The Freethought Society News
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Contact FS at:

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Articles on topics of interest to freethinkers are welcomed and will be considered for publication.

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Anti-Discrimination Support Network Adopted by Secular Coalition for America

Freethought Society (FS) founder and president **Margaret Downey** started the Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN) in 1993. Attorney **George Kelley** helped her create the concept shortly after she filed her 1991 discrimination complaint against the Boy Scouts of America. The goal of ADSN was to find others who were suffering discrimination, connect them to each other, provide help, and establish concrete evidence that nontheists are indeed victims of bigotry and hatred. ADSN became a committee of FS and Downey created a report form. She started distributing the forms at conferences, online, and through word of mouth.

The project was an immediate success and the ADSN committee (Downey, Kelly and **Peter Hance**) started dividing the narratives into categories. Discrimination narratives ranged from murder to families ousting sons and daughters.

The committee established a method for handling the received narratives and developed a process for finding more reported incidents. Throughout the years, not all national nontheist groups cooperated with this effort, but Downey always found a way to distribute forms and to talk to people about the database. In 1999, **Paul Kurtz** suggested that the Center For Inquiry (CFI) adopt the project. Kurtz knew that FS was struggling to fund staff and that it was becoming more difficult to process the narrative collection. His adoption offer was rejected because the FS board wanted the ADSN project to be owned by a neutral organization, dedicated to servicing the entire nontheist community. CFI remained the biggest supporter of ADSN and their staff always circulated materials to encourage participation.

When an incident is brought to the attention of ADSN, a narrative form is sent to the harmed party. When the form is received back (with signatures and an agreement to become part of the database), ADSN staff sends an acknowledgment card with offers to help find pro-bono attorneys, a connection to a confirmed *secular* volunteer psychologist/ psychiatrist, and/or an offer to be of assistance with filing a complaint with the proper relief agencies (including State Human Relations Commissions and the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission). ADSN also offers to connect a harmed person to others who have experienced the same trauma and will do so only if both parties agree to share personal contact information.

After a complaint is assigned a number and a brief database summary of the incident is recorded (no names are made public), the original documents are filed and stored in a locked file.

The ADSN database is used to provide evidence of intolerance to the United Nations Freedom of Religion or Belief Committee. Downey has attended two international conferences and achieved the title of "Expert" in representing the interests of nontheist in the United States. Her first report to the Freedom of Religion or Belief Committee in 1995 was listed in the book *Freedom of Religion and Belief – A World Report* by Professor **Kevin Boyle** and **Juliet Sheen**.

After meeting with Downey for lunch and a brainstorming session, Secular Coalition for America's (SCA) Research and Advocacy Manager, **Kelly Damerow**, reported that the ADSN project is of great value for lobbying efforts.

The database provides critically important evidence that demonstrates the need to fight for nontheist civil rights. There are many recorded cases involving bigotry as a consequence of the use of the motto "In God We Trust." SCA advocates for the discontinuation of the motto as well as the removal of the un-Constitutional 1954 wording "under God" in the United States' Pledge of Allegiance.

ADSN narratives have provide evidence for legal cases. **Michael Newdow** used the ADSN database several times to show harm done to nontheists when the government endorses and supports a belief in a God. ADSN's Amicus Brief in the 2010 case *Newdow v. John Roberts* (Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, case number 09-5126) was a great addition to the plea.

Teachers, professors, and journalists have also referred to the ADSN narrative collection in their research and reports. **Dr. Richard Dawkins** highlighted the ADSN database in his book *The God Delusion*.

Pictured above is **Michael Newdow**.

Shortly after it was published, *The God Delusion* was placed in prison libraries across the country. Consequently, ADSN heard from many incarcerated people who want to do something about the religious persecution they experienced. Some prisoners contacted ADSN simply to tell their story about how difficult it is to be a nontheist in prison. A few months ago ADSN added the "Prison Bigotry" category to the database.

On the recommendation of Damerow, SCA's Executive Director, **Edwina Rogers** contacted FS to discuss some type of information merger. Downey suggested that SCA adopt the project. When Rogers expressed interest, Downey called for a board meeting.

SCA qualifies as a national group servicing the entire nontheist community and, unlike FS, SCA has a large staff. SCA is able to designate a specialist to the project. FS's limited budget does not allow the ADSN project to grow, but SCA's large donor base will enable growth and needed financial support. SCA agreed to give FS (Downey, in particular) credit for having founded ADSN. On Saturday, November 2, 2013, the following motion was put on the table during a board meeting:

Motion

To allow the Secular Coalition for America the adoption of the Freethought Society committee, the Anti-Discrimination Support Network, beginning on January 25, 2014, with parameters for founding credit and the participation of a Freethought Society representative to act as a consultant.

