

June 2005
Volume 1, Issue 5

Manitoba Humanist

Special Interest Articles:

- Summer Solstice Party
- Evelyn Martens: Humanist of the Year.
- Ivan Pokus: My story.

Individual Highlights:

- Book Reviews 2
- Evelyn Marten 3
- Ivan Pokus 4,5
- The Last Word 6

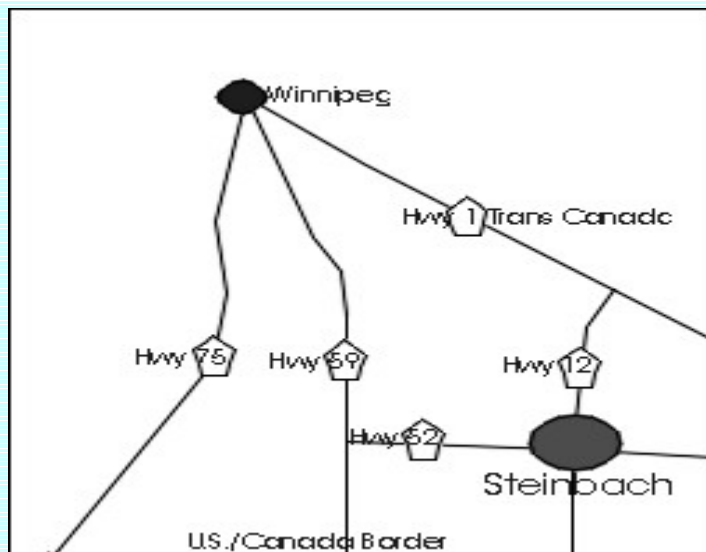
Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

President: Barrie Webster

Editor: Dennis Ousey

Summer Solstice Get-together

This year's Summer Solstice get-together will be held at John and Helen Friesen's new house at 7 Pinehurst Lane in beautiful Mitchell, Manitoba on June 18th starting at 3:00 pm. This will be a 'bring-your-own' barbecue. That means that you should bring your own meat (burger or steak), or veggie burgers, etc., and a potato or two, maybe a little bit of greens for your health and the barbecue (and the chef) will be supplied by Helen and John. Plates, forks, knives, etc. will be supplied. Don't forget to bring your own wine!



Mitchell is just west of Steinbach on Highway 52. Here are the directions once you get to Mitchell:

From the corner of the 59 and 52, go 10 miles east along the 52. This will bring you to the east side of Mitchell and the corner of Centre St. and the 52. There is a CO-OP gas bar at that corner (northeast corner). Go north (left) on Centre to the first street off Centre going east. This is Pinehurst Lane. Our house is on the northeast corner of Centre and Pinehurst Lane and the house number is 7. It is the Cream coloured house. Helen (phone 204 326 8181)

Anybody requiring a ride is asked to contact Barrie at bwebster@mb.humanists.ca or call 475 1266

Book Review: It's the Crude, Dude

War, Big Oil, and the Fight for the Planet – It's the Crude, Dude

Linda McQuaig, Doubleday Canada, 2004 ISBN 0-385-66010-3 (hardcover) 346 pp. McQuaig examines the motives for the 2003 American led invasion of Iraq and the fact that almost no investigative journalism in the mainstream press has examined these motives properly (hence her rather flippant "It's the crude, dude" statement in her title. Indeed, she laments the taboo in the mainstream press against

suggesting that Big Oil has a role in ongoing international political moves by Washington. The book explores the motives of the USA to gain control over the largest remaining petroleum reserves on the planet, and to defend it with all of the clumsily administered technological might of the US military. McQuaig also emphasizes the vital importance of oil in US-Canadian trade negotiations and decries the guaranteed access to Canadian energy supplies embodied in NAFTA. She

finishes her treatise by pointing out that the current battle over access to oil may be overshadowed by the looming environmental disaster represented by global warming and climate change. This is a very readable book on a deadly serious subject – a book worth reading if you have any interest in understanding the apparently bizarre international behaviour of the George W. Bush administration.

