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

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Skepticism on Parade: Educating the Public in Atlanta, Georgia

by Margaret Downey

For one weekend in early September, Atlanta, Georgia turns into the best place in the world for Skeptics to be proud of their point of view and to strut their stuff. During a Labor Day Weekend parade sponsored by DragonCon, a group of Skeptics dress in costume to convey their values, honor skeptics in history, promote education, recognize scientific advancements, and poke fun at "woo" thinking. This year, the crowd watching the 1.25 mile-long parade was estimated at over 80,000 individuals. The parade was filmed live by the CW Television Network (CW). Live viewing was also available on the CW website. Parade participants numbered over 3,000. There were horses, marching bands, walkers, floats and "Star Cars" for all to enjoy. 2016 marked the 30-year anniversary of DragonCon.

While the CW footage focused on the hosts when the Skeptic group was walking past the camera, the hosts did speak about the Skeptics in History characters (mentioning **Galileo** and **Thomas Paine**, specifically) and mentioned how "punny" some of our signs and costumes were. The best footage, however, was made by the DragonCon parade directors and is available for viewing at the following link:

http://bit.ly/2d3z4h0

I had the great pleasure of being the volunteer Event Coordinator for the skeptics entry in the DragonCon parade. The honorary title and position provides me with an opportunity to be creative with the parade costumes and signs. The 2016 parade was a turning point for the Skeptic entry. The costume and signage collection has grown to a selection of 50 full outfits for walkers! Plus, the Skeptic costume selections can now accommodate a variety of body shapes.

A costume and sign distribution method has been perfected making it easier for people to volunteer and participate. This new process is not easy and at least one distribution volunteer will always be needed. This year, I had the pleasure of working with **Judee Lee Rauchle** who traveled to Atlanta with me from her home in Roanoke, Virginia. There, she volunteers as a co-organizer of the Southern Virginia Atheists Meetup group. She is a co-founder of the group. She is also the co-organizer of the Secular Humanists of Roanoke Meetup. Rauchle's organizational skills came in handy during DragonCon.

Together, Rauchle and I kept track of who was using the loaner costumes. We also distributed parade instructions, information about the starting point location, and suggestions about how to get to the site. Lastly, we provided each person with their required parade wristbands. These procedures are too much for just one person to handle. Dividing up the responsibilities was the only way to make sure everything was done correctly. I was so happy to have Rauchle's assistance.

The most difficult part of the costume distribution process was determining which costumes worked best for the onsite volunteer walkers. Fortunately, I had created a written comprehensive description of each costume, including approximately which size body they would best fit. I also screened the volunteers with questions about what style shoes, shirts, slacks, skirts, and shorts they had brought to DragonCon in order to determine which costume would work best for each individual.

The ideal situation, however, is for volunteers to step forward weeks or even months in advance so that these additional clothing needs could be satisfied well-ahead of time. If anyone reading this article would like to make such plans, please join the Skeptic parade conversations through the following links:

DragonCon Skeptics Marching Yahoo Group:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/skeptrack_parade/

DragonCon Skeptrack Parade Facebook Page:
http://www.facebook.com/groups/291214834227560/

Two weeks prior to leaving Pennsylvania for Georgia, I ordered the needed parade signs. The signs were made by Goshen Signs, located in West Chester, Pennsylvania. They created the double-sided, weatherproof and lightweight signs for the reasonable cost of $25 per sign (including tax). Even though we conducted a fundraiser during DragonCon, we are in need of raising another $500 to offset costs involved with signage and miscellaneous costume expenses. If you would like to show your support for this effort and help continue the tradition, please make a donation to the Freethought Society earmarked “Skeptic Parade.” All donations are 100% tax-deductible. Your donation will allow us to add more costumes and parade signs. Any donation amount will be put to good use. The annual DragonCon parade helps to publicize the Skeptical outlook and raise awareness about the importance of education, critical thinking and freethought. It also highlights the long history of skepticism by honoring historic people who advanced society through their activism, and questioning authority, traditions, revelations, and who stood up against inhumane social mores.

A very large Skeptrack parade banner was carried by **Kim Ellingson**, **Bill Creasy**, **Mykle Alvis** and **Rick Petre.** It’s not an easy job to hold a banner for over an hour and walk 1.25 miles doing so.

A special “thank you” goes to **Angela Feazel Mattke** and **Mark A. Mattke**. They are allowing me to store the parade costumes, banners and signs at their home in a nearby suburb of Atlanta. Without their help, the job of Event Coordinator would be much more difficult. They also make a generous financial donation every year to support the DragonCon parade effort.

I also thank the Skeptrack Director **Derek Colanduno**, who invites me every year as a speaker at Skeptrack. Without an invitation, which includes the waiving of my conference fee, it would be financially impossible for me to attend DragonCon. Colanduno is a computer programmer, 3D graphic artist, and a fulltime nerd for most things science fiction and fantasy related. He is also the co-host and producer of Skepticality, the official radio show/podcast of *Skeptic Magazine*.

I very much enjoyed speaking at the Skeptrack and coordinating the parade. I hope to continue participating for many years to come. Visit this link to view the 2016 presentations and past Skeptrack speakers:

http://video.skeptrack.org

My First Time at DragonCon

by Judee Lee Rauchle

When **Margaret Downey** asked if I would like to ride along with her to DragonCon, I was intrigued and curious as to what I would experience there. Even though I had never attended, I knew that Downey, who is, in my opinion, the “Wonder Woman” of organizers, was the Skeptic Parade Coordinator for the big Saturday morning event. She advised me that I would be needed as a volunteer to help her before, during and after the parade.