The motion was seconded by board member **Sue O'Connell**. After a long discussion, all participating board members and officers voted in favor of the adoption. FS thanks officers and board members **Glen Loev**, **Carol Everhart Roper**, **Sally Flynn**, **Dan Hoffman**, **Patti Butcheck**, **Andrew Berritt**, **Greg White**, **Charlotte Carney**, **Tracy McPherson**, and **Bob Kay** for their participation.

SCA's adoption of ADSN was formally announced at the annual January nontheist leadership meeting by Rogers. Below are her comments:

Effective today, January 25, 2014, the Secular Coalition for America will officially adopt the Freethought Society's Anti-Discrimination Support Network committee.

Since 1993, the Freethought Society has collected discrimination narratives from the nontheist community. The database has served to highlight how poorly nontheists in the United States are treated. The results have been shared with the United Nations Freedom of Religion or Belief Committee.

Over the years, Margaret Downey has represented the nontheist community at international conferences of the United Nations Freedom of Religion or Belief Committee. At the 2001 Spain conference, she was honored to be designated an "Expert" in that field. Margaret will continue her involvement with the United Nations and will be of assistance to the Secular Coalition for America in filing future reports. Downey will also serve as an adviser for the continuation of the Anti-Discrimination Support Network data gathering and will be training Secular Coalition for America staff member Kelly Damerow soon.

The database has been used for many purposes and is divided into categories for easy reference. The Secular Coalition for America will continue to make the database available to the media, lobbyists, researchers, presenters, students, and interested parties. The database has provided evidence for legal cases and with the help of all national groups, SCA is sure that it will continue to useful.

As founder of the Anti-Discrimination Support Network Downey is pleased that the Secular Coalition for America has agreed to fulfill her vision, goals, and mission. Twenty-one years ago, the vision was to establish concrete evidence of discrimination cases.

The goals are to end negative stereotyping by the telling of stories involving incidents of discrimination in the workplace, within the government, community, schools, media, military, prisons and in families dynamics.

The mission will continue to be helping those affected by unfounded prejudices and to educate the public.

Damerow jumped right into the project and has already created an online narrative form to report incidents of discrimination. When a person fills in the information boxes, the data uploads automatically into an Excel spreadsheet. Updating of the database is automatic, but will remain private and completely confidential.

The responses are only shared with those personally invited to the spreadsheet. All those directly working with the database will always have access to the most current information. There is immediate acknowledgment of a submission, which includes the following text:

Thank you for sharing your story. Your response has been recorded. Discrimination of any sort is reprehensible. We may never know how many jobs were lost, how many families were broken, how many lives were ruined by disguised discrimination. Thanks for helping shine light on these issues. For more information, call 202-299-1091 or email ADSN@secular.org.

SCA will still follow up if the person/persons filling out the form indicates a need to do so. Submissions are also automatically time-stamped. The forms will remain available in print for those who prefer reporting that way. The form is also available as a PDF to be emailed as an attachment. Damerow created the email ADSN@secular.org for easy contact with SCA.

SCA is coordinating with Recovering from Religion because of its connection to many *secular* therapists. Recovering from Religion is an excellent resource for those who submit a narrative report form. The link to the new ADSN database is:

http://secular.org/content/discrimination

The collection of negative statements made against the nontheist community by the those in the media continues under the direction of SCA. When a journalist, celebrity, newscaster or politician is found to have made derogatory statements, SCA will demand a retraction.

FS is sure that the ADSN project will flourish and grow in the care, custody, and control of SCA. Stated Downey:

"The adoption of ADSN by SCA is a positive move and I am proud to be working with Damerow and Rogers. Together, we will educate the public, media and politicians about the harm nontheists suffer due to negative stereotyping. Recording incidents of discrimination provides data and evidence that will help us end unfair treatment of nontheists in the United States. The future is bright as we continue to record and address incidents of discrimination." □

Pictured above are **Kelly Damerow** (left) and **Edwina Rogers**.

Free to Rock n' Roll

by Dan Arel

I would say I was raised in a typical American fashion. Born into a Christian family, given a biblical name, and taken to church often. My mom even worked for our church. I was a part of youth group and I was involved with my church's own version of the Boy Scouts. I loved the church, I loved God. I even have very early memories of standing on my grandparents' fireplace stoop to preach to them. I was young, but I thought I knew my calling. I was so inspired by the pastors standing in front of the congregation and watching all the people dancing around and singing. We were Pentecostal, so we were inspired and amazed by those who could speak in "tongues."

The home I grew up in was very religious, but not completely closed-minded. I was raised to respect everyone, not to judge anyone based on sexual orientation, race, gender, etc. I was never taught that homosexuality is a sin, so when I heard many religious people saying "Hate the sin. Love the sinner," I had one major question: Why would being in love be a sin?

