



# The Freethought Society News

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## The 2018 Philadelphia Rally for Science and Thomas Paine Plaza History

by Margaret Downey

Many of the organizers of the 2017 March for Science continued their efforts to promote the need for fact-based public policies and decision-making grounded in sound science by helping to organize a 2018 Rally for Science. The newly formed Philadelphia Science Action held the event on Saturday, April 14, 2018 at the Thomas Paine Plaza located across the street from the Philadelphia City Hall (John F. Kennedy Boulevard and Broad Street).

The Freethought Society (FS) was the financial partner for the March for Science in 2017. At the 2018 Rally for Science; FS was mentioned and praised for that partnership. FS was also granted special table accommodations at the Rally for Science for the huge amount of work that was done before, during and after the March for Science.

FS has a special connection to the Thomas Paine Plaza as well. In 1994, FS was given a Philadelphia City Proclamation declaring June 8<sup>th</sup> as Thomas Paine Day. Working with educator **Mark Stone**, FS also received a Resolution from the Philadelphia City Council renaming Reyburn Plaza to Thomas Paine Plaza and to create a small city street named after him. The wording of the Resolution is as follows:

WHEREAS, City Council has enacted legislation to rename Reyburn Plaza as “Thomas Paine Plaza” and to rename that part of Chancellor street between Dock street and Third street as “Thomas Paine Place;” and

WHEREAS, Thomas Paine inspired the Declaration of Independence and the birth of this nation by his landmark documents *Common Sense* and *The Crisis*; and

WHEREAS, In 1780, he wrote the Pennsylvania law for the abolition of slavery, the first such state law in this country; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Paine advocated justice for women, public education, progressive tax law, religious freedom, and preservation of world peace through arbitration of international disputes; and

WHEREAS, His life and work have inspired many generations of democratic thinkers in many lands; and

WHEREAS, Thomas Paine died on June 8, 1809 and June 8 is a date to honor the life and accomplishments of Thomas Paine, therefore

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby declares June 8, 1994 to be the first annual Thomas Paine Day.

The Resolution was sponsored by Council members **David Cohen, Jannie L. Blackwell, Augusta A. Clark, Happy Fernandez, James F. Kenney, Joan L. Krajewski, Daniel P. McElhatton, Michael A. Nutter, Brian J. O’Neill, Angel L. Ortiz, Marian B. Tasco, and Joseph C. Vignola**. Brass plaques were placed on four corners of the plaza and a huge celebration organized by FS took place at the grand opening on June 8, 1994. The festivities that day included speakers and a parade consisting of students and teachers from the Thomas Paine Elementary School in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. FS is always pleased when events are held at the Thomas Paine Plaza. Each time the name of

this great Founding Father and patriot is spoken, more people might recall or seek to know more about his importance.

Rally for Science lead organizer **Kim Beidler** heard about the significant connection FS has to the Plaza and asked the FS Thomas Paine actor to open the event on April 14. **Julien Musolino** took on the job and his opening words were stirring. It was not hard to imagine the real Thomas Paine uttering the words penned by Musolino in order to kick off the Rally for Science. The full text is printed below as is a photo of Musolino delivering the opening message:



*My fellow Human Beings,*

*I feel deeply honored and privileged today to have the opportunity to welcome you all to the 2018 Rally for Science! It is also very fitting that this task should fall upon me. After all, I helped found our nation and anchor our ideals and values to Enlightenment Principles. These values entail a strong commitment to reason, science, and humanism. Reason is the most noble of all mental faculties, science is but a product of our faculty of reason, and humanism directly follows from the application of science and reason.*

*I would hasten to add that we do not have faith in science or reason; but that we trust them because they work. As I wrote in my book The Age of Reason “The most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is reason.”*

*Today, perhaps more than ever before, we need to renew our commitment to these enlightenment values; we need to renew our commitment to science, to reason, and to evidence-based practices and policies. In a letter addressed to a friend on the affairs of North America, I wrote that “the mind, once enlightened, cannot again become dark.” Let this be our motto today, and let us have the universal voice of reason resonate and serve as the harbinger of progress yet to come.*

*Throughout the day today you will hear from various speakers who will take a stand for science and reason, who are deeply committed to the values that I helped usher in*

*more than two centuries ago, and who believe that all of us can benefit from the best ideas and practices that science and reason have to offer.*

*I am honored and humbled to be with you today, for your cause is my cause, and to open this Rally for Science, I would like to leave you with these words that I penned at the end my book Rights of Man: “reason obeys itself, and ignorance submits to whatever is dictated to it.” Once again, welcome to the 2018 Rally for science!*

The Rally for Science program included the music stylings of the Bluegrass band, Who? What? When? Why? & Werewolves, and the following speakers:

**Laura Guertin, PhD**

Professor of Earth Science, Penn State Brandywine; blogger on geoscience education for the American Geophysical Union

**Patrick Callahan**

Co-Founder, CompassRed (data and analytics firm)

