



The Freethought Society News

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The Freethought Society News is delivered as an ezine newsletter only and is complimentary to supporters, donors and like-minded individuals. A limited number of hard copies are produced for meetings and special events.

The newsletter is published by the [Freethought Society](#) (FS) and offers information written specifically for the nontheist community. Articles in this newsletter, however, do not necessarily represent the opinions of the [FS Board of Directors](#).

Attention writers!
Interesting articles about freethought issues are welcomed.

Submissions will be reviewed and approved for publication by the FS Editorial Board. Article word count maximum is 5,000.

Please submit articles with a bio and photo, a suggested title, and relevant photos/clip art to:
newsletter@FtSociety.org

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Chester County Commissioners Reject Inclusion of Freethought Society's Tree of Knowledge Display

by Margaret Downey

The Freethought Society's (FS) participation in Chester County Winter Holiday has become a saga of Constitutional violations and equal rights. For three consecutive years (2007-2009), FS set up a [Tree of Knowledge](#) representing the nontheist community. FS supporters took great pride in the ceremony of putting up the *Tree of Knowledge* on the grounds of the Chester County Courthouse. After three years, the *Tree of Knowledge* became an anticipated addition to the winter holiday display area. FS considered the display a new tradition that brought great pride to its many supporters.

The *Tree of Knowledge* symbolized what nontheists believe in — knowledge, education and intellectual stimulation. FS supporters were also proud to be participants in a winter community celebration. The cold winter weather naturally drives people to desire the warmth of others. The placement of the *Tree of Knowledge* on public grounds conveyed to passersby that nontheists share a common bond with religious communities. While nontheists do not celebrate anything supernatural, we see the changing of the seasons as a special time to be with family and friends. Most nontheists give gifts, celebrate the natural world and think deeply about their one and only life. Peace on earth can best be achieved with an appreciation of diversity, respect for all and the application of Constitutional rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of thought. Coexistence on a local level can extend by example to world-wide communities. Peace on earth is a more achievable goal when citizens are loving, kind and welcoming to all.

As an educational non-profit organization, FS has a duty to provide information to the public. Placement of the *Tree of Knowledge* on the grounds of the Chester County Courthouse helps FS convey its mission, purpose and vision. The name of the display is of particular importance because we advocate the abandonment of a harmful myth — the association of “sin” with knowledge, a belief that has hampered human advancement for far too long. The book cover ornaments symbolize the “forbidden fruit” found in many so-called “holy stories.” FS encourages people to pick the fruit we offer and savor the joys of learning.

As reported in the November/December 2010 *Freethought Society News* (See: “FS President Questions Chester County Commissioners”) a list of questions regarding the submission of an application to display the *Tree of Knowledge* at the Chester County Courthouse during the 2010 holiday season was submitted, in person, to the Chester County Commissioners on October 19, 2010. On that date, Chester County Solicitor **Thomas Whiteman** promised to answer our questions and reassured FS vice president **Sally Flynn** and me that the deadline for applications would be November 15, 2010. While Whiteman did not provide a start date for applications, he indicated that the application process had not been changed.

Whiteman provided me with his business card and I contacted his office the following day, October 20, 2010. I requested a fax number, in order to send him our written list of questions. The fax number I was given was incorrect. I then sent an email to his office with the same list of questions. My email was not returned so I assumed that Whiteman's office did indeed receive it, but days went by without a response. I finally received the correct fax number from Whiteman's secretary — a full week after my initial attempts.

I faxed my questions, once again, and waited. In the meantime, I made sure to submit a holiday display application, following the 2009/2010 rules and regulations that could still be found at the Chester County Commissioner's Office website. The application included updated ornament photos, proof of insurance and a \$5,000 bank deposit earmarked for the display.

Little did I know that the Chester County Commissioners AND the Solicitor had no intention of responding to me. It became obvious that they considered my inquiries nothing more than trash. Their game plan was to ignore FS representatives, and the reason for that disrespectful treatment became clear when it was announced that Commissioner [Terrance Ferrell](#) would introduce Resolution 58-10 at the regularly scheduled Sunshine Meeting of November 18, 2010. I received information about the Resolution from a journalist working for [The Daily Local News](#) on November 15, 2010. Our only updates on this issue would come from journalists who would call to get my comments about actions taken by the Commissioners. FS was never given the courtesy of any communication or replies from Chester County officials involved in this issue.

Resolution 58-10 was written to ensure that the Commissioners could take control over the space that had been used by citizens of Chester County as a "free speech" zone, and to use the area specifically for their own purposes and choice of winter holiday exhibits. Specifically, Resolution 58 stated, "the Chester County Commissioners desire for the County to own, erect and maintain its own seasonal holiday displays to celebrate the traditions of the holidays, honor this nation's traditions of liberty and freedom and the men and women of our armed forces who protect and defend those traditions, celebrate peace and foster and promote commerce."

The obvious and purposeful attempt to make the Resolution seem like a patriotic move, actually backfired when many veterans responded to *The Daily Local's* coverage of the Resolution. One veteran wrote:

As a combat veteran, I want to make it clear that this is not what we fought for! Either allow freedom of religious expression on government property, or none at all. Allowing a select few government officials to decide what is displayed, and hiding the true intentions of denying non-Christians the same rights that will be given to Judeo-Christians behind a secular display claiming to honor veterans is deplorable. You aren't honoring my service by denying me a voice while given it to others. You can't stand up for freedom by taking it away from the people and putting it in the hands of a few government officials.

During an emergency virtual brainstorming session, FS board members decided that several pro-active steps could be taken. FS board member **Carol Everhart Roper** wrote an article for [The Philadelphia Freethought Examiner](#) ("Why the *Tree of Knowledge* holiday display is so very important")

and created an online petition to encourage the Commissioners to reconsider the issues and to vote against the Resolution. I notified national nontheist groups to get their support. National nontheist leaders, Roper and I also circulated an urgent plea requesting people to send email messages to each Commissioner.

Within a few days the petition had almost 400 signatures and we knew of at least 300 email messages which supported the displaying of the *Tree of Knowledge*. *The Daily Local News* conducted an online vote concerning the Resolution. A significant majority of respondents (approximately 62%) voted AGAINST the Resolution.

Long time FS member and former board member **Staks Rosch** also wrote a supportive article for [The Philadelphia Atheism Examiner](#) ("Tree of Knowledge to be excluded from county winter display") and his efforts helped spread the word about the campaign to convince the Commissioners to vote against the passage of Resolution 58-10.

The people who wrote to the Commissioners received the standard "thank you for writing" response, but my email was systematically rejected. My return message indicated that my correspondence was "Denied — Reason 554." Strangely, I began receiving Farrell fund raising event notifications through that rejected email address. It appears that my email address is good enough to use for solicitation, but not worthy of being read or acknowledged.

The petition was never acknowledged and not one of our many emails was ever answered. This mistreatment of Chester County taxpayers and national representatives of the nontheist community is another indication of how nontheists are denied equal rights and are treated as second class citizens.

At the November 18, 2010 Sunshine Meeting, the public was given a chance to state their concerns prior to the scheduled vote on Resolution 58-10. Four people from FS attended the meeting, but only Roper and I spoke. We tried our best to convince the Commissioners to vote against the Resolution, but we were obviously addressing a biased audience.

