An Overview of Reason Rally 2016
by Margaret Downey

The 2016 Reason Rally took place on Saturday, June 4, 2016 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The event began at 10:00 AM. It was a free and open-to-the-public event. The Reason Rally Coalition is dedicated to emphasizing that a person can be good without believing in any god. This event represented a community that advocates for public policy to be based on scientific evidence, not religious beliefs. The nontheist community advocates medical research based on scientific rigor, not on ideological influences. Nontheists are voters who support the separation of religion and government and who think that public policy should be based on facts, not faith. Nontheist know that being patriotic has nothing to do with believing in gods. In fact, Article VI, Clause 3 of the United States Constitution states that “...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

Dozens of outstanding activists and celebrity speakers took the stage to express their values for science, education, reason, and the separation of religion and government. On stage that day were (in order of appearance):


Video presentations from Richard Dawkins, Ricky Gervais, Lewis Black and Bill Maher were played on jumbo screens next to the main stage. An Exhibition Tent welcomed crowds of people, giving major and minor sponsors the ability to promote their missions, visions, and goals. The Freethought Society (FS) had a table there, of course. Visitors to the Exhibition Tent received complimentary items from participating sponsors.

A special onsite Donations Tent enabled attendees the opportunity to donate to a wide variety of organizations, including FS. All donations were tax deductible. No goods or services were provided as per National Park Service regulations.

Camp Quest provided activities throughout the day at their family tent. FS hosted a Thomas Paine-themed game in this tent.

Reason Rally 2016 featured four days of activities. Events began on Thursday, June 2nd and went on through Sunday, June 5th. Ticketed activities included a music and dance party, a comedy show, a mini-con and opportunities for secular activism through the Secular Coalition for America’s Advocacy Days.

Reason Rally 2016 was organized and sponsored by the Reason Rally Coalition, a nonprofit organization formed in 2011 by the nation’s leading secular, nonreligious and nonprofit organizations for the purpose of rallying the 1-in-5 Americans who identify with secular, humanist, skeptic, freethought, and atheist worldviews.
Reason Rally Coalition member organizations included:

FS’s Thomas Paine Memorial Committee honored Thomas Paine at the Reason Rally. Pictured below left is the custom-made corn hole game. Paine was portrayed by actor Ian Ruskin (pictured far right in the second photo below). Ruskin and singer James Klueh (pictured far right in the below photo holding his guitar) greeted people at the FS table in the Exhibition Tent, the Camp Quest Family Tent and the Donations Tent, rotating times during the day-long event.

Throughout the day folk singer Klueh performed live at each FS location. Klueh has written original songs and music to highlight the life and work of Thomas Paine. His creative and educational music style was entertaining and appreciated.

The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee also hosted world-famous sculptor Zenos Frudakis, who has been commissioned by the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee to create a sculpture of Thomas Paine in the near future. He spoke to many people about the plans and helped to gather contact information for those who might support the endeavor.

FS volunteers gave away Thomas Paine lapel pins, a stress ball imprinted with a Thomas Paine quote (“The world is my country.”), and Thomas Paine-themed hand fans.

The FS booth was very popular thanks to highlighting the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee efforts. People also stopped by the booth to see the FS golden Tree of Knowledge and to have their photos taken in front of it.

Reason Rally merchandise is still available at:

www.ReasonRally.org/store/

At the same link, you will find an option to purchase a DVD featuring all the speakers and entertainers.

FS invested over $10,000 to be a part of the 2016 Reason Rally. We hoped to find more supporters, encourage more activism, promote the legacy of Thomas Paine and to help end negative stereotyping of nontheists. Please make a donation to help us offset those expenses. All donations to FS are tax-deductible. Please see the back page of this ezine to learn how you can be a supporter.

A Few Thomas Paine Memorial Committee 2016 Reason Rally Photos

![Corn Hole Game](image1.png)

![Thomas Paine Lapel Pins](image2.png)

![Golden Tree of Knowledge](image3.png)
Pictured left standing with the Freethought Society (FS) founder and president, Margaret Downey, is Jamie Raskin. He has been a Member of the Maryland Senate from the 20th district since 2007. He was a hit speaker at the Reason Rally, mentioning Thomas Paine a number of times. After his speech, Downey was able to give Raskin a Freethought Society stress ball inscribed with a Thomas Paine quotation (see close-up photo).