**Josh McNeil**

Executive Director, Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania

**Halle Van der Gaag**

Manager, Delaware River Programs, National Wildlife Federation

**Monica Taylor, PhD, CSCS, EP-C**

Assistant Professor and Director, Exercise Physiology, Department of Kinesiology, Samson College of Health Science, University of the Sciences

**Steve Luxton**

Executive Director, Energy Coordinating Agency

**Andrew Javier Matamoros, M.S.**

Ph.D. Candidate, Drexel University College of Medicine; Senior City Coordinator for Taste of Science

**Ashleigh Jurgan**

Undergraduate Student in Environmental Sciences, Drexel University

The mission of the Philadelphia Science Action is to promote science and scientific thinking for the advancement of society and to champion evidence-based thinking in public policy. The organization’s specific objectives are:

- \* To spearhead dialogue around policies impacting science and the scientific community and broader issues of social justice and equality.
- \* To provide scientists and science supporters information and tools for active political participation.

The FS Board of Directors stands ready to be of assistance to the Philadelphia Science Action organization and we look forward to a 2019 March for Science or a Rally for Science. Perhaps the event will take place at The Thomas Paine Plaza once again.



## Photos of the 2018 Rally for Science



The Freethought Society booth and free literature table set up at the Thomas Paine Plaza is pictured above. Staffing the table are (left to right) **Tom Schottmiller**, **Cameron Archambault**, **Glen Loev**, **Patti Butcheck** and **Margaret Downey**. Many people attending the Rally for Science stopped by table for a newsletter, complimentary snacks, water and just to chat. Archambault, Downey and Schottmiller are pictured below (center) holding the signs made for the event.



Pictured left is **Kim Beidler**, the lead organizer for the Rally for Science.

Pictured right at the Rally for Science are **Brittany Siemon**, **Joshua Landis** and **Noah Loev Balistra**.



# 2018 Secular Coalition for America Lobby Days

by Margaret Downey



Once again, the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) organized and conducted a fantastic lobbying experience for the nontheist community. While it is not easy to meet with Members of Congress on Capitol Hill, the pre-appointment training offered by SCA eased almost all the anxiety of the members of the Pennsylvania group. We were provided talking points along with some helpful lobbying protocol information. The two issues we addressed with our legislators were:

## **Do No Harm Act (H.R. 3222):**

We asked for legislators to co-sponsor this act or support a Senate version. This Act was written because the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) is being used to justify discrimination and deprive people of their civil rights based on religious belief. The Do No Harm Act seeks to amend RFRA so that religion is not allowed to cause harm to others.

## **First Amendment Defense Act (S. 2525):**

We requested that legislators oppose this act because the First Amendment Defense Act would legalize discrimination against non-traditional families, including same-sex couples, single parents and unmarried couples. Entities intend to use this legislation to discriminate using the Act as a sword to hurt nontraditional families rather than as a shield to protect religious freedom from government overreach.

Our group chose me to open the conversation when we visited the offices of Senators **Robert P. Casey, Jr.** and **Patrick J. Toomey.** I began with my name and I immediately provided my philosophical label. In my case, I prefer to be called a “Freethinking Atheist.” I specified that we were participating in the Secular Coalition for America lobby days and stated the reason we were there (to talk about the two issues mentioned above). That led to me asking the other people in our group to introduce themselves. Each person took a turn stating their name and how they like to identify themselves as members of the nontheist community. I thought this was an important step in that we had an opportunity to show the diversity of non-belief and to educate about the many shades of nontheism. Some in the group identified as a Humanist, agnostic and secularist. I was so proud to be a part of this articulate group of people, all of

whom easily explained their philosophies quickly and very effectively.

The process led back to me and I presented our position about one issue. I told a short story about why I was personally interested in the issue and why I was there. Each person took their turn using the same method — a personal story and the reasons we are “for” or “against” the two Acts.

We all had a chance to speak, but the legislators we hoped to meet with were out of the office. We could only hope that **Virginia Lenahan**, Casey’s Legislative Aide and **Dan Sullivan**, Toomey’s General Counsel would convey our sentiments as well as we did that day.

During the visit to Toomey’s office I happened to sit across from a credenza located just behind the conference table. Sitting on the credenza was a large antique brass sculpture of a Boy Scout. I immediately recognized it because it is a mini-duplicate of the statue that was once located in front of the Philadelphia Boy Scouts of America (BSA) headquarters. It took over twenty years to oust BSA from that building for their blatant violation of Philadelphia’s anti-discrimination statutes. I was so happy when the building was returned to the city and the statue was taken down.

