Another Successful DragonCon Parade for Skeptics
by Margaret Downey

There is no better place where Skeptics can convey their goals, mission, and vision than Atlanta, Georgia. Every Labor Day weekend over 90,000 people line the streets of downtown Atlanta to watch the DragonCon parade. Millions more view the parade on television with live coverage on the CW network. There are over 3,000 participants in the Saturday morning parade. The parade is divided into 51 groups with a dozen vehicles traveling within those sections. Skeptics have participated in every parade since 2012.

While I am the organizer, every year many wonderful volunteers step up to be of assistance as walkers and banner carriers. Dr. Angela Mattke donates to the DragonCon effort every month throughout the year and she allows me to store 45 loaner costumes and parade signs in her home year after year. As the keeper of the costumes and signs, Mattke has also taken on the responsibility of delivering these items to the Skeptic venue at the Hyatt hotel in downtown Atlanta. She never complains about hauling six suitcases and six boxes to and from the Hyatt every year.

Throughout the six years of being the Skeptic parade entry coordinator, I’ve also had the help of dedicated and hard-working assistants. Those who have traveled with me to help set up, categorize, distribute, and handle the returned costumes as well as signs are Shaun McGonigal, Tom Schottmiller, Judee Lee Rauchle, and Emily Byrne. This year my assistant was Christina Jones.

The Skeptic parade entry has two sections. This year a bright red convertible carrying the Flying Spaghetti Monster was situated behind the Skeptrack street banner carried by the “Skeptic Heroes.” Behind the car walked the miscellaneous “punny” section featuring costumes that humorously express our appreciation of science and education. Next, onlookers saw a small banner stating “Skeptics in History.” The banner was carried by Skeptic Hero volunteers. The Skeptics in History section has walkers portraying Skeptic heroes who used reason and logic to help advance society.

Below is a sample of what CW show host Brian Richardson said when the Skeptic entry walked by the camera:

What this group does is make sure that you still have critical thinking skills. One of the great things about going to an engineering and science program, like I did for my engineering degree, is you learn critical thinking. It’s one of the skills you need to be in science – to understand how medicine works, to make sure you are doing research, and are finding out what is real in the world – and being able to look at things though a critical eye. So even though we love our fantasy and we like making things up at DragonCon, like building worlds, we like to make sure we are grounded in the real world. This ties in nicely with the science thing. You also see a lot of people in the Skeptic’s track dressing up as characters in Scooby-Doo. I think that’s pretty great. There’s Madame Curie. She has a glow about her... Too soon? It’s nice to learn something on a Saturday. Can we now get a grant for an educational conference?

The entire DragonCon parade can be viewed at this link:


Photos of the Skeptic parade entry are printed in the next three pages of this ezine.
Photos of the 2019 DragonCon Skeptics Parade Entry

Pictured below is Aly Sides. She is dressed as the “Cheerful Skeptic.” She shouted, “Think, people, think,” along the parade route.

Pictured above in the punny section of the Skeptics parade entry are (top row/left to right) Alden Hayes and Danielle Ellington (Flies and Lies costumes), Anthony L. Tonnerre (Firefighter), Sharon Chen (Navy costume), Matt Dillahunty (Sheriff), Chuck Miller (Quack Doctor), and April Phillips (Miss Universe).

In the middle row is the Harris Family representing the Scooby-Doo cartoon series. The Scooby-Doo cosplayers are (left to right) Doug Harris, McKay Harris, Elle Harris, Mackenzie Harris, and Bailey Harris. In the front row are Neil Carter (the Chef), Lori Arnold (the Geologist) and Jason Rhode (the Paleontologist).

Above left is the Skeptic parade coordinator Margaret Downey dressed as a farmer. In the center photo Bonita Anderson is dressed as a deviled egg. In the right photo Jon Anderson is dressed as the Truth Fairy.
The Skeptics in History section of the Skeptics DragonCon parade entry is always a big hit with the crowd of onlookers. Pictured left to right are Leighann Lord (Ida B. Wells), Stephen Ball (Galileo), Malcolm Hodges (Charles Darwin), Ian Harris (Albert Einstein), Bryant O’Hara (Frederick Douglass) and Cathy Miller (Madame Currie).

