On Saturday, January 12, 2008, I had the privilege of performing the wedding ceremony for two friends and ACA members. Shilling is an ACA board member and, among other roles, he’s active with The Atheist Experience crew. Sandra is president of the UT campus group, The Atheist Longhorns. For this month’s newsletter, I thought it might be nice to publish the speech I delivered at their wedding. Their wedding was a beautiful and nontraditional affair, held at the Alamo Draft house Theater. One nontraditional aspect of their wedding, that isn’t mentioned below, is the choice of a new surname. Instead of one spouse taking the name of the other, they chose an entirely new surname, together.

Good Morning.

I’m honored to have been asked to conduct this ceremony for two of my friends and, on behalf of Sandra and Shilling, I welcome all of you to this celebration. As family and friends, you have played a role in shaping their lives and it’s fitting that, as their lives unite, we should unite in friendship and respect to share this important moment with them.

I’ve never been to a wedding in a theater, and I’m betting that I’m not alone. People get married in backyards, meeting halls, churches, and courthouses. I’ve seen people marry on the beach, at a drive through in Vegas and in a friend’s living room. Some good friends of mine actually pulled off a surprise wedding by the pool, in the middle of a costume party.

Sandra and Shilling could have been married any number of places, but they specifically chose this theater. It’s a place in which they’re comfortable and a place in which they’ve shared a number of enjoyable experiences. It seems fitting, then, that they should share one of the most memorable and enjoyable experiences of their lives in this place.

Marriage is an ancient tradition which has changed, as most things tend to do, as societies have merged and as people’s understanding and values have changed. Ancient Sumerian and Babylonian laws describe the earliest marriage traditions on record, establishing a contract-based system where marriages were typically arranged by the parents. In most cases, the father of the groom would provide the “bride price,” or dover, to the father of the bride, who would often hand this payment over to the bride, along with her dowry after the wedding, thus returning the bride-price to the groom. In other cases, brides were simply purchased in exchange for land or livestock.

While their contract system was very detailed and almost modern in its coverage of rights and

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Wedding

—Continued from page 1

responsibilities, women had no say
in their future and there was no
requirement that either consent to
marriage.

Arranged marriages were also
common in ancient Rome, though
usually among the elite (the lower
classes married by simple cohabita-
tion), and these marriages were
primarily arranged to establish
political alliances. Interestingly,
we begin to see a slight change in the
process, around this time. While
dughters didn’t have any legal
rights to object, we have evidence
that some daughters had consider-
ably more input into who they
were going to marry, than others.
Women began attaining power,
behind the scenes.

Similar traditions of arranged
marriages arose in other cultures
and continue in some cultures to
this day. Arranged marriages were
common in Europe into the 12th
century. But, in the early 13th
century, Pope Innocent III declared
that no marriage was valid—regard-
less of the exchange of prop-
erty or contracts—without consent
from the parties to be married.

After all, I can’t take out a loan in
your name, and I can’t sign you
up for hard labor to pay off my
debts, yet these same scenarios
were resolved by the joining of two
families through an arranged mar-
rriage. Needless to say, this radical
new concept of requiring consent
dramatically changed the land-
scape of marriage. While romantic
love had probably always existed,
it was now an accepted justifica-
tion for marriage, and, in the west-
ern world, it became the norm.

This enlightened principle, that
consent was the critical require-
ment for marriage, represented a
new freedom.

And this freedom evolved.

Marriage has always been a part-
nership, but it hasn’t always been
an equitable one. We’ve slowly
raised our consciousness level
with regard to equality. We’re still
plagued by telemarketers, but they
no longer ask to speak to the “lady
of the house” or the “man of the
house.” The traditional roles are
no longer the presumptive default.
We’re free to define our roles in
a way that best suits our needs and
our desires, whether we assume
traditional roles, or not.

The changes in marriage are the
result of the ongoing struggle for
the right of marriage. In the United
States, 40 States had laws that prohibited
interracial marriage, and the social
prejudice which labeled these
unions as “unnatural” or “immoral”
ensured that it was uncommon in
those states without these laws.

After a number of legal battles,
the United States Supreme Court
eliminated these laws, nation-wide
deciding that:

• all Americans enjoy the freed-
non to marry,

• marriage is one of our vital
personal rights, and

• the right to marry is essential
to the orderly pursuit of happiness
by a free people.

This dramatic change occurred
in 1967 and many people in this
room are old enough to remember
it.

If someone else is making your
decisions for you, you are, in some
sense, a slave—and no one wants
to be a slave. We want to be free.
Free to make our own decisions,
free to live the lives we choose,
and free to be with the ones we
love. The Supreme Court was
correct. This nation was forged
with the deepest respect for the
enlightened principles of liberty
and the pursuit of happiness.

Few things make us happier than
love. Regardless of your views
about the source of love, the phe-
nomenon is ubiquitous. The love
of family, the love of friends, or the
romantic love shared by a couple
can provide some of the happiest
feelings we’re capable of experi-
encing; to care and be cared for, to
appreciate and be appreciated, to
respect and be respected, to love
and be loved.

Why would we want to deny
any consenting couple the right
to marry? Why should we inhibit
another’s happiness by arranging
a marriage or denying a marriage
because skin color differs or be-
cause gender doesn’t? Limiting
the freedom of others places our own
freedom in peril and this is a lesson
we should not have to repeatedly
learn.