Below is a photo of Raskin being interviewed by CNN. As Downey waited to speak with Raskin, she noticed that members of the security team each held a hand fan that was given away at the FS table in the Exhibition Tent. It was a very popular swag item and many people at the Reason Rally used them to cool off on this very hot day.

The Thomas Paine-themed swag was also made available for VIP gift bags given away at the Friday night dinner and on the day of the Reason Rally. Please consider donating to FS to offset related costs.
In the above photo Ian Ruskin is flanked by Cathy Miller (left) and Christy Swords (right).

The Thomas Paine musician James Klueh (above right) is pictured with a child who stopped by the Camp Quest Tent to enjoy games and refreshments.

Pictured below is Zenos Frudakis. He has been selected as the official sculptor for a future Thomas Paine sculpture.

In the photo below right, a visitor to the Freethought Society table brought her own pet snake to see the Tree of Knowledge. In the photo, she is testing Ruskin to determine if he was afraid of her pet reptile. Just as Thomas Paine would have been, Ruskin was not frightened. She gave permission for her photo to be taken and used, but did not leave us her name.
Actor Ian Ruskin is pictured above as he is greeting people at the Thomas Paine game area that was located in the Family Tent at the Reason Rally. The game was played by many children and adults. Prizes were distributed to the gamers, one of which was a Thomas Paine lapel pin.

Pictured right are (left to right) actor and entertainer John Davidson, Rhonda Davidson, and Ruskin. Davidson was a speaker during the Reason Rally but took the time to visit exhibitors before going on stage. He enjoyed meeting everyone working the tables in the Exhibition Tent and was very impressed with Ruskin’s talents at portraying Thomas Paine. Davidson knows talent when he sees it! Davidson’s career as an actor, game show host and talk show host spans decades.

Pictured above is James Klueh with an unknown person who happened to have made a sign displaying a Thomas Paine quote. This particular quote is from his book The Age of Reason. She made the sign to carry around the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial during the Reason Rally 2016 festivities. Her sign was very much appreciated by members of the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee and people who saw it at the Reason Rally.
The ability to purchase a Reason Rally T-shirt with the Freethought Society (FS) logo was made available for a short time. The shirts have now become collector items! Congratulations to those who own this unique piece of clothing that commemorates a very special occasion. Non-logo T-shirts are available for purchase at the Reason Rally Store link:

http://reasonrally.org/store/

Pictured wearing their FS/Reason Rally 2016 shirts are Greg White (above left), Eve Balistra (center), FS supporter Tom Haas (above right), Glen Loev (bottom left), and Tom Schottmiller (bottom right).

The FS exhibition items needed to be delivered to the Rally site on Friday, June 3rd. Schottmiller, Balistra, Loev and White arrived to Washington, D.C. to unload items and cart them to the tents. On the day of the Reason Rally, the team greeted visitors with smiles and passionate banter about the goals and mission of FS. They later repacked and reloaded the van without complaint. FS also thanks Patti Butcheck and many FS Facebook friends who saw a post asking for help and showed up to unload the van.
Above left is a photo of Margaret Downey with author Julien Musolino. He was thrilled to find the cover of his book, The Soul Fallacy made into an ornament for the Freethought Society’s (FS) Tree of Knowledge. This tree was located in the Donations Tent at the Reason Rally.

Pictured above right is FS supporter Jim Craig.

Left is Rachel Tobias striking her best “Eve” pose.

Pictured below is volunteer extraordinaire and FS supporter Celestia Ward. With other volunteers, she helped set up the FS booth and decorated the Tree of Knowledge the day before the Reason Rally.
In 1976, I was four years old, sitting in a Catholic church in Hamilton, New Jersey. The rituals, incense, and candles left me in awe as the prayers and singing swept me off my feet. At that time in my life, I thought I wanted to give my life to helping others and to do so I wanted to be a nun.

I already knew what poverty was and saw things a child should not have witnessed. At the age of six, I went to a different church with my next-door neighbors. When I got home after the service that evening, I was upset because I had learned that my mom and I were going to hell — according to this particular church. That day I heard for the first time exactly what hell was and that my mom and I were going there because I was conceived and born out of wedlock. I relayed to my mom, who was a single parent, what the preacher had said. My mom was angered by what she heard. It would be four years until I would ever step into another church. My belief in a god was stagnant but I did not challenge the concept.

