The Freethought Society News

Logo and website banner contest details inside. Submissions sought. See page 13.

May/June 2010 Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 4
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Purchase Hepburn stamps and mail a letter to Carter!

by Margaret Downey

This is a Freethought Society (FS) action alert urging nontheists around the country to visit local post offices to purchase **Katharine Hepburn** stamps. It was no coincidence that the Hepburn stamp was released to the public on May 12. Hepburn was born in Hartford, Connecticut on that day in 1907.

This call to purchase Hepburn stamps is not only to honor the memory of a great actress, but to also celebrate the fact that she was an atheist. In the October 1991 edition of the *Ladies Home Journal*, Hepburn stated:

> *I'm an atheist and that's that. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other, and do what we can for other people.*

Hepburn learned at an early age that actions were much better than prayer. She was the daughter of suffragist and birth control advocate **Katharine Martha Houghton**. Houghton worked closely with **Margaret Sanger**, the founder of an organization that later became Planned Parenthood.

Hepburn attended Bryn Mawr College which has a long history of encouraging freedom of thought. Suffragist **Martha Carey Thomas** was the second president of Bryn Mawr College and the first female dean in the United States.

With all this exposure to strong female role models and heroines of freethought, it's no surprise that Hepburn had no fear of controversy. She shocked many people by wearing comfortable slacks both in public and in her studio workplace. She excelled in golf which at the time was considered a masculine sport. She also spoke her mind about social issues concerning a woman's right to choose, separation of church and state, and religion. In her 1973 interview on *The **Dick Cavett** Show* Hepburn stated that, although she agreed with Christian principles and thought highly of **Jesus Christ**, she did not believe in religion or in "The Afterlife."

Hepburn's legacy is her afterlife. Her image, captured on film, continues to entertain people around the world.

The release of the Hepburn stamp will jump start a letter-writing campaign to urge former **President Jimmy E. Carter, Jr.** to disassociate himself from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Mr. Carter is a member of BSA's Advisory Board. His address was circulated through the Internet via email and Facebook.

Many nontheist organizations around the country are promoting the letter writing campaign. FS suggests that letters to Mr. Carter be graced with the Hepburn stamp as a reminder that nontheists contribute to society in meaningful ways and should not be discriminated against.

This "old-fashioned" letter-writing campaign is an effort to expose prejudices, negative stereotyping and blatant disrespect of the nontheist community at the hands of BSA. Ending discrimination against atheists would be a fitting tribute to Hepburn's legacy.

After six decades of involvement with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), in 2000 Mr. Carter severed ties with that organization. Mr. Carter stated that SBC's doctrines did not align with his Christian beliefs. However, at that time he continued his affiliation with the Maranatha Baptists in Plains, Georgia.

In July 2009, Mr. Carter issued a position paper indicting all organized religions for their discriminatory treatment of women. With the issuance of his position paper Mr. Carter also disassociated himself from his denominational affiliation, saying:

> *Women and girls have been discriminated against for too long in a twisted interpretation of the word of God.*

The time is right for Mr. Carter to hear more about the bigoted membership policies of BSA and how society is negatively affected. Please write to urge Mr. Carter to disaffiliate himself from BSA, just as he did with SBC and the Maranatha Baptists. Surely, Mr. Carter does not want his reputation of inclusion and kindness to be tarnished by his affiliation with BSA. Mail letters to Mr. Carter at:

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

Thank you in advance for taking the time to add your voice to this protest. Please send a copy of your letter to FS. Letters will be reprinted in future FS newsletters to inspire others to write. The letter writing campaign will continue until Mr. Carter is convinced that disassociating himself from BSA is the correct moral and ethical decision. ◘

Date Set for BSA's Philadelphia Eviction Trial

by Timothy Cwiek

On June 14, 2010 a federal jury trial is scheduled to begin at the U.S. Courthouse in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The trial decision could result in the eviction of the Boy Scouts of America's Cradle of Liberty Council (BSACLC) from a city-owned building. The eviction trial is believed to be the first of its kind in the country.

BSACLC, which claims to serve 87,000 youths in Philadelphia, Montgomery and Delaware counties, has been headquartered in a city-owned building since 1928.

The building is located at 231-251 North 22nd Street in Center City Philadelphia. Philadelphia anti-discrimination statutes are intended to protect citizens from discrimination in city-owned buildings. Protection is extended to members of the transgender community, nontheists, gays, people with disabilities (including those with AIDS), and females.

Before the BSA's declaration that they are a private organization (a stance taken in the U. S. Supreme Court case of *Dale v. Boy Scouts of America* in order to win the decision), Freethought Society President **Margaret Downey** filed a nontheist discrimination complaint with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission (PAHRC) against BSA. Her case took nine years to grind through the PAHRC (1991-2000) bureaucracy. Once BSA's profile changed from an open-to-the-public youth organization to a private organization, Downey's case was dismissed. The U. S. Supreme Court's acknowledgment that BSA can set their own membership standards cleared the way for BSA to impose restrictive membership criteria around the country.

While BSA can rightfully restrict membership, the City of Philadelphia is not obligated to allow BSA free use of any property or services — especially in consideration of the City's anti-discrimination statutes.

After many years of legal wrangling, the focus of the City of Philadelphia has shifted to removing BSACLC out of the city-owned building. The Scouts, however, are fighting the eviction by pursuing a lawsuit in Federal Court.

A simple solution is for BSACLC to pay fair-market rent, ending the entanglement problem with the City and the now private Boy Scouts of America (BSA). BSACLC, however, refuses to pay fair-market rent.

BSA claims they're being singled out for "punishment" by the City of Philadelphia simply for pursuing their First Amendment right to exclude certain people from membership. U.S. District Judge **Ronald L. Buckwalter** (a former Scouts official) is handling the case.

During the past two years, Judge Buckwalter has issued several rulings favorable to the Scouts — including a requirement that BSACLC need only to post a $1 nominal bond to protect the City's interests during the pendency of the lawsuit.

In April 2010, Judge Buckwalter cleared the way for a jury trial, when he acknowledged seventeen disputed facts in the case. The large number of disputed facts made it clear to Judge Buckwalter that a trial to determine the truth was required.

Buckwalter has not identified the facts in question to anyone as of the writing of this article, but jury selection is scheduled to begin **10 AM** on **June 14, 2010** in **Courtroom 14A** of the **Federal Courthouse** (601 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Interested persons are encouraged to attend the trial. Downey is gathering members of the Freethought Society to demonstrate outside the courthouse. Since the trial is focusing on discrimination against the homosexual community, Downey hopes to raise awareness that BSA's restrictive membership policies effect many other minorities as well.