Love grows, but it cannot grow
without honesty. It’s been said that
honesty is the best policy and, for
one, cannot conceive of any rela-
tionship that can truly grow in its
absence. We tend to be cautious
in the early stages of a relation-
ship, and it’s only when we’re
secure in our relationship that we
risk bruised feelings for the sake
of honesty. But, true friendship can
only be strengthened by honesty,
and while marriages can survive
on love, they can thrive on honesty,
cooperation, and mutual respect.

And so, we are here today to cel-
brate one of the most significant
and touching demonstrations of
freedom and the pursuit of hap-
piness. Sandra and Shilling have
exercised that right of choice
by choosing each other. They’ve
asked each of you to share in the
celebration of their union because
their relationships with each of you
bring them happiness.

Today, we witness the blending
of two lives.

I agree with what Pope Innocent
said 800 years ago. No marriage
is valid without consent. There is
no authority beyond consent.
We can establish laws that address
the rights and responsibilities of
married couples—but only the couple
standing before you can truly san-
tion this marriage. They’ve chosen
to do so, in the presence of family
and friends, with an exchange of
vows, an exchange of rings, and
the lighting of a candle.
A n important part of our country’s great democratic experience is our ability to elect new leaders every few years. The ability to choose a leader allows voters in our country to have an important say in our collective future. Many of the democratic ideals that help make our country great have been embodied in the constitution of the ACA. (Members can view the constitution in PDF format from the member log-in page on our Web site.) The ACA has elected officers and a board, all serving one-year terms. Members of the ACA serve as the voters in an election that occurs on the first Sunday in May. Our 2008 election will be held in the Austin History Center on Sunday, May 4, at 12:15 p.m., and the meeting will be in lieu of a lecture that month.

Every year in the ACA we fill the roles of officers and members of the board of directors. Officers serve in official capacities and act as official liaisons of the group. Two officers, the president and vice president are directly elected by the membership. The other two officers, secretary and treasurer, are elected by a vote of the board and later approved by a vote of the membership. All officers are considered part of the board. There are five at-large board seats, but the membership will vote for seven board members during the election, because two of those will go on to fill the offices of secretary and treasurer.

Regardless of title, all board members are proactive leaders and are expected to work hard in the best interests of the ACA. Having a large board means that the ACA should never want for good ideas or people to lead members in turning those ideas into reality. Ideally, the most sensible and proactive people in the ACA should find themselves serving on the board.

Once constituted, the board has leeway to match board members to various initiatives, so that the ACA is able to both preserve continuity and have sufficient resources to carry out important initiatives as they arise. Above and beyond being board members, officers have additional responsibilities. The president, among other responsibilities, acts as the official spokesperson for the group, runs board meetings, and keeps the group running smoothly. The vice president fills in for the president when necessary, and he/she has traditionally helped manage much of the day-to-day running of the ACA. The treasurer manages the finances, of course, but this management also includes things like investments, property, and taxes. The secretary records and publishes meeting minutes and runs special meetings including the election meeting. The current ACA board roster is available on the ACA Web site <www.atheist-community.org/activism/board.php>, along with a picture of the board members. Officers and directors are also listed on page two of this newsletter.

While the election is still a few months away, it’s not too early for members to think about whether they’d like to run for the board. It’s also not too early to start encouraging serious members you know to run for office. If you are interested in running, you can contact one or more current board members and find out more. Members are also welcome to attend board meetings. If you’d like to run, let our president or secretary know of your intent and you will be put on the slate. It’s preferable to nominate yourself, so there is no confusion about intents. Be aware that you will need to have been a member in good standing for six months by the day of the election in order to be eligible. Regardless of whether you run, please participate in the election, and the ACA as a whole, to help make it a stronger and more vibrant organization.

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—By Don Baker

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ACA CALENDAR

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2**
- 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophecy Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3**
- 12:15-1:45 p.m.: ACA Lecture Series (Austin History Center) Dr. Mark Loewe on “Results of the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)”
- 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7**
- 7 p.m.-?; Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10**
- 10-11 a.m.: Board Meeting (Romeo’s (outside))
- 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo’s (Romeo’s)
- 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)
- 5 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (El Arroyo)

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14**
- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16**
- 2-3:30 p.m.: Non-Prophecy Internet Radio Show (See Web site for details)
- 5 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (El Arroyo)

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21**
- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23**
- 10 a.m.-?: Blood Drive (Blood & Tissue Center)

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24**
- 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: Regular Sunday Meeting at Romeo’s (Romeo’s)
- 3-4:30 p.m.: Atheist Experience (Channel 10)
- 5 p.m.-?: Meet-up after The Atheist Experience (El Arroyo)
- 7 p.m.-?: Happy Hour (Dog & Duck Pub)

**REGULAR LOCATIONS:**
- Austin History Center, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas, 4300 North Lamar Boulevard, 512.206.1266.
- El Arroyo, 1624 W. 5th near Mopac (look for the blue bus)
- Mike Swift’s house, fog in to the ACA Web site for details.
- Romeo’s, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <www.atheist-community.org/calendar> for last minute changes.
CONCEPT BY DON BAKER — ILLUSTRATED BY DESIGN ©2007

BIBLE TOYS WE DIDN'T SEE THIS CHRISTMAS...

FIDO & FLUFFY “don't make the ark,” bath-time play set.

“Play house,” with LOT & HIS DAUGHTERS.

JOHNATHAN LOVES DAVID action figures and accessories...

GEN. 7:21-23

GEN. 19:30-38

1 SAM. 18:1-4

ATHEIST EVE