By the time I was 13, I was going to a Presbyterian church in Vineland, New Jersey with my mom and other family members. This family activity was mainly due to my mom’s ex-husband being an on-again-off-again alcoholic. He began going to church and the family wanted to support him in hopes that he would stop drinking once and for all. In turn, I had to go to church too.

I did not care for the sermons, the people, and anything else for that matter which dealt with god. I did not fit in with the rest of the parish, probably because I was a teenager. Although my mom’s ex-husband turned back to drinking, which he eventually died from in 1991, my mom ended up becoming a reborn Christian and was immersed in the church.

As I was entering tenth grade, I switched from public school to an all-girls private Catholic school called Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Newfield, New Jersey. It was not until my junior year of high school in religion class where I heard the phrase said (but only once), “God is not only masculine but he has feminine characteristics as well.” These words sparked my personal journey to search for a higher power and removed any further contemplation of me being a nun upon graduation.

I furthered my studies in Christianity by reading the Bible, which I found to be offensive at times and contradictory. What I found to be most disturbing was that I was to “fear God” because he could do “horrible things” to me at any time, such as he had done to Job — yet “he loved me unconditionally.” This was taught in Catholic school and in the various churches I attended: Catholic, Presbyterian, Protestant, Baptist and Methodist. I think of that entire scenario as being in a dysfunctional relationship and one that I did not accept.

Next, I studied Wicca for several years. There were too many deities and too many unexplained things, no evidence or proof. Because of that, I was not able to justify being a Wiccan and I moved on.

Then there was Hinduism. It was interesting, but I found it to be just not for me. In my early 30s I eventually discovered the philosophy of Buddhism and even now apply Buddha’s idea of searching for truth as one of my goals in life. I do not hold any belief in reincarnation, however.

From the time I was in my early 20s, up until 2007 or 2008, I did not like Christianity, nor did I care very much for those who believed in the religion. I thought some of them were hypocrites. They would portray themselves as abiding by God’s word yet they did not practice what they preached. Simply put, I found some members in the various churches I had attended throughout my life to be fake and this did not sit well with me. I believe we are alive for a limited time and should work together to make things better than we were when we started.

My negative perception of Christianity began to fade and finally diminish in the next chapter of my life. I was on a personal journey to love more while furthering my compassion for various walks of life. I felt that if I were to ever find my peace it would be through observation and understanding. I wanted to know others from Christianity.

Between 2007-2008, I began going to a Christian church a few times a month. I did this for about 18 months. I was surrounded by people who were welcoming, but most importantly, they were sincere. What I witnessed were everyday people who were on their own personal journey. As I discovered my heart and mind opening to this group, I one day simply stopped going. The reason was that I accomplished what I had set out to do, which was to understand a certain religious group better.

Fast forward to October 2011. I was on my first date with Michael Steven Martin (pictured below with me).

As we were on our way to see a play, he asked me what my religious preference was. What transpired at that moment would forever change my personal outlook. I told him that I was following and learning more about the Buddhist philosophy, to which he said, “You do know that you are actually an atheist, right?”

I just sat there for a few moments processing that word “atheist” and what it meant. I realized that he was indeed correct. Up to that time, I had an idea of what an atheist was. I had a few friends who were atheists but I did not take the time to fully embrace the concept, mainly because of the negative connotation that went along with being an atheist.

Today I find that many people do not fully understand what an atheist is, much like me before that first date with Michael. Religion has put local communities and entire countries behind socially and educationally. I know one
thing for sure: As the nontheist movement continues to grow and as we reach out to others from various religious backgrounds, it is important not to humiliate or shame religious believers.

Men, women, and children are bearing the scars of religious ignorance and are evidence of the type of harm being done. Further intolerance to one person is injury to all. If we continue to sit back in silence or make fun of believers, we are as guilty as those who gain prominence and power by the dissemination of false ideas and by appealing to the deepest fears and hates within the believer’s mind. It is important to educate others on what an atheist is, what we believe, and why we think the way we do. Also, we should all strive to present a good example of what an atheist is, because people are perceptive and do judge. Anything less than doing our best and being kind will only slow the nontheist communities momentum of gaining understanding and respect.