Church was a staple for us, we went every Sunday, often for the morning and evening service. We also went to every special Wednesday night service. I was surrounded by religion. God was a part of my everyday life and for many years, I didn't question anything.

Looking back, I saw some major red flags. At the time, they were not so obvious. I remember watching a video about the dangers of rock n' roll. As an example of the dangers of rock n' roll, they played music backwards. This was done to prove that all the songs were about worshipping Satan! I recall mentioning to my youth group that I liked the band AC/DC. I got a long lecture about the devil. I was given cassettes of Christian rock bands like Petra, and for far too many years of my life this was the only hard rock I was allowed to listen to.

I was a member of the Royal Rangers, a Boy Scout-like Christian group. If you can imagine the Boy Scouts being even more religious, this was the Royal Rangers. Questioning belief and biblical claims at any Royal Rangers meeting was not allowed. The Bible did not leave us with questions, only answers.

Fortunately, I grew up in a home in which the asking of questions was encouraged. I was allowed to question any faith-based claim I wanted and I would be provided an answer. This is not to say I was given the supposedly right answer. I may have just been given the religious answer that further enforced a faith position.

I also have a memory from when I was a student in my fourth-grade class at a Christian school — the now defunct Southeast New Hampshire Christian Academy — when we watched a video about science. The teacher would fast-forward through parts about Pangea and evolution. We were told that each was a "disproven" idea. I was taught to believe in a literal six-day creation "truth." That was the school's priority.

I can say that I was a typical teenager. At around age 12, God or not, I didn't want to go to church. I wanted to hang out with my friends, and I asked my parents if I could stay home. To my surprise, they obliged. I did not, at this point, question God or my faith. I would even admit I didn't know you had a choice to not believe in God. I thought you had two choices, God or Satan. Looking back, it seems silly to have no idea that there were people who didn't believe in God.

I spent my entire youth under the teachings that God created everything. How was I to know otherwise? I actually knew almost nothing about other religions.

Going to a public high school in a small town in New Hampshire didn't help much. Not a single class in all four years ever mentioned the name **Charles Darwin**. His name was not mentioned in a history class and not even in my biology class. We were not taught anything about the origins or diversity of life. It was just not mentioned! So through most of my early high school years, the only story I knew was what my church and my Christian private school had told me.

Around age 14 or 15, I had a newer group of high school friends who were into going to church. I did not often join them for Sunday services, but I would go to youth group functions. Those events often involving ice hockey games and bowling.

I remember these group outings because this is when I first questioned my faith. Before any of these outings, there would always be a small service. Often a cool and hip young pastor would "rap" with the kids about the dangers of music and the devil. Each service would end with people coming forward to be saved. We were, of course, encouraged to bring friends so they could be saved, too. On one particular night, the pastor wanted to save people who felt they had fallen away from the church. I felt that he was talking to me. I didn't think much about God or religion, so maybe I needed to be re-saved to secure my place in heaven. I walked up to the front of the service with 20 other kids and we started to pray. The pastor kept saying we would feel God enter our bodies. People around us were jolting and crying and some were speaking in tongues. I felt nothing. I tried so hard to feel something, but it just didn't happen. We left the church, watched hockey, then I went home. The un-moved feeling stuck with me.

Though I remembered this feeling, it had no immediate effect on me, but it was something that would come back later. Looking back now, it is easy to think this is where I lost my faith. At the time, I just felt rejected by God.

I had decided not to care about things like music when it came to being a Christian. I purchased a lot of Goth and heavy-metal music. I enjoyed listening to this music even through the bands played up the satanic image. I started to become angry at God, and was looking to turn against him. I honestly don't remember how much the music context brought out this anger, but I wanted to blame my frustration on God. I do remember lyrics from bands like **Marilyn Manson** that seemed to reference the existence of God but painted him as an evil figure, but even then I knew these

bands were acts. The lyrics, however, seemed to have some type of effect on me.

I also experimented with being a rebellious child and adopted Satanism. It lasted only a few weeks, and I even purchased *The Satanic Bible* by **Anton LaVey**. I read it cover to cover. I was shocked. Satanists don't believe in God *or* Satan! I never became a Satanist by any means, because after the first few chapters in the book it was clear that Satanism was not for me. The self-centered attitude just didn't fit with my worldview.

Around this time, I read part of **L. Ron Hubbard**'s *Dianetics*. I found that the concept just too silly for me. It was more than obvious I was reading science fiction nonsense and, coupled with what I had read about Satanism, things started to fall into place.

While I was not satisfied at all with Scientology or the Satanist "religion," they had one life changing effect on me — they made me think back to youth group and to the empty feelings during prayer times. My readings made me realize one important thing — I didn't believe in God at all! It made perfect sense, I was not angry at God, there simply is no such thing as a God. Furthermore, if one religion is so easy to discard as a myth, aren't they all that easy to discard? It turns out, they are.