The legal issue is whether it is unconstitutional for the City of Philadelphia to remove rental subsidies from an organization that refuses to comply with the city's non-discrimination policies. BSA has argued that other city tenants appear to be in violation of non-discrimination policies, including The Colonial Dames of America, and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

The Scouts also have portrayed themselves as victims of an "aggressive" lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. BSA claims that LGBT groups have sought revenge against them since 2000, when the U.S. Supreme Court said the Scouts could exclude openly-gay leaders. In the current legal case, BSA (conveniently) failed to mention in their court papers that Downey actually began challenging the Scouts' membership policies back in 1991, nine years before that Supreme Court ruling. Attorneys for the City of Philadelphia never addressed nontheist discrimination concerns in this lawsuit.

Downey states that, "A Freethought Society rally at the Federal Courthouse on June 14th may educate the public, the media and those involved in the case that the harm of discrimination is much deeper than revealed in court papers."

I will be covering the trial as a journalist for the Philadelphia Gay News. Below is a link to all of the articles I've written about this issue.

http://www.epgn.com/pages/results_content?page_label=news_regional&widget=search_content&string=boy+scouts+of+america&open=&

Philadelphia Federal Courthouse Rally Announcement

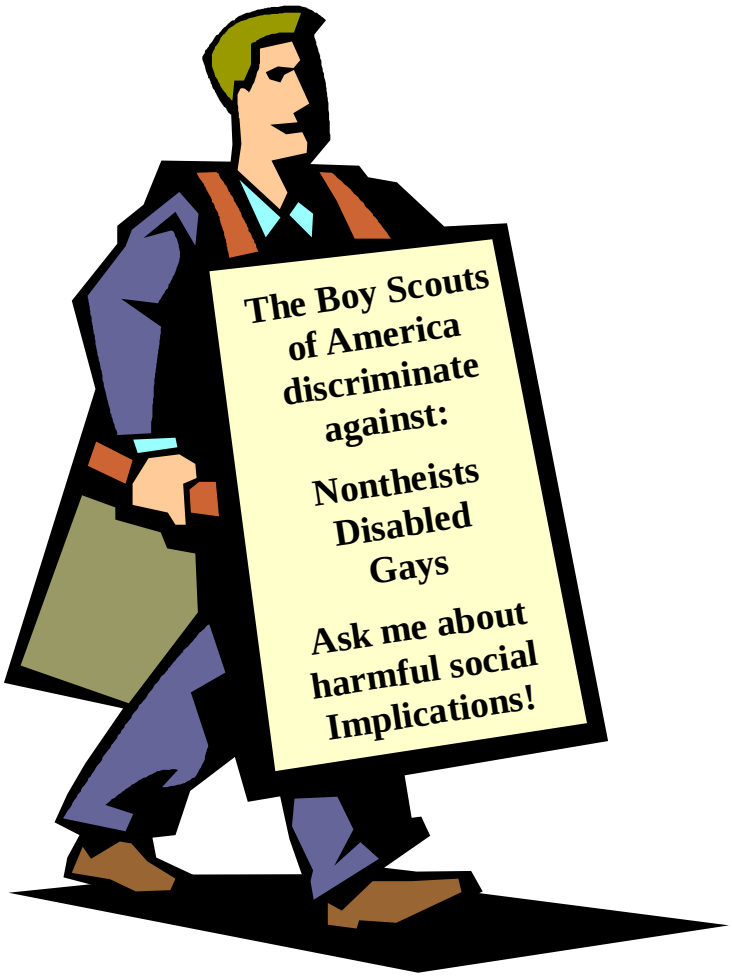
The City of Philadelphia and the Boy Scouts of America's (BSA) rental dispute is going to trial! The trial will only focus on BSA's discrimination against the homosexual community. Freethought Society (FS) members are needed to raise public awareness that BSA's restrictive membership policies affect many more people beyond the gay community.

Anyone sympathetic to this issue is encouraged to attend the trial and/or rally outside the Federal Courthouse Building. A rally at the Federal Courthouse on **June 14, 2010** will help educate the public, the media and those involved in the case that the harm of discrimination by BSA is much more extensive than revealed in court papers.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin 10:00 AM on June 14th in Courtroom 14A of the **Federal Courthouse** (**601 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**). The rally will start at **9:00 AM**. FS will make the necessary signs and a complimentary "Hi, I'm your friendly neighborhood atheist" T-shirt will be provided to those who attend. The rally will end at approximately **5:00 PM**. Participants will have a meal together after the event.

This is an opportunity to show that nontheists are nice people who deserve to be given equal access to the world's largest youth group. The media and the public are largely unaware that BSA is harming society by teaching children to separate from and discriminate against nontheists, gays and now the disabled (read about this situation in *The Freethought News* March/April 2010 newsletter, "2010 FS Letter Writing Campaign Concerning BSA" by Margaret Downey).

Please attend the rally at the Federal Courthouse Building (see address above) for a full day of protest against the teaching and implementation of harmful discrimination.



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The now "private" Boy Scouts of America maintain and defend their bigoted membership policy.

While the City of Philadelphia suffers a budget crisis and the cost of public transportation goes up, library facilities close, city employees are laid off and social services are cut back, the BSA's Cradle of Liberty Council refuses to pay rent they owe for use of city owned property! BSA refuses to pay because they claim that they provide a service to the community, but their so-called "public service" is tarnished with bigotry.

Make BSA pay
or move them out of the way!!

An Optimistic Perspective On Haiti

by Christopher Evans

In October of 2009, I was given the opportunity to visit my mother, who was nearing the end of her year-long stay in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I had visited my father in South Africa and traveled with my mother to Kenya, so I was no stranger to the experience of being in a developing country. Prior to leaving for Haiti, however, I was given numerous warnings about being kidnapped, robbed or murdered. Everyone I spoke with had a fearful vision of Haiti, but my mother was telling me how beautiful the country and the culture were. Naturally, I had to find out for myself.

On my second day in Haiti I traveled to Port-au-Prince's infamous slum, City Soleil. My mother and I went there with the sole intention of distributing medicine at a small health clinic, but that day became one of the most enlightening experiences in my life.

Upon our arrival at the clinic, a young boy quickly approached and started throwing his hands in the air trying to express something through makeshift sign language. As hard as I tried, the language barrier made it impossible to interpret what he was trying to tell me.

He continued to follow me diligently as the day went on, transfixed by a pair of cheap gardening gloves in my back pocket. After the day's work was finished, I brought a soccer ball outside to play with some of the children. The boy who had been signing to me was thrilled when he realized his opportunity had come. He pointed frenziedly to the gardening gloves and repeated the gyrations he performed earlier. I finally decided to hand him the gloves and see why he was so fascinated with them. He ran to a nearby open space flailing his arms enthusiastically and had his friend kick the soccer ball to him. *Why hadn't I seen it before?* He wanted my gardening gloves to use as goalkeeper gloves. I thought about the stylish Nike, Puma and Adidas gloves my friends wore in the States, and their price tags, sometimes reaching a hundred dollars or more. This young boy cherished the cheap, tattered, dirty gardening gloves that cost less than a dollar as one of his most prized possessions.

