Howdy and a hearty Happy Winter Solstice! That’s on December 21, at 1:35pm Eastern Standard Time. A very real worldwide astronomical event.

In this issue we address and cover several current topics, like the very sad statewide vote against gays and lesbians. We also bring up a national tv show that’s interested in Atheists, and another national tv show that recently featured a wild Christian freak-out.

We also bring you some color photos of some of the folks who have worked on our public access tv show. The Atheist Experience is our show, and you can find those pics on the inside of the last page. We’re real proud of our tv show. It’s been on the air in Austin for several years.

We also feature another Atheist Testimonial from one of our members. From a Baptist to an Atheist!

Dave Kent is back with another fine book review, bringing up the topic of Darwin and Evolution. Mr. Darwin sure has been in the news lately. As you may have heard, the Dover, PA Intelligent Design proponents have all been voted out! So Pat Robertson did the only logical thing for him to do. He rushed to throw his foot far inside his mouth, by condemning Dover, with all pride and confidence. What a giant billboard for Atheism he is! Thanks again Pat! Comments? Articles? joezamecki@hotmail.com Thanks and enjoy! :o)

In This Issue...

----Atheistic Military Service

----Reality TV Calls on Atheists
The Atheist Community of Austin is a local non-profit educational 501(c)3 organization founded in 1996, and is affiliated with American Atheists Inc., the American Humanist Association, and the Council for Secular Humanism, and is a member group of the Atheist Alliance Intl.

The ACA is a democratically run organization. Board Meetings are held every second Sunday of the month, and all members are welcome to attend, but only board members may vote. Board elections are held every year in May.

Regular membership in the ACA costs just $24. per year, and the membership year begins in March. You can join anytime though. We also offer student, family, senior and life memberships.

The ACA hosts a monthly lecture at the Austin History Center at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. This is a community service, and a means of disseminating information and ideas of interest to Atheists and the greater Austin community. Lecture topics usually focus on core areas of Atheist interest such as science, skepticism, the impact of religion, philosophy, church-state separation and community activism. Lectures are scheduled on the 3rd Sunday of every month starting at 12:30 pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free.

As of now, press time, a speaker for the December lecture hasn’t been announced. When it’s announced, I’m sure it’ll be a great speaker. Check with the ACA website or our voicemail for that. www.atheist-community.org  (512)371-2911
Your Editor on A Wild Month All Around

Lately, things have been going nuts in all directions. We’re on it though, and that’s good.

For starters, Crescent City Beignets closed forever! We used to have our regular Sunday weekly meetings there. A few Sundays ago, the owner pulled aside one of our long-time members and quietly told him that he likes our group, but that the place was about to close. It closed due to insufficient business, apparently. Despite our meetings and tips...lol

So now we have to meet somewhere else. The idea of meeting at Schlotzky’s is being tossed around, since that’s where we have our board meetings already. It’s a large, friendly place with lots of great food and drinks. I also like to meet in South Austin once in a while. That area is just visually arresting with beauty.

So check with the ACA website for details on meeting times and locations, or call our voicemail: (512)371-2911. Once we decide, it should stay the same for a long time again.

Also, lately, hate has been in the air in Texas. A statewide vote on a proposed amendment to ban gay marriage in Texas has passed democratic muster. In my opinion, the whole idea of that vote, along with the fact that gay marriage is already illegal in Texas to begin with are both giant legal billboards that scream out “Texans are morons!” What a shameful statement that makes, backed up by a popular vote.

In this issue of Atheist Community News, we have re-printed the two ACA press releases put out regarding this very ugly vote. And for those who may feel that this vote has nothing to do with Atheists, remember, if the question ever changes to whether to allow Atheists to marry, the result might not be so different. Since there were no clear secular reasons to vote for that amendment, the same people would probably look down on us the same way.

Now, as if that wasn’t enough reason to vote against that amendment, the Ku Klux Klan held a rally here in Austin in support of that amendment. It was peaceful, for the most part, unlike the last time they rallied in Austin. But imagine how shameful it must have been to walk into a polling place and vote in agreement with the KKK. That amount of shame wasn’t enough to keep the majority of voters away from the polls that day.

What else is going nuts? Well your editor and co-editor are both in the process of moving, so this newsletter is being rushed out. That involves a lot of time-crunching, and me being obnoxious about trying to get articles from our members. I want this to be a large, meaty local Atheist newsletter, with lots of input from our members.