When I pointed out that as a black man, Ferrell should be more sensitive to minorities who are not being "allowed" to participate as equal citizens, the audience gasped. It was shocking to some that I dared point out the obvious, but I knew that Farrell was turning a blind eye to the prejudices nontheists experience. I felt it was appropriate to remind Farrell of the discrimination and irrational hatred that his ancestors had experienced. Farrell apparently needed a reminder of the prejudicial circumstances that faced the black community because nontheists are fighting a similar battle.

Farrell showed his lack of understanding when he called my words an "ad hominem attack." My comments where in no way a character assassination. Farrell's response showed that in his mind, pointing out his heritage and civil rights background was considered an insult. If he had listened to my analogy carefully and thoughtfully, he would have recognized the imperative for him as a black man to embrace and sympathize with the minority cause for equality.

In spite of the petition, the emails, in-person pleas, and the

finding reported in a 2008 American Religious Identification Survey revealing that 15% of the American population claim “no religion,” Republican Commissioners [Carol Aichele](#) and Farrell voted in favor of Resolution 58-10. Democratic Commissioner [Kathi Cozzone](#) opposed the Resolution and stated that she was in favor of maintaining the past policy allowing holiday displays that satisfied regulations which had been written by the office of the Commissioners several years earlier. During the meeting Cozzone urged her fellow Commissioners to maintain the current policy or rule that there would be no displays at all. Unfortunately, Aichele and Farrell were not persuaded. The behavior of Commissioners Aichele and Farrell and the passage of Resolution 58-10 clearly shows hostility toward a non-religious world-view.

Passage of Resolution 58-10 made it possible for the Commissioners to nullify all prior policies related to private unattended winter holiday displays on the Chester County Courthouse and enabled the Commissioners to acquire their own choice of holiday decorations and displays. The Commissioners gave themselves the right to erect and maintain such decorations and displays as “constitutionally permitted.”

Suddenly the lawn of the Chester County Courthouse no longer belonged to the citizens. The space was used now for the freedom of expression of only a few elected officials. Winter displays would not be about “we the people.” Winter displays would be about “we the Commissioners.”

Commissioner Farrell attempted to word Resolution 58-10 so that the Commissioners’ newly created zone could exclude the nontheist community but would still be in compliance with the U. S. Supreme Court ruling in the 1984 case of [Lynch vs. Donnelly](#) (456 U.S. 668, 104 S.Ct. 1355). In [Lynch vs. Donnelly](#) U. S. Supreme Court Justices ruled that displaying a crèche does not violate the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. The Justices ruled 5-4 that the crèche is actually a “passive representation of religion” and that there was not enough evidence to establish that the inclusion of the crèche is a purposeful or surreptitious effort to express some kind of subtle governmental advocacy of a particular religious view.

According to the ruling in [Lynch vs. Donnelly](#), the First Amendment mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance. It also forbids hostility toward any religion. While FS is not a “religion,” members of the nontheist community want equality.

In [Lynch vs. Donnelly](#), the Court also ruled that the crèche has a legitimate secular purpose within a larger holiday display celebrating the season and the origins of Christmas which had long been a part of Western culture. Balance of secular items appears to be of the utmost importance in the Chester County situation and ACLU attorney **Mary Catherine Roper** was quoted as saying, “They better be careful how they do this. If the overall appearance is one of a general winter holiday celebration and not a celebration of a religious holiday the display will fall within legal guidelines.”

The fact is that case law allows display of government-owned religious figures, but only within certain guidelines. Knowing that, the day after Resolution 58-10 passed, FS sent

a letter to the Commissioners offering to donate the *Tree of Knowledge* display as a symbol of the nontheist community.

The importance of establishing the *Tree of Knowledge* as a secular symbol was imperative and another campaign was launched to prove FS’s claim. Many people sent photos of their own *Tree of Knowledge* displays and several nontheist groups provided evidence of their use of the *Tree of Knowledge* in public arenas as a winter holiday symbol.

Knowing that the Commissioners would want to display a Menorah, I wrote a letter to the [Chabad Lubavitch of Chester County](#) (CLCC). For several years, CLCC displayed a Menorah at the Courthouse during the winter holiday season. I requested that **Rabbi Yossi Kaplan** show support of FS and all other minorities by refusing to erect their Menorah unless all different world-views were also allowed. My letter reasoned that the CLCC should not be a party to any unethical discriminatory practices and that in the spirit of “tikun olam,” (improving the world) CLCC could help FS demand equality for all citizens of Chester County — not just for those who are religious.

A journalist reported to me that my letter had been referred to CLCC legal advisors. Apparently, CLCC decided to ignore our letter and the Menorah appeared once again on the Courthouse lawn as part of the Commissioner’s display. FS does not know if the Menorah was lent to or purchased by the Commissioners.

Just as my email address had been entered into the database for Ferrell fund raising messages, CLCC now sends me unsolicited messages. I was not respected enough to get a response to my letter, but apparently they now want me to become a part of their Jewish community. I have never placed an email address on the FS mailing list without the owner’s consent. That is the appropriate, ethical and courteous way to handle incoming messages.

After a private meeting with the president of the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce, the Commissioners’ office announced publicly on November 25, 2010 that the County had purchased the Chamber’s 15’ artificial “Christmas tree” (so named by the Chamber and the Chester County Commissioners) for the nominal amount of \$1.

As predicted, the crèche was placed in front of the Chester County Courthouse. For the first week of the holiday season, the crèche occupied a space near the front entrance — a location within view of an affixed Ten Commandments plaque. The crèche was relocated shortly after FS hosted a rally at the Courthouse. FS does not know if the crèche was lent to or purchased by the Commissioners.

The new location for the crèche was right next to the Christmas tree that was purchased by the Chester County Commissioners. In the photo on this page, note that the star on the top of the Christmas tree appears to symbolize the Star of Bethlehem which is traditionally included in a nativity scene.



The star on top of the Christmas tree lights up at night and gives the appearance of a Christian cross. Also notice that the Ten Commandments plaque can be seen just over the roofline of the crèche on the wall behind the pillar (see photo on previous page).

The Menorah was also placed on the front lawn of the Courthouse. It was placed near a plastic Santa Claus, a sleigh and a wire train. Those childlike figurines are apparently supposed to represent the secular community. If so, they are an insult to our community. Nontheists are not represented at all and our place in the larger community is being completely ignored. FS was never consulted, never contacted and was never invited to any meeting. Obviously the Commissioners' office had conversation with the Jewish and Christian communities, but nontheists were rejected from any participation. We wonder how this is possible in a country that supposedly embraces a secular Constitution — and that is what motivates FS to fully explore all possible legal remedies.

The question is whether or not a court would find that the 2010 Chester County winter display has entangled a government body excessively and endorses the Christian religion. Does the overall display promote the tenets of that religion? I also think there may have been a violation of the 14th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. FS is in contact with legal departments of national groups to examine this situation.

The fight to display the *Tree of Knowledge* generated a great amount of interest from the media. I was honored to represent FS with appearances on a national FOX News show, a local FOX news segment and interviews with journalists from local NBC and CBS stations. I was also twice featured as a special live radio show guest on WCHE (1500 AM), and a taped interview I did for KYW (1060 AM) aired in segments throughout a two day period (December 3-4).

Print media also highlighted the controversy and articles appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Daily Local News* and the *Tree of Knowledge* was mentioned in *The New Yorker* magazine.

