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THE ATHEIST

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Volume 4 #12

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin -- a Non-prophet Organization
P.O. Box 3798, Austin, TX 78764 512-371-2911 www.atheist-community.org
Member of the Atheist Alliance, a democratic confederation of non-theistic
groups

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ACA WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY - DEC. 23rd

Board Member Michelle Gadush will host the ACA Winter Solstice party at her home December 23rd at 7pm. Call 491-6162 for directions or get directions at the meeting.

The ACA is providing a beer keg. Monty Python's Life of Brian will be shown. ACA current and former members and their family and friends are invited. Guests should bring food items to share pot-luck fashion, plus any other beverages they may want. Volunteers to help clean-up afterwards appreciated. Thanks go to Janet Swisher, Suzette Krubbe and Elze Surgailyte for planning the party.

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VIC'S SUSPENSION LIFTED - TV SHOW AIRS

(From Jeff Dee) Austin Cable TV has lifted TV Producer Vic Farrow's suspension in response to his appeal. Live shows of The Atheist Experience may begin as early as January 7th. The time and day are not yet determined.

The TV Committee taped two more 1-hour episodes of The Atheist Experience on Dec. 13. These shows air at 10am Sunday on cable channel 16. We needed some more tapes to tide us over until we go back to being live (which we expect to happen some time in January). The first tape as Russell Glasser as guest co-host, and Arlo Pignotti as guest; the topic is Foreign Religion. The second tape has Vic Farrow as guest co-host and Ashley Perrien as guest; the topic is Religion vs. Morality.

We WILL have a live show on Dec. 31; the topic will be Rapture Wrap-Up!, examining all the predictions of Armageddon which were slated for the year 2000, but failed to come true... and a peek at NEW predictions for 2001!

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DON LAWRENCE SPEAKS TO UNITARIANS

ACA member and former FACT president Don Lawrence gave a talk on The Curse of the Supernatural and The History of Freethought in Texas to the New Braunfels Unitarian-Universalist group on December 13th. This U-U group does not have a building but rents space in another church.

Several of the New Braunfels U-U group are also members of the Freethinkers of Central Texas group in San Antonio. Don says about 30 Unitarians attended. Some of them described an experiment of not mentioning god in their daily talking.

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GOING FOR BEER AFTER BAGELRY BRUNCH

For several weeks now some ACAers have gone around the corner to Waterloo

Brewery for beer and more talk after our Bagelry meetings. Don Lawrence, Elze Surgailyte, Laura Sargent, Paul Wilson, Ashley Perrien, Janet Swisher, Russell Glasser, Ron Gurr, Tim Burnett and others have joined in. This may be just the thing for atheist sleepy-heads who can show up late for beer and lunch.

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MARY SUE OSBORNE DROPS BY

Founding member and first Social Chair Mary Sue Osborne dropped by our Dec. 9th meeting at Hot Jumbo Bagels. Mary Sue enlivened the gathering by bringing friends and vivacious energy.

Mary Sue is in a visiting nurse program that takes her all around the country. She currently works in Juneau, Alaska, where her Atheist Community of Austin bumper sticker gets noticed with positive comments. We think Mary Sue has the highest mileage, widest traveled ACA bumper sticker.

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ADVANTAGES & HOPES OF ATHEISM

The December 3rd Speakers meeting at Furr's Northcross Mall discussed the Advantages & Hopes of Atheism. The discussion was begun by panelists Virginia Glasser, Suzzette Krubbe, Howard Thompson and Paul Wilson.

Lively audience participation kept things going long after Paul Wilson's Top Ten Advantages & Hopes list. Getting along with neighbors and dealing with theistic children in a way that doesn't threaten parents were hot topics. Jeff Dee provided a timely reminder that all atheists have their own situations and none should suggest standards for all.