Attempting to assist her at my first DragonCon, I’m sure I was often more “agog” than a “help.” I thank her so much for bringing me along; because besides having a wonderful learning experience, I had a ball!

I enjoyed the elaborate fantasy and science fiction costumes and displays I saw there. Having previously lived and worked in and around the entertainment industry in Los Angeles, California, I'm not that easily “wowed.” I was, however, most impressed by the wise and confident organizers, educators, and innovators who are involved in the Skeptic movement. I was able to listen to, meet, and talk with many people that I hold in high esteem — people such as **Nicholas Eftimiades, Julien Musolino, Ian Harris, Dan Barker**, **Derek Colanduno, Leighann Lord** and **Aron Ra** — just to name a few.

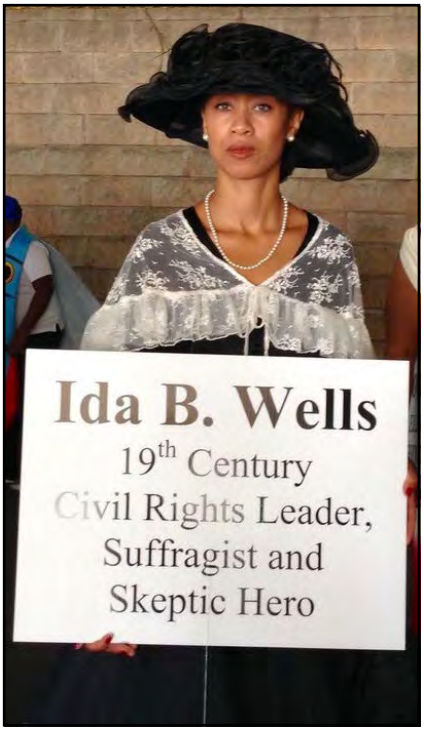
I have to admit that experiencing the wonderful SkepTrack lineup of speakers and panels was more down my alley than the entire cosplay, which is the practice of dressing up as a character from a movie, book, or video game. That noted, I was definitely thrilled to be able to participate in the Skeptic Parade entry as **Hypatia**. It was exciting to see and hear parade spectators as they recognize the historical characters. Many onlookers yelled out the names of the historical skeptics we portrayed.

The SkepTrack parade entry put Skeptics in the public eye and actually in the limelight before thousands of people in attendance for the parade and those watching on the CW Television Network! What a wonderful venue to convey the message of skepticism, reason, and science to a vast number of people. It gives the skeptic community a tremendous chance to have positive public exposure and acceptance while moving us gradually closer to true social and civil equality.

It’s impossible to realize how much hard work, time, effort, and personal investment goes into the creation, maintenance, and production of the Skeptic Parade entry at DragonCon until you’ve seen it up close and watched Downey in action. She cannot do this alone, however! The expense and time involved to make, organize, and distribute all the costumes, signs, etc. is overwhelming. Please consider a tax-deductible donation toward the “Skeptic Parade” through the Freethought Society. I can’t think of any other venue in which we skeptics can get our message out to so many people at once. Let’s make the DragonCon 2017 parade even bigger and better!

2016 DragonCon Skeptic Parade Entry Photos

Photos on this page are examples of the "Skeptics in History" section of the Skeptic Parade Entry. Left to right are **Margaret Downey**, **Cathy Miller**, **Ian Harris**, **Steven Ball**, **Julien Musolino** and **Judee Lee Rauchle**. Many onlookers called out the characters' names, thanks to the signs, and some asked for the walkers to stop for photos. It was reported later that many people said that the Skeptics in History entry is the most educational part of the parade.



Leighann Lord is pictured left portraying her favorite historical figure, Ida B. Wells. Her character was a huge hit in the Skeptics in History section of the parade. Many adults and children cheered as she walked by.

Pictured right are **Dan Barker** and **Chad Brown**. Barker was a speaker and also hosted a free literature table on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

More 2016 DragonCon Skeptic Parade Entry Photos

The photo above captured 10 of the "punny" Skeptic Parade characters. These "Punny Characters" are (left to right) The Truth Fairy (**Sonica Li**), The 1950s Hot Dog Stand Server (**Bruce Gleason**), The Fairy Godless Mother (**Jean Petree**), a female Sherlock Holmes (**Laura Ross**), The Quack Doctor (**Tad Batty**), The Skeptic Sheriff (**Aron Ra**), Nancy Drew (**Bella Harris**), Dr. Question (**Chuck Miller**), The Archeologist (**Chris Klein**), and the Skeptic Chef (**Doug Hamerski**).

Pictured right are characters from the "punny" and miscellaneous section of the Skeptic Parade Entry.

Characters from left to right are:

Elizabeth Sheff
(Princess Bubblegum)

Celestia Ward
(Leela Turanga a "Futurama" Sewer Mutant)

Mandisa Thomas
(Skeptical Goddess)

Myles Thomas
(a young lab technician)

Isaiah Thomas
(Thomas the Tank Engine)

More 2016 DragonCon Skeptic Parade Entry Photos

Five of the "Punny Characters" from the Skeptic Parade Entry are pictured above. The Educated Monkey is **Keith Jarvis**. The Spelling Bee is **Jeaninne Hardy**. The Beekeeper is **John Bass**. The Navy Girl is **Niyola Pais**. The Skeptical Firefighter is **Joshua Gregory**.

Pictured right are **Bill Creasy** and **Karen Moore**.

Creasy wore a lab coat to become a scientist character, but the fact is, he is an actual scientist. The sign he usually carries states, "Superstitions Stink!" This year, however, Creasy was a banner carrier. The Skeptrack parade entry must have at least 5 banner carriers. The typical costume for that job is a lab coat, but we are considering more interesting and creative costumes for this job. Submit ideas to Margaret Downey via email at:

Margaret@FtSociety.org.