FS thanks the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#), the [American Humanist Association](#), [American Atheists](#) and the [Center for Inquiry](#) for sending out email blasts to their members. Many people responded, and we thank them as well. It was particularly encouraging to receive the following message of support from a person who is known as “Anti-Claus,” **Tom Flynn**. Flynn is the author of *The Trouble with Christmas*. In that book, he advocates not celebrating the winter holidays at all, but the widespread adoption of *Tree of Knowledge* has convinced him that the nontheist community does, indeed, have a symbol that should be endorsed. Flynn wrote:

“As many in the movement know, I usually urge atheists, humanists, and other unbelievers to go out of their way not to do anything celebratory at holiday time. But some matters invoke larger principles, and the Tree of Knowledge is one of them. I have supported Tree of Knowledge since its inception, (pardon the expression) joyfully allowing the covers of my books to appear on the tree. The

modest number of municipalities across the country that operate fair and impartial open forums at “helladay” time is far too small. For three halcyon years West Chester was among them, opening its courthouse lawn to expressions of Christianity and other faiths, as well as to expressions of religion and irreligion. Now that's over. West Chester has decided to spurn nontraditional points of view and throw its rapidly unraveling prestige behind a narrow, mostly Christian agenda.

“Making yourself conspicuous in not joining into the Christians' birthday party is a great way to make the freethought community more visible. Another one is to represent the freethought agenda alongside more traditional holiday symbols where that possibility exists. In closing a once-exemplary open forum, West Chester has opted to frog-march into the past. I urge every humanist, atheist, agnostic, and freethinker to let its leaders know that they're making a regrettable mistake.”

Since a December 5, 2010 *Tree of Knowledge* unveiling and lighting ceremony was announced in the November/December 2010 FS newsletter, I announced that instead of celebrating on that date, people were invited to form a “Human *Tree of Knowledge*” and protest against the exclusion of our community on the grounds of the Courthouse. Participants brought flashlights and the rally theme was “Shining a Light on Bigotry.”



FS provided apple cider, free literature and a lively program on the evening of December 5th turning a negative situation into a productive event. Everhart Roper and I delivered speeches about the unfairness of Resolution 58-10. Rosch, **Nicholas Stark**, **Kelvin Kean**, and **Bill Wisdom** also spoke about their favorite freethought books and about their unhappiness at being treated as a second-class citizen.

Brian Sapient filmed the event. [The Daily Local News](#) reported that 30 people attended, but we counted over 40 in attendance. Some passersby stopped to hear the speeches. No onlookers openly objected to what was said. We were all on alert after an anonymous person wrote that upset citizens who

happened to be in the area on the day of the rally should “dress as Santa Claus and punch me in the face.” No violence occurred, but the threat was taken seriously and the police were notified.

FS did receive hate mail and threats of violence, but FS also received many messages of support, even from religious communities. Following is commentary written by **Eileen M. Lyons**. It was published on December 11, 2010 in *The Daily Local News*:

“We cannot deny that religious symbols are on government property. It is not a big deal to most people, but maybe it should be, if you take the time to think about it and its potential consequences... Like it or not, we have an issue, and the Free-thought Society has thought it out while most of us naively sing our carols and light our candles and look to enjoy our celebrations...We do not want our joy and happiness diluted or subdued. Yet, we can do this only because we have these freedoms.

“It would be wise to look at this situation as an opportunity to reassess our values and the main one: separation of church and state. Sometimes, we do things just because we have always done so. Maybe it is time to put religious symbols where they belong. The churches and synagogues can have all of the symbols of celebration that they want on their properties. Families can have all of this on their own lawns and homes...keeping things where they belong while protecting our country from any of the forms of religious tyranny that we have seen in other countries and times. Thank God for the Freethought Society. They got us thinking.”

Tree of Knowledge ornaments were distributed at a December 2010 FS meeting. Audience members were asked to utilize the ornaments in their own homes during the holiday season.



Above is a photo of **Bill and Fritz Wisdom** selecting their ornaments. **Everhart Roper** is holding the cover she

designed in 2009 for the “History of the *Tree of Knowledge*” book. The coffee table size of the book cover caused the Commissioners to demand that FS remove all ornaments that they considered too big in 2009. FS fought back and prevented the Commissioners’ office from destroying the 2009 *Tree of Knowledge* ornaments.

Rosch used the FS ornaments for his holiday tree in Glenolden, Pennsylvania. Rosch is the Philadelphia Coalition of Reason ([PhillyCoR](#)) Coordinator. He has expressed interest in placing a PhillyCoR sponsored 2011 *Tree of Knowledge* in the civic center area of Philadelphia. FS will continue to fight for the right to place a *Tree of Knowledge* in Chester County, but volunteers are researching the possibility of placing a tree at the Thomas Paine Plaza which is located across from City Hall in front of the Philadelphia Municipal Building.



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Pictured above is **Eve Loev Balistra**, **Doobie** (the dog) and **Noah Loev Balistra**. They decorated a tree outside of their family’s home in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. The Loev Balistra family have supported the *Tree of Knowledge* since it was introduced in 2007. They visited the *Tree of Knowledge* in West Chester each year and they considered the trip to the Chester County Courthouse a family tradition. ◆



Pictured left is **Lloyd Asimus** standing in front of the *Tree of Knowledge* that was placed in the Kauai vacation home of FS president **Margaret Downey**. Asimus, Downey's nephew, was visiting Kauai during the winter holiday season. He was proud of his aunt's essay "My Bye Bull Story" published in the book [50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists](#) (the cover of which is framed by Asimus's hands). The book was first distributed in Australia, and is now available through Amazon.com. Coincidentally, Asimus lives in Terrigal, Australia.

Pictured right is a *Tree of Knowledge* that was created by **Bill Creasy** in Havre De Grace, Maryland. Creasy is the past president of the [Washington Area Secular Humanists](#) and is currently secretary of that organization.



The cheerful group pictured right are decorating a *Tree of Knowledge* that was installed by the [Halton Peel Humanist Community](#) located in Mississauga, Canada. The effort was led by the group's president, **Kevin Saldanha** (pictured in the forefront of the photo holding the HPH sign). 2010 was the second year that the group decorated an outdoor tree with book covers. Saldanha said, "The tree is not designed to denigrate religion. The tree helps the group to celebrate and enjoy the season in a way that's in line with their beliefs. It was our way of celebrating with a tree that we felt was appropriate — and, hopefully, would inspire people."

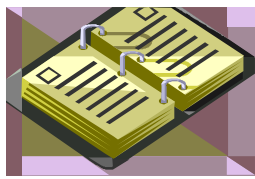


Pictured left is a *Tree of Knowledge* created by Reverend **Aaron O'Donahue**. The tree was installed in his home for the second year in a row. O'Donahue runs the Church of Atheism in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. For more information about the "Church," see:

<http://churchofatheism.webs.com>

A lovely outdoor *Tree of Knowledge* was installed by [Seattle Atheists](#) at the state capital lawn free speech zone in Olympia, Washington. The tree sits near a life-size nativity scene and a large Menorah. **Jerry Schjiffelbein**, a spokesperson for the group, was quoted on a local FOX News program saying, "We actually got the ideas from the Philadelphia Freethought Society." He also said that the *Tree of Knowledge* was a way to "share their beliefs in a positive way."