Despite my incongruous appearance and inability to communicate with the children in City Soleil, they were welcoming and initiated a game of soccer with me. Although I was excited to play, I was worried about the number of factors working against my team. The first handicap was that I was dripping with sweat in the eighty-degree weather because I had grown accustomed to the unusually cold Fall weather in Pennsylvania. The second was that I had next to no experience playing, or even watching soccer. The third disadvantage for my team was that instead of a regulation-sized soccer net, like the one I had practiced on maybe twice in my life, the clinic had painted a small goal on each of two adjacent walls, so I was playing an entirely different game.

Regardless, the children seemed absolutely ecstatic to play soccer with me even under these conditions. I was surprised when my team took the lead in the game. I even began to relish my newly discovered talent for soccer until I realized that my team was playing with a considerable advantage: we had the only player wearing shoes, and it was me. Still, these young boys were content to play soccer in bare feet and didn't seem to notice my team's advantage. As the game continued, people started crowding in from around the neighborhood to watch us play. One of the excited onlookers happily took my place.

While we were still at the clinic, my mother and I decided to clear out two garden plots in the courtyard and plant some vegetable seeds. The garden plots were filled with weeds, trash and rocks, so we had a lot of work ahead of us. We had limited tools to work with, which meant we would be cleaning and digging with our hands.

As we progressed with the project, members of the community started gathering around and helping. The mothers of the young boys I played soccer with picked up fallen branches from a palm tree and fashioned them into homemade tools. The leafy side of one branch became a broom, and the hollow wooden shaft of another became a shovel. With the whole community working on the garden, we were finished in no time.

Ironically, in this country of abject poverty I witnessed a culture that struggles through destitution daily, but still emerges with optimism. Despite the common opinion of Haiti as a hazardous country with menacing pickpockets and kidnappers at every turn, every person I met during my stay was generous and welcoming. I was never in a situation where I felt that I was at risk. The people of Haiti hold on dearly to their cultural heritage and, even through the extreme financial turmoil of their country, they radiate appreciation for every opportunity in their lives.

My job as the executive assistant for the Freethought Society presents me with an wonderful opportunity; I am able

to work with an organization that is fostering the development of essential critical-thinking skills in Haiti. I have first-hand experience witnessing the dire need for rational thought in developing countries around the world, so I can tell you that aid given to the Free Thinkers of Haiti (FTH) supports a great cause.

The widespread poverty that exists in developing countries is a catalyst for the growth of superstition. Individuals and organizations have a tendency to exploit people's susceptibility to superstition in these countries for financial gain. It is increasingly important for groups like FTH to form and encourage individuals to take a stand against those who would exploit a populous lacking a strong foundation in critical-thinking skills.

I commend FTH for their courageous stance against irrational superstitions in a country where they could face widespread persecution. It is inspiring that their thirst for knowledge prevails in this time of political and financial turmoil in Haiti.

Pictured above are the members of the Free Thinkers of Haiti (FTH) with a hand-made sign.

Pictured back row (left to right) are **Pierre Esnor**, **Patrick Alcimo**, **Edjel Geneste, Farizien, Ronald, Junior Buteau** and **Roginot Hyacinthe**.

Bottom row (left to right) are **Jamesley Augustin**, **Lorcy Valsaint** and **Billy Almoza**.

Pictures of FTH participating in community service can be seen on page 12 of this issue.

Newdow v. Roberts

by Margaret Downey

On Friday, May 7, 2010 the Washington, DC Court of Appeals dismissed the lawsuit *Newdow v. Roberts*. The lawsuit was a First Amendment Establishment Clause challenge to prayer and the use of "so help me God" in the oath at Presidential inauguration ceremonies. An opinion by **Judge Janice Rogers Brown**, joined by **Judge Douglas H. Ginsburg**, held that the suit should be dismissed on grounds of "standing." A concurring opinion by **Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh** would have dismissed the case on legal merits.

Judge Brown wrote that the challenge to religious expressions at President **Barack Obama**'s 2009 inauguration is moot. Plaintiffs (including the Freethought Society) failed to appeal the district court's denial of a preliminary injunction. The injunction date timeframe was too close to the actual inauguration to effectively file an appeal. According to Judge Brown, had the plaintiffs done so and won an appeal, the case would not have been moot.

The challenge in connection with the 2013 and 2017 inaugurations was also deemed moot because the plaintiffs were seeking relief against unknown parties over whom the court lacks jurisdiction. Court records indicated that there is no assurance that those involved in planning the 2009 Inauguration will be involved in the future. The court also found that there is no way for plaintiffs to sue all possible future Presidents-elect. The Court, therefore, concluded that a declaratory judgment will not remedy the wrong being challenged by the plaintiffs. Lack of standing prevailed.

Judge Kavanaugh concluded that plaintiffs have standing to challenge prayer and the oath for future inaugurations if they violate the Establishment Clause. The prayers in their current form should be permitted under the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Mash v. Chambers* which upholds "non-proselytizing legislative prayer."

The words "so help me God" added to the Presidential oath should also be upheld as a "long national tradition." A national tradition that is neither proselytizing nor exploitative. Judge Kavanaugh also used his opinion to explain his earlier vote to deny plaintiffs' motion for the court to eliminate — at oral arguments — its usual call asking God to save the court and the country.

My message to Newdow stated that FS has been in this fight with Newdow from the very beginning because it's all about fighting discrimination. The Anti-Discrimination Support Network's (ADSN) amicus brief was submitted out of concern that nontheists in the United States of America have become instant victims of bigotry when the government endorses and promotes religion.

The entanglement of religion and government in the inauguration process empowers the religious community and denigrates the nonreligious community. The basic Constitutional principle of protecting the minority from the majority is corrupted with every time a prayer is uttered in a government setting. ☐

Actus formalis

Act now to take your name off RCC records!

by Margaret Downey

After it was reported in the news that sex-crimes committed by pedophile priests had been covered up by the Catholic Church, **Richard Dawkins** and **Christopher Hitchens** called for the arrest of **Pope Benedict XVI**. It was suggested that the arrest should take place during the pontiffs state visit to the UK — the charges — crimes against humanity. The Pope's visit to the UK to beatify **Cardinal John Henry Newman**, the 19th-century theologian, is scheduled for September 16-19, 2010.