As an attendee of DragonCon, Moore never imagined that she would take part in the parade. She was moved to volunteer when she saw how easy it would be to portray a Paleontologist. Her sign stated:

PALEONTOLOGY
ANSWERING EVOLUTIONARY QUESTIONS.
NO BONES ABOUT IT!

Reflections on Freethinking: An Essay

by Paul Cech

The term “divergent thinking” is being tossed around in education. Divergent thinking is nothing more than another way of saying “be creative.” That is the approach I am taking with this essay.

I enjoyed the book *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby. Through a bit of introspection, I realized that I only choose to review books that I enjoyed reading.

My skepticism and freethinking began in the seventh grade classroom of a parochial school in Lakewood, Ohio. After attending my required religion class, I was impressed with a flurry of dust motes dancing in the sun’s rays that penetrated the glass. As the motes danced, I was thinking about the idea of a god “who always was and always will be.” The concept of God did not make sense to me.

A short time later I participated in a debate about Unidentified Flying Objects. I represented the skeptical side of the debate. This was in 1966. Forty-six years later, my wife gave me a copy of **Susan Jacoby**’s book as a New Year’s gift. I read it with great passion. I was familiar with the ideas of some of the people discussed in the book, but there were many other people highlighted in the book who were unknown to me. I learned so much reading this book.

Robert Green Ingersoll is mentioned at least 20 times in *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*. I was already somewhat familiar with Ingersoll since he is often mentioned, referenced to, and quoted within the pages of the Free Inquiry Group of Cincinnati’s newsletter, *FigLeaves*. Jacoby highlights Ingersoll’s July 4, 1876 speech given in his hometown of Peoria. I have always been particularly interested in all the wonderful ideas that came out of the Midwest, from Ohio to Illinois. I’ve enjoyed reading the works of **Robert M. La Follette**, **Clarence Darrow, Saul Alinsky**, **Carl Sandburg** and many others.

Jacoby intelligently highlights the Founding Fathers and framers of our Constitution. **Thomas Paine** stands out among this unique group of Freethinkers.

Of equal, if not greater interest is Jacoby’s coverage of freethinking women who were involved with the anti-slavery movement. I enjoyed learning about **Sarah Moore Grimké** (1792–1873) and **Angelina Emily Grimké**. The sisters, according to Jacoby, “...broke a social taboo — and contributed to a split in the abolitionist movement — by insisting on the right of women to full participation in the campaign against slavery” (page 67).

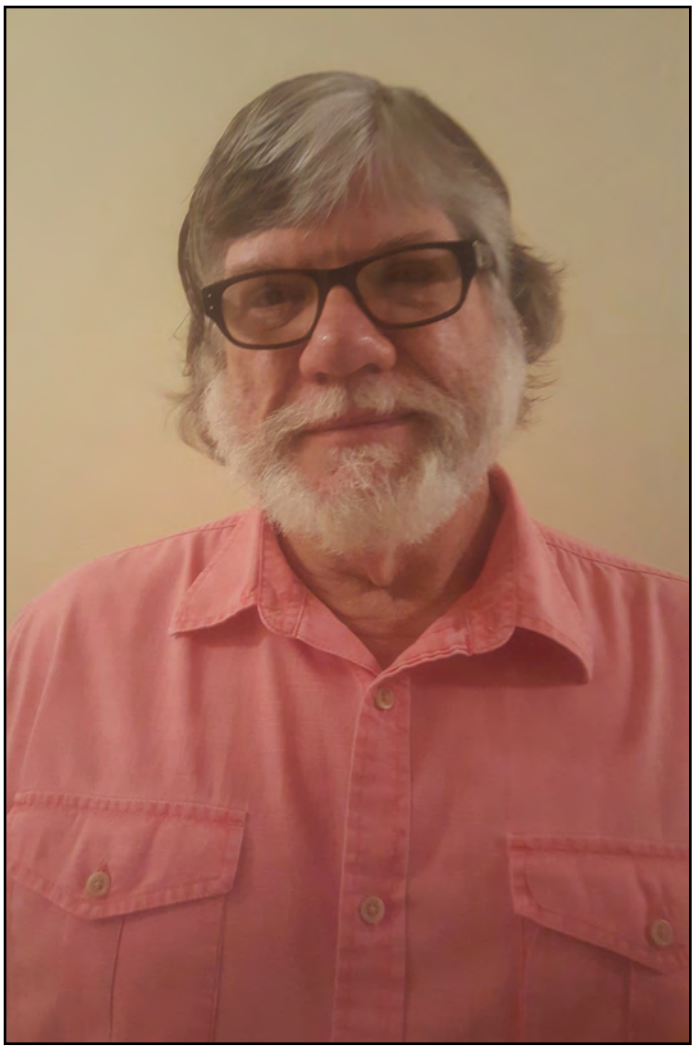
The eight remaining chapters take us from **Abraham Lincoln**, to evolution (an area of special interest for me), and on to the Golden Age of freethought. The story takes us through 20th century cultural wars to the present (2004). Chapter 12, entitled “Reason Embattled,” seems especially appropriate today in 2016.

The appendix is Ingersoll’s eulogy for Walt Whitman. This is a must read.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. Jacoby offers a wonderful journey through the history of freethinking in America. I think you will enjoy this journey, too.

Book Details:

Jacoby, Susan. Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism.ix- 417 pp., index, photos, Appendix, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Acknowledgements. New York, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004.