2016 Freethought Hero Awarded to Lisa Pedersen, for Doing Her Best

by Jan Meshon

I recently had the distinct honor of presenting Lisa Pedersen with a FreeThoughtAction Hero Award — in part for her efforts in the freethought movement, but mainly because of the extraordinary efforts she makes to improve the lives of those in need. Everyday Lisa shows the world that the good people do springs from their humanity, not from divinity.

The award was presented to Lisa at the May 2016 Freethought Alliance conference held in Fullerton, California. Margaret Downey (President of the Freethought Society) recommended Lisa for the award and also arranged for its surprise presentation at the conference.

Lisa is an ambassador, educator, advocate, and a humanist. She is a co-founder and former board member with the secular nonprofit organization Friends of Freethought. She also founded the Women’s Secular Group of Southern California, which hosts an Adopt-A-Family outreach within secular communities.

She raises awareness and educates the public on matters such as morality, the history of freethinkers, and activism. She does this in person and online, helping people access reference materials. She attends outreaches to educate the public as an example of what an atheist and humanist is.

Lisa has been involved with the Compton Initiative Project (CIP) for 10 years. CIP brings people together from different backgrounds and helps them make a difference while painting schools, cleaning parks, or maintaining homes.

Lisa raises money for a dozen orphanages in Tijuana, Mexico so they can purchase necessities like food, clean water, clothes, school materials, and medical care. She personally contributes money, diapers and cleaning supplies in addition to fundraising. Working with a national dental distributor, she provides toothbrushes and toothpaste for many within the orphanages. She works toward her goal of providing free dental care for these children.

She has created a bridge between her career in the dental industry and her local Orange County, California community where she has collaborated with Project Hope Alliance and National Children's Oral Health Foundation to help provide free dental care to over 400 homeless children in 90 schools. She hosts collection drives at work to gather dental hygiene products, and in two years raised over $25,000 for Project Hope.

Her concern for the welfare of the homeless inspires her to host events for the secular community with the Orange County Food Bank. She and her volunteers work with over 100 people from various organizations on an assembly line to package nonperishable food. These 1,200-1,800 boxes are delivered to low-income individuals or families. In the winter she partners with the Mercy House in providing up to 400 sleeping spaces a night at the Armory, which acts as the local emergency shelter.

Lisa’s passion for the environment compelled her to become a leader, fundraiser, and organizer with the OC Hiking Club. She has hosted events to maintain and clean local trails. She helps new hikers acclimate and propels them to an advanced level. She’s also an advocate for a children’s hiking program called Kids In Need.

Lisa’s tireless efforts on behalf of those in need help break down negative stereotypes and gain acceptance for all freethinkers as those she comes in contact with see her dogged optimism and heartfelt empathy. Lisa is a true Freethought Hero!
Meet the Newly-Elected Freethought Society Officers and Board Members

The Freethought Society (FS) Officer and Board Member election process took place this year, beginning with a call for nominations. A slate was created from all the nominees and the election took place May 1-June 31, 2016. We are pleased to present the following officers and board members, who will be serving FS for the next four years. Please welcome:

**Patricia Butcheck**
A humanist since childhood, an atheist since a young adulthood, Patti has always supported humanist values and advocates for reason without religious bias, the separation of religion and government, and secular acceptance.

A long-time member of the FS, Patti is a returning member of the FS Board.

She loves science and learning. Patti considers discovery and education to be humanity’s highest goals. An animal rights advocate, she has been involved in rescue and worked with no-kill shelters.


**Charlotte Carney**
Charlotte is a teaching artist and expresses her atheism and secular humanism in some of her work as well as when she is teaching. A recent painting by Charlotte was used by the National Center for Science Education, and she has also had work shown on the Brights’ Net and The Eloquent Atheist websites.

Charlotte lives her life as an out atheist, adding that openly living your life well as a godless individual — with kindness, respect and tolerance of others — is the best way to represent atheism. Charlotte lives in Margate City, New Jersey.

**Victoria De la Torre**
Victoria was born and reared in Southern California into a single-parent household. After a strict Catholic upbringing, she discovered freethought in 2007 while at the University of San Diego. There she earned a BA in Philosophy.

During her studies Victoria discovered the intellectual path of reason and began exploring a more secular understanding of the world. Victoria directed her attention to the field of science, reading Dawkins and Darwin, embracing evolution and the natural universe over the myth of a deity with a divine plan. She combines her cultural traditions with logic, reason and enlightenment, especially helping fellow Hispanics, who not only have a unique and distinct path to freethought but also often feel alone, scared, and torn as they recover from religion.