After the parade all Skeptics who volunteered to walk in the parade meet in the Skeptrack room at the Hyatt hotel. They are given well-deserved water and snacks. Each participant is invited to participate in a one-hour live podcast entitled “Scientific and Skeptical Outreach.” The show is hosted every year by Downey. The 2019 show can be viewed at: [http://video.skeptrack.org](http://video.skeptrack.org)

Pictured left is James J. Kovalcin.

Skeptics in History banner carriers are (left to right) Bill Creasy, Dawn Morales, and Guerre of Reece Guisse.

Richard Saunders is pictured right dressed as Epicurus.

Christina Jones is pictured below dressed as Hypatia. Jones was also the costume loan and return assistant to DragonCon Skeptic parade entry coordinator, Margaret Downey.
The Skeptic parade entry was led by three banner carriers. Left to right are Stephan Jansen, Dennis Lynch and Craig Petty.

“Skeptic Hero” banner holders are wearing a costume specifically designed to comply with the DragonCon parade participation guidelines. Everyone in the parade must wear a costume of some sort.

Dressing the banner carriers as Skeptic Heroes is appropriate because without them, onlookers would not know which section was marching by.

The costumes were designed by Margaret Downey and created by Emily Byrne.

Pictured right is The Flying Spaghetti Monster vehicle as it proceeded down Peachtree Avenue in downtown Atlanta, Georgia.

Professor Teddi Fishman is wearing The Flying Spaghetti Monster costume.

Pictured below is Fishman delivering a speech at the Skeptrack room — dressed in costume, of course.

Below right is an action shot of a section of the Skeptics parade entry.
Australian podcaster Richard Saunders participated in the 2019 DragonCon event as an invited guest. He is pictured below on stage with Freethought Society (FS) founder and president Margaret Downey during the live taping of Episode 568 of the Skeptic Zone.

Many Skeptic, Freethought, and nontheist subjects were covered during the 45-minute interview. Saunders started with questions about the FS Anti-Superstition parties that are held on a Friday the Thirteenth. Downey talked about the way FS teaches critical thinking skills through the use of games, a museum-like display of superstitions, and other activities with the theme of a pretend Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center. The Center is operated by pretend doctors and nurses who interact with partygoers throughout the evening.

Saunders and Downey discussed DragonCon and the work being done there on behalf of Skepticism. Downey spoke about the importance of being a part of the DragonCon parade, the help she provides to the Skeptrack, and the fun experiences she has had there.

After a little nudging from Saunders, Downey talked about why discrimination is of such importance to her. This led to a discussion about her battles against the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). She outlined her legal case against BSA which, at the time (1992), was a Federally Chartered public accommodations organization. In 2001, BSA declared themselves a “private organization” in order to prevail in a discrimination lawsuit brought to the United States Supreme Court in the case of Boy Scouts of America v. Dale. BSA convinced a narrow majority of the Supreme Court Justices that as a private organization they had the right to select who could and could not be a member.

Downey pointed out since that time, BSA has been pressured and convinced to accept gays, girls and trans-gendered applicants into the organization. BSA, however, continues to discriminate against members from the nontheist community. BSA will not allow any member, volunteer, or employee into the organization who does not hold a belief in God.

All BSA membership and volunteer applicants must sign a Declaration of Religious Principles (DRP). The DRP describes God as male and all-powerful. The DRP also certifies that the applicant agrees to this mandatory belief in such a being. Nontheists need not apply. Downey’s efforts to open BSA membership to nontheists included replacing the word “God” with the word “Good,” which simply involved adding one more “o” to the oath and DRP requirement.

Downey asked for audience members to help prevent BSA from recruiting in public schools and suggested ways in which BSA could be convinced and pressured to cease their bigoted membership policies.