It was not until after high school when I really started to be combative about my beliefs, or lack there of. I started to engage others in conversation and started to form my arguments for disbelief. My brother had "found God" around this time and we debated the subject for hours. I would not call my side of the debate "advocacy" of any sort, but that did surface later.

I rejected the word "atheism" for a long time. The word had negative connotations and I felt it was a religion in itself. I had only been told these stories from people who learned I did not believe and I had no atheist adults to fall back on for guidance. So I rejected the term until later in life when a friend introduced me to the writings of some great active atheists such as **Christopher Hitchens** and **Dr. Richard Dawkins**. I watched videos and read books, looked up websites for local and national groups, and realized I had a community of people waiting for me. It was then I became an outspoken, unapologetic activist for reason and equality. I felt like I did as a child standing on the fireplace hearth — I had found a calling of sorts.

I started my own blog. I also ranted against religion on Facebook and Twitter. Finally, after building up a bit of a portfolio of blog posts, I showed people what I had written and told them about my goals. I was fortunate to meet **Emily Dietle**, who invited me to blog as a contributor to her awesome website called *Emily Has Books*.

Once I started sharing my stories and my views, things took off for me. I was quickly offered a writing position at Examiner.com to cover humanist news. I stayed with Examiner.com for about six months. I was then offered a the position of "Contributing Writer" at the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. Since then I have expanded to writing for the *American Atheist* magazine and I have a blog at *The Huffington Post*.

I am so excited to have a platform to discuss atheism, secularism and social justice issues. Being honest with myself and discovering who I am has allowed me to find my place in this world and do what I can to make things better for everyone.

My coming out as an atheist helped to open the door for the rest of my family. I was the first of my three siblings to state "I am an atheist." My brother, who up until this point was a very devout Christian — actually even borderline "fundamentalist" — started to question his faith. His questions led him to finally rejecting the idea of a God. His wife followed and together they have rejected religion. My two sisters both felt comfortable saying that they, too, are atheists. The biggest surprise, however, was when my own father openly posted on Facebook that he despises religion and that he sees no reason to believe in any sort of God.

My mother, as far as I know, continues to hold onto her faith. It is not something she will discuss, but I am encouraged by fact that she often reminds me how proud she is of me. She is happy that I am doing what I love and she has even shared my articles on Facebook, letting her friends know about my activities.

Dan Arel is a freelance journalist who writes for American Atheists, The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science and for *The Huffington Post*. His book, *Parenting Without God* is due for publication in late 2014.

I am a proud atheist and an "anti-theist." I do not shy away from discussing my atheism, love of science, humanism, and my desire to educate the world. I hope others will continue to join in the fight to rid the world of bigotry, hatred, and violence brought forth by religion.

I share my story with the *Freethought Society News* because I'm sure it is a common journey thread throughout the country. Perhaps someone will read this article and relate to my words and expressed feelings. Maybe they will realize that there are other options and that they are not alone. There is another way to live your life. It is truly a much happier and more fulfilling life when a person is freed from the constraints and superstitions of religious beliefs. I am an example of that better and happier life. □

Beyond the Golden Globes Red Carpet

by Margaret Downey

Climatologists rarely agree on how to predict winter storms, but one thing was certain for the 2013/2014 season — El Nino conditions would create a very wet situation on the East coast. Depending on the path of cold air blasts (northernly, centrally or southernly), the East coast was likely be covered in snow, drenched in rain, or under a layer of ice most of the winter. I have many family members who live in Southern California, so I decided to spend the predicted wet winter in Newport Beach, California. The extended stay in California provided me with many opportunities to accept invitations to local nontheist events and activist efforts. And only in California could I attend a star-studded Hollywood awards event — to counter-protest messages of hate promoted by the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC).

WBC is a cult led by **Fred Phelps** who is, by all accounts a religious nut and a bigot. The home base for WBC is located in Topeka, Kansas, but church members travel across the country protesting at churches that are deemed by Phelps as not Christian enough. They also protest at military funerals because soldiers are defending freedoms and in doing so give equality to gays.

Phelps also selects many other protest venues, never failing to amaze citizens with his convoluted reasoning for the need to attract attention to his anti-gay belief system. Phelps is convinced that only he and his followers can warn everyone that God's wrath is coming down on America because the gay community is being accommodated, respected, and defended. Did I say he was a religious nut?

I have always advocated equal rights for the gay community but have never counter protested WBC. Since I was already in California and in Beverly Hills the day WBC planned to protest the Golden Globe Awards, I arranged to be involved in a prearranged counter-protest around the corner from the famous Beverly Hilton Hotel. The counter-protest was organized by **Damien AtHope** (Yes, that is his last name.), who is the founder of the Meetup group Humanism, Atheism, Rationality and Philosophy (HARP). HARP supplied the signs. All I had to do was show up and find a place to stand.