Victoria believes that through secularism we can achieve the American dream because the beauty of humanism presents the affirmation of our true potential through logic, reasoning, and understanding.

Victoria has served as the Community Outreach Coordinator for the Humanist Association of San Diego, organizing the association’s involvement in local parades, fundraisers, and homeless outreach. She is a member of the Freethought Society’s Diversity Outreach Committee, creating and facilitating programs, Hispanic materials and events. Victoria lives in San Diego, California.

**Michael DeLaurentis**
Michael is an attorney, writer, speaker, professor and philanthropist. His extensive education includes a BA from Amherst, a BA and MA from Oxford, an MA from Brown and a JD from Yale Law School. His career included founding Global Green Consulting, an advisory service for developing and marketing clean energy technology, and acting as associate and partner at large and mid-size law firms. He has taught at Brown, LaSalle and Villanova universities.

Michael’s work in the charitable community includes founding and supporting multiple charities and foundations doing work in the fields of health, athletics, inner-city support, special education and the mentally challenged, medical ethics, and many other areas. He was honored for his efforts in this area as the 2014 Philadelphia Eagles Community Quarterback Award for sustained leadership and dedication to community charitable activity.

Michael was a devout Roman Catholic until the ninth grade, when he became interested in the large philosophical questions, including the existence of a deity. He studied Anselm’s and Aquinas’s purported ontological and cosmological “proofs” of God’s existence, which seemed fallacious. He opened his eyes and mind, and concluded there were no such proofs and no such deity, but only the intense need and desire for one in most people. Michael lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Margaret Downey

In 1993, Margaret founded FS. She is currently serving as its president. FS duties have enabled her to work as an advocate for separation of religion and government, as well as developing events that appeal to the secular community.

Born into a multicultural family in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Margaret became aware of and appalled by unfounded bigotry in her formative years. At an early age she became concerned about persecution and has devoted her life to ending discrimination against all peoples.

Reading the literary work of Thomas Paine and Robert Green Ingersoll enabled Margaret to develop a keen sense of revolutionary thought. She became an openly declared atheist and activist in her twenties. Free from the constraints of religious dogma she became involved with the feminist movement. Margaret fought for basic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of choice, personal family leave for working parents, equal pay, and promotional opportunities for women. Continue reading “Who is Margaret Downey” for more information. Margaret lives in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Sally Flynn

Sally left Christianity behind 50 years ago. In addition to focusing on religious intrusion into government, Sally has supported Planned Parenthood and women’s rights issues.

She was active in the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. It took Sally several decades, however, to finally evolve from a moderate, cultural Christian to a rational humanist and atheist, and Sally continues to be very active in the movement. She maintains memberships in the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the American Civil Liberties Union.

She was the lead plaintiff in the Federal case of The Freethought Society v. Chester County, which was an effort to have a Ten Commandments plaque removed from the façade of the Chester County Courthouse. Sally lives in Pocopson, Pennsylvania.

Tracy Lockwood

Tracy spent her childhood living in an isolated religious sect before finding freedom at the age of 18.

Tracy’s journey took her through Evangelical Christianity before she admitted she did not believe in a god and gave up her faith.

Tracy is now a fervent advocate for the separation of government and religion. She also stands up for the rights of children in religious communities. Tracy lives in the Greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area.
Glen Loev
Glen reached the conclusion that there are no deities as he transitioned from his Conservative Jewish up-bringing.

His journey took him through Jewish Re-constructionism and Jewish Reform, at which point he finally arrived at Secular Humanism. He is currently serving as the Vice-President of the FS and also serves on the Board of Shir Shalom, which is a community in the Greater Philadelphia area designed for Secular Humanist Jews.

Glen retired from the practice of Dentistry in 2001. He is currently working as a bookkeeper for his husband’s hair salon.

His interests include travel, reading, bicycling, woodworking, and the intellectual challenge of discussing (sometimes arguing about) faith with religious friends and relatives. Glen lives in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

Tom Melchiorre
Tom is the former editor of and contributing writer to four atheist magazines, including, *Secular Nation*, *Secular World*, and *The Australian Atheist*. During his tenure as editor, he traveled the world reporting on atheist events on three continents.