The next subject Saunders and Downey discussed was the FS Tree of Knowledge Winter holiday project. Downey provided background information and highlighted the way the Tree of Knowledge became a respected Winter holiday symbol of the nontheist community. She also conveyed why the Tree of Knowledge is banned from inclusion in the public Winter Holiday displays at the Chester County Courthouse located in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

The complicated story of how the Tree of Knowledge was rejected by the Chester County Commissioners was shared by Downey. FS continues to fight to overturn a 2010 Commissioners Resolution that banned the placement of the symbol on public land as part of a winter holiday display.

Downey suggested that more organizations and individuals adopt the Tree of Knowledge and promote its use in public displays during the Winter holiday season.

Saunders and Downey discussed the 2001 Ten Commandments Federal lawsuit in which she was one of two plaintiffs. The other plaintiff was Sally Flynn who is currently an FS board member. Downey expressed the difficulties she experienced as a plaintiff. Downey also reviewed how the case was won, and then how it was lost on appeal.

As an Australian, Saunders was curious about how the nontheist community is treated in the United States. He asked Downey questions about politics and how nontheists are treated in general.

The interview included Downey’s story about a three-hour lunch she had with Neil deGrasse Tyson in 2008, her lobbying efforts, her interest in Thomas Paine, a project to install a statue of Paine and the FS Freethought literature prison placement program. The full interview is available at the following link: http://bit.ly/2BfPVYE

During the question and answer portion of the Skeptic Zone podcast, Downey was asked about her legal cases and how she was able to finance them. Downey gave a well-deserved nod to the ACLU and to the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

When Downey was asked about what she was most proud of having accomplished, she talked about having founded the Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN) in 1993. Downey explained the importance of collecting incidents of discrimination and creating a reference database. ADSN was adopted by the Secular Coalition for America in 2013.
I met **Bailey Harris** when I attended the 2018 Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRR) conference in San Francisco. It was easy to immediately recognize that 13-year-old Bailey is a rising star in the nontheist/secular community. She is a talented young lady who has a very strong interest in science.

At age eight Bailey started to write her first book, *My Name is Stardust*. She was inspired to start writing after watching the television series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*. Her writing goal was to convey to her friends the importance of what she had learned from the host of the show, *Neil deGrasse Tyson*. Since that time Bailey has written two more books, *Stardust Explores the Solar System* and *Stardust Explores Earth’s Wonders*.

“I think the most challenging part of the process is taking hard concepts in science and making them fun for children,” Bailey said. “Once that’s done it’s really the best part about creating the books.”

Bailey’s father, **Doug Harris**, helps Bailey simplify and organize her messages. They also enlist the help of a group of scientists and astronomers to fact-check everything.

Bailey has exhibited her books in places such as BookCon in New York City and most recently at the 2019 DragonCon event held during the Labor Day Weekend in Atlanta, Georgia. Pictured below is Bailey posing with a fan after inscribing her book. Bailey was given a sales table in the main area of the Hyatt hotel to promote her books, sign autographs and pose for photos.

Bailey’s first DragonCon public event took place on Friday morning. She participated in the opening Skeptrack Panel. Pictured below, left to right, are **Matt Dillahunty**, me, and Bailey as we prepared to answer questions, provide insight into upcoming Skeptrack events and explain the joys of being a Skeptic during the welcome and opening panel.

Not pictured but also participating in the opening panel were **Curt Anderson**, **Jamy Ian Swiss**, **Richard Saunders**, **Dr. Angie Mattke**, **Bob Nygaard**, and **Nicholas Eftimaides**.

A few hours after the parade, Bailey delivered a presentation about being a young Skeptic. She talked about her family life, her experiences at school, how she got ideas for her books, and why she started a Secular Student group at her middle school in Utah. All of Bailey’s appearances at DragonCon can be viewed at:

http://video.skeptrack.org/?fbclid=IwAR2Gq-3-AlmJNIRAzMUe1UC_TuFKJef2cqWhOOGISOuv6veDNvFDT3vuiY

The Harris family is creating an evolution game which will be available soon. In the meantime, please consider giving Bailey’s books to the children you know during the 2019 Winter holiday season. Please order through the Amazon Smiles program to benefit the Freethought Society.
Secular Coalition for America’s Lobby Day 2019

by Herb Silverman

Each year the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) organizes Lobby Day in Washington, D.C., arranging individual visits to Capitol Hill for attendees. Before telling you about this year’s recent Lobby Day events, however, I’ll give a little background on SCA.