So if you find an unusual number of typos and other mistakes, please forgive! We’re moving into a nice apartment that we might even try to host ACA functions at sometime in the future.

Now for this December, Happy Winter Solstice! That’s the first day of Winter, and the shortest day of the year. The changing of the seasons affects all life on Earth. With one possible exception. Animals that live in caves are often unaffected by the changing of the seasons, simply because the climate in the cave doesn’t change with the climate on the surface. (I work in a cave, and it’s a blast, so sometimes I bust out with cave-talk.) About the only thing on the surface that affects life in the cave is the amount of rainfall, and pollution on the surface that makes its way down to the cave. This is another very important reason to dispose of waste chemicals properly. What makes it down into the cave can very well make it into our water supply.

Anyway, the changing of the seasons are celebrated by lots of Atheists, as well as Pagans, Wiccans, and a variety of other folks. My favorite is the Summer Solstice, because I always try to bar-b-que, it being such a nice day, usually. Also since it’s the longest day of the year, there’s always time for extra bar-b-queing. Pics of a few Summer Solstice bar-b-ques I have thrown are still online at my old New Jersey Atheist Activist website: www.angelfire.com/nj2/atheists

Also for those of you who may be wondering, I still want to have an ACA lecture in the cave where I work. PLEASE let me know if you are interested in taking the Adventure Tour at Inner Space Cavern in Georgetown, in January. I’m a tour guide, and I’d like to give a complete tour as the January lecture. If we get a minimum of twenty people for this, we can get a discounted rate. Normally it’s $14.95 per adult. Yes, it’s well worth the money. Here’s the website for the cave: www.innerspace.com

Also, info about our Comedy Night Out hasn’t been listed on our ACA website for some time now. So here are the basics on that. On December 30, several of us are going to meet at Hickory Street Bar on Congress Ave. just South of the Capitol Building. We’ll eat dinner there, and then walk across Congress Ave. to the Paramount Theater where we’ll see GEORGE CARLIN Live! If you don’t know much about George Carlin, you should! He’s a favorite of Atheists all over. Here’s more info: www.georgecarlin.com

On that site, you’ll see the question, “When will Jesus bring the pork chops?” To George, I say, hey yeah! What’s up with that? JZ

Tips for writing about local events: www.georgecarlin.com

The answers to the questions on the ACA press releases are: "No!" and "I’m not sure!"

For more info on the George Carlin show, be sure to check out the website: www.georgecarlin.com
Atheist Community of Austin Social Calendar for December

(Check our website for locations of certain meetings, as we’re still ironing out details on that. www.atheist-community.org or call: (512)371-2911

Thursday Dec 1 7:30 p.m. Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex

Sunday Dec 4 11:30 a.m. A weekly social gathering - Location to be announced

4:30 - 6:00 p.m. Atheist Experience Host: Matt Dillahunty Co-host: Don Baker

Topic: The opiate of the masses

Monday Dec 5 7:00 p.m. Godless Gamers

Thursday Dec 8 7:30 p.m. Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex

Sunday Dec 11 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. Board Meeting Begin at 10am. Check weekly meetings for place.

11:30 a.m. A weekly social gathering - Location to be announced

4:30 - 6:00 p.m. Atheist Experience Host: Russell Glasser Co-host: Matt Dillahunty

Monday Dec 12 7:00 p.m. Godless Gamers

Thursday Dec 15 7:30 p.m. Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex

Sunday Dec 18 4:30 - 6:00 p.m. Atheist Experience Host: Russell Glasser Co-host: Jeff Dee

Monday Dec 19 7:00 p.m. Godless Gamers

Wednesday Dec 21 1:35pm EST Winter Solstice! The beginning of Winter! :o)

Thursday Dec 22 7:30 p.m. Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex

Sunday Dec 25 11:30 a.m. A weekly social gathering - Location to be announced

4:30 - 6:00 p.m. Atheist Experience Host: Russell Glasser Co-host: Keryn Glasser

Monday Dec 26 7:00 p.m. Godless Gamers

Thursday Dec 29 7:30 p.m. Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex

Friday Dec 30 Comedy Night Out - Dinner at Hickory St. Then George Carlin Live at the Paramount Theater

The Atheist Community of Austin

PO Box 3798

Austin TX 78764

Voicemail: (512)371-2911

Website: www.atheist-community.org
ACA Event Details

----Lecture Series We hold our monthly lectures at the Austin History Center, at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. We hold them on the third Sunday of each month and they start at 12:30pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free, and it’s open to the public.