As people in our group took their turn to speak, I could not take my eyes off of that Boy Scout statue. When the last person in our group spoke, Sullivan asked, “Is there anything else?” I was compelled to say the following:

*“As my fellow secularists were speaking, I could not help but notice the Boy Scout statue sitting on the credenza. Every person sitting with you here today would not be welcome as a member, employee, or volunteer in the Boy Scouts of America — neither would our children and our grandchildren.*”

*“The Boy Scouts of America now has a policy to allow lesbian, gay, bisexual scouts and leaders. They also allow transgender scouts and leaders. In addition, the Boy Scouts of America recently decided to allow females. Unfortunately, they continue to reject nontheists. We are treated like second-class citizens and it hurts us greatly.*”

*“My son was not allowed to continue his affiliation with the Boy Scouts due to his believing in ‘Good’ not ‘God’ and I was told that we could ‘never be the best kind of citizen, without a*

*belief in God.’ My son was unable to earn his Eagle Badge like the one Mr. Toomey is proud to have accomplished. When my son entered the Air Force, we learned that the United States government pays Eagle Scouts almost 2% more in comparison to non-Eagle Scouts. To us, this practice is the government rewarding the religious community. This is a small example of the harm being done at the hands of the Boy Scouts of America.*

*“Telling members of the Boy Scouts of America that they must separate themselves from nontheists is promoting hatred and misunderstandings. The Boy Scouts of America claims to be developing future leaders — all the while conveying that nontheists must be separated from, ‘not the best kind of citizens’ and excluded.*

*“Please let Mr. Toomey know that you met people today who also asked that he use his influence to persuade the Boy Scouts of America to allow nontheists to participate equally and without prejudice.”*

I had been looking directly at Sullivan the entire time I spoke. When I looked back at my fellow nontheists, several people had tears in their eyes. I had become rather emotional as I spoke and had not noticed that



Pictured above standing in the top row (left to right) are **Jim Palmquist, Jeff Prebeg** and **Bill Kaszycki**. Left to right on the lower stair levels are **Paul Richey, Jacki Richey, Margaret Downey, Ann Norman** and **Marie Schwab**. The photo was taken on an interior staircase that was located in the Russell Senate Building where visits to the legislators took place.

others were feeling the same. Sullivan noticed as well.

The harm that BSA has done to the nontheist community is without question. We are the last taboo for BSA, even though our children are more than willing to add one more “o” to the BSA oath. It is not intrusive or disruptive for an honest nontheist Scout to simply say:

“On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to Good and my country, to obey the Scout Law, to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.”

Asking for acceptance from BSA must become a priority for the nontheist community, national nontheist groups, lobbyists and activists. We simply can’t allow this type of bigotry to flourish without strong objections.

If BSA continues banning nontheists without good cause, the organization must not be allowed to solicit for new members in our public schools, receive government gratuities and be rewarded with benefits that favor religious citizens over nontheist citizens.

Perhaps this issue will be part of our next lobbying effort. I certainly hope so. Equality, acceptance and respect are long overdue. □

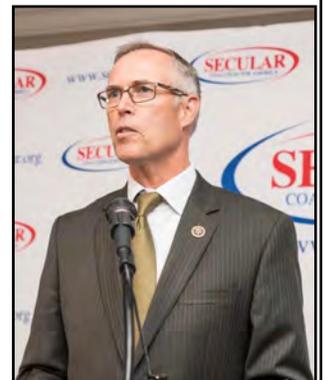


Pictured above are **Margaret Downey** and **Barry Lynn**. Lynn is the former Executive Director for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He was given the Herb Silverman/Secular Coalition for America’s (SCA) Lifetime Achievement Award at the Lobby Day banquet held on April 24, 2018. The elegant dinner took place the night before SCA’s training session and legislative visits. Lynn’s 25 years of service were honored and highlighted.

Pictured below is California Representative **Jared Huffman** speaking at the Secular Coalition for America’s banquet. He announced the launch of the Congressional Freethought Caucus to promote sound public policy based on reason, science, and moral values, protect the secular character of our government, and champion the value of freedom of thought worldwide. He is a co-founder of the caucus with Representative **Jamie Raskin**, Representative **Jerry McNerney**, and Representative **Dan Kildee**. The Congressional Freethought Caucus has four main goals:

1. to promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values;
2. to protect the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict Constitutional principles of the separation of church and state;
3. to oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons, and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide; and
4. to provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

There were cheers from the audience of secularists who were overjoyed with the great news.



# *In Freedom of Expression I Trust*

by Jane Kelly

I've always viewed my place of residence, West Reading, Pennsylvania as a fairly liberal, open-minded town. My lesbian, gay, bi, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) friends do not seem to have problems with being open in the community. I've never had any trouble with displaying my atheist bumper stickers.

I have an atheist practice that I automatically do whenever I get paper money in my hands. Every piece of currency that passes through my hands will have the word "God" adjusted. I often "clean" the bills openly and in public places. When doing so, I notice nothing more than an occasional curious look or a question.