Tom has mentored, discovered and fostered many writers who are now successful and prominent in the atheist community.

Tom is a Founding Member of The Freethought Society. He has also written for The Freethought Society News, with a regular column in the early years, and has provided proofing and editing services throughout the Society’s history.

Tom is the owner of Write Edit Publish! and provides services and guidance to individuals, businesses, government agencies, organizations, and nonprofits — both atheist and religious. His business services have been used for books (nonfiction and fiction), newsletters, public relations, and much more. Tom lives in Norwood, Pennsylvania.

Dennis Middlebrooks
Dennis graduated from Brooklyn College in 1973 with a BA in History, followed by an MBA in International Business at Pace University in 1984. He retired in 2014 after 40 years in the financial industry.

Dennis was raised as a Catholic in a working-class neighborhood. He was a religious believer until his mid-teens. It was then that he developed an interest in astronomy and discovered Isaac Asimov’s wonderful science articles in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, to which his father subscribed.

When Dennis was 13, his family moved to a more upscale and ethnically-mixed neighborhood. It was there where he made many friends of Jewish background — who were actually atheists. They were the first nonbelievers he had ever encountered. This paved the way for his growing skepticism about religious claims.

By the time he was a junior in high school, Dennis called himself an agnostic, and in a few years was an outright atheist. He became active in the freethought movement in the late 1980s as one of the original members of The Secular Humanist Society of New York. He is also a past president of the Society.

Dennis is proud to say that he is listed in Warren Allen Smith’s *Who’s Who In Hell*.

Over the years, many of his articles have been published in *The Freethought Today*, *Free Inquiry* magazine, the *International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) News*, *The Freethought Society News*, *Skeptical Briefs* and *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine.

Dennis loves to write Letters to the Editor and can boast about having more than 200 letters published in New York City newspapers and various magazines. Dennis lives in Brooklyn, New York.
Susan O’Connell
Susan has worked as a professional secretary and book production editor for over 25 years. Her role, however, as a political activist is her most important work.

Susan worked hard for Barak Obama’s presidential campaign and is a member of Progressive Democracy South Jersey. She has proudly participated in two Congressional campaigns.

She volunteers as an energetic member of FS’s Helping Hands Committee. Susan is proud to have been involved in dozens of events and public protests.

Susan is also a member of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, American Atheists, the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Atheists Meetup group. Susan lives in Atco, New Jersey.

Carol Everhart Roper
An artist, photographer and writer, Carol has been a nonbeliever since age 14. She prefers to discuss the reasons why she is sure there are no gods or supernatural events with believers in an atmosphere of mutual respect for one another’s humanity (not for the beliefs) rather than responding to proselytization with hostility. Her goal is mutual understanding, and, with that, helping the believer find the path out of superstition and into skepticism, as well as dispelling the ridiculous ideas most believers have about atheists.

Former Vice President of FS, she designed and managed the FS website, FS banners and ads, etc. After her husband’s death in 2014, Carol moved to New Mexico, and remains very active with the Freethought Society with design and writing services. She is the official designer of the Freethought Society’s Thomas Paine Memorial Committee.

Carol wrote two columns for the Examiner; one on Freethought and one covering science. She has always been fascinated with the biosciences, and in the last 25 years has become passionate about particle physics and cosmology. The columns are still available on the Examiner website. Her “Open Letter to Theists” and “Open Letter to Atheists” have been circulated widely on the web.

In addition, she writes poetry, and her artwork encompasses photography, photo-montage, mixed media, drawing and painting and is represented in multiple collections worldwide.

She has jokingly described herself as an existential determinist, a lazy obsessive-compulsive, decidedly unsure, a gregarious hermit and reluctant control-freak. A 1960s hippie chick who is still idealistic when not dejectedly jaded. She has been a Universal Life Church ordained minister since 1997.

Carol looks forward to continuing her work with FS. She lives in Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Jennifer Taylor
Jennifer Taylor was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and raised within a dual-religious family (Jehovah’s Witness and Baptist); she was skeptical from a young age, having an inquisitive nature. She considers herself both an Atheist as well as a Secular Humanist with a strong interest in community service, social justice, and separation of church and state issues.

Jennifer currently serves as the organizer for Black Atheists of Philadelphia, a group that both welcomes and encourages nontheists of diverse backgrounds to become both open and active within the Greater Philadelphia area. Black Atheists of Philadelphia is affiliated with African Americans for Humanism and the Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason (PhillyCor).