----Board Meetings We hold our board meetings on the second Sunday of the month, and lately we’ve held them at the very large Schlotzky’s at the corner of South Lamar and Toomey St., just South of Town Lake. That starts at 10:00am and usually lasts till 11:30am. All members are welcome, but only board members may vote at those board meetings.

----Happy Hour! We meet for Happy Hour at Antonio’s Tex Mex on Thursdays, at 7:30pm. That’s on I-35 Southbound side, just South of Research/183 and just North of St. Johns.

----Regular Weekly Meetings As of press time, we’re not sure yet exactly where we’ll be having regular Sunday meetings. Crescent City Beignets closed its doors for the last time, so we’re working on it.

----TV Show The Atheist Experience is our tv show. It airs on Time-Warner Cable, public access channel 10, from 4:30pm - 6:00pm every Sunday. It’s a live call-in talkshow, so feel free to call in with comments and questions for the show and their audience. Members of the ACA are also invited to visit the tv studio during the show, as live studio audience members. This show is also repeated, taped, on Tuesdays at 4:30pm on Channel 10. We also need volunteer help on the show from time to time, so if you’re interested in helping out, or if you think you’d like to be a guest on the show, please e-mail: tv@atheist-community.org

----Online Radio Show “The Non-Prophets” is a regular live internet radio show on the Freethought Radio Network. It airs on alternate Saturdays from 2 PM to 3:30 PM (3-4:30 PM Eastern time) at www.freethoughtradio.com. Just click on "Listen". The show is hosted by Jeff Dee, co-hosted by Denis Loubet and produced by Russell Glasser.

----Public Demonstrations Once in a while, we grab picket signs and cameras and hit the pavement in public on issues of importance to us. Usually these can’t be scheduled far in advance, so announcements about demonstrations will likely only be heard at regular membership meetings. The last demonstration we held was at the Texas State Capitol Building on 11th at Congress Ave. We picketed the National Day of Prayer ritual/rally/bad concert held on the steps of the Capitol Building. Around 20 Atheists picketed. It was fun!

----Godless Gamers is held at Russell Glasser’s house, email rglasser@apollowellworks.com for address and directions. We play all sorts of games. Strategy games, board games, card games, role playing games, party games. It just depends on what people bring. Some recent favorites: Siege of Avalon: a board game where all the players work together to fight back the forces of darkness, find the holy grail, and fill the round table with good knights. The interesting part is that there is sometimes a traitor who works against the others. Apples to Apples: A subjective word association game, where players vote on each other's use of random objects to match a description. For instance, "scary" is matched with "Michael Jackson"; "enormous" with "black holes", and so on.

“Banish me from Eden if you will, but first let me eat of the fruit of knowledge..” Col. Robert Green Ingersoll
The 2006 national convention for the Atheist Alliance will be at the Airport Marriott in Kansas City, where their special room rate for one to four people is $65 a night. Julia Sweeney will be there to accept the Richard Dawkins award. The first freethought lobbyist in Washington, DC, Lori Lipman Brown will speak, and author-activist Fred Whitehead will talk. Atheist Alliance 1-866-HERETIC.

The 2006 American Atheists national convention will be held in San Antonio, Texas! More details should come soon. For more info on American Atheists: (908)276-7300.

On the other side of this page, we feature a report from ACA member Don Baker about his trip to the 2005 Freedom From Religion Foundation national convention in Orlando, FL. Now the ACA is not affiliated with the FFRF, but they had a really impressive lineup of speakers, and we’d like to encourage our members to attend national conventions for all national Atheist groups, so we re-printed Don’s report here. With permission, of course.

The American Humanist Association’s next national event will be the 2006 AHA CONFERENCE: “The Wave of Reason.” It’ll be the 65th annual Conference of the AHA, and will be held May 11-14, 2006 at the lovely Tampa Airport Marriott in Tampa, Florida.

For more info: Toll free: (800) 837-3792.