Last week I was making my usual cash deposit at the drive-through window of a local Santander Bank, when the teller asked me why my bills are marked with a red symbol over the word "God." I explained that I advocate for separation of religion and government and it is an important issue to me. The teller said that I was defacing government money, and warned me that in future the bank would refuse my money if it was marked. She went on to say that there had been complaints about my actions and that crossing off the word "God" offended the beliefs of others. I informed her that what I do to the money is indeed legal. I upheld my right to protest religious entanglement with the United States Federal Reserve. The law actually states that defacing money is illegal when it involves fraudulent intent, or the intent to render it unfit for reissue. I'm not certain the latter is correct because there are coin machines where you can deposit a penny and pay to have it shaped or stamped which makes it worthless as legal tender.

I strongly suggested that the teller research this issue. She assured me she would. I left the bank feeling stressed and angry. Could they actually force me into overdraft by refusing my deposits?

I called the bank the next day and asked to speak with the manager. She returned my call the following day. The manager asked if I would please stop marking my money. I patiently told her I would not comply with that request. I also told her that being harassed by the bank to not mark my money for religious reasons makes it even more important that I continue my practice.

I long ago turned in my picket signs, but marking my money is my last small remnant of protest. Over the years, my money marking has saved me a considerable amount of money. Clerks have made mistakes at the cash register and I've had to prove, more than once, that I gave them a certain denomination. Without ever having to count the drawer, I have proven that a \$20 bill was given not a \$10.

The manager stated that the bank would find it necessary to send my bills back to the Federal Reserves. Because a certain number of bills are required to do that process, the manager requested that I deposit larger quantities of the same



Pictured above is the author **Jane Kelley**. She is a proud atheist and the former director of the Pennsylvania Nonbelievers. She enjoys Irish and ballroom dancing, Steampunk related activities, and many various creative hobbies.

bills. I said I would try. I think we ended this difficult conversation on a good note, and she even commented that I sound like a peaceful protester. I thanked her for her time.

I have continued doing business at that branch of Santander Bank as usual. To date, I've had no further problems. I do, however, recommend that anyone reading this article take up the habit and help the nontheist community protest the use of the word "God" on United States' currency. Mark it off any way you like, but let's send a message to the United States Treasury Department that we find the slogan an infraction, an imposition and worse yet, an assumption that all citizens of the United States are religious.

If you are asked why you are cleaning up your currency, use the opportunity to educate people. Here are some facts and talking points to convey:

1. The phrase "In God We Trust" first appeared on the two-cent piece in 1864 and has appeared on paper currency since 1957. A law declaring that the phrase must appear on American currency passed in a Joint Resolution by the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress and was approved by **President Dwight Eisenhower** on July 30, 1956. The decision centered around the "Red Scare." During the McCarthy years a belief in God was equated to being a good American. Those who did not agree/comply were labeled as "Godless Communists."
2. The phrase is used to discriminate against American citizens to this day. Christians use the fact that the word capitalized "God" appears on national currency as "evidence" that the United States is a "Christian Nation." It is not! If this is done to you, just ask how the Christian would feel if money displayed "In Allah We Trust," or "In Buddha We Trust." The best position for a government created by and for the people is neutrality. Crossing off the offensive phrase is our way of advocating for neutrality and absolute separation of religion and government.
3. On April 21, 1787, the Continental Congress of the United States authorized a design for the nation's first coin, the Fugio Cent. It was the first design for the penny and it was named the Fugio Cent because of its image of the sun shining down a sundial. The coin was designed by **Benjamin Franklin** and had the inscription "Mind Your Business."

Pre-1956 currency is easily found in coin shops and carrying one around is helpful to prove that the United States Treasury was at one time printing money without the phrase. They can be purchased in a clear plastic wrap which helps to preserve the paper and makes it easier to locate when immediate evidence is needed to prove your point.

I encourage everyone to mark off the phrase "In God We Trust," remembering to tell anyone who questions you to mind their own business! ◻

# Participating in the American Faith and Family Project

by Victoria de la Torre

For as long as I have identified as an atheist, I have been met with open arms, support, and acceptance from the secular community. I can't say the same about my friends and family. Many of us share the same struggles, experiences, and beliefs as other atheists, and with those experiences also come the very real rejection from our loved ones.

After going through the motions (questioning my religion, not finding answers within theism, then the ultimate acceptance of atheism) I have finally found my voice and passion for my beliefs, whether it be through humanism, skepticism, or studying Philosophy at the University of San Diego. For a long time, however, I have felt as though a lot of the outreach and rhetoric has circulated within the movement itself; I had often felt as though we atheists are "preaching to the choir" for lack of a better phrase. I wanted something new to show the theist world — that we too can have meaningful lives in the absence of a belief in god.

Having said that, you can imagine my excitement when I was asked to take part in a graduate research project that was inquiring about atheist marriages and parenting. I had found myself in the fortunate position to participate in the American Faith and Family Project, a research project that had started at Brigham Young University (BYU).

