Happy New Year, Freethinkers!

The Freethought Society (FS) Board of Directors extends best “Happy New Year” wishes to all readers of The Freethought Society News. 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of FS. FS was founded by Margaret Downey when she heard from hundreds of people who contacted her after seeing her television interviews in which she explained why she had filed a wrongful discrimination complaint against the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). “The media coverage about the complaint I filed against BSA inspired many nontheists to offer their support. It was then that I realized nontheists in the Philadelphia area wanted to build a community. People were anxious to get to know each other and I immediately offered to make things happen,” Downey recalled.

After receiving an endorsement from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to start a chapter in Pennsylvania, Downey arranged a meeting at Denny’s restaurant in Philadelphia. The restaurant is now closed, but FS is going strong. There were only 25 people at that first meeting, no official newsletter, and very few volunteers. Today, the FS Ezine/newsletter is sent to over 7,000 recipients, FS’s Meetup page has almost 1,300 members, the FS Facebook page has thousands of followers, and FS events take place all over the country (some abroad), with volunteers eagerly participating. FS is thriving — and another 25 more years of serving the nontheist community is on the horizon. In response to that projected future, Downey stated, “During my lifetime, I hope to see an end to discrimination against nontheists and that the United States will be united as a secular democratic society. Eventually, there will be no need for any specifically atheist, humanist, rationalist or freethought organization because belief in the supernatural and religious myths will be overshadowed by the light of reason. It may take 25 or 100 more years, but I am sure it will happen, if we all work towards that goal.”

It takes money to keep The Freethought Society productive. Our yearly budget is only $10,000. Consequently, every expense to run the organization is kept to a minimum (printing, mailing, phone, fax, etc.). FS does not have an official office and must rent storage space for items needed throughout the year. Items at-the-ready include Tree of Knowledge decorations; meeting/tabling items; Thomas Paine/Women’s Suffrage/Robert Green Ingersoll related paraphernalia; inventory for street fairs, anti-superstition parties; parade participation; historical records and much more.

Please help to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of FS by sending a tax-deductible donation of $25. Please also send a congratulatory message of encouragement. Congratulatory messages will be collected throughout the year and published periodically. FS will hold several celebrations in 2018 which will take place in different locations around the country to allow for the most supporter participation. The first celebration is described below:

Basic Information: The FS Philadelphia location anniversary celebration will include three options for participation. Past speakers will be attending. Comedians Leighann Lord and Steve Hill will perform after dinner.

Date: Friday, February 23, 2018
Starting Times: 5:30 PM Happy Hour, 6:30 PM Dinner, 7:30 PM Comedy Show
Place: Ethical Society Building, 1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Participation Costs: The full 25th Anniversary package with a happy hour, includes wine bar, dinner and comedy show is $100. Just the dinner and comedy show is $75 (includes wine bar and live-dinner music featuring Christine Jones on the piano). Only the comedy show (includes wine bar) is $25. Student discounts are available at the below site.

Purchase tickets at: https://www.eventbrite.com/o/the-freethought-society-12463140535
What makes for a good story? To begin with, better opening lines than that one. Here are a few great invitations to come into a story — first lines from some great novels:

Gabriel García Márquez, in One Hundred Years of Solitude, pulls you in and makes you curious: “Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.”

Ernest Hemingway, in The Old Man and the Sea, sets the scene and presents a challenge: “He was an old man who fished alone in the skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.”

Zora Neale Hurston touches hope in starting Their Eyes Were Watching God: “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board.”

C.S. Lewis, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader makes you smile: “There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”

And what also makes a good story is a great storyteller. While I’ve been practicing, I don’t think I’m a great storyteller. This talk was difficult for me to prepare because I too often violate a fundamental rule of good writing: don’t tell, show; don’t explain, illustrate. Maybe I’m more of an explainer; I tell better than I show.

Great storytellers paint pictures in our mind that amuse and enthrall — that enter our psyche smoothly and sweetly. Good stories resonate and fill us and sustain us.

I don’t consider myself a good storyteller. Others helped me prepare my story today. My wife Maureen reminds me that there’s more to the literary world than the nonfiction I tend to read.

Conversations with my son Justin helped. Just this week he is finishing his senior college project about how interviewing can draw out compelling narratives and dramatic stories. I also thank Ethical Culture Leader colleagues Jone Johnson Lewis, Randy Best, James Croft, and Jé Hooper for their insights about this subject.

I also thank my favorite fiction writer, Mary Kay Zuravleff, who told me of E.M. Forster, author of A Room with a View and Howards End. Forster’s advice about storytelling can be boiled down to two words: “Only connect.” If a storyteller fails to connect, they fail at telling a story. Forster goes on, “Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.” Storytelling offers passion and unity.

Good stories can be cleansing in a capital “R” romantic kind of way. Romantics see the world in terms of swirling passion and power, and a story connects us with that passion and power. With stories we connect with great natural forces that help wash away the small stuff that we sweat about way too much. It can be therapeutic.

13th Century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, Rumi wrote, “A story is like water that you heat for your bath. It takes messages between the fire and your skin. It lets them meet, and it cleans you!”

Storytelling is a deeply primal experience. From before the oft-cited “dawn of recorded history,” human beings have gathered around campfires to tell stories. The flickering glow sets the stage as speakers take turns drawing others more closely round the fire. The scene repeated innumerable times all over the world even before the invention of writing.

Stories help weave groups together, sharing cultural archetypes and social mores. This was probably even more true of cultures that were nomadic and spread out over vast territory. With less geographic consistency, it benefited from a rich literary tradition to hold a wide culture together. Arab culture, for example, incorporated tales from its long history as well as from Persian, Turkish, Jewish, and Indian folklore in a collection titled, One Thousand and One Nights. This collection, or parts of it, is portrayed in many forms and films and more commonly referred to as Arabian Nights.

Northern Virginia Ethical Culture Leader Randy Best spoke of Arabian Nights, and pointed out that often storytelling uses framing devices that are, in fact, stories about stories. In this collection, the narrator Scheherazade is condemned to execution by the king. Asked to tell a final story before her death, she ends each evening in the middle of a suspenseful scene. This goes on — for 1,001 nights. By then, the King has fallen in love with Scheherazade and allows her to live. Stories saved her life. As a character of one of the thousand stories explains, “people need stories more than bread itself, they tell us how to live, and why.”