The Council for Secular Humanism just celebrated its 25th anniversary with a World Congress last month in New York state. As of press time, their website doesn’t list another upcoming national event. But they publish a fine magazine called Free Inquiry, and we strongly suggest that all Freethinkers check it out. For more info: 1-800-834-1610.
Keep Religion Out of Civil Marriage
A press release from the Atheist Community of Austin
March 8, 2004

We, the Board of Directors of the Atheist Community of Austin, resolve to condemn the interference of religious beliefs in the question of same-sex marriage. We are unaware of any compelling secular arguments against same-sex marriage, and in accordance with the principle of separation between church and state, no citizen may be denied any right because of the religious beliefs of others. In its recent decision affirming the right of any two consenting adults to marry, regardless of the gender (Goodridge et al. v. Dept. of Public Health et al.), the Massachusetts Supreme Court noted, "Simply put, the government creates civil marriage. In Massachusetts, civil marriage is, and since pre-Colonial days has been, precisely what its name implies: a wholly secular institution." Religious prohibitions on homosexuality are irrelevant here: Marriage is a concept of civil law, and while religious figures can be authorized by the state to perform marriages, no religious ceremony is required to validate a marriage. Whether in Massachusetts, in San Francisco, here in Texas, or elsewhere in the United States, we the Board defend that institution against any attempt to impose religious strictures on it, particularly ones that impinge on individual liberty and equal rights.

Constitutional Ban on Same-sex Marriage Passes
A later press release on the subject, by the Atheist Community of Austin
November 8, 2005

The Atheist Community of Austin is dismayed by the passing of Proposition 2, the amendment to the Texas State Constitution concerning same-sex marriage. The amendment was proposed and championed by Christian conservatives who framed the issue as religious, despite the fact that same-sex, state-granted marriage is a civil rights issue. The State of Texas has never been in the business of sanctifying marriage. Christian conservatives successfully marshaled the votes of believers who were misinformed and manipulated with fear about what was at stake with regard to marriage.

In denying the contractual rights of a minority of Americans, Christians have used their religious beliefs and sheer numbers for the purposes of religious persecution. America is a constitutional republic where the rights of minorities are not appropriate subjects for majority votes. The US Constitution is on the side of same-sex relationships for both equal protection (14th amendment) and the free exercise of their religion (1st amendment). We predict that when prohibitions against same-sex marriage are successfully overturned on constitutional grounds, as were interracial marriage bans in the 1960s, religious conservatives will cry "judicial activism" and persecution of their beliefs. Despite their shrill claims, the religious liberties of conservative Christians have never had their rights threatened by the possibility same-sex marriage. In contrast, minority religions have been adversely affected by same-sex marriage bans through the tyranny of the majority. Religious freedom is a founding concept of this country, but it has been trampled upon.

The benefits of marriage should be available to all consenting adults who desire marriage and who are willing to undertake the rights and responsibilities of marriage. The poorly written amendment is vindictive toward a minority of Americans and their children. Far from being “pro-family”, the passage of the amendment will harm the children of gays and lesbians, and it interferes with their earned benefits. The amendment weakens the Texas economy by making it more difficult for Texas business to attract skilled workers. Legal challenges over the vague wording of the amendment will likely waste millions of taxpayer dollars.

The Atheist Community of Austin encourages Christians and other believers to examine their collective impact on the world and focus their attention on issues that are truly disruptive to our nation and the world, such as government corruption, education of our children, addressing poverty and health care, and care for the environment. While fomenting hate is a means of mobilizing the vote and reelecting conservative politicians, it does nothing to improve the world.
On the right, we have two of the Winter Solstice greeting cards available in the Products section of our website: atheist-community.org

Also we like to talk about our public access tv show, The Atheist Experience. A great many dedicated members of the ACA have served in front of and behind the cameras at Time Warner’s public access channel 10 and have made our Atheist tv show one of the most professionally done, longest, and most technologically advanced Atheist tv show around. It’s a call in talk show, so why not call in and give the hosts a good solid challenge. They like that. :o)

On the right is an older photo of the Atheist Experience cast and crew from back before 1999. Below is a more recent picture of the cast and crew back in the Spring of 2004. If you’d like to challenge the Atheist Community of Austin on any religious or Atheistic issue, this is one place to do that. It’s now on the air, Time Warner public access tv Channel 10, Sundays at 4:30pm. They’ll post the call in phone number. Seriously, they appreciate a good challenge. :o)

We also sell godless bumper stickers!

In our next issue...

---Another Atheist Testimonial!