For those unfamiliar with the university, BYU is a highly religious institution located in the heart of Provo, Utah. As a university whose mission statement is to "expand its influence both by encouraging programs that are central to the Church's purpose and by making its resources available to the Church," I was a bit skeptical about any bias in the project, but was looking forward to sharing with them an atheist's perspective. After reviewing my demographics, (Latina, mother of two, formerly Catholic and married to an ex-Southern Baptist from the Bible Belt), we set up a date and time for our Skype interview.

The project itself focused on my background, education, family dynamic, and lifestyle before and after finding atheism. The interviewer seemed genuinely interested in our responses, and strayed from the common, broad, and monotoned questioning. She would give feedback to my responses, and ask me to go into detail about how I felt during the questions that I found myself hesitant with. It seemed as though the questions about how I make decisions in my marriage and parenting relied heavily on a question that many atheists are asked over and over again — be it ill-intentioned or not — "Without a belief in God, what do you base your morals on?" Of course, we can all point to the Golden Rule, honesty, faithfulness, or any other moral principle. As the saying goes, "Be good for goodness sake!" The frustration was explaining those principles.



**Victoria de la Torre**, the author of this article, is pictured above.

She is a California native who received her BA in Philosophy from the University of San Diego.

She is a Freethought Society (FS) board member and the chair of the FS Diversity Outreach Committee.

She has also been involved in a number of secular movements in Southern California organizing local parades, fundraisers, and efforts to reach out to the homeless.

It's as if I, as an atheist, am put in a position to explain basic morality. I've realized that the problem lies within the fact that some people just can't conceive of a world in which an atheist actually understands and applies morals to their marriage and parenting styles.

There were some questions, however, that were completely new to me, questions that I myself had yet to consider. For example, "Do you ever feel like an outsider among other parents?" My hope is that other parents see me as a mother just trying to do her best to raise her children. Realistically, there will be times when it will affect my son and daughter, not just me, and I'll just have to make sure that I am doing my best to raise children who are confident enough to navigate through adversity. There are sure to be summers when my children's peers will be going to Vacation Bible School, (a popular summer program here in California), or participating in the programs offered by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). My family will have to pass on BSA opportunities as they continue to ban atheist members.

After a nearly 2 hour interview, the most important question I found solace in

came at the very end: "What is the one thing you wish people would understand about your parenting?"

I wish people could understand that one can be a good parent without believing in a god. So many times I have been told by my family and friends that I'm doing a great job as a mother and homemaker (we are all just trying our best), but the very same people have also told me that atheists don't know right from wrong, let alone are capable of being good parents. These people either didn't know that I'm an atheist or just didn't connect the two.

The interview gave me something that I could not have expected: a new foundation for my marriage and children. It is almost as if every moral decision I make is a reflection of not only how I want people to view me, but atheist parents and wives in general. I cannot speak for everyone — nor would I attempt to do so — but I would love to be the person that changes a person's mind about atheism. For the longest time, so many of my theist friends and family thought that atheists could not possibly be moral, but that I, their friend and loved family member, was an exception.

But I am not an exception. I'm an example of how one can, and should, choose morals over theology; truth over wish fulfillment; and have the strength to take control and make my own decisions, rather than follow the skewed teachings of a corrupted religion. I'm confident that it is simply just a matter of time before society knows that we are moral people and accepts us as such.

The research should be published later this year and I am so happy to have been a part of it. □

# *In Recognition of the Freethought Society's 25 Year Anniversary*



**Gary Betchan**, Co-founder of EvolveFISH.com and Co-founder of Freethinkers of Colorado Springs

**Becky Hale**, President of American Humanist Association and Board Member of International Humanist and Ethical Union

*Congratulations to Margaret Downey and The Freethought Society! 25 years of stirring people to think, from Trees of Knowledge to street theater, this organization is due its recognition and accolades. The Freethought Society has often led the way, showing larger national organizations how much can be accomplished with a few dedicated folks.*

*We fondly remember bringing our EvolveFISH merchandise to a couple of your events and have enjoyed the Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center Parties as well as the Thomas Paine walking tours. Thank you, Margaret and The Freethought Society, for adding much needed levity and artistic creativity to the secular movement.*

**Robyn Blummer**  
President and CEO  
of Center for Inquiry  
and  
Executive Director of  
The Richard Dawkins  
Foundation for Reason  
and Science



*Congratulations to The Freethought Society for 25 years of promoting secularism, evidence-based thinking, and good works.*

*When there has been a need to fill, the Freethought Society has stepped in to fill it, such as by collecting stories of atheists who have faced discrimination, or exploring ways nonbelievers can commemorate important life events.*

*With the wonderful Margaret Downey leading the way with a raft of charm, creativity, and verve, The Freethought Society has made itself indispensable to the larger secular community. Thank you for all you have done and will do, and congratulations again.*