One of my favorite stories is The Princess Bride. My wife and I just listened to a wonderful book on tape called, As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of the Princess Bride. It’s a story my family loved in its feature film format. It originated in the 1973 book by William Goldman, who reframed it in a screen play, which was then turned into a film by director Rob Reiner. In the film, a grandfather reads this story to his grandson. Cary Elwes plays a lead role.

We enjoyed listening to a story, about a story, about a bedtime story, that was made into a film. This is just one way
that stories live on and get reinterpreted. They become parts of larger stories that make up human experience. I’ll return to this idea of stories within stories later.

There are some neurological factors at play in storytelling. While I can’t venture too deeply into the science of storytelling, I do find it intriguing that brain science portrays memories stored as bundles of patterns of nerve firings, and that stories help order those firings into ever more comprehensible ways. It’s a result of our brain craving structure and resisting chaos. Croft, the Outreach Director of the Ethical Culture Society of St. Louis, puts it like this: “We are addicted to stories.”

For a number of years now, Croft has campaigned for better storytelling in Ethical Culture, and in humanism/ freethought in general. All the major religions of the world understand the power of storytelling. Millions of Christians believe that the story of Jesus is the “greatest story ever told.” Millions of Buddhists are enlightened by Siddhartha Gautama, who leaves his palace to seek the meaning of existence only to find four noble truths right before his eyes.

Where is our story? Croft says that we “need to learn to communicate if we are to make the 21st Century the ‘Century of Humanism.’” Atheist and secularist Susan Jacoby writes, “We must reclaim the language of passion and emotion from the religious right...”

So why aren’t we using stories to connect as well as we might? Some think it’s because we are relying too exclusively on reason. Perhaps I contribute to this over-reliance due to my strong preference for nonfiction over fiction. When I hear, however, that storytelling should “just connect,” I think about connecting to what the reality all around me. It’s a connection to facts — to observable data, verified observation, and through induction and deduction extended to create a map of our world.

Some argue that this connecting to facts obscures passion — that it overlooks what cannot be explained in words. This is a similar critique that the poet John Keats made of natural philosophy, Sir Isaac Newton, and the scientific perspective. Keats blamed Newton for unweaving the magic of a rainbow through scientific reductionism — by explaining away a wonderful experience in dry analysis.


Scientists say that “the more they discover about their subject, the more lovely and mysterious it becomes.”

Gottschall says that this “left me in awe of our species — of this truly odd primate that places story (and other forms of art) at the very center of its existence.”

But human beings are diverse, thank goodness, so no wonder we see stories differently. While I personally may feel passion in Carl Sagan’s description of the universe, others find connection more often through fiction, poetry, or the arts. While I sometimes find nonliteral poetry incomprehensible, others find rationalist analysis restrictive. So, if humanism is to reach the hearts of more people, we must escape exclusive reliance on purely rational modes of communication.

Storytelling may offer a compromise, or some common ground for both rationalists and artists. There is something universally appealing about good stories. While I find definitions useful, there’s a lot of truth in Hannah Arendt’s observation that “storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.”

Maybe we have to ask our scientific community to produce better storytellers — better at connecting the listener with how the universe is today. Neil DeGrasse Tyson is one such storyteller — just watch the new generation of Cosmos and you’ll see. He does a great job of telling stories with facts.

I tried to do the same in my 25 years of teaching history. I told stories full of facts that helped my students connect, not so much with the present, but with the past. Great history writers weave compelling tapestries that connect the reader, not with “what is,” as does science, but with “what was.” Our history told as story makes sense of the world. It takes the jumble of names and dates and creates a great unfolding drama. In that flow of history I draw meaning that makes more sense of my life.

Perhaps broad historical perspectives don’t connect with everyone. Perhaps more people appreciate their own effort to make sense of the jumbled past — the challenge to draw meaning from personal memories, dreams, and moments half forgotten in time. We want a map of where we’ve been.

I love British writer Graham Swift’s description: “Man...is the story telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker buoys and trail signs of stories. He has to keep on making them up. As long as there’s a story, it’s all right. Even in his last moments, it’s said, in the split second of a fatal fall — or when he’s about to drown — he sees, passing rapidly before him, the story of his whole life.”

To me, history, and even science that reaches into prehistory to explain our evolution, serves as useful and meaningful “marker buoys and trail signs.” It’s one of the reasons why I’ve reserved for my holiday reading the book Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, by Yuval Noah Harari. In less than 500 pages Harari tries to make sense of human evolution. It tells a story of our identity as a species. I expect that it would overwhelm some readers, as it might overwhelm me. But it seems to me that this story needs to be part of our humanist story.

I now want to turn to terrain less familiar to me. I want to turn away from facts, away from connection with the present as it is, or the past as it was. I want to imagine the future as it might be. In The Storytelling Animal, Gottschall comes up with a new term for human beings: “Homo Fictus,” or fiction man. Not only are we storytelling animals, Gottschall explains, we also demonstrate a uniquely human quality: the tendency to “make-believe.” In other words, to imagine different worlds.
For decades, one of the most natural storytellers in Ethical Culture has been Arthur Dobrin. As Leader Emeritus of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, storytelling is a big part of his 17 books and hundreds of articles. Some are based on his real-life experiences, but some are make-believe, like one children’s story he wrote about 20 years ago, Love Your Neighbor: Stories of Values and Virtues. Recently one adult told Dobrin that it was one of their favorites as a child. But not all in Ethical Culture embraced it because some of the story’s characters were talking animals. Not all humanists embraced this bit of fantasy. One leader recalled an Ethical Culture member saying, with a distinct tone of disgust, “Everyone knows that animals can’t talk.”

While few others might have made such a criticism, one of my colleagues recalled reading an article in Free Inquiry Magazine (a publication of Council for Secular Humanism/Center for Inquiry) that discussed myths and stories. The author said that the writing of fiction was, essentially, lying. They said that it was unethical to portray the world differently from what empirical research and reason told us.

This reminded me a bit of the rationalist philosopher Plato. He condemned realistic sculpture for misleading the viewer into thinking a sculpture was actually a human being. He criticized theater for trying to convince us that the actors were actually feeling the emotions they were portraying, evoking from us false tears or laughter over something that did not, in reality, exist. In fact, the only art that Plato praised was music, due to the fact that it could be explained in terms of numbers — tones from a lute, for example, can be analyzed through a purely mathematical analysis of the length of the string plucked.