About the author:

Paul Cech is a teacher-scholar with over 30 years of experience in education. His poetry, essays, and book reviews have covered a variety of topics including human evolution, the history of science, geography, behavior and cognition. He also writes about American literature, history and government. Since 2007 he has formally and independently studied law, criminal justice, and criminology. He is a member of the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology, The Pennsylvania Geographical Society, The Northern Appalachian Network, Pennsylvania State Educational Association, and the National Education Association. He will be a regular contributor to *The Freethought Society News* and is looking forward to writing more articles.

Freethought Society President Honors Past Board Members

On August 24, 2016, Freethought Society (FS) President **Margaret Downey** gave awards to **Bob Kay** and **Susan O'Connell**. Kay and O'Connell have contributed greatly to FS over several decades. They remain actively involved with FS, but are no longer serving as board members. Below is an overview of why Kay and O'Connell were given a "Freethought Society Appreciation of Service" award.

Bob Kay

In 1992, The Freethought Society (FS) started at a restaurant on City Line Avenue in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Thirty people gathered at Denny's to discuss the possibility of creating a nonprofit organization. Our goal was to create an organization to help us challenge violations of religion and government separation that we observed in our communities. We also hoped to make bonds with like-minded individuals. That is where I met Bob Kay.

It was at Denny's where we forged a bond of friendship and a commitment to activism. Bob immediately became a Founding Member of FS by donating $100 — the very first donation we received. He has been a regular financial contributor ever since and thanks to Bob, when we found ourselves nearly broke, his generous donations saved the day.

Our first activist adventure took place at a United Way (UW) office in Philadelphia. A group of us gathered in front of the office every month to object to them giving the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) a huge check from the Community Funds that UW collected from general (not earmarked) donations. When we found another UW office doing the same thing (giving BSA a portion of unallocated donations), Bob and I also protested at the UW office in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.

We both spoke at the UW Kennett Square office and our words created a movement to stop giving BSA any more money from Community Funds. Shortly thereafter, the Philadelphia office of the UW joined the Kennett Square office and determined that the only funds that would be going to BSA would be those sent as "Designation" only.

We were victorious in stopping BSA from receiving unallocated UW funds primarily because we contended that if people want to support the bigoted and prejudicial membership policies of the BSA, they could do so by checking off an allocated box marked specifically for their donation to go to BSA. Insisting that BSA become listed under UW's "Designation" process was the best way to make it clear that BSA violates UW's very own anti-discrimination policies.

I'll never forget the time when FS conducted a contest to find a winter holiday symbol. Bob submitted his idea of a giant question mark. We really liked the idea and considered creating it as a metal sculpture or a wood carving.

Bob's idea came in as a runner up to *The Tree of Knowledge*. Even though his question mark design came in as the second place entry in the contest, Bob has been a big supporter of *The Tree of Knowledge* — speaking on behalf of its inclusion in the Chester County Winter Holiday public display — donating money to keep the project active and sending us color copies of his favorite book covers in order for us to make ornaments.

We are still battling for acceptance of *The Tree of Knowledge* and I'm sure Bob will celebrate with us when we are finally able to, once again, participate in the Winter Holiday public display in Chester County.

Bob served as a member of FS board for 20 years.

Susan O'Connell

Susan was recently re-elected to the FS board of directors, but resigned to concentrate on politics and other areas of major interest to her.

Susan is thanked for her 12 years of devotion to not only the FS board, but also for being a founding member of the Helping Hands Committee.

The Helping Hands Committee started in 2004 when FS adopted an older gentleman named **George Hetzel**. He needed a lot of assistance and 13 freethinkers immediately signed on to be of help. Over the years, volunteers began to drop out. It was difficult for many of the committee volunteers to provide George with the transportation help he required and to be of assistance with his housekeeping needs, such as cleaning, home maintenance and grocery shopping.

Susan never complained, however, and she worked with George until his dying day. She drove George to doctor appointments and all his shopping trips. You see, George would never just want to go to one store. George insisted in visiting three of four stores every week. It would be a difficult day for any volunteer and towards the end, the Helping Hands Committee was comprised of just Susan and me.

For always being a thoughtful and helpful committee member, we thank Susan. For being a financial contributor and supporter for our causes, court cases, events, and projects, we thank Susan.

For their wonderful, generous contributions over the years, we presented Bob and Susan with the "Freethought Society Appreciation of Service Award" as a token of our gratitude.

Challenging the Yearly BSA Recruitment Effort

by Margaret Downey

Several years ago, Freethought Society (FS) board member **Sally Flynn** and I formally objected to public elementary schools in both the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District and the West Chester Area School District allowing the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) to place recruitment signs on school grounds. We said that allowing BSA signs is showing endorsement and support for an organization that discriminates against the nontheist community. Our concerns were acknowledged and in early September 2016 we noted that none of the elementary schools in both the West Chester Area School District and the Unionville-Chadds Ford School District allowed BSA to display recruitment signs on their lawns.

On September 13, 2016, I sent a message to the Yahoo Freethought Society (FS) Discussion Group, posted on the FS Facebook page, and sent a tweet requesting that people all around the county drive by their public elementary schools to see if BSA recruitment signs were displayed on the lawns of the schools.

The placement of recruitment signs on the lawns in front of public schools gives the impression that the school endorses BSA and condones a membership policy that excludes nontheist families.