The Freethought Society's (FS) 2011 Four-Month Activities Calendar

January 25

FS proudly presents **Dr. Arthur Caplan** as the Tuesday, **January 25, 2011** speaker at the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The meeting will begin promptly at **7:00 PM** in the **Skyline Room**. The address of the library is **1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**.



Dr. Caplan's presentation entitled, "Life, God, and Synthetic Biology — Ethics at the Frontiers of the Genomic Biology" will examine both the genomic revolution in medicine and the impact of developments in synthetic biology.

The "genomic revolution" carries many promises — personalized medicine, risk detection for diseases and screening embryos for different conditions and traits. Perhaps the biggest change in our lives is going to come from synthetic biology which is the genetic manipulation of bacteria and viruses. We may even see the creation of novel life forms! What ethical questions do these developments raise? What does synthetic biology tell us about religious explanations of life?

These are all great questions that only a bio-ethicist can answer. Don't miss this encore FS appearance of Dr. Caplan.

February 16

The **Wednesday, February 16, 2011** meeting is going to be unusual. The operational hours at the [Norristown Public Library](#) (1001 Powell Street, Norristown, Pennsylvania) have changed so FS is trying a new meeting approach. Come to the library at **5:30 PM** with your own dinner and chat with friends before the screening of a **George Kalman** movie.

Kalman is a filmmaker based in Pennsylvania. Kalman told his story about his struggle to register his production company under the name "I Choose Hell Productions" at the FS December 9, 2010 meeting. His fascinating story led to the audience requesting to see at least one of his movies.

Kalman will present his 48 minute film "Rust Little Baby" at around 6:30 PM. The movie was filmed in 2007. It is about Lisa who is an inner city, low income black woman. She falls prey to the mechanics of a capitalistic society built by and for wealthy, greedy white men. "Rust Little Baby" is Kalman's interpretive culmination of true stories he heard from his parents during their involvement in the civil rights struggles for minorities and women.



March 28

On **Monday, March 28, 2011** FS will host **Jill McDevitt** in the auditorium of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The presentation and FS monthly business meeting will begin promptly at **7:00 PM**. The address of the library is **1901 Vine Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**.



Take an attractive young blonde, a sex shop, a political candidate, and add a Catholic Church for good measure, and you have the recipe for a riveting controversy that riddled a wealthy Philadelphia suburb and divided a community.

McDevitt is a recent college graduate with a degree in sexuality. She enjoys "pushing the envelope." After opening a sex shop and education center with a focus on female pleasure at just 21 years old, McDevitt and her shop [Feminique Boutique](#) quickly became the center of a firestorm in conservative West Chester, Pennsylvania.

McDevitt's presentation "The Crusade Against Sex" is a compelling story that exposes our culture's archaic shame of sexuality, the dangerous ability of the self-righteous to control the law, and the power of the American entrepreneurial spirit.

April 16

Alan Gold, a generous FS supporter, has donated money for the group to host a table for the **Spring Festival** in Lansdale, Pennsylvania at the **North Penn High School** located at **1340 Valley Forge Road, Lansdale, Pennsylvania**. The festival will be held on **Saturday, April 16, 2011**. Details can be found at:

<http://www.internationalspringfestival.com/>

During the Spring Festival, **Margaret Downey** will deliver a presentation in a classroom or auditorium. She will highlight what it is like to be a nontheist in America and answer questions about the atheist worldview. The Festival advocates "diversity" so FS should be there to represent a fast growing minority.

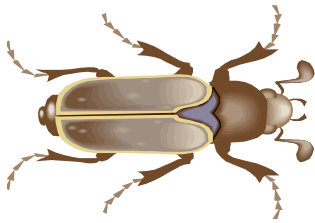
FS is in need of about ten volunteers. Staff is needed for set-up, meeting and greeting passersby and break-down duties. Volunteers will be asked to wear a nontheist themed T-shirt provided by FS and will need to arrive at approximately **10:00 AM**. The event ends at **5:00 PM**. Volunteers should bring their own lunch, but FS will purchase dinner for those who work until closing time. Volunteers are welcome to work a few hours or as many hours as the like. To volunteer contact: Volunteers@FtSociety.org

If you cannot volunteer, please consider donating to this effort. Even with the donation of the table, many other expenses will be incurred (T-shirts, literature, signs, etc.).

Shared Treasures

Freethought Society Vice-President, **Sally Flynn** suggested that readers of *The Freethought Society News* might want to share favorite literature with each other. The shared literature can be anything from poetry to short stories. Newsletter editors request that submissions be pre-screened to ensure that reprinting will not violate any copyright laws. A maximum of two pages will be available to this “Shared Treasures” newsletter feature. Send submissions to: editor@FtSociety.org

Don Marquis first introduced archy the cockroach and mehitabel, the cat in her ninth life, in his newspaper column, *The Sun Dial*, in 1916. archy and mehitabel was originally published in a hardbound edition by Doubleday & Company, Incorporated. In a previous incarnation archy was a free-verse poet, while mehitabel's soul once belonged to Cleopatra. She is toujours gai, but archy is more philosophical. It is he who records their songs and observations on the boss's typewriter late at night. But he is not strong enough to make capital letters so it all comes out lower case:



warty bliggens the toad

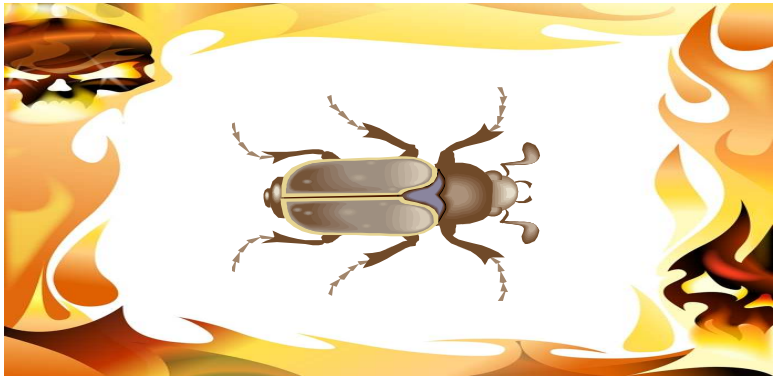
i met a toad
the other day by the name
of warty bliggens
he was sitting under
a toadstool
feeling contented
he explained that when the cosmos
was created
that toadstool was especially
planned for his personal
shelter from sun and rain
thought out and prepared
for him
do not tell me
said warty bliggens
that there is not a purpose
in the universe
the thought is blasphemy

a little more
conversation revealed
that warty bliggens
considers himself to be
the center of the said
universe

the earth exists
to grow toadstools for him
to sit under
the sun to give him light
by day and the moon
and wheeling constellations
to make beautiful
the night for the sake of
warty bliggens

to what act of yours
do you impute
this interest on the part
of the creator
of the universe
i asked him
why is it that you
are so greatly favored

ask rather
said warty bliggens
what the universe
has done to deserve me
if i were a
human being i would
not laugh
too complacently
at poor warty bliggens
for similar
absurdities
have only too often
lodged in the crinkles
of the human cerebrum



the cockroach who had been to hell

listen to me i have
been mobbed almost
there s an old simp cockroach
here who thinks he has
been to hell and all
the young cockroaches make a
hero out of him and admire
him he sits and runs his front
feet through his long white
beard and tells the story one
day he says he crawled into a yawning
cavern and suddenly came on a
vast abyss full of whirling
smoke there was a light
at the bottom billows
and billows of yellow smoke
swirled up at him and
through the horrid gloom he
saw things with wings flying
and dropping and dying they veered
and fluttered like damned
spirits through that sulphurous mist

listen i says to him
old man youve never been to hell
at all there isn t any hell
transmigration is the game i
used to be a human vers libre
poet and i died and went
into a cockroach s body if
there was a hell i d know
it wouldn t i you re
irreligious says the old simp
combing his whiskers excitedly

ancient one i says to him
while all those other
cockroaches gathered into a
ring around us what you
beheld was not hell all that
was natural someone was fumigating
a room and you blundered
into it through a crack
in the wall atheist he cries
and all those young
cockroaches cried atheist
and made for me if it
had not been for freddy
the rat i would now be
on my way once more i mean
killed as a cockroach and transmigrating
into something else well
that old whitebearded devil is
laying for me with his
gang he is jealous
because i took his glory away
from him don t ever tell me
insects are any more liberal
than humans

archy

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I am an atheist Eagle Scout and this is my story.