The mission of SCA is to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheist viewpoints, as well as to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government.

SCA provides a unified voice in Washington for nontheist issues. In 2002 they started with only four national member organizations and now they have nineteen, covering the full spectrum of atheists, humanists, and other secular Americans. SCA also facilitates cooperation and strategic coordination between member organizations. The nontheist movement has often been compared to “herding cats.” Uniting secular Americans into a cohesive community requires vigilance, determination, and a significant investment of resources. The end result, however, is well worth it.

When SCA was founded, its member organizations were educational nonprofits with strict limits on lobbying, so SCA incorporated as a political advocacy organization to allow unlimited lobbying on behalf of secular Americans.

SCA operated as a volunteer organization for its first three years. Board members and volunteers from the four founding member organizations maintained a website, raised funds, and issued action alerts. Lori Lipman Brown, a former Nevada State Senator, was hired as the Coalition’s first director and lobbyist in August of 2005. Associate director Ron Millar joined the SCA staff, initially as legislative associate, two weeks later. SCA immediately began a full time program of lobbying, media relations, and outreach, advocating for those millions of Americans without god beliefs. Located in Washington, D.C., SCA lobbies Congress, the White House, and federal agencies on issues of concern to our constituency. We want to show our representatives that atheists and humanists are not asking for special rights, but we do expect and demand equal rights.

In 2007, SCA announced the results of a contest to identify the highest-ranking elected official to publicly acknowledge a nontheistic worldview. Representative Pete Stark (D-CA) became the first member of Congress in U.S. history to so declare.

In 2008, SCA organized its first Lobby Day event, and since then has held one every year. I’ve attended all of them. Each year seems to have been more effective than the previous year. Attendees from around the nation are briefed on the most pertinent legislation and issues related to church-state separation, and trained on how to advocate effectively. SCA arranges appointments for us with our senators and congressional representative, or with their staff members. We are also coached on how to engage and build relations with our members’ offices on the local level throughout the year.

Last year, Mark Sanford was my South Carolina congressional representative. He was at another meeting, so we talked to one of his staff members. But Sanford came out of his meeting because he knew me and wanted to discuss our issues. Despite his foibles, I’ve always found him to be good at communicating with his constituents. Shortly after his nationally-televised Appalachian Trail apology, I saw him at an airport. When he apologized to me, I told him that he didn’t have to apologize for adultery, which was his personal business. But I was upset by his press conference apology “to people of faith across South Carolina, or for that matter, across the nation.” I told him implicit in his apology was that people of faith are expected to be more moral than people without faith, and that those of us without religious faith are no less moral.

At the time, I happened to have a copy of my book, Candidate Without a Prayer with me. Sanford saw it, and said he planned to buy a copy. So I gave him mine. I would have liked to have seen his reaction when he read the first paragraph:

“South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum,” observed Congressman James L. Petigru, shortly after South Carolina seceded from the Union in 1860 and declared itself a republic. Had television existed, no doubt many of its politicians at that time would have been fodder for late-night comedians. I’ve lived in South Carolina since 1976, and stories that make our local politicians famous no longer surprise me. The comedy group Capitol Steps takes its name from the escapade involving former congressman John Jenrette, who had sex with his wife on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in the late 1970s. More recently, our former governor Mark Sanford had sex with his “soul mate” in Argentina, which he mistook for the Appalachian Trail. Come to think of it, South Carolina may not be “too large for an insane asylum.”