FS did not receive any sign reports. FS, however does not reach as many people as we would like to through these methods. I am asking for more FS supporters to join one or all of the following communication avenues so that you can be immediately advised of situations and can immediately take action:

Yahoo FS Discussion group:
http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/fs-discussion/

Facebook:
https://is.gd/Like_FS_on_Facebook

Twitter:
https://twitter.com/FreethoughtScty

After FS supporter **John Stolzfus** reported that the Keystone Valley Fire Department located in Parkesburg, Pennsylvania had plans to support a BSA recruitment drive at the department's location, I sent out another alert. I sent this link to supporters Race into Scouting at KVFD 9/14 - Keystone Valley Fire Department and asked that people strongly object to the Fire Department giving BSA recruit help. By assisting BSA, the Fire Department is becoming entangled with a private organization that excludes a segment of the population. Why is the Fire Department helping them?

While it is too late to stop the Keystone Valley Fire Department from aiding BSA (the recruitment took place on September 14, 2016), it is not too late to send letters of objection to:

Keystone Valley Fire Department
329 W 1st Ave.
Parkesburg, PA 19365

Comments can also be left at the above link to the Keystone Valley Fire Department. The Department posted photos of the recruitment drive which inspired me to leave the following comment:

The photos show many wonderful and fun activities. It's a shame that a Boy Scouts of America membership application contains a "Declaration of Religious Principles." That requirement excludes a fast growing segment of the population — families who are not religiously affiliated. Our nontheist families are denied participation in the world's largest youth group. Obviously, the Keystone Valley Fire Department condones this and one would have to wonder if there is a religious test to become a firefighter. Is there? We are curious. We are also interested to know if the Keystone Valley Fire Department will open its doors to our nontheist community and treat our children to fun activities.

You can also send an email to the Keystone Valley Fire Department using their online form at this link:

http://www.parkesburg.org/FormCenter/Contact-Us-2/Email-31

Thank you in advance for objecting to a taxpayer public service endorsing and assisting BSA. When you object to the entanglement, you are standing up against discrimination. Let's not stay quiet when the world's largest youth group declares that nontheists are "not the best kind of citizen" and prevent our children from participating equally with their classmates, friends, family and members of the community.

When I noticed that the recruitment drive at the Keystone Valley Fire Department involved BSA Pack Number 135, I sent the following message to the Cubmaster in order to initiate dialog about BSA's biased membership policies.

Dear BSA Cubmaster,

If a nontheist family arrives to the recruitment drive center at the Keystone Valley Fire Department on September 14, 2016, would Pack Number 135 accept their application for membership if the word "God" was replaced with the word "Good?"

Since a nontheist would not be able to, in good conscience, sign the BSA "Declaration of Religious Principles" on the application, would they be denied membership that day or would Pack Number 135 stand up against the national BSA policy of "only religious

boys need apply," and accept the nontheist child/family who is interested in learning Scout-crafting?

I very quickly received a response from the Cubmaster of Pack Number 135. He did not sign his name, but I found his comments interesting as he appears to not understand that a nontheist family cannot in good conscience pretend that there is a contrived higher power to believe in. Below is his response:

Margaret,

We've never turned a boy away. All applications go to our local council to be processed. However this is the first this has been asked since I've been with the pack.

My understanding is the BSA is looking for acknowledgement of a higher power/being. The "Duty to God" is whatever "God" may be for that family. This is evident when you look at the BSA's religious emblems program:

http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Awards/ReligiousAwards.aspx

I looked at the link and was compelled to write to the unnamed Cubmaster again. Here is my communication which, as of the date of the publishing of this ezine, remains unanswered:

Dear Cubmaster of Pack Number 135,

Thank you very much for your response. I looked at the link you sent and could not find a "Duty to Good" achievement metal. The nontheist duty to doing "Good for Goodness Sake," is not related to anything supernatural, nor does it require a belief in a "higher power." Nontheists ascribe to doing good within our philosophical humanistic and naturalistic worldview. We are reverent of nature, science, and humanity. There is no supernatural "being" to worship in the nontheist life stance.

I would like to send in a volunteer application, but I know that it will be rejected because I would not be able to agree to and affirm the "Declaration of Religious Principles" section which states:

Article IX. Policies And Definitions (Policies) — Charter And Bylaws Clause 1:

"The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law." The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members. No matter what the religious faith of the members may be, this fundamental need of good citizenship should be kept before them. The Boy Scouts of America, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and the organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life."

So, the bottom line is that BSA membership rules are projecting hateful prejudice against the nontheist community. This is a terrible example of citizenship and kindness.

You are fortunate to have not been forced to turn away a boy, a potential leader or a volunteer. However, the current BSA national (down-the-line) membership rules put nontheists in your community at risk of being persecuted, separated from and targeted as being "undesirables" by your local council. This is a shameful position for the world's largest youth group.

I ask you, as a leader and as a Cub-master, to please object to being forced to comply with national policies that are harmful to individuals and families. Please stand out as a Cub-master who refuses to discriminate against a segment of the population. Welcome volunteers such as myself and open your hearts and minds to those nontheist families who desire to learn Scout-crafting without prejudice.

Every year, FS receives complaints about BSA recruitment in public schools. Last year (2015), a teacher from the Avon Grove School District requested that we speak on her behalf as she feared for her job. It upset her to be required to advocate on behalf of BSA by distributing their recruitment literature and announcing that a recruitment drive was in progress.

The teacher is a nontheist and she knew that BSA would not allow her family to participate yet there she was working at a public school helping to recruit for a discriminatory organization as part of her job requirement. Not only that, the Avon Grove School District allowed BSA to hold recruitment assemblies during the school day, on school property with help from and the appearance of endorsement from teachers and staff.

FS's endorsement and support complaints fell on deaf ears as reported in the July/August 2015 (Volume 7, Number 4) issue of the FS ezine. See article entitled "Octorara School Board and Residents Defend BSA Public School Assemblies."