by Neil Polzin

(Polzin is pictured below with his mother Denise. The photo was taken in 1996 when Polzin was 10 years old)

There were two events during my association with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) that changed my life: The first shows why I am proud to be an Eagle Scout. The second illustrates the blatant discrimination BSA has institutionalized and teaches to children.

I joined BSA as a Cub Scout when I was in the fifth grade. A recruiter came to my public school and during the presentation in class gave out pamphlets to bring home. I was captivated by the idea of scouting, so I gathered all the offered pamphlets, then took them home to pitch the idea to my parents.

I joined Pack 820 in Covina, California. It was sponsored by my elementary school and met in the cafeteria occasionally after class. I had fun, and my parents didn't seem to mind dropping me off for a few hours at what seemed like a school sponsored extracurricular activity.

I started at an older age compared to most Cub Scouts. After a year I 'bridged' to the Boy Scouts. I was active, but was by no means the model Scout. At the end of three years I was still "Tenderfoot" rank — a rank most boys surpassed only a couple months after becoming a Scout. I learned first aid, tying knots, and whatever else that was required to know in order to go camping. It was entertaining, and something to do that wasn't school related.

I can vividly remember the first moment scouting changed for me, going from being an after school activity into something life altering. The day was May 15, 1999.

I woke up early Saturday morning, eager to meet with the other Scouts for an overnight backpacking trip. I had diligently packed my gear the night before, including the "Ten Essentials" which were organized neatly on top of the pile. I was ready to roll out the front door once the alarm sounded. It took some coaxing to get my mother out of bed, but I was soon dropped off with a group of two dozen Scouts ready for the hour drive ahead of us.

This was not my first time camping or backpacking with the Scouts. By the time I was 13, I had been a member of BSA Troop # 448 for a several years and was considered one of the older Scouts. Most members of this troop were new Scouts, recently bridged from Cub Scouts a few months earlier. Most were anxious and scared about their first backpacking trip.

The Scoutmaster and assistants were going through packs and gear checklists with the new boys. After the food was split among the packs, the gear was loaded into trucks, and everyone took a seat for the drive out of the city.

The sun was slow to emerge during the drive and a thick cloud layer came in from the ocean. There was barely enough light to be called day by the time we pulled off the mountain road at the trail head. In the higher elevation above the city,



the clouds hung thick and clung to the canyon walls.

By midday, we had gained in elevation as we hiked along the trail. The clouds burned off transforming a cool morning into a warm and humid day. The energy everyone started with had long waned in the day's heat. Everyone was glad to reach the ridge of the mountain. At the ridge we realized that the trail would now be all downhill into the creek. The creek would be a great place to stop for lunch.

Of the Scouts, two boys were my age. I had known both Daniel and David from the last few years in the troop and David had been in my Cub

Pack. We were walking with an older boy named Jack. Jack was the older brother of another Scout who was not with us during the hike. The topics of conversation bounced around and being immature we laughed at the younger kids. We were all walking oddly trying to stave off rashes and blisters.

After lunch at the creek, the four of us decided to stick together on the trail. The back side of the mountain was rockier and the trail was situated close to the side. Winding around, the trail grew thin as the mountain slope expanded to form a cliff above and below. The rock became exposed and shifted to shale. Only a few bushes were rugged enough to root into the hillside. Progress was slow and we halted completely at times to help boys find footing across the trail.

I heard the sliding of rocks and a yell from behind me. Turning around, I could see a blur of color leaving the trail. I was frozen still, each heart beat stretching into what felt like minutes. Daniel was behind me, looking as lost as I. Peeking over the cliff edge I could see nothing but loose shale rock and the canopy of the trees far below. It was hundreds of feet down; there was no way Jack could have survived the fall.

It was at this moment the training I was forced to sit through became relevant. I began delegating tasks to younger boys, sending them to the front and the back of the group to alert the adults. Assuring the younger boys, and myself, that everything was going to be alright, I dropped my bag to retrieve my first aid kit and other essentials. Three sharp whistle blasts pierced the air below. Daniel and I grabbed our response supplies, leaving our packs, and darted down the trail.

By now, alerted to what happened, Mr. D. joined us in running down the trail from the front of the group, while Mr. R. stayed behind. The trail extended along the cliff side a half mile, bringing us further away from the fall, before reaching a series of switchbacks dropping to the creek.

The creek bed was too wide to see across and dense overgrowth made it impossible to see more than a few yards. Tall trees and fallen logs littered the area, covered with a thick layer of poison oak. The creek deeply eroded the floor,

leaving numerous tall islands between a maze of forks in the creek. We kept to the east side of the creek bed close to the mountain looking for Jack.

We separated to cover more ground, hoping our yells could be heard over rustling of the trees and running water. Half an hour had passed since Jack fell, and when we first heard the whistle blasts. What little hope I had for Jack being safe was fleeting fast.

Bushwhacking a trail, I was hoping to stumble across Jack, and not a corpse.

I could hear Daniel close by, also calling out. Something called back, it was neither loud nor strong. It came from in front of me, I rushed to the call. Daniel had heard the call as well, converging together in a eroded canyon between the mountain and one of the larger islands.

Jack rested against a log with the lower half of his body submerged in water, back against the mountain, still strapped into his pack. Daniel and I knew he was lucky to be alive. He was conscious, and grasping the whistle that hung from the top pole of his pack.

We started to work with what we brought, bandaging the head wound and checking for a spinal injury. We caught the attention of Mr. D., searching the underbrush with David. Daniel, Mr. D. and I began to build a stretcher from the logs and branches. David returned to camp to alert the group and retrieve additional supplies.

The remaining adults lead the Scouts to the camp site. Without any way of phoning or using a radio signal, Mr. R. and Mr. C. needed to hike out to seek medical help. The last adult stayed with the Scouts. David brought emergency supplies and updates from camp to the scene.

We placed Jack on a stretcher, suspended on a tarp from two logs strewn across the creek. Wedged against the steep banks on both sides, the stretcher kept Jack elevated and dry. We had treated the head wound, along with other scrapes. We also treated Jack for hypothermia and shock. Jack was experiencing a lot of abdominal pain, however. Without medical assistance there was no way to treat or help ease the pain.