In addition, Jennifer is an organizer for the newly-formed group Humanists of East Tennessee and is happy to also serve on the board of FS.

Jennifer is presently employed within corporate America, has a background in management and has more than 17 years of diverse management level and financial experience. She has attended numerous secular events, conferences and rallies, including the 2012 Reason Rally and the Blackout Secular Rally. She has also participated in the Madison Atheists booth during the group’s “Ask An Atheist” event. She has been a guest on the Black Freethinkers radio show and The Forbidden Fruit radio show, has served as a guest panelist during the People of Color Beyond Faith conference, and has delivered presentations at several secular events. Jennifer lives in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Greg White
Greg has been an atheist/humanist/freethinker since at least the age of 12.

Greg donates his time to help build a vibrant secular community that reaches far beyond the confines of online activity. His activities focus on advocating for separation of religion and government. He also seeks to end religious indoctrination of children. Greg lives in Bristol, Pennsylvania.
My Tattoo
by Tom Melchiorre

I did it again.

I hid my atheism out of concern for, possibly fear of, repercussions to my physical health when people in medical and therapeutic professions who are injecting and inserting needles and catheters, withdrawing blood, and/or handling/manipulating/operating on/into/from my body ask me what the tattoo on my right arm means.

I have several tattoos. All of them are obvious as to what they are, though there’s a deeper meaning to each that I explain if asked. All except the atheist tattoo. Atheists would no doubt not need it explained to them in any way as they already know what it stands for, and many have given me the thumbs up, a smile, a “hell, yeah” when they see it. Everyone else, well, “What’s your tattoo mean?”

And therein lies the problem.

When the physical therapist is manipulating my neck or my hip — necessitated by a dog attack — and asks, what’s this tattoo stand for, I inevitably respond that it stands for science, knowledge, the atom and, if I’m emboldened for some reason, the initial atom that stands for all life without which pretty much no life would’ve ever formed on this planet. That usually answers their question and we move on.

While I’d like to think everyone is professional in doing their jobs, when the guy or gal has my neck literally in their hands, I don’t want to antagonize them in any way, shape, or form as they do what needs to be done. The question I ask myself is would they still do their very best upon learning my tattoo is an expression of my atheism or would they do something slightly, unknowingly or overtly, different to hinder my healing or, possibly, make my condition worse?

And invariably I err on the side of caution. I’m sure all these people are good people doing their jobs, but when just one “slip” can make me a quadriplegic, I’m not going to take the chance.

Once, I asked my doctor of over 25 years during the annual “turn-and-cough” exam why they say “turn and cough” and he was quite blunt in his response: because we don’t want to be coughed on. He then added, and I’m paraphrasing here, that I didn’t want to piss him off when he had my cajones in his grip. Mixed metaphors aside, I’ve taken his advice to heart ever since.

I’ve been especially careful explaining my atheist tattoo this way when asked by the surgeons and nurses while I’m naked on the table and being prepped for surgery as well as during surgeries where I was awake since some were only local numbing, as well as asked by, if not more so, the anesthesiologists for all surgeries where they knocked me out — I want to be able to wake up and with the same mental capacity as I had before going under. Again, would I know if something was done, or wasn’t done, while under that was meant to not fix the problem or even exacerbate it if the surgeon knew I was an atheist after explaining the full meaning of my tattoo? Keep in mind, being men and women of science my explanation that it stands for science, knowledge, the atom and (if I’m bold enough) the basic building blocks of life usually impresses the surgeons and doctors. Still...

I can’t take that extra step.

Needles don’t bother me. I watch them go in with no problem. I laugh at the big burly men who look away and wince when getting a shot or having blood withdrawn. But if the medical technician who sees the tattoo asks what it means, I still use my standard reply. I have no idea if the full explanation will result in a bad insert, resulting in a hematoma, which can be very painful at most or just annoying in the least. I, nonetheless, don’t want the possibility of a perceived insult resulting in injury to me.

I have even told the mailman who delivers my mail and the workers at the post offices when I buy stamps my standard answer when they ask about the tattoo. Hell, do you really want to piss off the people who can misplace your checks and bills?