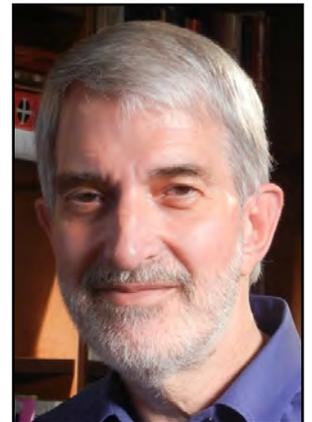


**Larry T. Decker**  
Executive Director of  
The Secular Coalition  
for America

*Congratulations to the Freethought Society on their 25 years of activism, education, and outreach. Under the leadership of the inimitable Margaret*

*Downey, the Freethought Society has become a pillar of the larger secular movement through its tireless work building a thriving secular community and educating nontheists about the rich history of freethought (not to mention how wonderful it is working with Margaret). I'm grateful for the work that the Freethought Society does and am proud to have them as a member organization of the Secular Coalition for America. If the Freethought Society's next 25 years are as successful as its first, the secular movement has a bright and very promising future ahead of us.*

**Ronald A. Lindsay**  
Former president and CEO of  
The Center for Inquiry  
Board Member of the Secular  
Coalition for America



*Congratulations to the Freethought Society on its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary! The Freethought Society has done much to advance the cause of secularism and religious liberty, especially through its vigorous efforts to protect the rights of the non-religious.*

*The Freethought Society also stands out for its creative and engaging educational programs, including its wonderful Tree of Knowledge. The dedication of its leaders and members is truly inspirational. May this be the first of many milestones for the Freethought Society!*

**Barry Lynn**  
Former Executive Director  
for Americans United for  
Separation of Church and State



*It is hard to believe that the Freethought Society is now 25 years old. Through its extraordinary staff, volunteers and the indefatigable Margaret Downey, the country has learned exactly what it has to fear.*

*The Freethought Society exposes ignorance, bigotry and hypocrisy; it insists on the full separation of church and state; it applauds critical thinking — all on the way toward building a world rooted in freedom of conscience and expression. The work that the Freethought Society does is very clever, careful and commendable. It has*

been a great honor to work with Margaret and her board during my own 25 year tenure with Americans United for Separation of Church and State.



**Andrew L. Seidel**  
Constitutional Attorney  
Director of  
Strategic Response  
Freedom From Religion  
Foundation, Inc.

*Warmest congratulations to Margaret Downey and The Freethought Society on 25 years of educating the public about nonreligious Americans and providing a vibrant community for them. The Freethought Society has done so much to raise awareness of the “nones” and to fight the stigma of being an out atheist or agnostic or heathen.*

*Here's to 25 more years with Trees of Knowledge, Thomas Paine events, suffragist education (with costumes), and battling the horrors of triskaidekaphobia.*

**David Tamayo**  
President  
Hispanic American  
Freethinkers



*An organization doesn't last 25 years without great and sincere ideals, as well as an even better board leadership.*

*The Freethought Society has served local communities and the nation at many levels, and has always been a great example to other secular organizations in the country.*

*The Freethought Society has demonstrated that it is an organization for everyone — from the young to the mature, and from the quiet to the activist. The Freethought Society has served as a home for thousands over its two and a half decades of hard work. The Freethought Society has fought for separation between government and religion, equal rights, political fairness, pro-science education and the elimination of hurtful superstitions.*

*The dedication of The Freethought Society's staff and board, under the leadership and dedication of Margaret Downey, is second to none. This is one of the many reasons the Freethought Society is one of the oldest nontheist organizations in the United States, and one of the most respected — always avoiding the unnecessary while concentrating on doing the job that is so necessary to preserve a secular nation.*

*Hispanic American Freethinkers wishes the Freethought Society another 25 years of great success. May you continue to set the highest standards of ethics and freethought which have served as an outstanding example of what a secular non-profit organization should be. For all this and much more, thank you from the bottom of our hearts.*

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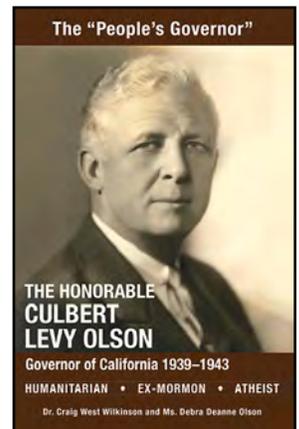
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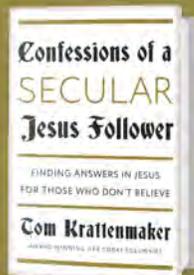
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CONVERGENT

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# How to Forgive Without Forgiving

by Byron Varvarigos

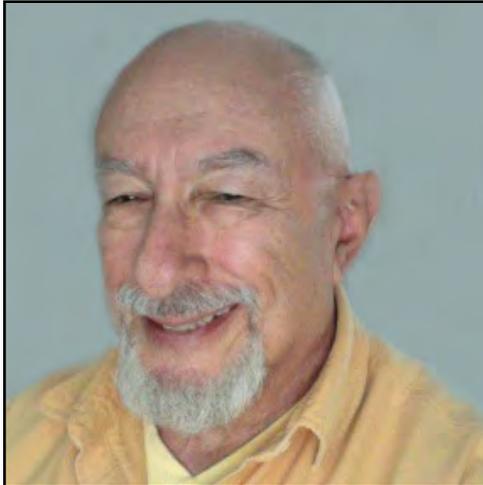
What does “forgive” mean? To cease to feel resentment against an offender, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary; to stop feeling anger or resentment toward someone for an offense, flaw or mistake, according to a slightly expanded definition, the first dictionary hit that came up when I Googled the word “forgive.” So, forgiving results in the absence of a feeling, in this case anger or resentment, (pretty much synonyms) which is a great relief!