FS was forced to drop the complaint when the Avon Grove School District Superintendent, **Dr. Thomas Newcome**, demanded that the teacher come forward to complain to him in person. The Avon Grove School Board also said that FS's concerns were not valid because "Nobody has been harmed so far."

This is a shocking position for a public school to take. Aren't they supposed to take preventative measures against any child becoming a victim of discrimination? Aren't teachers expected to have high ethical values that do not

allow them to be a party to any type of bigotry? These questions were never answered by representatives of the Avon Grove School District.

To make sure that the West Chester Area School District was aware that FS is watching and still very concerned about BSA's biased membership rules, I contacted the Superintendent of West Chester Area School District, **Dr. James R. Scanlon,** and requested a copy of what was said over the "in-school broadcasts" on behalf of BSA, the BSA recruitment "flyer" that teachers distributed, and a sample of the "special stickers to join Scouting." These recruitment techniques were boasted about in the description of Pack 135's "Race Into Scouting" efforts. See:

http://www.parkesburgpack135.org/Pack-135-News/raceintoscouting

Dr. Scanlon denied that in-school broadcasts took place and he sent me a link to view the flyer. He said that "All community bulletin board flyers are required to contain a disclaimer that clearly states that the West Chester Area School District does not sponsor/sanction this program or activity." The link he provided is:

http://home.wcasd.net/pages/West_Chester_Area_SD/Community_Bulletin_Board/Community

While the disclaimer appears on the sample flyer at the link, when printed the disclaimer falls off the layout and disappears completely. In order to make sure the disclaimer appeared as it should in the printed form, one would need to see an actual in-use flyer. I requested this sample as well as more information about the BSA recruitment stickers that were mentioned in the "Race Into Scouting" recruitment effort. These items were not provided by Dr. Scanlon, so I did some online research to locate the sticker samples.

I found recruitment sticker samples at BSA's Chester County Council's website. The stickers are included in a "School Night for Scouting Pack Planning Guide." See page 16 at this link:

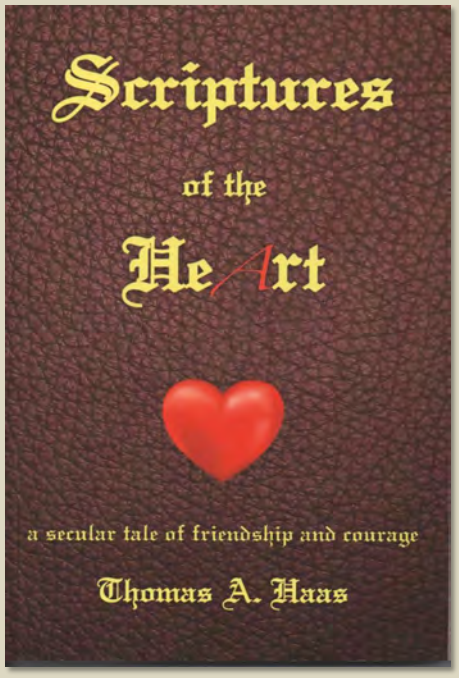
http://www.cccbsa.org/images/schoolnight/joinguide2011.pdf

The question is whether or not the stickers are distributed by teachers during the school day and on school grounds, or if they are distributed just by BSA representatives at a distinctly BSA sponsored event that is not in any way sponsored by the school district.

I also took the opportunity to question Dr. Scanlon about BSA's use of school facilities. On September 19th Dr. Scanlon sent me the following explanation of the West Chester Area School District room rental policy:

> *Our board policy on Facility use (707) indicates that the boy scouts and girls scouts are treated the same as other non-profit groups where WCASD students are part of the group's meeting. Classroom rentals for Category 5 is $1 per hour (5A) if 60% of the students attend schools in WCASD and $2 per hour (5B) if less than 60% of the students attend WCASD schools. (Policy 707 AG-1). Other rooms are more expensive and are also treated the same as per the policy. The custodial rate for all groups is $65 per hour.*

Like all fact-based atheists, I am compelled to ask for proof of Dr. Scanlon's declaration that no in-school broadcasts took place, a disclaimer appears on the recruitment BSA flyer, and that BSA is paying rent for use of public schoolrooms). I have an in-person appointment with Dr. Scanlon in November 2016. A full report about what my investigation un-covers will be printed in the January/February 2017 FS ezine.



What happens when a young Boy Scout realizes he is no longer religious?

It is the 1960's. Billy Graham is President Johnson's spiritual advisor and Madalyn Murray O'Hair has been labeled the most hated person in America. And yet one idealistic young man has the audacity to seek the truth.

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Karen Sloan, co-founder, *Atheism, Skepticism, Knowledge.*

The ebook version is available through Amazon.com.
The paperback edition may be purchased at:
thaas7.wix.com/ScripturesoftheHeart.

Freethought Society products now available!

The Freethought Society has partnered with EvolveFish to help you show support for freedom of thought. Buy items for yourself and/or gifts for your family and friends.

Mousepad: $11
Mug: $12
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Tote Bag: $16
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Sales taxes will apply to Colorado orders.
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Use the link below to see more products and to order today!

Shop online today at: https://is.gd/FtSociety

Anti-Superstition merchandise is now available. Proudly proclaim every Friday the 13th that you are not a superstitious person!

Support the efforts of the Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center by wearing or displaying our merchandise.

Double-sided T-Shirt is available in white with black lettering or black with white lettering: $28

Double-sided Tote bag: $16

Complete your Friday the 13th outfit with your Friggatriskaidekaphobia accessories!