I have tattoos on my left upper arm as well, which were done several years before my atheist tattoo. I deliberately didn’t go below the elbow for business reasons, as it’s still frowned upon in many business circles to have tattoos and, being self-employed, I would often roll up my sleeves in a client’s presence and he or she would be none the wiser. Still, I find myself explaining my atheist tattoo the same way to people I do business with, if they see it, and some have, as my atheism has cost me business. I’ve learned not to bring up my atheism with potential clients in any way, which is difficult since my résumé is filled with jobs relating to atheism, although phrased to downplay the atheism aspect, as it has caused a complete change in atmosphere when interviewers have asked me to further explain particulars.

If people deny me jobs ostensibly due to my being an atheist, whether that’s the official reason or not, and there have been times when such has indeed been stated, can I be any less cautious when my physical health — when my life itself — is on the line?

I knew going into this tattoo such would be the case, I just didn’t know it would be so pervasive. Truthfully, honestly, for personal reasons I’m extremely glad and proud that I got this tattoo, but is it paranoia or common sense to withhold my full tattoo story to those who admire and inquire about my atheist tattoo, knowing the potential for problems? It’s both, really, and when it all boils down to everyday life, as much as I want to shout to the world the full explanation of my atheist tattoo, I have to err on the side of caution.

And I am the sadder for it.
July 24

The Philadelphia Coalition of Reason is sponsoring the 10th Annual Unity Picnic on Sunday, July 24, 2016 at 1:00 PM, rain or shine, at the Fort Washington State Park, Militia Hill Pavilion (MHL-1), 6036 Joshua Road, Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, 19034. All nontheists, friends and family are welcome. When you enter the park, please follow these easy directions and look for signage:

- Turn right through the gate
- Stay right at the fork in the road
- Parking is on the right side
- The Militia Hill Pavilion is on the left

Please plan to donate a minimum of $10 per adult to cover the cost of burgers, hot dogs, and vegetarian alternatives for the grill, as well as condiments and beverages. There is no charge for children under the age of 13. Attendees are also requested to bring a side dish to share. Please follow the chart below using the alphabetical designation according to the first letter of your last name:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-G</th>
<th>salad or vegetable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H-P</td>
<td>fruit or dessert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-Z</td>
<td>bread, potato or rice dish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please bring the entire family. There will be games and activities for children. The picnic is over at 5:00 PM.

We must estimate how much food, beverages and utensils to purchase, so please RSVP at: PhillyReason@gmail.com

The Philadelphia Coalition of Reason is an umbrella organization for local groups:

- Atheist Meetup
- Black Atheists of Philadelphia
- Drexel Freethought Society
- The Ethical Humanist Society
- The Freethought Society
- The Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia
- Penn Secular Society (UPENN)
- Penn State Atheist Agnostic Association
- Temple Atheists and Critical Thinkers

August 24

On Wednesday, August 24, 2016 please join the Freethought Society (FS) as we host author Julien Musolino. This free and open-to-the-public presentation is entitled “The Soul Fallacy.”

The program begins at 7:00 PM in the remodeled community room at the Ludington Library located at 5 South Bryn Mawr Ave., Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

Most people believe they possess an immaterial soul that will survive the death of the body. In sharp contrast, the current scientific consensus rejects the concept of a traditional soul. This conclusion is rarely discussed publicly. Musolino will explain why modern science leads to this controversial conclusion. Musolino will demonstrate that we do not lose anything by letting go of “soul beliefs” and that there is something important to gain in doing so.

September 26

On Monday, September 26, 2016 please join FS as we host author Fernando Alcántar. This free and open-to-the-public presentation is entitled “To the Cross and Back.”

The program starts at 7:00 PM, in the community room at the Ludington Library located at 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

In his presentation, Alcántar will take the audience on a journey of discovery, analyzing the cultural barriers and psychological consequences of organized religion which lead to bigotry, prejudice, and harm. Through his personal story ascending up the ranks of Christian leadership in North America, Alcántar will flesh out the systematic institutionalization of a religious system that promotes the withering of critical thinking, homogenization of cultural values, and the promotion of attacks on minority communities, such as the LGBT and ethnic populations.

Alcántar is a former denominational state leader for the Foursquare Church in Mexico, the United Methodist Church in the United States, and missionary leader for Azusa Pacific University — the second largest evangelical college in the nation.
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 many locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tri-state 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**
  (locate 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)