The hours stretched on as we waited to hear from the party that hiked out. We knew that it was impossible to leave the site trying to manipulate a stretcher. The thick canopy on the cliff above us made it nearly impossible for anyone to see us from above. We waited, without knowing if the hikers made it out safely and we wondered if they had found help, and if they now were trying to look for us.

I scuttled up the rock side to place silver emergency blankets over the few cacti that grew in the shale rock. I hoped that the canopy would be visible from above. Daniel started a fire. We cleared small trees and bushes from the top of the small island the stretcher was propped against. We burned the fresh plants, creating a smoke trail into the sky.

Six hours passed, an incredibly long time for so serious a situation. Jack regained full consciousness soon after we found him. He continued to struggle to stay conscious, however. We rotated duties alternately feeding the fire and talking to Jack. He remained untreated for pain or internal

injuries. A sense of helplessness crept in.

In the distance, the sound of a helicopter came into focus. Quiet at first and no one said anything. We were unsure if it was a helicopter or if our minds were playing tricks with the sound of the creek. Suddenly, the sound was on top of us. Our signals had worked.

A rescuer was lowered down to the clearing. The line was retracted, and a metal basket was lowered. We transferred Jack from the make shift stretcher to the basket. It took everyone available to help lift the metal basket back up the hill. Before we knew it, the basket with Jack, the rescuer, and the helicopter were gone.

I later discovered that Jack had suffered multiple breaks to his pelvis. He walked with a cane for many years and a limp remains as a reminder of the experience.

This was the first time scouting changed me. The first time I utilized the skills Scouts taught me to save a person. I was thirteen years old, this event changed how I approached life, and how I saw scouting. I earned my First Aid merit badge by attending training that I actually hated sitting through. As a result, however, I was more prepared for this situation than anyone in the troop. Until that incident I was an unmotivated Tenderfoot, but now I was setting my goals on becoming an Eagle Scout.

The Boy Scout motto is "Be Prepared." Beginning on May 15, 1999, I took that motto to heart. I began to maximize every opportunity and training presented to me. In April of 2000, the San Gabriel Valley BSA Council hosted their annual lifeguard training. I met the minimum age requirement only by a few months, but I was excited for the opportunity to advance my skills.

I enjoy swimming, and I took naturally to rescue training. I pushed hard to learn all of the lessons, and my efforts were noticed. Susan (our lead trainer), invited me to be a lifeguard for Camp Cherry Valley on Santa Catalina island.

I had been to the island as a camper, but being on staff for BSA was a new experience. There were hundreds of kids in the ocean and I immediately put the skills I learned to good use. I not only resolved problems, I taught kids to swim and kayak. I also took some of them on their first snorkeling experience. I learned the waterfront was a great place to be, and began to understand the unique quality of camp.

Later on, I was invited to help train lifeguards and eventually returned to the same camp the next year. Every year, I trained lifeguards in the Spring and returned to the island to lifeguard every August.

After a very successful lifeguard training in 2001, the BSA Council asked me to start working at local camps. I began to work weekends at Trask, which is nestled in the Los Angeles National Forest. For me, scouting grew from one weekend a month to every weekend. I acquired certifications in CPR, advanced First Aid, and wilderness First Aid training.

The summer of 2002 brought more opportunities with BSA. On a scholarship, the council sent me to the National Junior Leadership Instructor Training at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. I was also chosen as a member of the

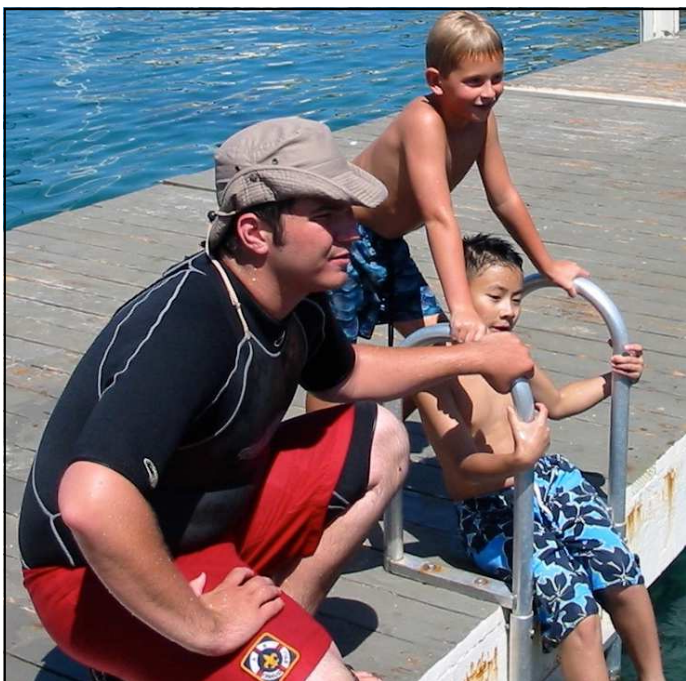
Western Region Staff for the 2002 National Scout Jamboree at Fort AP Hill, Virginia. At age sixteen, BSA had provided me with independence and travel that I never thought possible.

In addition to being paid to work at camps, San Gabriel Valley Council hired me to work at the local Scout shop, a position I held for years while attending school. I was able to utilize my extensive knowledge of the council's programs in the area, and could easily arrange my schedule to work at camp.

As part of the requirements necessary to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, applicants are required to organize and execute a service project. For my project, I gathered a hundred volunteers to serve nearly one thousand hours at the Los Angeles Arboretum. We completely restored the upper water gardens that were suffering from years of neglect. By the time I was sixteen years old, the Scouts had already given me the skills needed to lead people and achieve results. I can not think of another youth program or sport that prepares the participants in the manner scouting does.

Fast forward several years. I finished college and had all the while remained a council employee. I no longer worked at the Scout shop, but I returned each year to Camp Cherry Valley (CCV). I had remained active with my home troop, holding the position of Assistant Scoutmaster.

Susan, the lifeguard instructor who trained me, had stepped down as Waterfront Director years before. After she left, CCV had a string of new directors each year. The year round job of organizing and recruiting staff proved difficult. I had years of experience guarding at CCV and each year my experience and talents were used to offset the lack of experience of my supervisors. I am pictured below teaching two young Scouts to swim at CCV.



I was asked to step up to the position of Waterfront Director for the 2007 season, but I had reservations about

taking the position. The job requires finding and training staff. I would also be in charge of organizing meetings, budgeting and acquisitions. The job also required that I take an additional 7 day training course. Along with the title came added responsibility and a salary that reflected the position. Even with so much responsibility, I decided this is what I wanted.

Early in college, I came to the realization that I had always been an atheist. Working my way through college, I worked for the Scouts at camp during the summer, and for the Secular Student Alliance (SSA) during the school year. I helped to organize and support freethought groups on college campuses. I was also becoming active within the freethought community.

I had heard about BSA's discrimination against homosexuals and atheists, but thought it was an antiquated practice similar to laws currently on the books prohibiting cursing in front of a woman, or spitting in public. While these laws have never been repealed, no one has been charged with or arrested for those "crimes" in decades. Yet the laws remain on the books. The ban on homosexuals and atheists in BSA felt to me much like those other silly laws.

It was no secret that I did not believe in a god. The topic came up from time to time while sitting around the campfire between sessions. My philosophy never conflicted with my work. I never felt the need to proselytize my atheism at camp. Any grace or prayer that took place at camp was non-denominational, and didn't even mention a god. A simple Google search in 2007 would clearly link me to a number of atheist groups, but I did not see a conflict between the two. I did not feel like I was making a compromise by working for BSA. I hid nothing.