Barrie Webster
April 2005

Books, not which afford us a cowering enjoyment, but in which each thought is of unusual daring; such as an idle man cannot read, and a timid one would not be entertained by, which even make us dangerous to existing institution—such call I good books.

-Thoreau

Book Review: Halliburton Agenda

Halliburton Agenda: The Politics of Oil and Money

Dan Briody, Wiley, 2004 ISBN 0-471-63860-9 (cloth) 290 pp.

Dick Cheney, Vice-President of the USA, was CEO of Halliburton, the American company with the most to gain from the American occupation of Iraq, before he became George W. Bush's vice-presidential running mate in 2000. Dan Briody, the award-winning, best-selling author, has documented the rise of Halliburton from its

humble beginnings in Texas at the end of the 1800s to the present day. He has also followed the rise of Dick Cheney to power, from being a civil servant to his powerful position at the head of Halliburton. While Cheney has cut his ties with this company, he retains stock options that gain value with every move that adds to Halliburton's bottom line. The saga of cost overages dates back at least to the Second World War and rears its head in Vietnam, Somalia, and Bosnia before continuing in Iraq. Briody also describes

ongoing Halliburton business deals with Libya and Iran, countries on the US terrorist list. Finally, the privatization of logistical support to the US military and the reconstruction of Iraq both have led to spectacular financial gain for Halliburton and its subsidiaries. Briody's book untangles the complex webs involving American business leaders, which have led to the rise of Halliburton to its present position of power. A good read!

Barrie Webster
April 2005

Canadian humanists honor right to die with dignity advocate

The Humanist Association of Canada has named Evelyn Martens of Victoria, B.C., 'Humanist of the Year 2005'. The association will honor the right to die with dignity advocate with its 'Humanist of the Year' award during HAC's national conference in Ottawa next June.

Ms Martens last November was found not guilty of having incited the suicides of Leyanne Burchell and Monique Charest. She had been arrested in June 2002 charged with "aiding and abetting" suicide. The jury at Ms Martens' trial in Duncan, B.C. last

year found her not guilty of the charge. Legal experts have called the finding a landmark decision in that it narrowed the definition of "aiding and abetting" suicide and, in effect, clarified that it does not include providing information and merely attending a suicide.

HAC's 'Humanist of the Year' award pays tribute to humanists who have vigorously supported a cause, which the association deems important. In so doing, recipients almost inevitably will have accepted risks beyond their comfort zone and made an impact on

Canadian society. For 12 years, the now 74-year-old Ms Martens risked her freedom to provide information and solace to terminally ill individuals who asked for information as to how to end one's life in dignity. Ms Martens' trial and its outcome last year drew attention to what she and her supporters consider Canada's inadequate law on assisted suicide. The findings of the trial also are expected to impact on the continuing debate in and outside the Canadian Parliament about the right to die with dignity and assisted suicide.

[Reality means you live until you die. The real truth is nobody wants reality](#)

Member Ivan Pokus Tells of Humanist Journey

By Catherine Ousey

led him to reject the church.

jobs they dislike.”

As he grew older, he came to see how illogical and unscientific the “holy books” were.

At the May 14 meeting of the Humanist Association of Manitoba, members of the Association heard the story of retired teacher Ivan Pokus’ journey from a religious upbringing in what is now called Slovakia to humanism in Manitoba.

After World War II Ivan taught school under the communist government in Czechoslovakia. Officially atheistic, the communists suppressed all religions. At odds with communist ideology, Ivan says, “...by default, I supported people of faith who were being oppressed.”

Ivan had difficulty finding a faculty advisor when his Master’s degree thesis proposal on surveying Manitoba teachers about their opinions of religious exercises and prayers in public schools. His area of study was deemed too controversial.

Beginning with his early experiences under the totalitarianism of the Nazis and the Communists, Ivan traced his conversion from the Roman Catholic Church to atheism.

Upon immigrating to Canada after the 1968 revolt in Czechoslovakia, Ivan settled in Steinbach, a predominantly Christian community, in southeast Manitoba. After learning English, he went to work in a local high school where he was required to begin the day with a Bible reading and the Lord’s Prayer.