---Enter the Cavern! Face Your Fears!
Atheist Testimonial

We’d like to feature an Atheist Testimonial in each issue of Atheist Community News. This is just an article written by an ACA member about how they became an Atheist. All ACA members are invited to write their Atheist Testimonial and send it to joezamecki@hotmail.com.

Raised in a wonderful traditional, conservative Baptist family by great parents, I was dressed in a suit and taken to Sunday school and Church every Sunday. I never liked Church. It seemed stuffy, and boring. I would have much rather slept late, or done something fun, but I didn't have a choice. Nevertheless, at age 9, I volunteered to get 'saved', and was Baptized. No big deal, just something I felt expected to do.

I had learned at an early age not to be gullible, and always make up my own mind about everything. To never be afraid to be unique, and independent, so I was a little bit skeptical about the whole story, but everyone believed it so it must be true. I always considered myself a true Christian, and Baptist.

After High school, I wandered about the country wondering what to do with my life. Along the way, I encountered a group of young Christians who invited me to join them. In the time I spent with them, I experienced a 'miracle' or two, and felt the 'spirit' that they did. Having remembered that my Grandmother, (the sweetest lady ever) had told me many times that I'd make a great preacher, I made the choice to do just that.

Taking much of my college money that I had saved, I went to Israel to learn and experience the Holy Land. I went to all the places talked about in the Bible, and learned more about the Dead Sea Scrolls. I returned and enrolled in the seminary.

Upon studying the history of the text that makes up the Bible, I discovered how unreliable it really was. I had spent my whole life studying the scriptures without knowing anything about their origin, or evolution of the text itself. As I became aware of these things, I knew that I couldn't honestly just have faith in what was written in the Bible. Simply the fact that the origin of the stories of Genesis (1-11) were stories passed from one generation to another, campfire to campfire for unknown generations made them nothing more than ancient, primitive myths, legends, and folk tales no better than any other legends. That any and all references to a god in the Bible from that point on depended on their accuracy, and reliability. It made me aware that the god written about throughout the rest of the Bible was just a god that the writers believed in. Not a testament of its existence.

A great teacher I had in the 6th grade conducted an experiment once that came to mind. He told a secret to the student in the front row of one side of the class, and asked each of us to whisper it to the next until it reached the other side of the room where he asked what the secret was. The last student then told the secret aloud, and nearly everyone laughed. When the teacher asked the first student what the secret was, it was nothing even close to what the secret ended up. Remembering that lesson from the 6th grade, I applied it to the generation to generation, campfire to campfire path of the stories of Genesis. Just that alone made it unreliable.
The amateur genealogist may attempt to trace his ancestry back 7 or 8 generations and be pleased to discover a Revolutionary ancestor. With a little more effort and experience, he may extend his line half a dozen more generations in a search for a Mayflower ancestor. Developing skills in research and record analysis, he may push on until eventually he joins the hordes who descend from Charlemagne. But Big Charley may not be the end of the line. Depending on the luck of the draw and his skill in avoiding the myriad fabricated ancestries common in that early period, the savvy researcher may actually reach 60 or so generations, before his line tails off in the traditions and legends of Lala land.

But the proud researcher is reduced to eating humble pie when he picks up Dawkins’ latest book and notes that the common ancestor of ourselves and the colugos of South East Asia ranks “something like our 10-million-greats-grandparent” (p. 174). Making use of the latest genetic, morphological, and fossil data, Dawkins succeeds in providing his reader with a comprehensive understanding of the working of natural selection, in his usual lucid and engaging style. While some may object to his occasional asides, in which he destroys such creationist nuisances as “irreducible complexity” and “intelligent design”, Dawkins stays on topic and presents an incredible wealth of evolutionary information that is a delight to read. His format is to work back in time through 39 phylogenies to Eubacteria, one most-recent-common-ancestor at a time. If you have ever pondered the question of speciation or the question of the origins of life forms, this is your book, which will be of permanent value on any bookshelf.

This year the Atheist Alliance International developed its annual Dawkins award for outstanding contributions to atheism. The award is in the shape of an ammonite, a coiled-shell mollusc (described at pp. 383f), contemporary with the dinosaurs. In his detailed discussion of DNA applications and scams (pp. 48ff), Dawkins remarks that Y-chromosome Adam and Mitochondrial Eve “could well have been separated by tens of thousands of years,” which would certainly leave the Genesis account in the dust.