In 1985, Pope Benedict was in charge of the Congregation for Doctrine of Faith (CDF). CDF specifically deals with sex abuse cases. During his service on CDF, the Pope signed a letter which argued that a cover-up for the "good of the universal church" should take precedence over the defrocking of an American priest who committed sex offenses.

Barrister **Geoffrey Robertson** and solicitor **Mark Stephens** have been commissioned by Dawkins and Hitchens. The first step for legal action would be to request that the Crown Prosecution Service initiate criminal proceedings against the Pope. Dawkins and Hitchens will launch their own civil action against the Pope or the case may be referred to the International Criminal Court. Interestingly, the Pope would not be able to claim diplomatic immunity because he is not the head of a state recognized by the United Nations and Vatican City has un-policed borders.

In 1998, the same legal principle was used to arrest the late Chilean dictator, **Augusto Pinochet**. In 2009, pro-Palestinian activists persuaded a British judge to issue an arrest warrant for **Tzipi Livni** for offences allegedly committed during the 2008-09 conflict in Gaza. Livni cancelled her trip to the UK and the warrant was withdrawn.

While the legal action taken by Dawkins and Hitchens to arrest the Pope is worthy and commendable, the Freethought Society (FS) is calling for people who were baptized by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) to take immediate action.

FS is asking that former Catholics request the removal of their name from church records. Taking this action serves as a protest, and is also an opportunity to condemn the entire process of baptism.

Many nontheists were baptized into the Catholic faith as infants. If you were baptized, you are being counted as a member of that religion. FS is asking people to participate in this effort if their parents, against their will, attached them to a church that behaves disgracefully by harboring criminals. Surely baptismal victims do not want RCC to claim them as one of their adherents. It is the hope of FS that proud atheists everywhere will try to have their names removed from RCC records. Nothing screams "protest" like RCC receiving hundreds (or thousands) of petitions from people who no longer want to be counted as a member.

Now is the time to protest your unauthorized RCC indoctrination. Since the RCC claims that once indoctrinated there is no leaving the Church, this protest is even more justified. One way to have your name expunged from RCC records is to write a letter to the Bishop of the church listed on your baptism certificate. Below is a sample letter (most wording provided by deceased activist **Greg Erwin**):

Dear [proper name and title]:

I was baptized a Roman Catholic on [date] at [location]. The purpose of this letter is to secure the removal of my name from the records of the Church or to have those records show that I am no longer a Roman Catholic. I do not want to be counted for any statistical purposes as a member.

To clarify further and to leave no doubt as to my sincerity in this matter, I hereby renounce all the trappings of religion and declare that I am an atheist.

I renounce all blessings, benefits, graces, sanctifications, and advantages supposedly conferred on me by any religion or by any religious act done by me or on my behalf in the past, present or future.

I condemn as monstrous the idea of original sin, and renounce any baptism done on my behalf to wash it away.

I reject as ridiculous the idea of an atoning sacrifice and spurn its presumed benefits. Furthermore, I do not believe that any god, supernatural realm or afterlife exists, and will not act as if they did.

I do not believe that any book, building, place, person, thing or action is holy and will not pretend that they are.

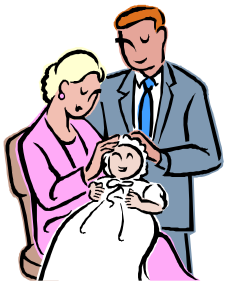
I conclude that praying is nothing more than talking to oneself and hold that blasphemy is a victimless crime.

I do not believe that any person is more sanctified than any other, or that any human being should be elevated above another in any way, due to ancestry, race, gender, occupation, belief or for any other reason and will not feign that I do.

Consequently, as a principled and rational person, it pains me that someone, somewhere may be counting me as an adherent of an irrational superstition which has done and is doing irreparable harm to humanity and with which I profoundly disagree. Please remove my name from the records of the church, and record that I am no longer a Roman Catholic. Please send me, as soon as possible, confirmation that this action has been completed. Please comply to my request as soon as possible.

Your signature_____

Note: To insure that your letter is taken seriously, send it certified with "return receipt requested." □



Mormon No More

Act now to take your name off LDS records!

by Margaret Downey

Close connections between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) and the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), has been revealed in the discovery phase of many legal cases. Mormon families traditionally register male children into the BSA program at age 7. The influence LDS has on BSA is evident in that without the Mormon head count, BSA membership would be much lower than reported. To pacify LDS doctrines, BSA maintains its selective membership which excludes gays and atheists.

In protest of LDS's bigotry and entanglement with BSA, the Freethought Society (FS) is requesting that nontheists who once were Mormons take action to leave the church.

If you were baptized Mormon, you are still counted as a member of that church. You will be counted until you actually "resign" from the church. It is not enough to request that your name is removed from LDS records; a formal resignation request must be sent.

It does not matter if you have not been to church in 1 week or decades. A letter with your birth date, current address and resignation request is all that is needed. Below is a sample letter:

Date

To: Member Records
50 E North Temple, Room 1372
SLC UT 84150-5310

From: Your full birth name
Your date of birth
Your current address

To whom it may concern:

This letter is my formal resignation from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) effective immediately. I hereby withdraw my consent to being treated as a member and I withdraw my consent to being subject to church rules, policies, beliefs and discipline. As I am no longer a member of the Mormon religion, I want my name permanently and completely removed from the membership rolls of the church.

I have given this matter considerable thought and I understand what you consider the "seriousness" of the matter. I also accept the so-called "consequences" of my actions. I am aware that my resignation cancels the effects of baptism and confirmation, withdraws me as a member and revokes temple blessings.

I also understand that I could be "readmitted to the church by baptism only after a thorough interview."

I am confident, however, that I will not change my mind. I will not be dissuaded. I expect this matter to be handled promptly, with respect and with full confidentiality.

My resignation should be processed immediately, without any waiting period.

After today, the only contact I want from the LDS church is a letter of confirmation indicating that I am no longer listed as a member of the church.

Sincerely,

Your signature_____
Print your name_____

Notary signature_____
Notarized on (date)_____

Notary Seal

Yes, you must have your letter notarized to avoid any interviews or the need to invite anyone into your house to authenticate your request. With a notarized and certified letter, there will be no need to have either a telephone conversation or visit with anyone about your resignation.

Using the suggested text insures that your resignation will be effective immediately. You become a non-member the minute LDS receives your letter. Send your letter as certified "Priority Mail" and "Return Receipt Requested."

LDS Member Records will find your original baptism records. The letter can be type-written or hand-written; it does not matter, as long as it's legible.

If you live with people who are members of the church, they will likely be told about your resignation. That is true whether the person you live with is a spouse, a parent, a sibling or even if they are just a roommate. If a relative lives in the same ward, branch or stake as you, they will probably be told about your resignation.