I was honored by the promotion to Waterfront Director, but I was required to attend National Camp School — an extensive and expensive program. Even though attending the National Camp School was a prerequisite to hold the job of Waterfront Director, CCV hired me.

My Aquatics Instructor certification enabled me to certify lifeguard instructors and to also "run" a waterfront. While I was at National Camp School, I also earned an Aquatics Director certification, the highest level of aquatics certification possible. This enabled me to certify Aquatics Instructors, a certification that was achieved by less than a dozen people in 2007.

2007 was completely different on the waterfront as compared to previous years. The program offered more activities, the staff worked together and there were no injuries. A new bar was set, so the council renewed my contract.

2008 was a great year for the waterfront. After the initial run in 2007, the entire process came together even more seamlessly than the year before. The Program Director, Camp Director, and BSA Council were all very pleased with my work. With two successful years under my belt as Waterfront Director in addition to the seven years at CCV as a lifeguard, the BSA Council asked me to return for my tenth season.

Going into the 2009, the reputation of the waterfront at

CCV had drastically improved. An isolated camp with fewer perks, CCV struggled to find qualified guards. In previous years, directors managed to fill their staff with promises of a island vacation. This is an inappropriate expectation to set when looking for an employee. Unfortunately, many of these employees remained longer than the director that had hired them. The pool of available guards had increased, and I had the opportunity to gather a hand picked team. I dropped those who were looking for an all expenses paid vacation, and found a dedicated team of guards.

All was going well with BSA. I was doing the job that I wanted to do, and was getting a great sense of reward from passing my love for the outdoors and the ocean to young Scouts. I returned to school to earn my Masters Degree in Philosophy with an emphasis on Ethics and Religion, and the waterfront position fit my schedule perfectly. I held planning meetings and staff trainings during the year in the evenings around classes, and worked at the camp when the summer returned.

All this would soon morph into the second time BSA changed my life. One of the guards seeking a Club Med vacation, only coming to camp for the food and lodging, was asked not to return. He held an Aquatics Instructor certification, not as high as my credentials. He thought that he was the obvious successor to my position, in spite of his poor performance. He became disgruntled about not returning to CCV, and began a personal attack, assuming that it was I standing in his way.

It was June and everything was looking good for the season in spite of the conflict with the disgruntled employee. He begun using Facebook to send messages to other members of the CCV staff. He made sure others knew that I listed myself as an “atheist” on my Facebook profile. He called for my removal because he thought I could not be a “real Scouter.”

The Facebook attacks seemed almost comical until I was contacted by a few concerned staff members. Any uncertainty about an employee is not acceptable with BSA and camp was due to start within weeks. I realized the situation needed to be addressed head on.

With all the attention the issue was receiving, there was no question these accusations would soon reach the BSA Council. I wanted to explain the situation in my own words, instead of trying to address a rumor mill of fractured accusations. I wrote a letter to the Council Executive, **Marcus Mack**. The letter explained the situation and confirmed that I am indeed an atheist. I asked him to clarify my qualifications for the job, and dismiss any absurd talk about my being unqualified to run a waterfront because I did not share a belief in a deity. After the previous two years there was no question I was the most qualified person for the position. The archaic discriminatory policy that was being cited had no bearing on my abilities as a person.

Instead, I received a letter that completely changed my relationship with BSA. It stated:

We have received information that has compelled us to revoke your registration. You must

immediately sever any relationship you have with the Boy Scouts of America.

The letter made me sound like a felon and BSA did not include a thank you for years of service. I was completely flabbergasted.

I contacted my Camp Director and Program Director to alert them of what had happened. I did so in part to see what could be done, but I was also concerned about camp. Hundreds of kids were expected to attend an island adventure in just a few weeks, but now there was no director to open the waterfront. The Camp Director and Program Director were shocked to see the letter from Marcus. They immediately got involved and wrote letters to the BSA Council and national offices on my behalf. They vouched to the fact that I was the only truly qualified person for the job, and a replacement at such short notice would be problematic. Both men knew of my lack of beliefs, and felt personally insulted that I was told I was not qualified.

The letter did not give any reason for my dismissal so I hoped that it was still all just a mistake. The letter from Marcus, after all, did not mention what effect my lack of a belief in a god had to do with my work. I had dedicated the last ten years to CCV as a guard. I worked for BSA off season and I had earned the Arrow of Light, Eagle Rank. I had even traveled across the country as a scouting representative. After a long relationship, Marcus would not return my emails or take my phone calls.

Since I was now a non-working student, I had some time on my hands. I took it upon myself to visit Marcus in person. I had questions that needed to be answered. I finally had my opportunity to ask Marcus questions one day after waiting for him to be available at the Council headquarters. I was very familiar with the building, having worked for the council for many years and waited two hours before I finally saw Marcus emerging from a meeting.

Without hesitation, I showed him the letter he has sent to me and asked him, “Can you explain this?”

Marcus responded, cold and flat “I got a letter from you, this is my response.”

The conversation continued, and spilled into the parking lot. I found it odd that he struggled and stumbled in his words to avoid saying the word “atheist” during the entire encounter.

When pushed further, Marcus said that “The scouts have a moral standard — one that you do not meet.”

I was no longer employed because of my lack of beliefs in a god! No performance issues had been reported. Marcus informed me that a volunteer registration is a requirement for BSA’s employment. I could no longer be a volunteer, so I could no longer be an employee. He felt this was not discrimination, because religion and sexuality were moral choices and not inherent to the person. Marcus also refused to pay me for the months of planning, preparation and meeting work that had already been completed. Saying the salary paid was for being the director at camp itself, not for all the months of required work leading to camp.

Other than having a void in my schedule Wednesday

nights when I normally held meetings, I felt a strong conflict. Hating the organization that just deemed me useless and immoral, but loving the people and lessons I gained over the last decade. One staff meeting remained before the start of camp, and I felt deep conflict over helping find the camp a new qualified director, yet the BSA Council had just informed me that I was expendable.

I received many calls in the week that followed, mostly from staff expressing their shock. The Camp Director called me, explaining that he had written on my behalf to everyone he could think of. He then invited me to the last staff meeting, a barbeque to boost the moral of the staff before they went to CCV. He knew my orders were to sever any relationship with BSA, but he wanted to ignore them.

I decided to attend the barbeque, but I had a very odd feeling. I was received well, with open arms and thanks for the lessons and memories I had given the staff, yet a sense of helplessness was apparent. It felt like my fellow staff was at a burial service — mine.

I suddenly found myself out of a job. I had new doubts that I had not had before. Doubts that I knew had no place being there. I had been exiled from a community that was a focal point of my life experiences. I had spent years building professionally specialized qualifications from BSA that only their camps accepted. If I were to start over at a non-Scout camp I would be without the certifications I had worked so hard to achieve. This should have been a call to action against BSA — instead there I was at a barbeque trying to be friendly and kind.

What happened to me has happened to many volunteers and professionals. BSA places the blame for the discrimination directly on the victim and many people silently step away. Young Scouts are unaware of the loss of these fine people that BSA claims are not “morally straight.”