When I arrived at the Beverly Hills location, I spotted an open space facing the street. There was a well-dressed man standing next to the open space in front of a steel barrier put up by the Beverly Hills police. I could not see his sign until I claimed the spot. He was a WBC supporter! His sign was X-rated and his message was hateful. I instantly realized that I had a "Golden" opportunity to talk to him one-on-one if only I could script my words carefully.

I began by introducing myself. I asked him questions using my soft and friendly voice. I attempted to draw from him the exact reasons why he was there, what he wanted to achieve and how he came to his conclusions. He talked to me for quite a while. Eventually, he stopped talking because he must have heard himself saying terrible things about the gay community. I was there to "counter" so I used my time to tell him why I think so differently than he.

After about 45 minutes, he said, "I can't talk to you anymore. You are a witch sent to me by God to test my commitment to this cause."

I told him that his thinking made no sense and that I was there because I chose to be involved in stopping prejudices against the gay community. As a representative of the nontheist community, my goal is to dispel myths and superstitions, so I talked about the natural world and what he and I might have in common, what we as humans value in life, and why everyone should be treated with respect and kindness. He listened and looked deeply into my eyes at times, but he would turn away when he realized that I was having an effect on him. I remained very calm and sweet. Frankly, it was difficult to be tolerant of intolerance. I could have received a Golden Globe award for my performance that day!

As I turned to leave towards the end of the afternoon, my friend **Christine Jones** asked if she could take a photo. I was shocked when the man turned and said, "Sure."

After the photo was taken, I tried to give him my Freethought Society business card. He waved it away and said, "I can't touch your sinful information."

I said, "You may change your mind, Amir, after you think about what we discussed today." I tucked my card between his fingers and his sign and said, "Have a good life, Amir. It is your one and only."

I doubt if I will ever see or hear from Amir, but I did the best job I could to open his heart and mind to the morality of acceptance and understanding. I am a friend of **Nathan Phelps**, who is the son of Fred Phelps. If he could become an atheist and reject his father's prejudices and indoctrination, anyone can. □

Nontheist Tide Rises on California Coastline

by Margaret Downey

While escaping from inclement East Coast winter weather was one reason I spent three months in California, the other reason was that I accepted speaking engagements for the months of January and February 2014 even before packing my luggage.

In January 2014 my speech topic was "Exploring the Freethought Trail." The presentation was co-created by the Executive Director of the Center for Inquiry, **Tom Flynn**. He is also an expert in the American freethought movement and is the director of the **Robert Green Ingersoll** Birthplace Museum. Flynn and I were not sure how well it would be received on the West Coast since the Freethought Trail is located in upstate New York, but we discovered that audience members really enjoyed hearing about 19th century freethinkers. The presentation is also comprised of many interesting bits of trivia, which amused and entertained attendees.

The January presentation was sponsored by the Backyard Skeptics, which is a group that meets in and around the Southern California area. My speech took place in Villa Park. The host was **Bruce Gleason**. He is a well-know local activist and president of Backyard Skeptics and a also a good friend. Gleason is an Internet and video genius. He live-streamed my presentation. **Christine Jones** watched from Vietnam and several friends from Pennsylvania stayed up late to view it. It was exciting to know that the speech could be enjoyed in so many places at once.

On February 15, 2014, I spoke at the San Diego Humanist Association's state conference, "The Heart of Humanism." My speech was entitled, "Actions Speak Louder Than Words." The subject of altruism has always interested me so I enjoyed researching various reasons why people do good deeds.

During my presentation, I reported on current scientific studies and recommended enjoyable books about the subject. I also highlighted many community projects around the country that nontheist groups conduct in the name of "good." I was proud to detail past and current FS projects, such as clothing and shoe drives for the homeless, providing solar cookers for Haitian freethinkers to use as teaching tools, and the Helping Hands Committee, which provides assistance to struggling seniors.

Pictured right are (front row, left to right) me, **Jennifer Kalmanson**, (back row, left to right) **Maggie Ardiente**, and **Jason Frye**.

Ardiente spoke about the work the American Humanist Association is doing to raise awareness about discrimination against the nontheist community both abroad and locally.

Kalmanson spoke about ethics and humanism in business practices. She highlighted the human services of large corporations and educated us all about ethical treatment of the work force.

Frye was the conference coordinator. The photo was taken on Friday, February 14, at the pre-conference event where my friend **Steve Hill** entertained the crowd by showing the film *Contradiction*. In *Contradiction*, **Jeremiah Camara**, (also the author of the book *Holy Lockdown*) travels around the country examining the saturation of churches in the midst of dependency and powerlessness. Camara seeks to find out if there is a connection between high-praise and low-productivity. It is a well-made documentary that should be seen all around the country.