Free Inquiry Magazine’s critique seems particularly misguided when we think about children. One of the most endearing common requests from children is “tell me a story.” This request is an invitation to connect — to connect the storyteller and the listener, whether snuggling together in front of a fire or lying in bed for one more story before the lights go out. It’s also an invitation to connect to the imagination — to be a collaborator in make believe. I’ve never heard a child ask for a story and then reject it, as did the Center for Inquiry/Council for Secular Humanism, because it was fictional.

Obviously storytelling has many benefits for the growing child. Education experts point out that children who are told many stories, especially those not strictly “just about facts,” develop more active imaginations, greater confidence, superior language skills, and are more able to cope with their feelings. In generating wonder, suspicion, joy, and fear through stories, children can experience these emotions without being overwhelmed by actual, intense, first-person experiences. They can develop emotional literacy and self-knowledge.

More importantly, stories offer up many engaging ethical lessons. They allow children to practice thinking through tough situations in life. “What would you do if you were that character?” That is the repeated question, sometimes said out loud, and sometimes left unstated. Daniel Taylor, the author of Tell Me a Story, wrote, “…at the heart of all stories is choice, the necessity of choosing coupled with the uncertainty of consequences…Stories abound with questions of ‘ought,’ and are therefore a powerful if imprecise embodiment of humankind’s preoccupation with right and wrong.”

It is, in fact, the questions of “ought” that nagged at the heart of a young Felix Adler. It is through his life that I offer you one final story.

There once was a boy named Felix who sailed on a great big boat. Felix, Mama, Papa, brother Isaac, and sister Sarah sailed from Germany to a new home. Papa Samuel was to be the new rabbi for a temple in New York City.

It was there that Samuel challenged religious traditions that no longer served people. He said that men and women should be able to sit together in religious services, and he questioned kosher laws that no longer helped keep people healthy. He was reforming his own religion, helping it come into modern times.

Meanwhile, Felix’s mother, Henrietta, worked with other members of the temple to do no less than help heal a broken world. It was their most important mission. They went to places where people struggled to live — to the dockyards of New York, to apartments full of hungry families, to Children’s Homes where orphans lived. She took Felix with her and he learned a lot. He learned how many people suffer every day. He learned the habit of helping others. He learned what he called his duty. He listened to his conscience, what some people call that “small, still voice within.”

As he grew into a teenager, that voice grew louder. Felix practiced bringing out the best in other people. He taught children at the temple to help those with too little food and too little work — to help those crowded together in rundown apartments. Felix wanted to grow up to be helpful like his parents, and maybe be a rabbi like his father.

He did very well in school and went to Europe to study philosophy. But Felix started to see the world differently from his parents. While they prayed to god to help them do good works, Felix said that one day he just stopped praying. He knew he had to follow his own path, and it was one through the world before his eyes. Felix came back to America wanting to help people be good without god.

So Felix started an alternative to traditional religion that he called an Ethical Society, where he spoke not of god but of treating people well. A place where people could be inspired by talks, and support each other in an effort to make the world a little bit better every day.

He organized meetings in New York City for those wanting to honor the worth of every person and to build justice for all. He wanted to do that by growing ethical relationships with other people and groups — relationships that were caring, honest, and respectful.

Felix organized nurses to visit the poor, schools to teach everyone to be good citizens, and committees to keep children out of factories. He helped others make their own Ethical Societies in Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities.

Felix did it for so long that, when he died in 1933, people in Ethical Societies missed his leadership. Of course they could read his talks and try to live like him. But an important lesson Felix left for them was that they would have to find their own path in life — their own way to be good in their own time and place. And, as we all know, the times they are a changin’, so we have to change too.

Life after Felix challenged Ethical Societies because the world changed so quickly. Wars, battles for civil rights, and human destruction of the environment forced them to evolve.
How could those after Felix honor worth, grow relationships, and build justice in a modern world? How can we do that today?

We still come together in Ethical Societies to support and inspire, but we can no longer just look to Felix for help. We have to listen to that small still voice within, while at the same time listening to others — others from different backgrounds and with different experiences, from different lands and different cultures, and with different genders, races and orientations.

Change is not always easy. But like Felix tells us, and like he told his followers, in order to flourish you have to evolve. Today the three largest Ethical Societies are led by women. Today the Ethical movement is trying to address issues of racism and the criminalization of poverty. It’s trying to invite new people to the table, and to protect the planet for all people. Some of that means getting past the past — of moving beyond Felix. That’s just what Felix would have wanted. He wanted us to be good without him, to be good without god, and to be good with others.

I ask you to help me frame Felix’s story within a new narrative, your own narrative, and our narrative as a movement. Maybe that means that we have to write a whole new story — a story of our future that draws folks in close around our fire, to make sense of the world, to make sense of our lives. I invite you to write it with me.

After Hugh Taft-Morales delivered his speech “Tell Me a Story: Nurturing our Lives through Narratives” and the Tree of Knowledge was decorated on Sunday, December 3, 2017, Freethought Society (FS) president Margaret Downey and Taft-Morales conducted a free one-hour writing workshop.

In the above photo, Zenos Frudakis (right) is being interviewed by Taft-Morales. Frudakis is answering a series of questions that were written specifically in order to draw out interesting facts that might be used in the creation of a journey story. Looking on at left is FS board member Alan Gold.

The workshop was attended by ten people, all of whom were interested in learning more about how to recall facts and incidents to create a compelling journey story. Most said they would likely submit their story to FS. Watch for these stories in future FS ezines/newsletters.

Journey stories are important because the written word enables us to connect emotionally to others. We can present hundreds of logical arguments and facts concerning why people should not be attached to religious and superstitious beliefs, but religious belief is more emotional than rational. Nontheists can debate the validity of scripture or argue the existence of God, but we cannot deny a person’s personal religious experiences. When a religious person tells their story about how God has worked some kind of perceived miracle or how God somehow blessed, transformed, lifted and encouraged them, we can’t argue against that. It’s their story.