I wondered what prevents forgiveness? Thoughts like: “they should have known better,” or “they had better choices,” or “they didn’t have to do that awful thing,” usually coupled with feeling betrayed and victimized, and often thoughts of revenge. These thoughts and feelings result from the belief that the offender or offenders were free to make other choices, that they had the power of free will.

Though free will is virtually universally, unquestionably assumed to exist, it is also virtually universally an unexamined concept, perhaps nothing more than a myth, an illusion, a mirage. Though changes in attitude and behavior are often possible, the offender could not have done anything differently than what they did, at the time. It may well look like they could have made choices other than the ones that screwed you, but please consider the following:

Our bodies and minds are constantly being conditioned in every moment and in every way since conception. “Conditioned” means the effect of any and every interaction during one’s life, whether consciously received or not. For example, all interactions with others and with our own thoughts; illnesses, changes of addresses, diet, climate, religions, political landscape, solar storms, cosmic rays, whatever. Nothing known or unknown is excluded. Our genetic inheritance and the many epigenetic and other effects of environment affect us right up to (regarding the making of any choice) the very moment of becoming conscious of our decision/action. The conditioning shapes our values as well as our intellectual, esthetic and physical aptitudes, determining the choices to which we are drawn. How could we then step out of our conditioning, we being an inseparable part of the universe, embedded in it, and are we able to act independently? Where would the wiggle-room be?

One may protest, “I’m not a puppet, I’m free to choose and free to change my mind at any time!” But any wish to change one’s mind, and whatever it is that is to be changed, and changed to, are all also results of conditioning. The mental process is not free at all; it is conditioned, particular to each person, and unpredictable to a smaller or greater extent, by others and oneself — we don’t know what our next thought will be until we are aware of it, and we don’t know



Pictured above is **Byron Varvarigos**. He was born in New York City and stopped going to church at the age of 15. He is a retired psychiatric RN and has been an avid nature photographer. After extensive reading Varvarigos recently began writing short articles on various topics regarding human nature. He has had various careers throughout his life. He identifies as agnostic and advocates for separation of religion and government.

what we’re going to do next until we do it. Whether we are religious or not makes no difference; any “divine interventions” would be part of our conditioning. The factors involved in making choices are operating mainly below conscious awareness. Sexual attraction and falling in love are obvious examples.

We feel we are free, independent individuals. But this individualistic intuition is itself the result of long cultural conditioning, which overlooks or discounts our total dependence on air, light, water, gravity, the supporting activities of society and countless life forms on our planet, perhaps the whole cosmos, all of which affect our being and frame our choices.

Also, neuroscience is showing that decisions are made subconsciously milliseconds or even seconds before the decision becomes conscious, which further invalidates the concept of free will.

Another key piece of evidence negating free will is one’s ongoing reflection on one’s own life unfolding: If we had free will, real control over what we chose, why would we not choose to

always feel happy? What advantage would there be in choosing unhappiness, a common feeling? A calm, clear mind is advantageous, so choosing a troubled mind would imply inexplicable impairment. But is a choice for any state of mind even possible? As an experiment, choose to not think of a trumpeting elephant herd for the next couple of minutes or the rest of the day.

If the reasoning here showed you that people cannot help but do what they did, then you can see that the offender was as helpless as you were, at the time of the offense, so that neither being angry nor forgiving make sense.

This doesn’t mean you should overlook the offense, if harm was done, and not take steps to protect yourself and your interests. It only means that there’s no reason to be reflexively angry with the offender — which can free you of uncomfortable emotions to deal more effectively with the offense and offender — with all appropriate remedies on the table. Understanding behavior does not free anyone from accountability for it, which means offenses could warrant punishment and/or rehabilitation for the offender.

Absence of free will also does not mean that the universe is determined. Past acts can be seen in careful hindsight to have been determined, but there is no way to know all the factors that will determine the future, and it will always be unpredictable to some degree. We’ll always feel we have choices and that the future is open, which it is — as far as we can know. Of course, the range and quality of the choices available to us may be largely determined by the quality of our present choices. □

# The Freethought Society's 2018 Four-Month Activities Calendar

## July 26

Freethought Society (FS) founder and president, **Margaret Downey** cordially invites you to a reading/dress rehearsal of her one-woman show “The Love Story of Robert Green Ingersoll and Eva Amelia Parker.”