Hill showed the film again the next day and it was well-received by those who had missed the pre-conference event. Hill also spoke in the afternoon of the conference and performed comedy Saturday night. I am proud to call Hill my friend and highly recommend him to other groups looking for speakers who can bring in a wide variety of presentation.

On February 26, 2014, I spoke at "Cafe Inquiry" a regular event sponsored by the Center for Inquiry-West. I was thrilled when my cousin, **James Ortiz**, arrived to hear "Exploring the Freethought Trail." He is pictured above with me.

Even though we have kept in touch most of our lives, my cousin has never been able to attend one of my speeches. I am proud of this particular speech and I had improved it even more since delivering it to the Backyard Skeptics in January. Ortiz worked my slide show, so the presentation turned into a family affair.

Many attendees that night expressed interest in traveling to Freethought Trail events being planned for August 15-17, 2014. Please watch for more announcements in this newsletter. □

Attending a Sunday Assembly in California

by Margaret Downey

For more than a year, I have been hearing many good things about a new type of atheist gathering that originated in England. The Sunday Assembly is a godless congregation bringing people together who simply want to celebrate life. The Sunday Assembly motto is to "live better, help often, and wonder more." The mission is to "help interested people find and fulfill their full potential."

When I heard that comedian **Ian Harris** would be the Master of Ceremonies at the Los Angles Sunday Assembly and that **Sean Faircloth** was the scheduled speaker, I just *had* to attend.

The free and open-to-the-public event lived up to all the hype. The Sunday Assembly was inspiring and thought-provoking. I got many ideas and met some wonderful people. I was amazed to find that I knew very few people there. Of the 400 people in attendance, I recognized only about 50. The new and young faces proved to me that the Sunday Assembly concept was not only needed, it was truly going to bring nontheist people together!

The Sunday Assembly may be the most effective way to outreach to the quickly growing numbers of non-affiliated and nonreligious people across the country. In October 2012, a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study found that one in five Americans (19.3%) claim no religious identity. These are the "freethinkers" we want to connect with and welcome into the community of reason.

At the January 13, 2014 Sunday Assembly, I enjoyed a live music presentation, a sing-along, Faircloth's speech, the sharing of a few on-stage journey stories, a poetry reading, and social activities geared to encourage interaction. Food and drinks were served and an overall feeling of community prevailed.

I interviewed a few people to get a view of what motivated them to attend and to find out if the event lived up to their expectations. All the people I interviewed were happy and completely satisfied with the experience. My wondering if this type of event would go over well in the Philadelphia area was answered when I received the below commentary from **LeeAnne Randmaa,** a women I asked to send me her additional thoughts:

As you may recall from our conversation at the Sunday Assembly, I was raised an atheist. I went to church with many childhood friends. I always found it interesting, and even won a "Look-Up Bible Verses" race in Sunday school. I won even though I had never read the Bible!

Attending church made me feel gross and yucky. I always felt sick to my stomach — like I was going to throw up from eating something with too much sugar. It was because I knew they were all acting completely fake. Children know when someone is not being honest.

Today, the Master of Ceremonies said something that really struck home. He was talking about his daughter. She said it was silly that her friends believed in God, but didn't believe in Santa Claus because — well, at least we had evidence for Santa Claus. I could relate! I recalled that I was surprised as a child when I and my friends found out there was no Santa Claus, but everyone around me still kept believing in a God. I thought it was obvious God was a myth, just like Santa Claus! Both, it seemed to me, were made up to keep children from misbehaving. This concept confused me. It was irrational, I thought, for my friends and and almost all the adults around me to believe in God. The entire God concept was harder to grasp than the notion that there is no such thing as a Santa Claus! Well, this still confuses me to this very day.

When I find myself channel surfing and happen across a religious channel, I watch in abhorrent amazement for a moment or two. It's like not being able to avert my eyes away from a devastating car accident as human beings become horribly disfigured and possibly die. The morbid curiosity is too much to overcome, so I must watch for a few minutes. As I watch, I become saddened by the massive auditorium of lost 'souls.' I feel almost as sad for them as I feel for the poor children in starving countries, or the pets that are being deprived of proper care in those commercials, that really tug at your heart. Then I feel nauseated, and can't wait to change the channel.

Today, at Sunday Assembly, I felt wonderful. It was so free of dishonesty. So full of positive energy. I felt relaxed and at home with so many people, some of whom I had not even met yet. They were just like me! They were not phony and irrational.