Telling a journey story either in person or on paper is a way to build a better level of understanding. Your story can be told in many different ways — a poem, a song, or just in a one minute elevator speech. Thinking about and creating a story regarding your experiences and what has influenced your life can be the perfect exercise to relate to friends, family, and even strangers you meet on an airplane flight.

Everyone has experienced something special, different, and exceptional.

Writing about yourself is never an easy task. Start by asking yourself the right questions and brainstorming. Then, move on to writing and revising.

Think about writing or just talking about a journey story — a story that can capture how using reason, logic, and critical thinking became an important value in life. Ask yourself what is special, unique, exceptional, and/or impressive about you? What details of your life (personal or family, history, people, or events have shaped or influenced you? When did you become interested in the nontheist community and what has motivated your interest?

If you want your journey story published and read, you must bring to light some personal experiences. Think about any unusual obstacles you had to overcome. For example, you may have experienced economic hardships or you may have had family or physical difficulties. After thinking and remembering, you must make a commitment to be honest with your readers. Honesty is very important for a good connection to readers.

We humans have malleable memories, so I always advise writers to fact-check with a little research before publishing. Facts such as dates are very important. The year of an incident must be credible. If the writer gets the date wrong when recalling a historical event, the reader will lose confidence in the writer. You can fact-check online and you can double check your memories by asking questions of family and friends who knew you around the time of your story.

What personal characteristics (such as integrity, compassion, or persistence) do you possess that would inspire and motivate readers? Remember that when you are creating your story, each one of you will have a unique way of expressing yourself. Your story is important because it is original and nobody can tell it like you can.

One way to get started is to find a comfortable place to talk to a friend or family member. Let your mind search for special thoughts and memories. When you feel ready, please submit your story to The Freethought Society News! 
In 2003, I started to see that the holiday season did not include me.

The West Chester Courthouse had holiday cheer, but only the religious were allowed to be near.

Believers in God were welcomed with joy. Nonbelievers, were not — they would surely annoy.

A crèche with baby Jesus was given a space. A menorah with lights also had a great place.

And because it’s only totally fair, a Chamber of Commerce Tree was also put there.

I asked, “How can nontheists get a chance, too?”

The problem back then was that nobody knew.

I conducted a search and asked lots of friends, then gathered ideas for secular trends.

We finally settle on one special tree, one that could speak for more than just me.

It’s important, we thought, to display learning books. Intellectual books that would get many looks.

The tree needed a name to convey our clear vision. The name *Tree of Knowledge* was the final decision.

In 2007, we got our big chance, book cover ornaments would hang from each branch.

That first *Tree of Knowledge* was an amazing sight, but soon it would cause a ridiculous fight.

The Commissioners imposed some made-up new rules, in an effort to please some objecting town fools.

“The books are just wrong,” those fools would proclaim, and yelled very loudly, “It’s atheists we blame.”

Year after year the tree was reduced. The Commissioners had only one thing to boost.

“Religion must reign on the Courthouse grounds. We only allow our own pious sounds.”

It took the Commissioners three years and a day, to force nontheist citizens to just go away.

A Resolution was passed that stated so clear, “Nontheists can’t show the books they hold dear.”

That was the year of 2010. The nontheist crowd has not come since then.

“The Santa and choo-choo will suit you just fine, Your books are not welcome — get rid of your pine.”

Each year since that time, nontheists have pleaded they just want equality — accepted and heeded.

Hundreds of nontheists have presented the case. Each Commissioner, however, froze a frown on their face.

The Ethical Society jumped into the fray, and welcomed the tree in their lobby to stay.

It’s been seven years, and people are happy. The ethical books make the tree look quite snappy.

Please place a *Tree of Knowledge* in your very own home. Nontheists of all types will tell you, “Shalom.”

I agree with Robert Green Ingersoll when he said, “Banish me from Eden when you will, but first let me eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.”
The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” contest inspired me to create and deliver a secular invocation. As a huge Robert Green Ingersoll enthusiast, I decided to write an invocation that could feature the eloquence and persuasive power of his words. Ingersoll excerpts were important drivers to my thinking about the proper words to say given the chance to deliver an invocation.

The St. Pete Beach, Florida city council was the obvious forum for me to deliver an invocation. I have lived in the area since 2004. The mayor, Alan Johnson, is a fellow triathlete as well as a frequent training partner.

The 2014 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Greece v. Galloway opened the way for secularists to deliver invocations on an equal basis to religious representatives. In my opinion, Christian and other prayer invocations at government meetings are unconstitutional, but I’m not a sitting Justice on the Supreme Court. If I were, the decision would be much different.

It took less than a month from my first request to delivering a secular invocation. There were, however, a few discussions within the system and I had a two-week wait before a decision was rendered giving me the go-ahead.

I chose to send a preview of my remarks to Mayor Johnson. I wanted to be sure he would not think I was taking advantage of our friendship. I wanted him to see that the secular invocation I was planning to deliver as not just OK, but my words would be of value and interest. I wanted the invocation to be a contribution and to reinforce the idea that atheists can be good without god, have worthy things to say, and, to some modest extent, seem even charming! I was careful not to attack religion. I decided to make a case — in the maximum of 3 minutes I was allowed — to convey that the truest source of values and the city council effectiveness was to be found in something Ingersoll wrote. In his work Improved Man, he stated that, “honest labor is the highest form of prayer.”

I also wanted to make a case that government functions need not, and should not, be mixed with religiosity — another bit of Ingersoll wisdom and that of our Founding Fathers. Below is what I said on November 28, 2017:

I rise to offer a secular invocation that speaks to all citizens of Gulfport. No need to bow your heads or close your eyes to consider a few reflections upon ideals and values that unite, as opposed to issues that separate us — in Gulfport and elsewhere in America.

We share values that override by many times the hot button issues of the day that divide us. Yes, the people of our town, like Americans in the great cities and rural communities across the land, have varying passions about leaders and political parties. We have very different preferences on the great issues of the day, such as gun control, universal health care, changes to the tax code, women’s reproductive rights, immigration policies, the extent of global warming and religious privileges — and even a few not so great issues, like whether football players have a right to take a knee during the national anthem.

But the ideals, the values we share, should mitigate or resolve these temporal perturbations. Our unifying ideals and values do not reside in holy books, but in our Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. These secular mores and guarantees address human rights, safeguards for liberties, education of the young, care for the health and wellbeing of all, support for critical thought, for reason, science, and the pursuit of happiness.