Member Records will very likely send you a form letter telling you that "this is a local ecclesiastical matter that needs to be handled by local priesthood leaders." They will tell you they have forwarded your resignation letter to the local Stake President or Bishop or Branch President.

With their letter to you, Member Records will probably include a one-page pamphlet called *An Invitation*. The pamphlet may be upsetting to some people while others find it ridiculous. The pamphlet is an attempt to change your mind about leaving the church. Consider it as evidence that your resignation has been received.

Another tactic LDS may use is to return your letter with a claim that you must speak to the local bishop or branch president in order to resign from the church, but Member Records is the proper place to process your request. Call the LDS offices (800-453-3860), if you have any questions. ☐

Becoming an Atheist through laughter and tears

by Anne Silber

In my 30's I decided to major in Anthropology at the University of Colorado in Denver. A required philosophy class opened my eyes to the world of logic and reason, with which I was unfamiliar.

Adopted in infancy by a middle-aged devout Catholic couple, I was sent to convent schools. Somehow I managed to talk my adoptive parents into letting me graduate High School from a private, co-ed school.

I was deeply religious, and the class in philosophy at college opened my eyes wide.

Why anthropology? I joked about it. I told people that I chose it because I could spell it. But it was really because of a deep, insistent longing to know from whence I came. My parents would tell me nothing. The State had sealed my records. As I read the syllabus on anthropology, I felt that perhaps I could learn something about my own origins.

From age 8 I had insisted that I was Jewish. Mother told everyone that I was a pathological liar. I would say, "I don't know how I know, but I know."

At age 6, I made my First Holy Communion with five other little girls, in a beautiful flower-filled chapel. Dressed in lace, and wearing the white veil of purity, we were ready to receive Our Lord.

The priest put the wafer on my tongue, I drew it in, and it promptly stuck to the roof of my mouth — then it broke. Still kneeling at the altar rail, I broke into loud sobs. I imagined that I had broken Jesus in two pieces! The nun in charge rushed to me and tried to shush me, while my horrified parents looked on. She could not stop my tears, but did get me to muffle the sound. As a result of having to gulp and strain to stay quiet, I delivered the final insult to God and my parents. I wet my pants.

Some years later I used to sit in the dim chapel and stare at the statues of the lovely lady Mary and St. Joseph, so hard that my eyes jumped, and I thought the statues were moving. I knew I was a saint, and would share bliss with Jesus for eternity. Jesus was my imaginary friend and playmate until I was about 13. It was then that the first questions surfaced. I did not doubt there was a God, but I began to doubt the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

We had encyclopedias at home, and one evening I read about the Spanish Inquisition, and ran to my father. The Inquisition, it seemed, had been orchestrated and executed by RCC!

My father said that the encyclopedia lied. He told me that Catholics were hated because they knew the only real truth. My father told me that I must tell the priest in confession that I had doubted the Church — which was a sin. I never "confessed" to the priest.

I began reading about other Christian denominations. I decided to be a Presbyterian because I had a crush on a boy at school, and he was one.

After that, there wasn't even a pretense of a relationship between myself and my parents. I stayed in my room a good deal of the time.

I wasn't a Presbyterian for very long, and started reading about other religions and other ideas of gods, or god. I knew in my heart, however, that I was a Jew. At 16, I decided to talk to a rabbi. I had read many books about Judaism, but had never met a Jewish person! I knew that I felt a connection to these people, and it was the people I wanted, not the religion. But I did not admit that to myself for years. I used religion to find my origins.

I made an appointment, and the kindly-looking rabbi was certainly surprised to see me. I told him that I had no proof, but I simply knew I was Jewish. I told the rabbi that I wanted to be with my people. That simple.

I was not prepared for the explosion that followed. Did I not know, he spat out, that the Denver Jews had spent years trying to build a good-will relationship with the Archdiocese of Denver? Only in recent years had the Jewish leadership been invited to some functions at the home of the Archbishop. "Do you think," he bellowed, "that I'm going to jeopardize all that because some teen-age girl has fantasies about being a Jew?"

The rabbi grabbed my arm and hauled me from the chair to the door. I was told to go home and be a good daughter to the parents who raised me. Then he softened a bit.

The rabbi took my face in his hands and said, "You have a nice little Jewish face."

Then I was on the doorstep, and the door slammed behind me. I was devastated. Respect for and fear of authority had been pounded into me, and I slunk home with a heaviness and sadness that took years to resolve.

I married at 17 just to get out of my home. My parents were delighted to give permission. Good riddance! In the six years of that marriage, no one knew I was adopted, nor did they know that I really felt Jewish. The pattern of self-deception had entered me.

I had been living as a Jew since that first divorce, but only in my home. Much happened in the following years, and only when I was 42 did I embark on the search for my maternal biological family.

I became a Jewish matron by reading and watching others. I thought I was proving that I was *really* Jewish when I finally learned to make matzah balls that didn't resemble bullets and sink to the bottom of the soup pot! I went to different temples for holidays, slipping in and out without flourish.

The story of my dramatic search can be read in my forthcoming book, *Elizabeth's Baby: An Adoptee's Journey*. Yes, I found the wonderful Jewish family I had been born to. My mother had died by that time. In my search I found two wonderful uncles and an aunt who treated me as if I had only been gone a few days.

The funny thing was that they were not at all religious. Like me, they adhered to a Jewish culture, but only gave lip service to it's religion. It was only me that felt a requirement to practice the faith. I now realize, sadly, that I could have dropped the pretense. They did not believe in the old iron-age tribal god of the Jews.

I completed my B.A. in anthropology, with a new knowledge of evolution, science and a whole world of reason denied to me by religion. I became somewhat agnostic, practicing Pascal's Wager, more or less. I still wanted to curry the favor of the Denver Jewish community, which I never did.

My biological aunt told me that I was "illegitimate." In fact, my birth father was a married man. I did not react much to the news. I think my aunt thought that I realized the implications of it within Judaism, but I did not.

In 2002, I took a last, desperate leap into the faith tradition. I so wanted to believe that I believed! I went to live in the strict, ultra-orthodox Hasidic community. I lasted seven months there. Eventually I was actually ordered out of the apartment I rented in a rabbi's home.

Why? Because I asked too many questions. I saw through the hypocrisy, the reliance on tedious dogma and empty rituals. I felt like the White Queen in "Alice in Wonderland" who practiced believing "6 impossible things before breakfast."

Finally, I had to confront myself. I had been trying to cure a pain in my foot by poking myself in the eye.

The final bit of knowledge that I gained through the ultra-orthodoxed Hasidic community was that I am a "mamzer." A mamzer is a child born of an adulterous union. Mamzers cannot marry anyone except another mamzer. Mamzers cannot be called to the torah. We are the "untouchables" of Judaism. I was so revolted by the injustice of punishing a human being for something utterly out of their control that I began to abhor the very basis of a faith that would do such a thing.