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GODLESS GAMERS NEWS

(From Jeff Dee) The Godless Gamers group is going strong. On the 4th we split into two groups. At one table we had the card game Guillotine going. At the other they were playing Robo Rally (a neat maze game where you have to "program" your robot's moves every turn using randomly dealt cards). On the 11th Jeff kicked off his new superhero role-playing campaign; our fledgeling heroes busted up a smuggling operation while on the trail of clues about a terrorist threat.

If you'd like to join the Godless Gamers, email Vic Farrow (vicflicvideo@hotmail.com) for directions.

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ROAHN WYNAR DEFEND PHYSICS THESIS

U.T. Austin PhD candidate has completed a successful oral defense of his Physic thesis for a doctoral degree. Roahn and Joan will soon be leaving us for Seattle, Washington to begin new careers.

Roahn is a long time warrior in the struggle against quasi-magical, pseudo-scientific ideas and thinking. He has challenged the U.T. Nursing School's holistic medical classes that taught nurses how to massage auras to heal people. As if we want medical nurses waving their hands in the air over a pillow at home as a way of "healing" their patients.

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EVANGELICAL OPPOSED ON UT CAMPUS

Cliff Knechtle was on UT's West Mall during the last week of November. He has been coming to campus for over ten years at the invitation of the ProbeCenter, a Christian apologetics group with offices in Dobie Mall.

This year he was opposed by ACA members Suzzette Krubbe and Howard Thompson. Cliff tries to turn every question into one of his standard responses. He ignores good arguments he had trouble with as he repeats the same propaganda over and over. Since Cliff has the microphone, it is hard to sustain a line of questioning that he knows will lead to problems.

You can see tapes of Cliff's performance on Austin Cable Access TV. It will probably be months before the new visit will show up.

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ACA MEMBERSHIP NOW DOUBLED

The new memberships of Robert Sharp and Chris Perkins brings our membership to 76, double the level of members for our May officer elections.

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STEPHEN GOULD IN AUSTIN JAN. 24TH

KLRU-TV will have a fund-raising event with Stephen Jay Gould as one of four speakers with a moderated 30 minute Q&A session. The lecture is January 24th, 7 p.m. at U.T. LBJ Library Auditorium, 2314 Red River, in Austin. Lecture and private reception \$45, lecture only \$25. Tickets on sale through UTTM January 2nd at 512-477-6060.

Gould's many books on evolution are widely read. His hypothesis of "punctuated equilibria" caused wide discussion among Darwinians by proposing the occasional, relatively rapid evolutionary development of species in response to large environmental changes and species die-offs.

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APPEALS COURT NIXES OHIO VOUCHERS

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has struck down an Ohio law which funds educational vouchers that can pay for religious schools. The 2-1 ruling said, "To approve this program would approve the actual diversion of government aid to religious institutions in endorsement of religious education, something 'in tension' with precedents of the Supreme Court."

The victory may be short lived if the case is accepted on appeal by the very conservative Supreme Court. The Supremes last year let continue a Milwaukee voucher program which includes religious schools. Chief Justice Rhenquist has expressed an absolutely backwards reading of the First Amendment as only prohibiting national a religion. When W. Bush appoints more conservative Justices, the Supremes will no doubt further weaken, if not destroy, Constitutional separation of religion from government.

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JOYOUS WINTER SOLSTICE GREETINGS

Winter solstice helps remind me of my natural humanity and place within reality. It reminds me of my physicality and the nature of the universe from which we descended.

I enjoy the reliability with which our tilted planet moves around the sun. The sun's winter solstice predictability confirms an orderly universe

of consistent physical forces.

I enjoy feeling my physical processes interact with the seasons. The protein molecules that communicate between my body's cells adjust to the shortened daylight and winter's cold. These seasonal adjustments tell me in unmistakable ways that I resonate with reality. I am at home in the universe because the universe generated my life.

I enjoy thinking about how the Big-Bang produced the physical forces and sub-atomic particles that made me possible. I enjoy thinking about how the gases from the Big-Bang collapsed into galaxies and stars. I enjoy imagining how the nuclear fusion of stars made all the heavier elements necessary for my life. My life was made possible when atoms blasted out from an exploding star to become the material of our sun and humanity's planet.