These secular treasures give us our moral guides, regardless of which religion, if any, we embrace. Let us devote less energy seeking favor from the Infinite, and more energy creating a little more temporal heaven here in Gulfport. Let’s do what we can to spread a gospel of cheerfulness, happiness and hope.

To paraphrase America’s greatest orator during the latter half of the 19th century, Robert Green Ingersoll, let us embrace liberty of thought and expression as our surest moral guide.

Such freedoms enable us to nourish the ethical and expand our best ideas of justice, of conscience, of charity and of self-denial, when necessary, for the common good.

Intellectual liberty is as holy as our Constitution, as sacred as our flag. It is the blossom and fruit of justice, the perfume of mercy. Such liberty, in summary, is the seed and soil, the air and light, the dew and rain of American progress, love and joy.

Thank you so much for your work and for allowing this invocation.

There were no lamentations, walkouts, hymn-singing protests or other disruptions. In fact, the commissioners were attentive, even nodding now and then. Pleased to report that there was audience applause. A clear sign, I suppose, that the address was blasphemy deficient. Many audience members seem to welcome the fresh approach to the usual prayer babble.

I encourage anyone in the secular community to exercise their right to deliver an invocation where these ceremonies take place. The Greece v. Galloway decision actually signals that the secular community has every right to become involved in such traditions. If my words above inspire a reader to pursue an opportunity, please know that the use of all or just some parts of my invocation is hereby given. As Ingersoll said, “The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here.”
I am honored to call Barry Lynn a friend, fellow activist, and a separation of religion and government colleague. He has been the executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) since 1992. The Freethought Society (FS) has always worked with AU, helping each other with legal efforts, and activism as well as coordinating events together. While Lynn is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he is a true friend to the nontheist community. Thanks to Lynn’s knowledge and appreciation of the Constitution, he works just as tirelessly as I to end discrimination against the nontheist community.

I very much admire Lynn’s educational background. He received his B.A. from Dickinson College (located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania), his theology degree from Boston University School of Theology in 1973, and his J.D. degree from Georgetown University Law Center. With that level of religious and legal training, and his exceptional intelligence, Lynn has been instrumental in building bridges between people who share one important tenet — separation of religion and government.

In May 2015, Lynn agreed to speak at two events I had arranged. He was my houseguest during that two-day trip. It was a delightful visit that I will never forget. Apart from wonderful conversations, Lynn visited board member Sally Flynn, conducted two in-studio radio shows with me, and spoke with the Chester County solicitor about why a Tree of Knowledge display should be allowed on the grounds of the Chester County Courthouse during the winter holiday season.

During the last 25 years, Lynn often appeared on television representing not only AU but all of us who advocate for maintaining the Jeffersonian Wall of Separation between religion and government. His debating/interview style is sophisticated and well-researched. Standing strong on First Amendment issues, Lynn exchanged words with Phil Donahue, Larry King, Robert MacNeil, Lou Dobbs, Anderson Cooper, Bill O’Reilly, and many more appearances too numerous to list in this article.

When I heard Lynn’s voice on the radio, I knew that the issues he would talk about would be fully explained, facts clearly conveyed, and a new way of thinking provided. Not many activists can calmly and expertly discuss difficult constitutional issues such as civil rights and freedom of expression. He always made me proud.

His input has been highlighted on National Public Radio, hundreds of podcasts, and many national and local radio shows.

At one time Lynn hosted the radio program Culture Shocks. It was heard on 1160 AM in Washington, D.C. as well as several radio stations around the country. I was an invited guest once. Lynn talked with me for almost an hour about the work I was doing to establish a database of discrimination reports that would capture the struggles of the nontheist community. The program drew many new supporters and donations to FS.

Lynn was always generous with connections and leads. When a small organization with good ideas succeeds, we are all better off, seemed to be his motto!

In 2007, his book Piety & Politics: The Right-Wing Assault on Religious Freedom was one of the first book cover ornaments placed on The Tree of Knowledge. His second book, God and Government: Twenty-Five Years of Fighting for Equality, Secularism, and Freedom of Conscience, was added to The Tree of Knowledge ornament PDF library in 2015.

In 2001, when the Freethought Society challenged a Ten Commandments plaque that was affixed to the facade of the Chester County Courthouse, the district court ordered it’s removal. The decision was appealed and AU immediately filed an Amicus Brief. That was December 2002.

The brief informed the court that the plaque was erected as part of a religious campaign spearheaded by a religious group known as the International Reform Bureau. AU argued that singling out the Ten Commandments for display on a courthouse, while disregarding all of the other documents that have influenced American law, sends a religious message.

AU also argued that the court should place no emphasis on the fact that the plaque has been in place for a long time, because this is likely due to the fact that challengers have been reluctant to come forward out of fear of hostility. Oral argument took place in April 2003.

On June 26, 2003, the Third Circuit found the plaque constitutional, reasoning that while it may have been erected with a religious purpose and effect, it was being retained by the County with the secular purpose and effect of preserving a longstanding historical relic. The plaintiffs sought re-hearing en banc and AU filed an amicus brief in support of the request on July 31, 2003, but the motion was denied. The plaque remains on the facade of the Courthouse.

AU’s support in lawsuits, such as the two described above, will continue, but walking in the footsteps of Lynn will not be easy. FS remains committed to this important alliance, and thanks Lynn for all his hard work, perfect representation, and brilliant legal analysis over the years.

A celebration of Lynn’s career at AU took place on November 3, 2017. Hundreds of people attended to personally thank him for all of his hard work. Photos from the special evening can be found on the next page.
Photos from the Barry Lynn Retirement Party

In the above left photo, Freethought Society (FS) board member Alan Gold is pictured between co-presidents of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

Above right is a photo of Cameron Archambault (left) meeting U.S. Supreme Court plaintiff/winner Ellery Schempp (right). Archambault is the same age (17) that Schempp was when he wrote to the ACLU to report details about how religion was infused into his public school. That letter started the case known as Schempp v Abington School District.

Philadelphia-based sculptor Zenos Frudakis is picture above shaking the hand of Barry Lynn as he congratulates him on his retirement.