Whatever the level of your knowledge of evolutionary biology, you will find the dozens of examples Dawkins provides fully accessible and useful in fleshing out and updating your understanding of evolution. I concur with the many Amazon reviewers who would like to bestow six stars out of five on this stunningly conceived and executed achievement.

When Mark Twain mischievously remarked, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it rhymes,” he could never have envisioned Dawkins’ elegant adaptation of his simple idea to Darwin’s dangerous idea of evolution to produce this classic of evolutionary biology. Give yourself a treat: buy this book.

David L. Kent
philosophical diversity that exists in our beautiful city, Austin, Texas.

...
Perhaps you’ve recently heard about the FX Network’s effort to find an Atheist to take part in their tv show, 30 Days. Yes, we’re fascinated by that prospect too, so here is the text of the invitation, re-printed with permission, of course. Now the deadline for contacting Mr. Sutton is Dec. 16, so hurry!

Actual Reality Pictures is looking for a subject for their second season of the critically acclaimed TV series called 30 Days. The documentary is being co-produced by Academy Award winning documentarian, RJ Cutler and Academy Award nominated documentarian, Morgan Spurlock.

They are interested in conducting phone interviews with as many atheists as possible. The interviews will be about what led to their decision to become an atheist, their experiences with family and friends, and what misconceptions they believe that the average American has about Atheists. The interviews are very casual and informal and will only take about ten minutes.

Each episode of 30 Days places an individual in a living environment that is antithetical to their upbringing, beliefs, religion or profession. Topics for our upcoming second season will deal with social and behavioral differences in America ranging from ethnic to religious to economic.

The show is neither exploitive nor mean-spirited. We are looking to see what happens when someone walks a mile in someone else’s shoes. Ideally, we’re looking for someone who is willing to go on an explorative journey. That is what makes documentaries like this so exciting.

There is a $15,000 compensation for those individuals chosen to participate in this program. For more information, please go to our website:

http://www.fxnetworks.com/shows/originals/30days/main.html

Those interested should call toll free at 877-786-2004 and ask for Michael Sutton. Feel free to call me at any time and I would be happy to discuss the show in more detail.

Thanks,

Michael Sutton
Casting Director - 30 Days
Actual Reality Pictures
6725 W. Sunset Blvd. Suite 320
Los Angeles, CA. 90028
310-202-1272 ext. 140
My name is Joe Zamecki, and I'm very proud to say that I served three years in the Texas National Guard - as a proud American Atheist. For today, Veteran's Day, I decided that I had to let you know that. I served in the Guard proudly, and received a few ribbons for service. I left the Guard honorably in 1993 at the rank of Specialist E-4.

After having a great many personal conversations with fellow Guardsmen, I realized that there is a large amount of cultural and philosophical diversity in the makeup of the Guard. There is also a lot of religious diversity. So the out loud displays of Christianity in our Guard unit always seemed a bit out of place. Most of the unit did not attend the Sunday services held in the chow hall. But the doors to that were open wide for all to hear. When we had a unit dinner at a local hall, it began with another out loud display of Christianity, and this time, everyone was expected to bow their heads obediently for Christianity.

You should know that Christianity is very offensive to a lot of people. They're just usually polite enough about it to not mention it. It's also not always wise to rock the boat like that, in certain military situations.

So for this Veteran's Day, I'd like to ask you to take a minute to think about the diversity in the people serving in the Guard today, in the past, and tomorrow.

If you'd like to know more about Atheists in the military, why not check out what some of them are doing today in Washington DC: www.atheistfoxholes.org

They're marching on the National Mall for pride and recognition for Atheists in the military. Because it's a beautiful day to be an Atheist in the military! Thank you very much for reading and have a great Veteran's Day.

Joe Zamecki
Austin, TX
Christian Misbehavior on Trading Spouses

Regarding the recent shocking episode of Trading Spouses, I'd like to chime in. I recorded it, and I may offer to let other members watch it with me. If you've never seen this show before, here's the gist of it.

They take the wives/mothers from two families, and swap them. Like "Wife-Swap." Then they put the wives/mothers back with their real families and give each family $50,000. But the catch is, the opposite wife/mother has to decide on what each family will do with that money.