The case of Chris Tait, a student in Macgregor, Manitoba, spurred Ivan to action. Ivan recognized that Chris Tait’s human rights had been violated when he was suspended for not standing up during the religious exercises at his school.

Religious exercises and prayers in public schools; His area of study was deemed too controversial.

He began by doubting the integrity of authorities such as priests and teachers. As he grew older, he came to see how illogical and unscientific the “holy books” were. He soon began to doubt the R. C. Church and other Christian religions. The actions of Pope Pius XII and other church leaders supporting the Nazis during World War II

“At that time,” Ivan says, “I just, thought of it as something I had to do to keep my job. Many people have aspects of their

Not happy with the settlement of the case, Ivan volunteered to be a complainant in a claim against the Manitoba government by the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties (MARL).

(Cont’d next page)

(Cont'd from previous page)

The claim challenged part of the Public Schools Act on the grounds that no teacher should be required to perform religious exercises. Even though he knew there might be some negative consequences in terms of his job and his life in the community, Ivan pursued the matter over several years.

"Sometimes," says Ivan, "you just have to stand up for what's right." The case was won soon after courts upheld similar cases brought in Ontario and B. C.

Denying that his actions were courageous, Ivan told the group that some of his fellow teachers shunned him after the case. He was not officially reprimanded or fired from his job, but he wondered what might have happened had the case not been successful. Maria Pokus, Ivan's wife, says that an employee of the

bakery she frequented "...gave me the 'cold shoulder'" after the story hit the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

These experiences and the many wars being fought on religious grounds in many parts of the world brought Ivan to realize that perhaps not only Christianity is to blame for much violence. Ivan says, "Maybe no religion is good."

The final step in Ivan's conversion to humanism and atheism was his realization that there is no proof of God's existence. With his science background, Ivan questioned how so many could believe in something without any evidence.

He is critical of present-day churches. "Religions want to increase the number of adherents," he states, "so they oppose birth control and disregard concerns about the environment." He also dislikes the tendency of religions to attempt to control

political systems. He believes that working for the separation of church and state and upholding individual rights are the most important tasks of humanists.

Many members at the meeting agreed with Ivan that there is still much to be done in Manitoba. Although religious exercises are illegal in Manitoba public schools, HAM members are aware of many schools that still allow Christian prayers and Bible readings and continue to give unfair advantage to Christian philosophy and teachings.

Ivan told the group that some of his fellow teachers shunned him after the case.

Humanist Assoc. of Manitoba

225 St. Michael
Road
Winnipeg,
Manitoba
R2M 4L3

PHONE:
204-254 3691

E-MAIL:
dousey@mb.humanists.ca

We're on the Web!
See us at:
mb.humanists.ca

The Last Word

Hearing Ivan's story makes me very proud to be a Humanist. It reminded me of the turning point in my life where Christianity and I parted ways. It was the summer when I just turned 16. I had joined the Army reserve to make some cash over the summer holidays. In those days at the Shilo army camp on a Sunday, one would be forced to go to church with a line up for Catholics on one side and Protestants

on the other side. Being of little faith I chose one side one week and the other line the following week. That was okay, but what bothered me more than anything else was my Jewish friend, who could not pick either line. There was no line for Jews. The army, being what it was at the time, made no provision for him, but rather made him stand outside one of the churches in the blistering heat of the

morning. As if it were a punishment for being Jewish, he was made to stand for an hour outside the church. I felt so sorry for him. The injustice of it all got to me and after that I vowed that I would, (1) not join the army and, (2) not join any church. That is only part of why I became a Humanist but I shall never forget that summer and my Jewish friend.

Dennis Ousey

Anthony Mars: Omni scientific Cosmology 05/19/2005

On Thursday, May 19th 7 members of HAM and 20 or so members of the Unitarian Universalist church, attended a lecture by Anthony Marr. He discussed a

branch of cosmology that he called 'omni-scientific cosmology'. It was a very interesting point of view. It offered up a challenge for humanity to

cooperate on all levels to reach the next stage of evolution of integrative transcendence.
www.omni-science.org