Pictured right are Margaret Downey (president and founder of FS) and Eric Rothschild (Senior Litigation Counsel at Americans United for Church and State). Rothschild was the lead attorney in Kitzmiller v Dover Area School District, which was the first case to test the constitutionality of teaching intelligent design/creationism in public-school science classes. The teaching of intelligent design was deemed unconstitutional.
In my opinion, David Silverman’s first book is simply brilliant. He gets you thinking in new ways. His concepts are based on truth, science, morality, and what should be the secular American Way. Silverman explains his views intelligently, assertively, and honestly and he is consistent throughout the book. Key points in the book are:

1. Separation of Church and State are mandatory for a free society;
2. The Bible and other holy books are hogwash on any level, not relevant to today’s world, and is conflicting and even dangerous for the believer and nonbeliever alike;
3. Atheists, under a broad definition, are more numerous in society than everyone thinks, so if more came out of the closet and spoke up for their rights, politicians would sit up quickly, listen, and act;
4. Activism works. Most nontheist groups are nice and this gets you nowhere. Bold, even offensive action by American Atheists (AA), of which Silverman is President, may annoy others but it is the ONLY way to effect equal protection for the oppressed. It makes other nontheist organizations look moderate and less threatening.

Silverman is a key reason that the atheist movement is becoming more visible and accepted. His book publicizes what, why, and how to plan and execute goals to gain equality for nontheists nationwide.

According to Silverman, in the struggle for fairness and equality, the silent atheist gets no results, let alone respect. The apologetic atheist gets demeaned. Silverman is loud and proud of being an atheist. He is an original, but not surprisingly, disliked by many for his in-your-face style.

Fighting God is not the title Silverman wanted, since it implies there is a god to fight. But he was told that it would sell a lot more books with the use of the Fighting God title, which is probably right. He caved in about the title and one other point he wanted to make. He agreed to remove a non-offensive drawing of the Muslim prophet Muhammed.

According to Pew polls, a majority of Muslims internationally seek Sharia law across the globe. Silverman wanted to protect booksellers, the publishers, and his family, so the removal of the drawing was a reasonable editorial recommendation.

One thing Silverman said made a lot of sense to me: When Martin Luther King, Jr. was rising to power, he was criticized and feared as an enemy of the state. The NAACP was considered shocking and radical. Then Malcolm X came along and all of a sudden Martin Luther King, Jr. was the moderate of choice for society at-large.

Silverman says he goes overboard “on purpose,” to make Americans want to listen to and accept the more modest groups such as the Freethought Society (FS) and humanists groups across the nation. I am a board member of FS because I support a less in-your-face approach to changing the hearts and minds of those who discriminate against the nontheist community.

Other atheist groups say that AA, under Silverman’s leadership, gives them a bad image to overcome in settings where diplomacy matters. Silverman contends that atheists should not have to prove to anyone how many good works they do in order to show that they are similar to the religious community. Nontheists just want equality, and there are many paths that seek the same results. Silverman is advocating a firebrand style as just one way to achieve equality. Even though David Silverman’s approach is harsh and/or insulting to many, the atheist community is a big tent, and to achieve our mutual goals it doesn’t hurt to attack the problem of discrimination from all angles.

Silverman caustically disregards all religions. He loves people, but hates their religion and/or their belief in a God/gods. He equates the two, but in my opinion, religion and god belief are often not the same. This opinion leads me to one sticking point in Silverman’s theory: that Jews have no right to claim to be atheists, rather would need to annul their Judaism to be complete “firebrand atheists.”

Silverman says Judaism is not a culture because some black Jews in Africa may not eat lox and bagels or gefilte fish. He says Jews are not a race because there is no “Jewish gene” and that Jews did not even originate from the Mideast, but came from conversions in central Europe. In my opinion, this position is opposite to common sense and reality.

Silverman goes on to say that Judaism is “not a history,” because not one word of the Bible is true. Silverman says Judaism is also not a philosophy nor is it a creed. He says this because Judaism is similar to other religions and philosophies. He also says that Judaism is “not tradition,” because Jewish sects have different traditions.

Silverman contrasts Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews, but does not express one word about the key difference between the totally God oriented Jewish Orthodox (including modern Orthodox) and all the other branches of Judaism — most of whose adherents observe some traditions, but are atheist.

Silverman denies the phrase “atheist Jew” and “Jewish atheist,” but that is in direct opposition to the 2016 Pew polls which say 52 percent of American Jews are atheists. This is a small sideline, though, to a powerful, educational, and interesting piece of writing.
Review of the Book
“An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land”
by Alan Gold

Herb Silverman’s first book, a funny autobiography titled *Candidate Without a Prayer*, is a classic! His second highly-readable book, *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*, is a philosophical treatise every bit the equal of Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Baruch Spinoza, and Bertrand Russell. Silverman would never admit to this, however. He speaks gently, accepts diversity, shares insights with humor and logical views. He uses facts very persuasively. I learned a lot from this book.

For example, did you know why you can’t divide by zero? Silverman tells you why in just two lines. He writes beautifully using plain language. Silverman is humble yet, with massive word power, pulls the reader toward his ultimate goal — seeking equal treatment for nontheists by politicians and the public alike. Silverman really gives it to the “bad” guys. They are “those who are closed-minded, intolerant, and seek to harm those who disagree with their narrow views.”

Silverman’s activism and great powers of observation make the reader curious that ignorance, hatred, and idiocy against atheists prevail in the United States and around the world. He brings to the fore commonsense conclusions that most of the population in general doesn’t see. For example, a 2014 Pew Research poll shows that Americans view Judaism most warmly, and atheists, the least. Yet, according to the 2003 Harris poll, most American Jews are atheists! Go figure!

*An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land* analyzes important social issues and topics, in a clever writing style from an atheist viewpoint. I was unable to argue with a single point Silverman makes — unlike with other books in this field. I think even fundamentalists would have to agree with Silverman on virtually everything he writes about.

Thumbing through the table of contents, I was fascinated with what Silverman would say about science, Islam, free speech, women, foreign relations, and so much more. I was never disappointed with what Silverman had to say about those topics. I will be quoting many sentences and paragraphs from Silverman’s book in future blog postings — giving him full credit, of course. This book should serve as a source of brilliant quotations for all time and should be on every library shelf and in every home as well as every hotel nightstand.