So the really shocking episode that just aired went something like this. They took the wife/mother of a fundamentalist Christian family and put her into the home of a Pagan/Unitarian/Psychic family, and vice versa for the other wife/mother.

The Pagan wife/mother, did quite well in the fundamentalist Christian home, and we saw how the Christian family isn't nearly as fundamentalist in thinking as their mother. So the Pagan was also tolerant and patient, so she fit in pretty well with the Christian family, and tried to help with some of the family problems there. She was a big fan of hypnosis, so she hypnotized the oldest daughter in the Christian family, with her consent, and it turned out well. No problems or major disagreements from the Christian family, sans their mom.

Meanwhile the Christian wife/mother didn't do so well in the Pagan family. She immediately was shocked by the Pagan, Unitarian, Physic, Astrological, and Solstice-type lifestyle that the Pagan family had. Now in the defense of the Christian wife/mother, the Pagan father and family really poured the Paganism on thick. They really seemed to overwhelm the Christian with Physic talk, Astrology, and even a big backyard Solstice celebration. And they partied it up for Solstice, much more intensely than we Atheists typically do.

Well this boded the Christian mother greatly, in fact she flipped out. She complained about how all that Pagan stuff was ungodly and against God, etc. She eventually got the Pagan family to attend a mass at a Catholic church, and they didn't seem to have any difficulty doing that. The Christian mother was Catholic. A Catholic fundamentalist...odd, but not so rare.

When the Pagan father tricked her into sitting in as a guest on his radio show when he was planning on having a Psychic on as his other guest, she flipped out again. She abandoned the show without discussing anything on the air, and really didn't want to hear a word from the Psychic.

At the end of the "swap time," the mothers met alone and discussed things. The Pagan mother gushed about how the Christian family were all wonderful, sweet people, and that she really enjoyed being around them and helping them with their daily lives.

Then the Christian mother chimed in on the Pagan family she had stayed with, and it was not a pretty chiming in. The Christian mother seemed to have great difficulty accepting that there are non-Christians in the world. Even though the Pagan family said again and again that they believed in God, and didn't want to push anything contrary to God on the Christian mother, she was not calmed by this. She told the Pagan mother some really angry and belligerent things, and then the mothers went back to their respective families.

The Pagan family read about how their $50,000 will be spent, as per what the Christian mother decided. Now she decided well, and the Pagan family made out well, with lots of money they needed, and money that will help them in the future. They were very happy with the outcome.

Then the Christian family got back together, but the money they got didn't make it long. The Christian mother immediately tore up the letter regarding their money, saying it was against God. She then screamed at her own family saying that the Pagan mother was against God, and immoral and all that stuff. She heard how the Pagan mother hypnotized her oldest daughter, and was outraged. She demanded to know about that from her daughter. Then she demanded that the camera crew who was there the whole time leave their house. She announced that "if you're not Christian, get out of my home!"

The temper tantrum was what made those two episodes such a must-see for that network. Really, they got their money's worth from that Christian woman. She went into a zone of anger and tantrum-izing that yes, I would be very concerned for her family, especially her children. But as other list participants have said, the tv producers are careful to edit out the calm and boring parts, so they can exploit the really loud and immature behavior on her part.

It makes for some incredible psychological thought on her religion. In fact, it's just the type of behavior I'm looking for on video, so I can add it to my video entitled "When Christians Misbehave." But of course it would probably cost too much money for me to get permission to do that. Otherwise it's exactly what I'm looking for.

If anyone else comes across video of any kind, showing Christians misbehaving on behalf of their religion, please let me know. Also if anyone wants to see these two episodes, let me know. It's one of those grotesque things that you HAVE to see. If that makes any sense...lol Joe Zamecki
From ACA member Don Baker

I attended the 28th Annual Freedom From Religion Foundation convention, November 11-13, 2005 in Orlando, Florida. FFRF is a national organization for free thought and church-state separation based in Madison, Wisconsin. True to other atheist/humanist/freethinker conferences I have attended, most of the attendees were over 50. This particular conference had a near equal balance of sexes, which made the conference less myopic in its scope than those of other groups I have attended. I suspect that the entire organization has this balance. The founding Gaylor family and Dan Barker still have a strong and positive influence on the organization. Dan, the author of “Losing Faith in Faith”, was formerly a music minister. He performed songs between the presentations and gave us a lovely musical presentation on atheist/agnostic songwriters during the dinner banquet. Syndicated cartoonist Don Addis from the St. Petersburg Times was also honored, which added an artistic flavor to the night’s festivities.