At SCA’s 2018 Secular Awards Dinner, Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) made a historic announcement that a Congressional Freethought Caucus had been established. Congressional Caucuses are formal groups of congressional members with shared goals, interests, or ideology. This was a milestone for nonreligious Americans in the constant and continual struggle for inclusion in the political process and recognition as a constituency.

The Congressional Freethought Caucus (CFC) promotes public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values. It protects the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict separation of church and state. CFC opposes discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, as well as religious and nonreligious persons. CFC champions the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide. It also provides a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

Initially there were four members in the Caucus, and now there are twelve. See:

https://secular.org/governmental-affairs/congressional-freethought-caucus/

Four members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus were at the 2019 Lobby Day events. At the reception on Thursday, September 26th, the evening before our visits to the Capitol Steps takes its name from the escapade involving former congressman John Jenrette, who had sex with his wife on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in the late 1970s. More recently, our former governor Mark Sanford had sex with his “soul mate” in Argentina, which he mistook for the Appalachian Trail. Come to think of it, South Carolina may not be “too large for an insane asylum.”

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Hill, Representative Sean Castin (D-IL) spoke about his work on climate change. Representative Jerry McNerney (D-CA) said there were closeted nontheist members of Congress who are not yet ready to come out. He mentioned one who told him, “Religion is what politicians talk about when they don’t want to talk about ethics.”

McNerney added, “Morality is what you talk about when you don’t want to talk about religion.” Talking to McNerney later, I was pleasantly surprised to learn that he, like me, is also a mathematician.

Rita Swan received the SCA Lifetime Achievement Award at this reception. Swan speaks and writes about child abuse and neglect related to religious or cultural practices. After their son died in 1977 because of their faith in Christian Science, she and her husband left the church and became advocates for the rights of children to medical care. In 1983, they founded Children’s Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD), a national membership organization.

CHILD disseminates information about ideological child abuse and neglect, opposes all religious exemptions from child health and safety laws, lobbies for rights of children to equal protection, and files amicus briefs in support of those rights. Swan has testified before legislative committees in 15 states and at a United States Senate staff briefing. CHILD’s work in coalition with state organizations has gotten religious exemptions from child neglect laws repealed in nine states and prevented exemptions from being enacted in several other states.

In her outstanding acceptance speech, Swan talked about some strange religious exemptions she helped overturn. For example, she was instrumental in repealing the religious exemption from wearing bicycle helmets in Pennsylvania.

On Friday morning before heading to Capitol Hill, we heard from Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Representative Huffman, co-founders of the CFC. Raskin has sponsored anti-blasphemy laws, one of the two issues we planned to advocate on Capitol Hill that afternoon. He also mentioned his personal confidence in reason and science. Raskin closed with a meaningful quote for us today, by Thomas Paine, which he modified for modern sensibility, the one that begins, “These are the times that try men’s and women’s souls.”

Representative Huffman talked about how good it felt to be out and publicly honest about who he is. He and the others in the CFC were pleasantly surprised by how much support (and contributions) they got from constituents and from others around the country. He thought that they might soon have as many as twenty members in CFC. He also brought up the Project Blitz playbook, and how Christian nationalists are shaping state law using a distorted definition of “religious freedom” to attack equality. This includes LGBTQ rights, access to reproductive healthcare, and attempts to inject religion into public schools.

Barry Grant, a former addict now serving as Director of Outpatient Programs for the Hope House Treatment Center in Crownsville, Maryland, spoke about what was at stake in personal terms. Grant rejected a faith-based, 12 step program, fought for an alternative secular program that fit his individual needs, and now fights to ensure others can have that same life-altering experience.

Prior to heading to Capitol Hill, we were prepped on how to advocate for two issues: access to secular addiction recovery options for all Americans, and a resolution calling for the global repeal of blasphemy and apostasy laws. These are not only issues of concern to secular Americans, but also is an inclusive vision of religious freedom.