As a tenured math professor and respected author of math books, Silverman has a bio that is legend in the United States of America. Raised an orthodox Jew, he rebels, as do many Jews I know, and reasoned carefully that there is no Creator. Silverman has always fought discrimination against all minorities — not just atheists.

This definitive work should be mandatory reading for all students. It would change a lot of minds, with understanding and kindness, not by, in any way shouting, pleading, or demanding. Perhaps we can all do our part of spreading the word by donating Silverman’s book to high schools, colleges and public libraries. Future, and hopefully much more accepting generations, will thank us.

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Cowan welcomes invitations to speak about the themes of her book.
Contact her through: www.eleanorcowan.ca
February and March 2018 Voter Registration Project

The Freethought Society (FS) has joined efforts with the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) to conduct a national voter registration campaign during the first quarter of 2018. The goal is to register as many people as possible before the November election date. It does not matter under which party people register. The goal is to increase voter registration numbers overall.

The following interesting observations can be found at the SCA website:

Despite growing at an exponential rate, the nonreligious have only made up 12% of the total voter turnout in every election from 2008 to 2014 and increased to only 15% in 2016. In fact as of just this year; more than one-quarter of the nonreligious report they are not even registered to vote. By comparison, despite their shrinking share of the total population, evangelical voters made up 26% of the electorate in 2014. That means evangelicals are beating secular voters more than two-to-one at the polls.

When secular Americans sit out an election, we’re letting others decide who wins and what issues matter. As the largest “religious demographic” in the United States, secular voters have everything we need to become the next great voting bloc but it depends on each of us doing our part.

We cannot expect lawmakers to hear us if we’re not speaking up when it matters most. Help bring secular values to the ballot box by registering to vote.

SCA seeks more than just encouraging secularists to vote. In order to register as many potential voters as possible, SCA has recruited all their affiliates to participate in this effort. There are 18 affiliate members of SCA (including FS). Each affiliate has been asked to register voters in their own unique way.

The unethical political landscape of today finds the younger generation discouraged about making a difference through the voting process. Religious blocs are highly organized and they are gaining control in many levels of government. FS plans to concentrate on registering students by tabling on college campuses. The plan includes educating students along the way. The FS outreach will take place during the months of February and March. Volunteers are needed. Please see the below description of the planned efforts and please consider helping by volunteering.

Earmarked donations are also appreciated. For more information visit the FS website (FtSociety.org).

Since 1969, February has been recognized nationally as Black History Month. FS will be setting up voter registration tables at a renowned black university located in the state of Pennsylvania. Cheyney University has approved an FS table for February 22, 2018.

To kick off the voter registration effort, Steve Hill has volunteered to portray equal rights activist, Frederick Douglass. Douglass spoke before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society after General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox in April 1865. He explained why the black man wanted the right to vote, saying this:

*It is said that we are ignorant; admit it. But if we know enough to be hung, we know enough to vote. If the Negro knows enough to pay taxes to support government, he knows enough to vote; taxation and representation should go together: If he knows enough to shoulder a musket and fight for the flag for the government, he knows enough to vote...What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice.*

In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave African Americans the rights of citizenship. The Amendment did not always translate into the ability to vote. Many black voters were turned away from state polling locations. In an effort to fix the problem, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, which states, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” This history must not be forgotten and voting rights should be appreciated today, more than ever.

March is Women’s History Month. Congress officially recognized it nationally in 1987 (in perpetuity). Since that time a Presidential Proclamation is issued every year which honors the extraordinary achievements of American women — past and present.

The formal fight for women to gain the right to vote started with two brave women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony. With the help of energetic and passionate men and women, reason prevailed in spite of obstacles such as religion and social ignorance. The same obstacles haunt us today as youth forget about the traumatic struggles of the Women’s Suffrage Movement.

To attract students to a voter registration table, FS volunteers will be dressed in historical costumes that will honor the heroic effort of those who participated in the Women’s Suffrage Movement. The dates between March 1-20, 2018 are being considered for tabling on campuses in the Philadelphia area and in Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Pictured left is FS founder and president Margaret Downey dressed as a late 1900s Suffragist. Downey has many relevant costumes to lend to volunteers. The photo was taken is 2002 at the Women’s Rights National Historical Park which is located in Seneca Falls, New York. The life-size golden-bronze statues represent the many heroes who devoted their lives for women to be allowed the right to vote.
Freethought Society President Scheduled to Portray Eva Amelia Parker Ingersoll

Margaret Downey is pleased to be an invited presenter at the Silver Anniversary Celebration of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum’s reopening to the public. Downey is a member of the Museum’s Advisory Board, but also has a keen interest in the legendary love story of Eva Amelia Parker and Ingersoll. It is said that their union in 1862 had a great influence on the intellectual and philosophical development of Ingersoll. On Saturday, August 18, 2018, Downey will portray Eva (pictured right) to convey what is known about the couple’s story.

On Sunday, August 19, 2018, Downey will be one of three tour bus hosts. She is looking forward to organizing entertaining activities that will include music, games, and prizes as the bus travels along **The Freethought Trail**. Below are details about the event, courtesy of Free Inquiry Magazine (a publication of the Center for Inquiry and the Council for Secular Humanism).

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**ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL Birthplace Museum**

**SILVER ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

**AUGUST 18-19, 2018**

Crowne Plaza Hotel Syracuse, New York

2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum’s reopening to the public. Celebrate the Museum—and its companion project, the Freethought Trail—at this gala conference event.

**ATTENDANCE IS STRICTLY LIMITED TO 150 PERSONS.**

**DON'T BE DISAPPOINTED: REGISTER TODAY!**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 18:** Lecture Program, featuring keynote speaker
Susan Jacoby and Tom Flynn | Robyn Blummer | Tim Madigan | Margaret Downey
Roderick Bradford | Melinda Grube | Norman K. Dann | Sue Boland | Jeff Ingersoll | Dorothy Willsey
and many more!

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 19:** Luxury Motor Coach Tour to the freethought, women’s rights, and abolition sites:

* Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum
* Matilda Joslyn Gage Center
* National Abolition Hall of Fame and Gerrit Smith Estate

Conference registration is just $105, including lecture program, coach tour, and luncheons. Saturday banquet $65 additional. Sleeping rooms are available at the Crowne Plaza Syracuse at the discounted conference rate of $119 per night (not included; you must reserve sleeping rooms separately).