I enjoy learning how the inevitable chemical interactions of molecules resulted in an increasingly complex chemical evolution that eventually became what we call life. I arose from a natural selection of interacting matter that survived and reproduced across billions of years. I am both unique and related to all the sibling life of our planet.

I enjoy the human good fortune of a brain that thinks. My brain processes perceptions, generates feelings of consciousness, creates ideas of reality, motivates me with emotions, makes choices, and imagines things that have never been. I can think about all that I am, all that I perceive, all that I feel, all that might be, and choose for myself what I do.

I enjoy my naturally evolved instincts and behaviors which let me interact with other humans to create knowledge, cultures, and societies greater than a lone being could ever achieve. I teeter in balance between necessary self-interest and necessary social cooperation, as do we all.

It is the orderly forces of nature that make our planet reliably follow its path of space-time distortion around the sun which reminds me each year of all that I am and all that is. The winter solstice reminds me of why I try to accept and enjoy reality as it is.

I am a naturally selected, self-aware social primate. I am not afraid of, diminished by nor ashamed to be a natural human animal.

I understand that I have only the few decades of human life to live and enjoy the material reality that created me.

I understand that my self-awareness came into being as the molecules of my mother's ovum translated a DNA template to build my body and brain.

I understand that my self-awareness ceases to exist when the body and brain which are me die.

I understand that the most I should expect is to be glad to wake up for a new day of life each sunrise. Each new day gives me another chance to see just how much and how well I can live with nature and what nature has made me.

I do not hope for unreal perfection, redemption or salvation. I hope to be the "best" human being I can be, one day at a time, by the measure of my genetic heritage, cultural learning, and reasoning. I hope to enjoy as much of what human bodies can enjoy without inflicting harm that damages humanity or nature.

The winter solstice reminds me of all this because I love to watch nature's movements and I have access to humanity's accumulated knowledge for my musings.

I hope this winter's solstice finds you well and full of hope for the future of your years. I hope that the new solar cycle is for you one of discovery, accomplishment and joy.

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CALENDAR

ACA Meets every Sunday. 1st Sunday of the month Speaker's meeting, 11:15AM, Furr's Cafeteria Longhorn Room, North Cross Mall at N. Burnet Rd. and W. Anderson Ln. All other Sundays 10:30AM, at Hot Jumbo Bagels, 307 W. 5th St.

2nd Sunday ACA Board Meetings. 12 noon at Hot Jumbo Bagels. Send agenda items to Susan Brown or 512-443-0689.

Godless Gamers every Monday at the home of Vic Farrow. Jeff Dee, unigames@io.com, 512-346-0366.

Dec. 23rd - ACA Solstice party, see article above.

Dec. 31st - The Atheist Experience, special call-in TV show, see article above.

Jan 7th 11:30 am - Andrea Gunn of the Texas Civil Rights Project will speak to the ACA on the American Jewish Congress/TX Civil Rights Project charitable choice lawsuit in the Longhorn Room, Furr's Cafeteria, Northcross Mall, 2525 W. Anderson Lane, Austin, TX.

Jan. 24th - Stephen Jay Gould see article above.

Jan. 29th - Thomas Paine's birthday.

Mar. 1st - ACA membership renewals due.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Newsletter: The Atheist newsletter schedule is to be out by the third Sunday meeting each month. Send news items to Howard Thompson

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Products: Atheist paraphernalia for sale at meetings. Contact Michelle Gadush .

Library: The ACA library is in our cabinet at the bagelry. You may donate or check out books from this growing repository of valuable information.

Randalls Donations: Randalls grocery will donate a percentage of your purchases to the ACA. You'll need your receipts and their code number for the ACA, 5158. So, contact the customer service dept. at your Randalls to increase donations to ACA.

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Send newsletter items to Howard Thompson
PO Box 1782
Georgetown, TX 78627,
gofreemind@aol.com.