Participation in Lobby Day visits also remind our elected officials that the secular community is an active, engaged part of their constituencies and that we are invested in a wide range of issues. These in-person visits allow us to tell stories that members of Congress don’t often hear. Visiting their offices is the highest impact advocacy in which we can engage. For instance, we can tell them that 25.5 percent of Americans are nonreligious, and that number is growing; that there are 64 million religiously unaffiliated adults in the United State, more numerous than Catholics or mainline Protestants; and that the median age of the unaffiliated is 37 while the median age for white Evangelical Protestants and white Catholics is 55.

SCA is working to make our voices heard on Capitol Hill, but they can’t do it alone. When SCA staff lobbyists walk into a congressional office, their political clout is determined by how many voters your elected official have heard from. Your voice is important to get real change in Washington and in state capitols all over the country. Even as we fight against religious privileging on the federal level, some of the most egregious violations occur at state levels. I should know. I live in South Carolina!

Your congressional representatives need to know that secular Americans like you are an important part of their constituency. If you haven’t already done so, please logon to secular.org and sign up for Action Alerts about upcoming legislation. The more members of Congress who hear from our community, the more attention they will pay to our issues. Please become active on our issues at the local level and visit members of Congress in your home district.

As SCA continues to grow and gain influence, I look forward to one day seeing an America that respects atheist and humanist viewpoints, and an America where the influence of religion is contained within the walls of churches, not the halls of Congress.
Help for People Leaving Their Religion

Dr. Marlene Winell is a human development consultant, psychologist, and writer living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a doctorate in Human Development and Family Studies from Pennsylvania State University and is the author of Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Who are Leaving Their Religion. Winell is considered one of the foremost experts on Religious Trauma and offers a variety of support programs through her Journey Free organization.

Leaving the Fold is a one-of-a-kind self-help book for people recovering from the harmful effects of religious indoctrination. It provides insight into the psychological manipulations involved in authoritarian religion and Christian fundamentalism in particular.

Drawing from her own personal experience as well as clinical expertise, Winell gives step-by-step guidance for healing from confusion, fear, guilt, anger, and grief throughout the book. Readers will learn to reclaim their right to think for themselves; experience freedom and self-love; develop inner resources and personal skills; and celebrate living in the here-and-now.

Winell is uniquely qualified to address the subject of leaving religion. In addition to her personal experience with freeing herself from fundamentalist religion, she has worked with clients recovering from religion for 28 years. She is known for coining the term “Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS),” which is a recognizable set of symptoms experienced as a result of prolonged exposure to a toxic religious environment and/or the trauma of leaving the religion.

RTS is a function of both the chronic abuses of harmful religion and the impact of severing one’s connection with one’s faith. It can be compared to a combination of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD (C-PTSD). There are ways to stop the abuse and recover. Following is more RTS information gleaned from several articles published in the British journal Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Today, Leaving the Fold, and the Journey Free website at: https://journeyfree.org

Causes of Religious Trauma Syndrome include authoritarianism coupled with toxic theology which is received and reinforced at church, school, and home results in:

- Suppression of normal child development — cognitive, social, emotional, moral stages are arrested
- Damage to normal thinking and feeling abilities — information is limited and controlled; dysfunctional beliefs taught; independent thinking condemned; feelings condemned
- External locus of control — knowledge is revealed, not discovered; hierarchy of authority enforced; self not a reliable or good source
- Physical and sexual abuse — patriarchal power; unhealthy sexual views; punishment used for control

The religious doctrines of original sin and eternal damnation cause the most psychological distress by creating the ultimate double bind. Religious persons are made to feel guilty and responsible as they face eternal punishment. Also, according to doctrine, a mortal being cannot do anything about it either. These are teachings of fundamentalist Christianity; however, many other authoritarian religions have equally toxic doctrines.

The religious person must conform to a mental test of “believing” in an external, unseen source for salvation, and maintain this state of belief until death. Dictates demand that they cannot ever stop sinning altogether. Consequently, the religious must continue to confess and be forgiven, hoping that they have met the criteria despite complete lack of feedback about whether or not making it to heaven will ever be achieved. Salvation is not a free gift after all. For the sincere believer, this results in an unending cycle of shame and relief.