The 35-minute presentation was created by Downey using details gleaned from the many books written about the life and work of Ingersoll, chronologies, historical letters, documents, and a little bit of added speculation. Downey will offer the first public reading of her presentation and will appreciate attendees’ suggestions and ideas for improvements. Downey seeks to perfect her performance with the use of candid feedback and helpful critiques. The formal final presentation is scheduled for Saturday, August 18, 2018 in Syracuse, New York at the celebration of the Silver Anniversary of the reopening of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum.

The reading/dress rehearsal will take place on **Thursday, July 26, 2018 at 7:00 PM** in the community room of the **Ludington Library** located at **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.**



## August 18-19

2018 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum’s reopening to the public. Celebrate the Museum — and its companion project, the Freethought Trail — at a major gala conference event on **August 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>.**

Conference registration is just **\$105** and includes lectures, presentations, coach tour, and luncheons. The Saturday banquet is an additional **\$65**. Hotel rooms are available at the **Crowne Plaza Syracuse** at the discounted conference rate of **\$119** per night (reserve sleeping rooms separately).

The Saturday, August 18 presentations will feature experts of Freethought history. Bestselling author and scholar **Susan Jacoby** will deliver the evening keynote address, “Reason Embattled in a Culture of Lies: Why Robert Ingersoll Wouldn’t Recognize Trump’s America.”

Other speakers include **Robyn Blunner, Tom Flynn, Roderick Bradford, Melinda Grube,** and many more.

On Sunday, August 19, attendees will board luxury motor coaches to visit Freethought Trail sites including The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum (Dresden), The Matilda Joslyn Gage Center (Fayetteville), The Gerrit Smith estate, (home of the philanthropist whose gifts helped fund abolition work in New York State), and the National Abolition Hall of Fame (Peterboro).

Join us to celebrate the Museum’s twenty-fifth anniversary and to explore irreplaceable sites along the Freethought Trail. Attendance is strictly limited to 150 persons, so ensure your registration today! Register at:

[https://secure.centerforinquiry.net/csh/ingersoll\\_silver](https://secure.centerforinquiry.net/csh/ingersoll_silver)

## September 26

FS and the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) invite you to an event highlighting the work of author **David N. Schwartz.**

Please plan to attend **Wednesday, September 26, 2018** when PES Leader **Hugh Taft-Morales** will interview Schwartz about his book *The Last Man Who Knew Everything*.

Schwartz holds a PhD in political science from MIT and is the author of two previous books. He has worked at the State Department Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs and at Goldman Sachs in a variety of roles in both London and New York. The Nobel Prize in Physics 1988 was awarded jointly to Schwartz’s father **Melvin Schwartz, Jack Steinberger** and **Leon M. Lederman** “for the neutrino beam method and the demonstration of the doublet structure of the leptons through the discovery of the muon neutrino.”

Schwartz’s book and speech is about the fascinating life and incredible work of **Enrico Fermi** who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1938. Attend this presentation to learn how Fermi’s work is hailed and respected by so many.

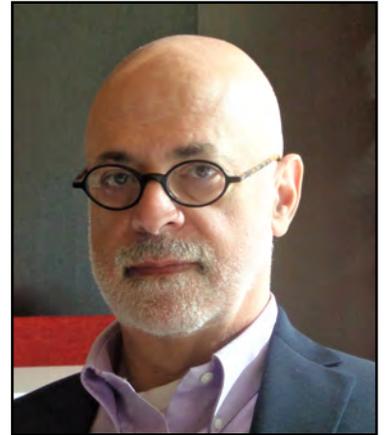
The event starts at **7:00 PM** at The Ethical Society Building located at **1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19103.**

## October 15

FS is very pleased to host **Dr. Paul Offitt** as an honored speaker on **Monday, October 15, 2018.** The meeting takes place at the **Ludington Library** located at **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania).** The meeting will start at **7:00 PM.**

Dr. Offitt’s highly informative speech is entitled, “How to Communicate Science to the Public—Or Die Trying.” Using a series of personal experiences, Dr. Offitt will discuss the challenges that scientists face in trying to communicate science to the public.

Dr. Offitt is the Director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia as well as the Maurice R. Hilleman Professor of Vaccinology and a Professor of Pediatrics at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a recipient of many awards including the J. Edmund Bradley Prize for Excellence in Pediatrics from the University of Maryland Medical School, the Young Investigator Award in Vaccine Development from the Infectious Disease Society of America, and a Research Career Development Award from the National Institutes of Health.



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/](http://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 would like to:

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( ) become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through

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Scan and email this form to: [Ezine@FtSociety.org](mailto:Ezine@FtSociety.org)

## ***Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society***

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donating money. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees are designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We assist 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](mailto: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 unique events of interest to nontheists)*

### **Sole Searching**

*(collection of athletic shoes for donation 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)*