Mug: $12

Water Bottle: $11
Glass: $10

Use the link below to see more products and to order today!
Sales Tax added for Colorado addresses. Buyer pays shipping.

Shop online today at: https://is.gd/FtSociety

How to Promote and Support *The Tree of Knowledge* as a Secular Winter Holiday Symbol

If you are searching for a winter holiday symbol that conveys your philosophical point of view, consider using The Freethought Society's (FS) *Tree of Knowledge.* This lovely display may be the perfect secular symbol you seek and can be proud to place in your home. Please visit the following website to learn how you can create your own version of *The Tree of Knowledge:* http://v.gd/ftsociety_ToK

FS hopes to see *The Tree of Knowledge* used in private homes and in local Winter Holiday Free Speech Zones. Should a secular group that you are associated with be inspired to display a *Tree of Knowledge* on public grounds, FS will offer complimentary advice, assistance, guidance regarding the ornaments, sound bites, press releases, and so much more.

If you use the *Tree of Knowledge* concept in your home or in a public venue, please send photos to FS (see contact information at the end of this article).

When FS began the *Tree of Knowledge* winter holiday display project in 2007, volunteers made ornaments using color copies of book covers. FS received copies of books from authors, publishers, nontheist organizations and individual collectors. Within that first year, *Tree of Knowledge* volunteers created hundreds of ornaments.

Now that *The Tree of Knowledge* concept has drawn interest from locations all around the world, FS would like to provide ornaments upon request. The only feasible way to create needed ornaments is to build a database of scanned book covers.

FS needs your help with this important project. We ask that participants submit a high-resolution scan of the front covers of books you want to see used on the branches of *The Tree of Knowledge*. It's fine if you send a scan of a book cover that we already have — we would like as many scans as possible for our collection.

There are several ways that scans can be delivered for use. One way is to send a scan as an email attachment to:

TreeofKnowledge@FtSociety.org

Another way is to place your scans on a flash drive and bring it to the next FS gathering. The file will be immediately downloaded to the FS laptop during the event.

Please name your scan the same name as the title of the book so that FS will be able to fulfill ornament requests quickly and easily.

For those who would like to purchase ornaments, below is the cost per ornament (postage billed separately):

$1 Extra-Small
(Recommended for top tier of a tree.)

$2 Small
(Recommended for top tiers of a tree.)

$3 Medium
(Recommended for use on the upper middle area of a tree.)

$4 Large
(Recommended for use on the lower middle area of a tree.)

$5 Extra-Large
(Recommended for use on the bottom area of a tree.)

Do you want a *Tree of Knowledge* ornament kit for your home or organization? Here is an approximate number of ornaments you might need:

10-12' Tall Tree
100-120 Ornaments

6-8' Tall Tree
50-80 Ornaments

4-5' Tall Tree
40-50 Ornaments

The FS email address is listed above. Here is the mailing address for snail mail contact:

Freethought Society ToK Project
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, PA 19366

To the Cross and Back:

An Immigrant's Journey from Faith to Reason

By Fernando Alcántar

"His ability to reach my emotions caught me off guard"

"One of the best books I've read in a long time"

"Wow! Couldn't put it down"

"Love it!" "Inspiring!"

"Fascinating"

"A MUST READ"

"I'm telling everyone I know to read it"

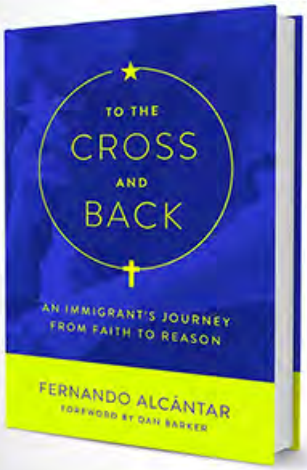
"It's Amazing!"

"MAGNIFICENT!"

"What an incredible life's story!"

"It made me laugh, it made me cry, and made me feel better about the person I am"

tothecrossandback.com



"This is an important book; brilliantly subversive and extraordinarily helpful."

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Krattenmaker demonstrates the ways in which the ethics and example of a secularly engaged Jesus are powerfully relevant.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT:
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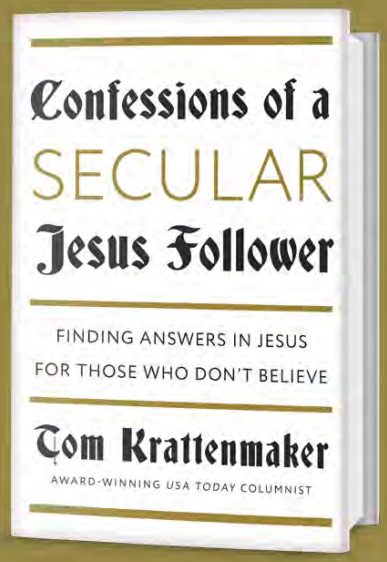
SECULARJESUSFOLLOWER.COM

IN BOOKSTORES
OCTOBER 4TH, 2016



CONVERGENT

LOGICAL LA

JANUARY 13-15, 2017

The West Coast **Friggatriskaidekaphobia** Treatment Center
will kick off LogiCal-LA on Friday the 13th of January!

7:30PM - Midnight

Friggatriskaidekaphobia doctors and nurses will give a "Clean Bill of Mental Health"
to those who prove they are not superstitious! Enjoy anti-superstition games, mirror breaking,
a Miss Fortune Teller (Heather Henderson), caricature artists, live music, and entertainment
from Margaret Downey, Christine Jones, Dave DeLuca, and Buck Bowen!
Dance to anti-superstition music and enjoy complimentary snacks.