Much more information is available in the book Leaving the Fold. An ebook and Kindle version of Leaving the Fold is available for only $12 directly from the journeyfree.org website. Simply visit the website and press the “Donate” button. Indicate that you are purchasing the book and fill in the $12 price. The book and a workbook with accompanying exercises will be sent to you.

Leaving the Fold is available at your favorite bookstore or online. Please shop at: smile.amazon.com Using this link to order automatically increases the Freethought Society's (FS) AmazonSmile donations when FS is designated as the recipient.

Winell’s next Journey Free Retreat takes place January 17-20, 2020. Please visit the Journey Free website for reservations and additional retreat details.

Winell also offers individual counseling, an online support group, and professional training for those who desire to be of service to others.

Symptoms of Religious Trauma Syndrome:

- Cognitive: Confusion, poor critical thinking ability, negative beliefs about self-ability and self-worth, black and white thinking, perfectionism, difficulty with decision-making
- Emotional: Depression, anxiety, anger, grief, loneliness, difficulty with pleasure, loss of meaning
- Social: Loss of social network, family rupture, social awkwardness, sexual difficulty, behind schedule on developmental tasks
- Cultural: Unfamiliarity with secular world; “fish out of water” feelings, difficulty belonging, information gaps (e.g. evolution, modern art, and music)

RECOVERING FROM RELIGIOUS TRAUMA?

Journey Free Retreat

January 17-20, 2020
Lafayette, CA (SF Bay area)
journeyfree.org/retreats
The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee (TPMC) was established in 1993 with the goal of conducting educational and entertaining programs promoting the ideals and ideas of Thomas Paine and the Freethought philosophy. Throughout the years, TPMC honored the life and legacy of Thomas Paine in many ways. The committee’s efforts have received local, national and international recognition for its efforts.

In 2016 TPMC received a financial boost when the estate of Walter A. Schmitz named the Freethought Society (FS) as a benefactor. At that time, FS announced that a Thomas Paine sculpture project could be possible (See: “The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee Receives a Financial Boost” article printed in the March/April 2017, Volume 8, Number 2 issue of The Freethought Society News).

The FS board unanimously agreed that the Thomas Paine sculpture project would be designed and created by the talented sculptor Zenos Frudakis. Frudakis is considered one of the top 25 sculptors in the world. He is a Pennsylvania resident and has been a supporter of FS for over 5 years.

Frudakis created a small sample sculpture pictured in this announcement. The plan is for a final bronze statue to stand approximately 8-9 feet tall, with a base that may have the names of Paine’s books – one title on each of the four-sided base. These details are subject to change as this project evolves. The rough statue sample is approximately 20” tall and shows Thomas Paine holding a copy of Common Sense in his left hand and a quill pen in his right hand.

FS is pleased to announce that a grant applied for through The James Hervey Johnson Educational Foundation for the creation of a Thomas Paine statue was recently approved. FS was given $5,000 to help honor the life and work of Thomas Paine through the placement of a statue. FS seeks to educate the public about the important work that was done by Thomas Paine. His writings paved the way to the Enlightenment Era and his books inspired civil revolutions on two continents that were governed under tyrannical rule. Many regard Thomas Paine as a “forgotten Founding Father.” FS is determined to change that, and create a place of honor for this remarkable Freethought hero.

A target installation date for a sculpture is June 8, 2020 or June 8, 2021, as fundraising efforts dictate. June 8th is recognized in France and England as Thomas Paine Day. Thomas Paine Day is also recognized in Pennsylvania (York, Philadelphia, and Lancaster), New Jersey (Bordentown and Cherry Hill), Illinois (Champaign/Urbana), New York (New Rochelle), and California (Garden Grove). June 8th is the date of Thomas Paine’s death in 1809.

So far, Washington, D.C. seems to be the preferred site for a Thomas Paine statue. Thanks to the efforts of David Henley, land was set aside for a Thomas Paine Monument via Public Law 103-422, S.P.J. Res. 227. It was approved on October 25, 1994 by President William Jefferson Clinton. TPMC is currently researching the availability of this land. The process is complicated due to government red tape.