I look forward to meeting many more Sunday Assembly attendees in the future. It was a wonderful experience and more events are being planned. The music was absolutely terrific. It was fun to sing with everyone. The Master of Ceremonies was a great speaker as well. He was a hilarious story teller. It was also exciting to see such a packed house. Actually, I would have liked the Sunday Assembly to last longer!

Pictured above are Sunday Assembly attendees **Diane Freeman**, **LeeAnnne Randmaa** and **Veronica Swarens**.

I am hopeful that volunteers in Philadelphia will want to organize and implement a Sunday Assembly. Please visit the Sunday Assembly website to learn details:

www.sundayassembly.org

The Wisdom of a Life Well-Lived

by Margaret Downey

Dr. William A. Wisdom ("Bill" to his friends) served on the Freethought Society (FS) board of directors for two terms before retiring from his duties in 2010. Even though he left the board, Bill stayed involved with FS, supporting the projects he loved and attending as many meetings as possible.

Bill died on December 15, 2013 at age 78. He was also a member of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking.

Bill was born on February 5, 1935 in Haverford, Pennsylvania to the late **Joseph Peyton Wisdom** and **Esther Asbury Wisdom**. He was married 29 years to **Frances Wisdom** (Fritzi to her friends).

Bill graduated valedictorian of his class in Haverford High School in 1952. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Classics at Wesleyan University, and went on to earn his Master of Arts in Philosophy from Bryn Mawr College and Ph.D in Philosophy at New York University.

Bill worked in the Philosophy department at Temple University from 1964 until his retirement in 1997. He was a specialist in formal logic. Bill co-authored the textbook *Deductive Logic* (Allyn and Bacon, 1972) with **Hughes Leblanc**. Bill taught "Deductive Logic" at the introductory, intermediate and advanced levels. He also taught "Modal Logic." He was a Director of Graduate Studies from 1986-89 and served on many committees in the College of Liberal Arts at Temple University.

In his retirement, Bill enjoyed writing stories about his life and his skeptical point of view. His writings can be found at:

http://www.unconventional-wisdom.com/WAW/

One of my favorite memories of Bill is when he and Fritzi entertained picnic attendees with an Old Time music concert. They made a wonderful duo, with Bill playing the banjo and Fritzi playing the fiddle. They often performed for friends and family.

Bill is preceded in death by his son, **Robert Wisdom**. He is survived by his wife and her three children.

When Bill's obituary was printed, I was so taken to see that Fritzi wrote, "In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that contributions go to the Freethought Society." FS received $120 in donations to honor Bill's memory. He was very generous in his lifetime and I will never forget when he won a bidding war for a hotel Bible signed by Penn and Teller. Bill donated $500 for the book and we often giggled about the inscription. Penn had written "Fuck God," and Teller wrote, "That's no fun. Fuck something real!"

Bill had a great sense of humor and I'm sure he liked to show off that Bible often.

Another precious memory I have of Bill is when he asked me to update his look. He had just volunteered to join the Anti-Discrimination Support Network's (ADSN) "Teaching Tolerance" program and wanted to get some new clothes for the anticipated classes.

I took Bill to Syms clothing store and together we made a film about how to update a wardrobe. The film was named "The Wisdom of New Clothes." We had a great time purchasing new slacks, blazers, a mock turtle neck, several ties, and new button-down dress shirts. He also purchased new glasses and took my advice about a new hair style. Bill was absolutely dapper when we started our ADSN outreach. But I was always proud of Bill.

The FS *Tree of Knowledge* was important to Bill. He attended every Chester County *Tree of Knowledge* event we hosted, even when the weather was close to freezing. He was upset and dismayed when the Chester County Commissioners banned *The Tree of Knowledge* in 2010. Bill stood with us to form a "Human *Tree of Knowledge*" in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

I was not the only one at FS who thought highly of Bill. Below are comments from others:

Bill Wisdom was one of the first Freethought Society people I met when I joined and started attending meetings. He made me feel welcome from the very beginning and I always looked forward to hearing his interesting comments and opinions. He will be greatly missed by all of us.
Sally Flynn

So sorry to hear the news of Bill's death. Bill was a really nice, friendly, and well-spoken gentleman. He gave a fascinating presentation on logic at one of the first Freethought Society meetings I attended. He will be missed.
Glen Loev

In December of 2011, I was Bill Wisdom's guest speaker at an event in his retirement community. I will always remember Bill as being active, involved, and passionate about educational and philosophical excellence. He was very sweet, and always had a smile on his face. I am glad I got to see him in 2011. I will always remember him.
Janice Rael

Bill was a very "cool" guy. I enjoyed the few conversations I had with both Bill and his wife, Fritzi at The Tree of Knowledge *events.*
Carol Everhart Roper

Yes, Bill was a cool guy. He touched many people with his kindness, intelligence, devotion, principles, generosity and "wisdom." I will miss him, too. □