Upon moving from the Hasidic community, I thought I had lost all contact with the Jewish people. I was sad, but also thankful not to be sucked into the tragic lives of innocents who needlessly suffer because of the circumstances of their birth. More and more I studied science, and read deeply into the works of principled scientists.

In 2008 I heard about **Rabbi Sherman Wine**'s movement into Jewish Humanism. I learned that it was possible to remain a Jew, with new respect for the real philosophy behind the traditions and holidays, without having to accept a ludicrous theology along with it. We are secular Jews who still participate in the rhythms of the Jewish life cycle. I loved it from the start. I do not live close to the humanist congregation in Denver, but I do belong to the humanist movement.

I live in the books of **Richard Dawkins**, **Sam Harris**, **Christopher Hitchins**, and others. My world is complete. All is well.

One thing of importance that I want to share with readers is that not everyone comes to a decision to leave faith traditions through deep scientific knowledge. My title contains the words "laughter" and "tears" for a reason. You can also find your way through intuition, common sense, and trusting your emotions as teaching tools. I did. It is only now that I am truly expanding my knowledge of and respect for science.

There are still days when I am lonely and want to hang a sign around my neck reading, "Free to a Good Home."

Instead, I go to freethinker socials, talk with other atheists and curl up with some mighty good reading, such as the works of **Thomas Paine**.

Because it is known that I am an atheist, some people will no longer speak to me. They also tell their children not to speak to me. A life filled with rejections has only made me a more resilient person

Today I'm proud to say that my matzah balls are incredibly good!

Anne E. Silber, M.A., is 77, and works as a substitute teacher in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She also writes essays, opinion pieces, and is the author of one young adult novella entitled *Zaidy* (a story of youth and age set in the 1940s). Her novella can be found through Amazon. A signed novella ($9.95) can be ordered directly from Sibler at: mymailbox52@yahoo.com

CFI's African American for Humanism (AAH) Conference Report

by Margaret Downey

The Freethought Society (FS) is concerned about the lack of diversity within the nontheist community. A Diversity Outreach Committee (DOC) has been formed to address the problem. DOC will develop an action plan that will find various ways to locate like-minded individuals in black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, and other minority communities. DOC members are: **Mike Estes**, **Eustes Mush**, **Olga Bourlin**, **Sean Robbins**, **Patrick Innis**, **Norm Allen** and **Patrick Cleveland**. Please see the FS website for information about the committee and its members. DOC is developing outreach literature, planning tabling events, producing YouTube videos and coordinating a research effort to assist Estes in publishing a book. If this important project is of interest to you, please volunteer for DOC.

In an effort to learn better ways of reaching out to the black community, I attended the African Americans for Humanism (AAH) conference on Sunday, May 16th 2010. The conference was held at the Center for Inquiry (CFI) facility located at 621 Pennsylvania Ave, SE in Washington, DC.

Norm Allen's speech entitled "Why it is Time for African American Humanists to 'Come Out,'" focused on the success of spreading humanist and freethought ideas via the Internet. The Internet certainly has affected this movement, and the use of Facebook, blogs and websites can draw many blacks to the movement. Allen has had great success in getting "closet" humanists to "come out" in Africa. Allen compared the progress that needs to be made to the history and successes of the LGBT movement.

Allen is the editor of the ground-breaking book *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*. He edits and publishes the *AAH Examiner*, and he is the Deputy Editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is the Executive Director of AAH.

Dr. Christopher Bell spoke about the creation of a "new Christianity." His presentation was fascinating. His thesis alleges that white racism and white privilege is the main underlying cause of the high incarceration rates of black American men. Also in play is a more subtle and potent underlying cause — the glorification of Jesus Christ in Christianity reinforcing "white male worship." Worship of this sort has a detrimental effect, especially by encouraging white superiority, circumventing racial equality, and emotionally emasculates young black males. Dr. Bell calls for an end to the black community's "Jesus worship," which he calls a form of self-inflicted psychological oppression. With the help of the NAACP, he hopes that a "new Christianity" may emerge that leads to less racial fears and improved race relations.

I was able to spend quality time with Dr. Bell during a break and I highly recommend his book, *The Black Clergy's Misguided Worship Leadership* (Trafford Publishing, ISBN: 9781-4252-7807-2). The bottom line is that we can't expect to find many black nontheists, but Dr. Bell's theory can offer a step-by-step guideline that will eventually lead to the abandonment of any God worship.

The subject of "Spare the Rod, Save Your Child" was presented by freelance journalist (and natural comedian) **Jamila Bey**. She strongly opposes the physical discipline often times ascribed to by the religious community. To her, physical discipline is equivalent to parents simply "whipping" their children. The sentiments of sparing the rod to save a child never appears in the Bible. Bey calls for an end to this misquoted adage. What the Bible actually conveys about punishing and correcting one's offspring has been used to justify abusing children. Scientific studies have concluded that corporal punishment negatively affects the development of a child. Bey gave examples of alternative discipline and conveyed her own parental techniques. Bey is also a member of the 2013 Unity Event Committee.

Sikivu Hutchinson's (a writer and intergroup specialist for the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission) speech, entitled "This Far by Faith? Race Traitors, Gender Apostates and the Atheism Question", discussed gender politics found in the American Black Church. Slavery and Jim Crow segregation had an influence on black women's obedience to Christianity. Hutchinson is using her atheism to radically challenge these paradigms of femininity and to offer alternatives to today's African American communities. She is the author of *Imagining Transit: Race, Gender, and Transportation Politics in Los Angeles* (Lang, 2003), has published fiction, essays and critical theory in *Social Text, California English, and Black Agenda Report*, and is a contributor to atheist/humanist publications like the *New Humanism Blog* and *RichardDawkins.net*.

Hutchinson is a co-founder of the Women of Color Media Justice Initiative, the editor of blackfemlens.org, and a commentator for KPFK Los Angeles and WBAI New York. She is currently working on a book on race/gender politics and the "New Atheism" entitled *Moral Combat.*

The question of "Diversity in the Humanist Community: Where do we go from here?" was examined in **Debbie Goddard**'s presentation. Goddard's background in community-organizing volunteer work has identified several problems. Some humanists simply turn a blind eye to the lack of diversity in the movement. In the past, nontheist community-building did not focus on outreach. The message needs to resonate with a wider range of nontheists in order to bring diversity into the movement.

Goddard pointed out that all national leaders are white, and that needs to change. The message being sent is not welcoming to blacks or other minorities, and Goddard should know. Prior to working as the Center for Inquiry's Field Organizer, she volunteered for campus outreach initiatives on both a local and national level.