**REGISTRATION NOW AVAILABLE:** [www.secularhumanism.org/silver](http://www.secularhumanism.org/silver) or phone 1-800-458-1366 during business hours Eastern time.

This event is underwritten in part by a generous grant from the James Hervoy Johnson Charitable Educational Trust.

**DON'T MISS THIS ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EVENT. REGISTER TODAY!**
Freethought Society

25-Year Anniversary Celebration

Friday, February 23, 2018

Live dinner music by Christine Jones

Comedians:
Leighann Lord and Steve Hill

Location:
Ethical Society Building
1906 Rittenhouse Square
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

$100
Happy Hour, Dinner and Comedy Show
(includes wine bar)

$75
Dinner and Comedy Show
(includes wine bar)

$25
Comedy Show Only
(includes wine bar)

Special student prices available to those under 21 years of age!
Information at ticket link below.

Purchase tickets here:
https://www.eventbrite.com/o/the-freethought-society-12463140535

Three start times:
5:30 PM Happy Hour
6:30 PM Dinner
7:30 PM Comedy
February 9-11
For the second year, a scientific skeptic’s conference will take place in Los Angeles, California February 9-11, 2018 at the Renaissance Los Angeles Airport Hotel.

The LogiCal-LA conference Director is Bruce Gleason (Founder of Backyard Skeptics and the Freethought Alliance). The conference will kick off Friday night with a 5:30 PM - 6:45 PM panel discussion featuring Bob Novella (co-founder and host of The Skeptics Guide to the Universe podcast) Margaret Downey (Freethought Society President), and other speakers from the conference (TBA). At 8:00 PM, return to the ballroom for a “MagiCal” show starring Jamy Ian Swiss (skeptic, magician, comedian, artist: The Honest Liar).

The Saturday and Sunday LogiCal-LA speakers are Professor Lawrence M. Krauss (theoretical physicist and cosmologist), Yvette D’Entremont (science blogger SciBabe, scientist, writer, and public speaker); Diane Goldstein (Retired Lt. Commander and board secretary at Liberal Education and America’s Promise); Pascal Gagneux (Ph.D. UC San Diego School of Medicine); Abby Hafer (Ph.D. in zoology, professor at Curry College, speaker, writer, and humanist); Harriet Hall (Retired Air Force flight surgeon, family physician, and skeptic writer also known as “The SkepDoc”); Sheldon W. Helms (professor of psychology, Ohlone College, and podcaster); Cheryl Hollinger (biology teacher and TIES Coordinator for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science); Julien Musolino (cognitive scientist, author, and professor at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey); Alex J. O’Connor (owner of the Cosmic Skeptic blog and YouTube channel of the same name); Brian Palermo (actor, author, and science communication advocate); John Wathey (computational biologist and author); and Karen Yuen (Science Data Applications Lead at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory).

There will also be a lot of entertainment during the weekend conference. Saturday evening will feature “ComiCal.” Emery Emery will present a fantastic night of comedy by Los Angeles-area skeptical comedians. Sunday evening will feature “Musical” with George Hrab performing his original songs, stories, and interesting covers.

The post-conference event will take place on Monday, February 12th when Darwin Day will be celebrated with a private tour to La Brea Tar Pits, led by paleontologist Donald Prothero. The tour will include a 3D movie and special viewing of the observation pit. This tour has limited attendance. Please reserve your space early!

Discounted room prices are $139 (discounted hotel rate is only available until January 26, 2018). Book your stay directly with the hotel by calling 1-888-236-2427, or book online through the below link.

Sign up for the party, conference, shows, and/or the field trip individually, or purchase a package at:

LogiCalLA.com

March 22
On Thursday, March 22, 2018 at 7:00 PM in the large community room of the Ludington Library (5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania), FS will host acclaimed science writer and physicist Dr. Paul Halpern. He is Professor of Physics at the University of the Sciences and is the author of fifteen popular science books.

Halpern’s latest book, The Quantum Labyrinth, investigates how physicists Richard Feynman and John Wheeler, despite strong personality differences, established a lifelong bond that stimulated each of them to explore the fundamental ingredients of nature and revolutionize the nature of time and reality. His March 22nd speech is based on this book.

Halpern is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Scholarship, and an Athenaeum Literary Award. He is a regular contributor to NOVA’s The Nature of Reality physics blog. Halpern has appeared on numerous radio and television shows, including Future Quest and The Simpsons 20th Anniversary Special.

More information about Halpern, his books and other writings can be found at:

volunteers@FtSociety.org

http://phalpern.com
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes The Freethought Society News every other month. The publication is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tristate area of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey as well as Southern California. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please donate generously.

Yes! I want to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):
$30 Individual Supporter $40 Family Supporter $20 Student $1,000 Supporter for a Lifetime

( ) become a “Freethought Star” by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): $5 $10 $15 $20 $25 $30 $35 $40 $45 $50 $55 $_____ other (per month)

( ) earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____________________________________________

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________
Street Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________
City, State and Zip: ____________________________________________________________________________________
Email Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________________________ Cell: _______________________________________________

( ) Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will send a complimentary ezine (or hard copy upon request) to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication.

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________
Email: ____________________________________________________________________________________________

Mail this form to: Freethought Society, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366
This form can be scanned and emailed to: Ezine@FtSociety.org

Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donate. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees are designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We seek to be of assistance to nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas. Please see the FS website or contact FS to volunteer at: volunteers@FtSociety.org.

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
(nontheism explained in classroom settings)

Anti-Discrimination Support Network
(assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports)

Community Outreach
(locates tabling opportunities)

Diversity Outreach Committee
(brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)

Free Speech Zone Committee
(research and implement displays in public venues)

Helping Hands
(provides helpers to seniors and in emergency situations)

Jump Into the Jean Pool
(collection of jeans for the homeless)

Meetup Committee
(social events and improving online communications)

Monthly Meeting Coordinators
(schedule and manage speakers and venues)

Secular Celebrations
(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)

Speakers Bureau
(provide FS a resume, photo and speech subjects/titles)

Special Events
(coordinate interesting and unique nontheist events)

Sole Searching
(collection of athletic shoes for donating to the homeless)

Thomas Paine Memorial Committee
(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)

Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee
(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the winter symbol concept nationwide)