The Concourse Hotel 6225 W Century Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90045

www.LogicalLA.com

The Freethought Society's 2016-2017 Three-Month Activities Calendar

November 29

Each year since 2010, representatives of the Freethought Society (FS) and leaders from many secular organizations have spoken at the Chester County Commissioners Sunshine Meeting advocating for the inclusion of the secular community symbol, *The Tree of Knowledge*, in the Winter Holiday public display that is placed on the grounds of the Chester County Courthouse located at Market and High Streets. *The Tree of Knowledge* was banned from public display when the Commissioners adopted Resolution 58-10 deeming that they, and they alone, would determine which symbols would represent the secular community.

Since then, the Commissioners have determined that the secular community is sufficiently represented by the following items: A Santa Claus figure, candy canes, reindeer, and/or a wire train with white lights. FS contends that these items are not representative of secularists. Year after year, FS conducts an effort to convince the Commissioners that only *The Tree of Knowledge* symbol is acceptable as a secular winter symbol.

Another attempt to reason with the Commissioners will take place on **Tuesday**, **November 29, 2016** at **10:00 AM**. The location of the Sunshine Meeting is: **313 West Market Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19380**. Please go to the sixth floor Commissioners Board Room. Please be prepared to speak in support of displaying and including the *Tree of Knowledge* during the 2016 Winter Holiday public display. If you do not want to speak, please make a hand-held sign stating "I support *The Tree of Knowledge*" to hold up so that the Commissioners know your position in the matter.

Scheduled to address the Commissioners are **Margaret Downey** (president of FS), **Hugh Taft-Morales** (Ethical Humanist Society Leader), and **Glen Loev** (vice-president of FS and a representative from the secular Jewish community).

December 4

FS and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia (EHSP) invite you to the installation of the 2016 Philadelphia *Tree of Knowledge*.

The Tree of Knowledge will be decorated as a group effort immediately following the EHSP platform and a **Rollin Wilber** piano mini-concert on **Sunday**, **December 4, 2016**. **Hugh Taft-Morales** will be the platform speaker.

The **11:00 AM** free and open-to-the-public platform takes place in the Ethical Society Building, located at **1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**.

Attendees are encouraged to bring two color copies of the front cover of their favorite book so that an ornament can be made for either use on the 2016 tree or for a home display.

Margaret Downey will be making the ornaments at **1:00 PM** in the upstairs meeting room at the EHSP building. Volunteers are needed to assist in creating new ornaments which will help FS improve the diversity of *The Tree of Knowledge* ornament selection. Ornaments will be available for purchase. These weatherproof ornaments sell for $1-$5, depending on the size.

January 13-15

A new scientific skeptic's conference will take place in Los Angeles, California **January 13-15, 2017** at the **Hyatt Concourse Hotel** located next to the Los Angeles airport.

The LogiCal-LA conference Director is **Bruce Gleason** (Founder of Backyard Skeptics and the Freethought Alliance). **Margaret Downey** is working as an event advisor and will help kick off the conference with a Friday-the-Thirteenth Anti-Superstition Bash and the opening of a West Coast Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center. Special guests that night include a live band (The Heathens), entertainers **Heather Henderson** (Miss Fortune Teller), **Buck Bowen**, **Christine Jones** and **Dave DeLuca**.

The Saturday and Sunday LogiCal-LA speakers are **Dan Barker**, **Don Prothero**, **Eugenie Scott**, **Seth Andrews**, **Joe Nickell**, **Harriett Hall**, **Jerry Coyne**, **Gad Saad**, **Angie Mattke**, **Elizabeth Loftus**, **Brian Dunning** and **Sean Carroll**.

Two panels focusing on the arts and skepticism will take place during the conference. The "Comics Panel" features **Celestia Ward**, **Lee Moyer** and **Tom Chalkley**. The "Skeptics in Entertainment Panel" is comprised of **Emery Emery** and **Michael Rowe**.

There will be lots of entertainment during Saturday and Sunday evenings, including a comedy show featuring **Paul Provenza**, **Tim Lee** and **Ian Harris** and a concert with entertainers **Barker**, **Shelley Segal** and **Roy Zimmerman**.

Prothero will lead a field trip on Sunday for geology enthusiasts. The movie *A Year Without God w*ill be shown on Sunday evening. After the movie questions will be answered by the star **Ryan J. Bell** and the executive producer.

Discounted hotel prices are $135 (single or double). Book your hotel stay directly with the hotel by calling (424) 702-1234, or book online at: https://is.gd/LogiCal_LA.

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

There is so much to see and enjoy in the Los Angeles area and January is the perfect time to take advantage of the lovely California weather. Please consider extending your trip and see nearby California sites.

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

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

Yes! I want to:

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

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

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

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____Cell: _____

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

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

Name: _____Email: _____

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

Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society

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

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
(nontheism explained in classroom settings)
Anti-Discrimination Support Network
(assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports)
Community Outreach
(locate tabling opportunities)
Diversity Outreach Committee
(brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)
Free Speech Zone Committee
(research and implement displays in public venues)
Helping Hands
(provides helpers to seniors and in emergency situations)
Jump Into the Jean Pool
(collection of jeans for the homeless)
Meetup Committee
(social events and improving online communications)
Monthly Meeting Coordinators
(schedule and manage speakers and venues)
Secular Celebrations
(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)
Speakers Bureau
(provide FS a resume, photo and speech subjects/titles)
Special Events
(coordinate interesting and unique nontheist events)
Sole Searching
(collection of athletic shoes for donating to the homeless)
Thomas Paine Memorial Committee
(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)
***Tree of Knowledge*/Winter Display Committee**
(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the winter symbol concept nationwide)