Goddard is a member of the 2013 Unity Event Committee (a sub-committee of FS's DOC). The Committee is addressing this problem to insure a better future for the nontheist community. ◻

Photos from CFI's AAH Washington, DC Conference

Pictured above left are (left to right) **Margaret Downey**, **Norm Allen** and **Debra Goddard**. Goddard and Allen work together on various committees educating members of the nontheist community about the best ways to conduct outreach efforts.

Pictured above right are **Dr. Christopher Bell** and Downey. They enjoyed a break together and discussed the ways in which Dr. Bell's book could be promoted.

Below is a group photo taken at the conclusion of the Center For Inquiry's African Americans for Humanism conference.

Free Thinkers of Haiti Doing Good

The photos on this page are from a February 5, 2010 dinner give-away sponsored by the Free Thinkers of Haiti (FTH). The dinner took place in the Tibanane locality. FTH members cooked and served a hardy plate of rice, beans and chicken.

Before the meal was served, FTH members announced that the meal was made possible by donations from the Atheist Alliance International, the American Humanist Association, the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers and **Margaret Downey**. FTH made it clear that the reason they were there was to do something "good" in the name of reason — not in the name of God. They announced that they are Freethinkers and Humanists.

The dinner turned into a celebration when FTH announced that all the children in the village would received FTH scholarships to attend school. The scholarships include school supplies and donations of clothing. Pictured right are **Billy Almoza** (holding a plate) and **Rochelin Forzene** (holding tickets).

In the left photo below, Forzene accepts a meal ticket from a child and Almoza dishes up the tasty food. FTH served fifty meals and drinks.

Pierre Esnor Pierre is pictured below right. He helped cook and serve the FTH meals.

FTH members enjoyed sponsoring the event. When Almoza sent the photos via email, he said, "We would do this kind of work every day if we could. Thank you for sending us money."

May 7, 2010 email message from FTH: *Thank you for all the aid you have given to us. We are helping many Haitian people in their time of need. The Freethinkers of Haiti are concentrating on helping the children because they are more vulnerable to illness and disease. We take this opportunity to especially thank Margaret Downey, who helped raise funds and continues to help. We have a very big job to do. Doing the work with help from other freethinkers will promote reason over religion.*

Freethought Society Logo Contest

Now that the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia has adopted the new name of the Freethought Society (FS), the organization is in need of a new logo and website banner. The use of the Liberty Bell was fine when the name reflected the geographical location of Philadelphia, but the outreach area is now much larger. A new logo can be very general in nature because no geographical location needs to be indicated. The Logo Contest prize is a lifetime membership to the Freethought Society (valued at $1,000). As of the publication date of this newsletter, six possible logos and website banner samples have been submitted. This is the last call for submissions. Voting will take place in the July/August 2010 issue of *The Freethought News*.

Below are tag lines that are also being considered. FS hopes that the messages will spark your imagination and inspire you to create artwork to go along with the sentiments expressed. ***The Freethought Society is:***

Promoting freedom of thought, freedom of choice and freedom of expression

Advancing acceptance and understanding of the nontheist world view

Encouraging education, investigation and understanding

Questioning everything to insure individual freedom

A philosophical home for the open-minded thinker

Advocating freedom from religious intrusions

A community of, by and for freethinkers

A welcoming non-religious community

Advancing secular freedoms for all

Freethought Society Logo Submission

Name: _____

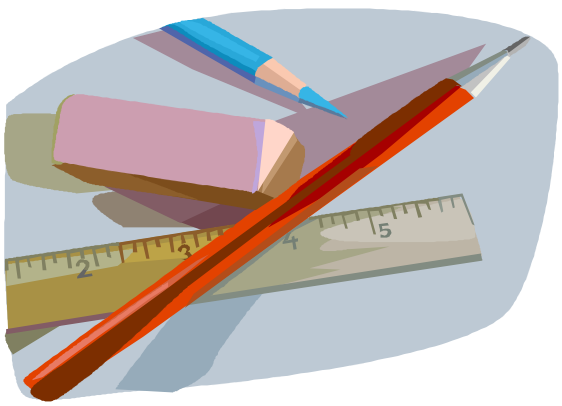
Email Address: _____ Phone: _____

Send this form, logo submission and any design information to:

Freethought Society
Logo Contest
P. O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366

A scan can be sent via email to: downey1@downey1.cnc.net

Fax designs to: (610) 793-2569



The Freethought Society's 2010 Three-Month Activities Calendar

May

Please attend the Monday, **May 24, 2010 Roy Zimmerman** concert at **Maggie O'Neill's Pub**. The address is 1062 Pontiac Road, Drexel Hill (behind JB Dawkins in the Pilgrim Gardens Shopping Center), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The show starts at **7:00 PM**. The suggested donation is $10. Zimmerman's humorous and entertaining songs are about ignorance, war and greed. CDs can be purchased at: royzimmerman.com/store.php

The *Los Angeles Times* says, "Zimmerman displays a lacerating wit and keen awareness of society's foibles that bring to mind a latter-day **Tom Lehrer**."

Lehrer himself says, "I congratulate Roy Zimmerman on reintroducing literacy to comedy songs. And the rhymes actually rhyme, they don't just 'rhyne.'"

Joni Mitchell says, "Roy's lyrics move beyond poetry and achieve perfection."

There's a decidedly "Lefty" slant to his lyrics. "We used to have a name for Right Wing satire," Zimmerman says. "We called it 'cruelty.'"

June

Abby Hafer will present "Un-Intelligent Design: Why Evolution Explains the Human Body and Intelligent Design Does Not" at the **Norristown Public Library** (1001 Powell Street, Norristown, PA 19401). The meeting time is **7:00 PM**. The meeting will take place in the large community meeting room on **Wednesday, June 2, 2010**.

Hafer will look at five parts of the human body that are designed very poorly, and show other animals that got better body parts, leading one to ask "So who does the Creator like better — us, or squid?" Hafer will also explain vestigial organs, and dispose of irreducible complexity by showing eyes in the rest of the animal kingdom at many different levels of complexity, all of which work.

Hafer earned a doctorate in zoology from Oxford University. She has taught human anatomy and physiology at Curry College for the last fifteen years. Hear Hafer interviewed at:

http://www.hereandnow.org/2009/02/unintelligent-design/

In preparation for the June FS meeting, you can see Hafer on YouTube at the following link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_u4yEUvPJ0

July

Sunday, **July 25, 2010** will be the third unity picnic bringing together members of FS and the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia.

The picnic will take place at the **Flourtown Pavilion** in **Fort Washington State Park** (500 North Bethlehem Pike, Fort Washington) at **1:00 PM**. To cover the cost of burgers, hot dogs, and vegetarian alternatives for the grill, as well as buns and beverages, a minimum donation of $10 per adult person is suggested.

