war on terror as a Christian war on Islam, continuing to add to the argument that “American soldiers are Crusaders,” exactly what fundamentalist Muslims want to believe.

Weinstein said he lodged the complaint about the cross on behalf of 43 people at Fort Carson. He said 29 of them are Protestants or Catholics; one is a civilian and the others are enlisted personnel or junior officers. He said they took their concerns to him for fear of reprisals if they complained to military commanders, and none wanted to be identified.

MRFF <http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org> had a recent success persuading the Army to withdraw an invitation to evangelist Franklin Graham to speak at the Pentagon on May 6, the “National Day of Prayer,” Mikey Weinstein cited comments Graham made in 2001 describing Islam as evil; the Army said it withdrew the invitation because Graham's remarks were “not appropriate.” Graham is the son of famed evangelist Billy Graham.

Rep. Jack Kingston, R-GA, asked the House Armed Services Committee to hold hearings on what he called “a growing movement in the military to censor certain biblical teachings.”

» In the same week that Iranian cleric Hojatolislam Kazem Sedighi offered his explanation of earthquakes, i.e., “Many women who do not dress modestly ... lead young men astray, corrupt their chastity and spread adultery in society, which increases earthquakes,” Rush Limbaugh speculated that the volcano eruption — in Iceland — might be God showing his anger for passage of health care reform in America.



All religions are the same: religion is basically guilt, with different holidays.

– Cathy Ladman, comedian, writer, (1955-)

God builds his temple in the heart on the ruins of churches and religions.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson, Writer and Philosopher (1803-1882)

ANNUAL HSSB *Summer Solstice* PICNIC!

JUNE 19, 2010, 1:00 PM

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