The following speakers were noteworthy:

- FFRF honored Prof. Oliver Sacks with “The Emperor Has No Clothes” award. He is a prolific author on the disorders of the brain. You may remember his book “Awakenings” which was made into a movie in which Robin Williams played the doctor. He was a cautious speaker who was not so willing to criticize religion but was much more outspoken against Intelligent Design and the impediment of stem cell research.

- Eddie Chambers, Nebraska State Senator for over three decades talked about his challenge all the way to the Supreme Court of state-sponsored prayer during legislature sessions. He also gave insights into how he has been able to achieve so many liberal goals in a highly conservative state. We need more politicians like Eddie.

- Nan Aron, President of the Alliance for Justice, spoke on the importance of an independent judiciary and how religious-based court appointments are a new phenomenon. She was very much against the confirmation of Judge Alito to the Supreme Court.

- Robin Morgan, poet, journalist, lecturer, and activist, talked primarily about her book, “The Demon Lover: on the Sexuality of Terror”. She spoke about how important the control of sex and reproduction is to religions and other dominance hierarchies. She is best known for her books, “Sisterhood is Powerful,” “Sisterhood is Global,” and “Sisterhood is Forever,” which explore the problems that all women face and the need to build a community of support.


- David Haebecker, former City Trustee of Estes Park, Colorado spoke about his recall by special election for his refusing recite the Pledge of Allegiance during city meetings. FFRF is helping him sue the township on state and federal constitutional grounds. Watch for the results of this case in the coming months.

FFRF is a fine national organization, which has successfully challenged a number of faith-based charity breaches of the separation of church and state. We have many FFRF members in our group who can provide you with more information, or surf to http://www.ffrf.org. Feel free to ask me if you have specific questions about the conference.
And that was just the beginning of the path the text of the Bible took. Not to mention the translations, and editings. Even if it is accurate, there is no way it could possibly be reliable. There is not even any text still available to compare to from the New Testament. It turns out that what Jesus said was actually what someone said, someone said, someone said Jesus said, at best. Too many other things didn't add up, too. As far as anyone knows, Jesus never wrote a single word, nor did he instruct anyone to "Be sure and make a note of this". More people saw Elvis after he died than saw Jesus after he died. Too many contradictions, and too much time after his death to accurately report what he did and said. For someone here to save the rest of all Humanity for evermore there is absolutely no secular evidence that he even existed at all. And why would an all loving, all powerful magical man kill a fig tree for not having fruit out of season, and still not save the hungry children of the world?

Knowing that I could not in all honesty to myself have faith in something so unreliable, and knowing that I could not stand up before others and be dishonest, I discarded all plans to be a preacher.

I later realized that any and all 'miracles' I had experienced were just a result of careful selection of coincidences. Careful selection of noticing the good things, and ignoring the bad. I now see Christians do the same thing. When a one in a thousand thing happens that they pray for, they notice that while they ignore the other 999 times it doesn't. They have a tragedy, and claim a miracle if one survives. Nonsense!

Also later realizing that the 'religious experiences' and 'feeling the spirit' I had before were simply emotions I developed in my own brain because of the belief I had, not anything from a magical being. That 'healings' are a result of a placebo effect we can create inside our own brains. And that prayer is no more or less effective than tossing a coin in a fountain and making a wish.

I continue to study the Bible, and ancient mythology. I find it a part of history and history an interesting subject. I'm also sure that I will never completely rule out the possibility that a god exists. I will always welcome any attempt to prove that it does exist, but until someone does, I have no reason to believe in one.

I take pride in my atheism. Not necessarily the belief itself, but rather the means at which I arrived at it. I did not need to believe in a supernatural existence to have a full, happy, rewarding life. To love and appreciate the people around me, and the world I live on. To have a good strong, compassionate, and honest character. I feel good in knowing that I used knowledge, and rational, logical reasoning to arrive at my beliefs. Happy that I don't resort to a faith in something because it might fill a void, or make me feel good.

As of 2005, I've been an atheist for about 30 years, and each day I analyze religion, and the religious, my disbelief is only further reinforced. And the happier I am that I am an atheist. I'm also sure that if religious folks would just stop insisting that I believe as they do, we'd all get along just fine. Chuck Taylor