"Roy Zimmerman simultaneously inspires me and makes me laugh my ass off." - Paul Krassner

roy Zimmerman

Ethical Society of Philadelphia
1906 S. Rittenhouse Square
Wednesday, April 16 - 7:30 pm
$18 general / $15 students, seniors

funny songs about peace and justice

The Freethought Society's 2014 Three-Month Activities Calendar

March 25

The Freethought Society (FS) is pleased to host Temple University professor **Berton Caine** as a speaker on **Tuesday, March 25**, **2014**, at **7:00 PM**. His presentation "Separation of Religion and State — A Fading Constitutional Dream," will take place at the **Ludington Library** in the large meeting room located on the main level. The library address is **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue**, **Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania**. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

The first clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution provides that government "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The Supreme Court, in its first decision on the subject, interpreted this to impose "a wall of separation" between religion and state, prohibiting government from giving even one cent to, or for the benefit of, religion. The Court quoted Jefferson that doing so would even be "sinful." In a series of baffling formulas, the Court has since effectively abandoned the Wall and the result is often that majority religions win and minorities lose. Caine will examine these serious Constitutional violations and how they affect the nontheist community.

April 17

FS and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia are proud to co-host satirical songwriter **Roy Zimmerman** on **Wednesday**, **April 16, 2014** at **7:30 PM**. The performance takes place at the Ethical Society Building, located at **1906 South Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia**. General admission is $18. Students and seniors pay only $15. Don't miss Zimmerman's "Blue Dot Tour" and an opportunity to purchase his wonderful CDs.

Zimmerman tours almost constantly, taking his funny songs about fracking, creationism, guns, marijuana laws, government shut-downs, same-sex marriage, taxes, and abstinence across the country, often playing in some of the least progressive places in America for the most progressive people there. Zimmerman calls them the "Blue Dots."

The "Blue Dot Tour" show is 90 minutes of funny songs such as, *The Faucet's on Fire!* and *I Want a Marriage Like They Had In the Bible*. His songs have been heard on HBO and Showtime. Zimmerman has recorded for Warner/Reprise Records and has been profiled on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*. Zimmerman's YouTube videos have amassed over seven million views, and he is a featured blogger for *The Huffington Post*.

April 29

FS is proud to host freelance science journalist **Faye Flam** on **Tuesday, April 29** at **7:00 PM**. Her presentation, "Writing on Sex, Evolution, and Climate Change — Why a Secular View Matters," will take place at the **Ludington Library** in the large meeting room located on the main level. The library address is **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue**, **Bryn Mawr**, **Pennsylvania**. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

Flam teaches science writing at Ursinus College and also hold the respected position of "Writer-in-Residence." She has written for WHYY/NewsWorks, *The Washington Post*, *Science*, *The Economist*, *Science News* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. She was recently awarded the National Center for Science Education's "Friend of Darwin Award" for her *Philadelphia Inquirer* column "Planet of the Apes." Flam also works as a critic for the Knight Science Journalism Tracker.

May 8

FS is pleased to host **Maggie Ardiente**, who is the Director of Development and Communications for the American Humanist Association (AHA), as a speaker on **Thursday, May 8, 2014** at **7:00 PM**. This free and open-to-the-public event will take place at the **Ludington Library** in the large meeting room located on the main level. The library address is **5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania**. A SEPTA stop is located across the street from the library.

Ardiente's presentation, "Nontheist Discrimination: How Atheists and Humanists Are Mistreated in the United States and Around the World," will highlight stories of individuals, both in the United States and globally, whose lives were affected by discrimination for identifying themselves living "without god." She will provide an update about what AHA is doing at the national level to end negative stereotyping against nontheists.

Ardiente's presentation has been getting rave reviews across the nation and includes a PowerPoint slide show. She will also be available to answer questions from the audience regarding the AHA annual conference that will be taking place in Philadelphia June 6-8, 2014.

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 newsletter 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 and New Jersey. FS activities and services depend on the financial contributions of 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 of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):
$30 Individual Supporter **$35** 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** $_____(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 email a complimentary newsletter to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS newsletter.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Use this same form to bid on the use of the FS St. Croix Cottage.

FS's cottage in St. Croix is available for use the 11th week of each year. In 2015, the week offered will be March 14-21 (Saturday-Saturday). The yearly maintenance fee for the beachside cottage at Chenay Bay Beach Resort is $950.

The lowest bid FS can accept must meet that cost.

The bid is for a one-week stay in cottage number 6 and does not include travel, rental car or food expenses. If you are interested in placing a bid for the use of this property, please return this form to the address below:

Freethought Society
St. Croix Cottage
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Email a bid to:

http://bit.ly/17p4FfK

For additional information see:

http://bit.ly/1dYwjVN