Please also plan to bring a dish large enough to share with 7-10 people. To insure a wide variety of food, please follow the chart below using the first letter of your last name as a guide:

A-G
Salad or Vegetable
H-P
Fruit or Desert
Q-Z
Bread, Potato or
Rice Dish

Don't miss **Roger Scott Jackson**'s (also known as, **Sam Singleton**) 2:30 PM "G" rated picnic presentation, "Too Big for God" which is the story of young Brother Sam's escape from superstition and fear. Jackson is a New York City actor who created the satirical character Brother Sam in order to educate people about the harms of religious beliefs.

Jackson hopes that, through Brother Sam, he will raise questions that many of the famous atheist authors have not discussed. You can read more about both Jackson and Brother Sam at Jackson's website:

www.samsingleton.com

"Too Big for God" is the scary, funny, and ultimately inspiring tale of how young Sam Singleton learned to use his own power to think in order to overcome the disabling fear he acquired as a child being raised among snake-handling holy rollers. This 40 minute presentation is all-ages-appropriate. The presentation is followed by a question and answer session.

Supporters Added and Renewed

James Briggs	Gibbstown. New Jersey
Brian Engler	Burke, Virginia
Alan Gold	New Britain, Pennsylvania
Jerry Kagan	Wayne, Pennsylvania
Dan Silverman	Salem, Virginia
Luv Sodha	Richboro, Pennsylvania
Mark Zacharias	Langhorne, Pennsylvania

General Donations

John Dimillion $125

Tribute to Helen Kagin

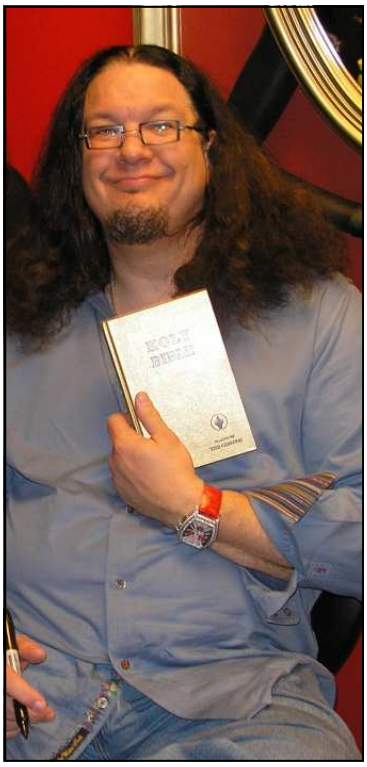
Helen Kagin, co-founder of Camp Quest, passed away on Wednesday, February 17, 2010, in Cincinnati, Ohio. She died surrounded by family members.

Helen was born Helen McGregor Smith in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada on January 31, 1934. She attended Medical school at the University of Saskatchewan and came to Christ Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio as an Intern. She did her residency there, was employed as an anesthesiologist, stayed until she retired, and died there. She was 76 years old.

Helen was an accomplished athlete. She was a figure skater, an ice dancer, a hockey player, a softball player, a swimmer, a fencer, and a superb human being.

Many people in the nontheist community knew and loved Helen. The lovely photo of Helen below was taken by her husband **Edwin Kagin** during a trip to Myrtle Beach, Florida. Edwin and Helen traveled often and were frequent attendees at national nontheist conferences. Her kindness will be missed.

Autographed Bible Give Away

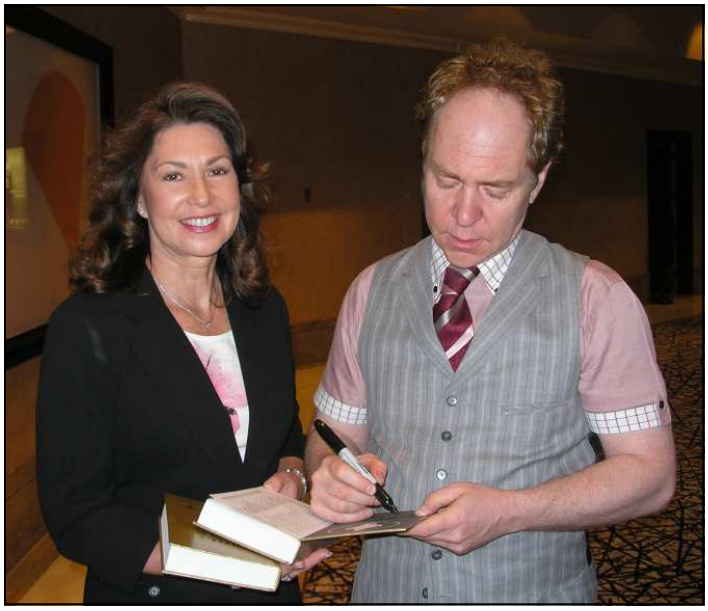


A Bible autographed by **Penn and Teller** will be given to the next person who becomes a Life Member of FS. The title of "Life Member" is given to anyone donating $1,000 or more to FS. At right is a photo of Penn holding the Bible he signed. His inscription states:

"Fuck God."

Below is a photo of Teller signing the collectible Bible. Teller's inscription states:

"Sell me and kill God."



Yes! I want to be a Life Member of Freethought Society. Enclosed is my donation of: $_____.

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone or Email: _____

☐ Please keep my membership anonymous.

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

Yes, I want to:

( ) become a supporter of FS (includes newsletter): **$30** basic, **$35** family supporter, **$20** student and email newsletter recipient. Please make checks payable to **FS**.
( ) join FFRF: **$45** individual membership or **$50** family membership. Please make checks payable to the **Freedom From Religion Foundation**.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

( ) Check here if you want your sponsorship to be anonymous.
( ) Check here if you want to receive the newsletter as a **PDF** email (make sure to provide your email address below).

Please provide your email address to enable FS to keep in touch:

_____

Our policy is to give interested readers a free newsletter to decide whether or not FS is for them. Please provide mailing address information to us regarding people who might be interested.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Clip and mail to: Freethought Society, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Freethought Society

P. O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366-0242

Print and Place First-Class Postage Here

Please consider donating to the Freethought Society. Supporters are needed and appreciated. Every dollar counts!

Special Quote

"We are one nation under the Constitution (or maybe under Canada), but not one nation under God. Given how the religious right opposes any scientific view that conflicts with the Bible, we are really becoming one nation under-educated."

Herb Silverman, born June 14, 1942. After an eight-year battle, including a run for Governor, Silverman won a unanimous South Carolina Supreme Court decision. That decision struck down the religious test requirement for public office. Herb is founder and president of the Secular Coalition for America.