The other preferred location would be in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Location research is ongoing and many possibilities are being considered.

In the meantime, FS is beginning a formal fundraising campaign. The projected overall cost will be approximately $400,000.00. To inspire donations, Henley has provided FS with Thomas Paine items to distribute to large donors. Please see details in the donation form below. Please consider donating generously. All donations are tax-deductible.

**Donation Form for a Thomas Paine Statue**

Yes! I would like to donate to the project. Please process the following financial donation for:

Name (first and last): ____________________________________________

Street Address:________________________________________________________________________

City, State, and Zip Code:_________________________________________________________________

Phone Number: ___________ Email Address: ________________________________

For a donation of $50 or more the donor will receive ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of $100 or more the donor will receive one CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, and ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of $200 or more the donor will receive one CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, ten Thomas Paine lapel pins, and a framable color portrait of Thomas Paine.

____I do not need a gift. I am donating the following amount to the Freethought Society’s Thomas Paine statue project: $____ Charge cards can be used at: FtSociety.org

Note: Any amount is appreciated; however, gifts are limited. Donors may receive special mention in this publication.

Please mail this form to: The Freethought Society, Thomas Paine Statue Project, P. O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366. Donations can also be made online at: https://www.ftsociety.org/menu/thomas-paine-memorial-committee/
November 21
Freethought Society (FS) founder and president Margaret Downey invites you to attend a free and open-to-the-public presentation entitled “The Tree of Knowledge Project: History, Placement, Challenges, and the Future.”

The presentation will take place on Thursday, November 21, 2019 at the Bala Cynwyd Library (131 Old Lancaster Road, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania). The presentation begins at 7:00 PM in the community meeting room on the second floor of the library.

Attendees are invited to bring two color copies of the front cover of each of their favorite books. The copies will be made into a Tree of Knowledge ornament at a later date. Scans of book covers (front only) are also needed in order to build the FS ornament database. Scans can be sent anytime to:

Margaret@FtSociety.org

Pictured below is a photograph of the very first FS Tree of Knowledge. The 18-foot-high tree was placed at the Free Speech Zone located at the Chester County Courthouse (2 North High Street, West Chester, Pennsylvania) in 2007. Using a slide show, film and poetry, Downey will take you through the 12-year journey of all the attempts to continue to use the Tree of Knowledge as a Winter holiday symbol of the nontheist/secular community.

December 1
The 2019 Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge will be installed and decorated on Sunday, December 1, 2019 in the lobby of the Philadelphia Ethical Society (1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

The installation ceremony begins at 11:00 AM with a presentation by Hugh Taft-Morales, who is the Philadelphia Ethical Society Leader. The title of his presentation is “The Hidden Joy of Serving: Appreciating Their Story.” Taft-Morales will talk about the importance of listening to the stories of the people we volunteer to serve.

Freethought Society (FS) founder and president, Margaret Downey will create ornaments on-site for anyone who brings two color copies of the front cover of their favorite book.

Below is a photograph of the 2018 Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge that was installed in the lobby of the Philadelphia Ethical Society after it was fully decorated by FS and Ethical Society members. Pictured in front of the tree are Downey and Taft-Morales.
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The publication is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

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

Yes! I would like to:

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

**Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society**

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

**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 in emergency situations)*

**Jump into the Jean Pool**
*(collection of jeans for the homeless)*

**Meetup Committee**
*(social events and improving online communications)*

**Monthly Meeting Coordinators**
*(schedule and manage speakers and venues)*

**Secular Celebrations**
*(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)*

**Speakers Bureau**
*(provide FS a resume, photo and speech subjects/titles)*

**Special Events**
*(coordinate unique events of interest to nontheists)*

**Sole Searching**
*(collection of athletic shoes for donation to the homeless)*

**Thomas Paine Memorial Committee**
*(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)*

**Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee**
*(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the Winter symbol concept nationwide)*