The Scouts give an incredible service and unique experiences to the children in the program. I know without Scouts, I would not be the person I am today. My Cub pack was sponsored by a public elementary school, and given free

meeting space. My BSA troop met at a local “Scout House,” which was a large meeting and storage area used only by a half dozen troops on different nights of the week.

The facility was provided to BSA by the City of Covina and BSA never paid rent or utility charges. The Jamboree I staffed in 2001 was made possible by subsidized rent of \$1 at Fort AP Hill, further enabled by thousands of free hours of labor and site improvements given by the military.

The Scouts introduced me to science and technology through merit badges like astronomy, chemistry, atomic energy, and electronics and I decided to attend Cal Poly Pomona for a undergraduate degree after attending science merit badge days at the public university hosted for BSA every year. I have learned and used the skills from the Scouts to save lives, and I have been able to reciprocate similar life changing experiences to other Scouts. It was the multi-denominational programs of the Scouts that interested me in world religions, beginning the path to find atheism and later studying religion in my graduate program. I would hate to think who I would be, and the experiences I would be lacking, without BSA — an organization that seems to now refuse to acknowledge even my existence.

I once made the mistake of thinking the problem of discrimination was a fight that was over, but it is not. Discrimination is institutionalized on a national scale by organizations like BSA. The bigotry is being assisted by subsidies from tax payer dollars.

I did not want to be another victim of the Scouts so I will not remain silent. I will not be shamed into the shadows for being an atheist. I have no reason to be ashamed. Moving forward, the supporters of BSA, including lawmakers and taxpayers, need to be made aware of the discriminatory practices BSA systematizes. We must all put every bit of pressure possible to ensure the benefits of BSA can be enjoyed by ALL. We need to assure that another generation does not learn that “morally straight” is **not** at odds with being atheist and/or homosexual. ◆

Former President James E. Carter, Jr. Letter Writing Campaign Continues

By Margaret Downey

A call to write letters asking former President **James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Jr.** to disaffiliate from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) was published in the March/April 2010 newsletter. Carter currently serves on BSA's Advisory Council. The article “I am an Eagle Scout and this is my story” written by **Neil Polizin** and printed in this issue of *The Free-thought Society News* highlights BSA's unfair prejudice of the nontheist community. ADSN is hopeful that the article has inspired readers to take action and participate in the letter writing campaign. Surely, Mr. Carter does not want his reputation for being tolerant and kind to be tarnished by his affiliation with BSA. Letters may educate him about the seriousness of this matter. Mr. Carter can be contacted at:

Former President James Earl Carter, Jr.
c/o Carter Center 453 Freedom Parkway NE
Atlanta, GA 30307

Please send a copy of your letter to:
Anti-Discrimination Support Network, P. O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366
Email: Margaret@FtSociety.org



Supporters Added and Renewed

Gwendolyn Elliott	Magnolia, DE
Alan Mann	Princeton, NJ
Scott M. Pleune	Philadelphia, PA
Staks Rosch	Glenolden, PA

General Fund Donations

Al Collins	\$100
George C. Marks	\$100
Marshall Martin	\$25
John DeMillion	\$100
Robert E. Kay	\$125
Marshall Martin	\$50
Susan O'Connell	\$125
Steve and Susan Rade	\$1,000

Signed Bible Give Away

A Bible signed by **Sam Harris** will be given to the next person who becomes a Super Supporter of FS. The title of "Super Supporter" is given to anyone who donates \$1,000 or more to FS.

The photo above of **Margaret Downey, Dr. Richard Dawkins** and Harris was taken at the Center for Inquiry's 30th anniversary conference held in Los Angeles, California October 7-10, 2010.

Harris not only signed and dated the Bible, he also wrote "Just read Leviticus."



2010 Winter Display Donations

Stacie Dale	\$50
Sally Flynn	\$100
Larry Hothem	\$100
Linda Mahan	\$200
George Marks	\$50

Even though FS was unable to display the *Tree of Knowledge* during the 2010 winter holiday, the donations mentioned above will be applied to efforts in 2011. Watch for announcements in FS newsletters for further details and updates concerning *The Tree of Knowledge* issue.

Spring Festival 2011 Volunteers

Yes! I want to volunteer to staff the Freethought Society's (FS) table at the 2011 Spring Festival being held in Lansdale, Pennsylvania on **Saturday, April 16, 2011** (8:00 AM—6:00 PM). Additional information can be found at:

www.internationalspringfestival.com/

Please note my contact information below: :

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

You may acknowledge my volunteer efforts in the FS newsletter.

Please keep my participation anonymous.

Sorry, but I can't volunteer this time. Please apply the enclosed donation to assist with related expenses:

\$____(literature production, signage, T-shirts, etc.)

You may acknowledge my donation in the FS newsletter.

Please keep my participation anonymous.

Mail this form to:

FS Spring Festival
P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366

Yes! I want to be a Freethought Society Super Supporter. Enclosed is my donation of \$_____.

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please keep my donation anonymous.

You may publish my name as a donor.

Freethought Society Committee Reports

The Freethought Society (FS) offers many volunteer opportunities. Please see the FS website for a list of committees. You can volunteer by contacting FS at: volunteering@FtSociety.org. If you cannot volunteer, please consider earmarking a donation to a committee you want to support. Highlighted below are just a few FS committees and a brief description of recent activities:

The Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN)

Documented report of discrimination in December (Pennsylvania). **Michael Newdow** (California) reported several incidents that involved threats of violence. He also reported that an un-loaded pipe bomb was mailed to him in an obvious attempt to intimidate him. He was not deterred and continues to advocate for separation of religion and government through the legal system. **Margaret Downey** is helping associate Professor **Caroline Mala Corbin** at the University of Miami School of Law, to gather evidence of discrimination for a comprehensive paper regarding the treatment of nontheists in the United States. Narrative collection help is needed and many reports must be entered into the ADSN database and booklets. Please volunteer to work from your home.

Diversity Outreach Committee (DOC)

DOC chair Downey, met with Professor **Anthony Pinn** for two hours on Sunday, January 23, 2011 to discuss ways in which to find more members of the black community to join or participate with local and national nontheist groups. A report and recommendations list will be submitted to DOC shortly. Downey is also developing a business plan to acquire funding for an outreach plan to find Hispanic and Asian nontheists. Volunteers are needed to form a research team to assist DOC member **Mike Estes** as he begins a book writing project about black freethinkers who helped change the world. Most work for this committee can be done in the comfort of your own home. Please volunteer.

Helping Hands Committee (HHC)

Susan O'Connell provided Burlington County, New Jersey resident **George Hetzel** transportation from Lourdes Medical Center of Burlington County after he was admitted for emergency surgery. Downey provided Hetzel with groceries as he settled back home after his recovery. More volunteers are needed to assist Hetzel with his needs.

The Freethought Society (FS) is a chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and is a member of the Atheist Alliance International (AAI). FS members are committed to the advancement of Freethought and issues of religion and government separation. FS activities and services are supported by donations. A list of activities and services can be found at the FS website (www.FtSociety.org). Please help finance FS's endeavors to promote freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of choice and freedom from religious intrusions by donating via the website.

Yes, I want to:

- become a supporter of FS (includes email PDF newsletter): **\$30** individual supporter, **\$35** family supporter, **\$20** student. Please enclose checks payable to **The Freethought Society**.
- join FFRF: **\$40** individual membership or **\$50** family membership. Please enclose checks payable to the **Freedom From Religion Foundation**.
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