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Web!

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Upcoming events

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Monthly Meeting

April 14, 2007

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Meet and Greet 5:30

Dinner (may be ordered from coffee shop menu) 6:30

Meeting 7:30

Speaker: Chris Tait

Lawyer and originator of the challenge to the Lord's Prayer
in his high school

Don't miss this meeting – it's sure to be interesting

Everyone is welcome

Next Monthly Meeting

May 12, 2007

Discussion – topic to be decided

and don't forget:

Upcoming June Meeting

June Solstice Party

More Details Soon!

Students Without Borders - Afrique 2007

How do you help young people become citizens of the world? You let them learn for themselves, by fundraising, writing to pen pals and going on a life-changing voyage to Africa.



At HAM's March 2007 meeting, we met teacher Diane Plamondon and two of her grade 12 students. Plamondon has been

working with this group of students, and encouraging them to think in broader global terms, for over three years. Earlier this year, Plamondon and 41 of those students from College Jeanne-Sauvé made the trip to Mbour, in Senegal.

Students Without Borders has three main funding areas – women's literacy, health care and education. In a region of the world where a nurse's wage runs about \$45 to \$50 Cdn per month, one chicken, carefully reared until it can produce eggs, can be life-altering. It may mean the difference between starvation and sustenance for an entire family.

Plamondon shared stories about the people and events she has encountered, and her students added anecdotes about their own experiences.

The accompanying slide show of their photos of the trip was much appreciated.

The message certainly came across that this was not a simple effort at charity or a hand out, but an effort at understanding, and an opportunity to exchange ideas and resources. The aim is long-term self-sufficiency for the residents of Mbour.

To find out more, you can contact Diane Plamondon at (204) 257-0124, or email Diane.Plamondon@rielsd.org

If you missed the HAM meeting, but are interested in finding out more about the organization and their recent trip to Senegal, Students Without Borders is hosting an open event to discuss their activities:

Students Without Borders Afrique 2007 Elèves sans frontières invites members of our community to join us in revisiting our journey to Mbour, Senegal, Africa. This evening will feature students' stories, a photo gallery presentation, African music and souvenirs (paintings and crafts), and the premier showing of the Radio-Canada documentary produced by Denis Chamberland / filmed by Trevor Lyons.

Wednesday April 11, 2007
 College Jeanne-Sauvé, 1128 Dakota Street
 7:30 pm
 (no tickets required)

Young atheist leader assaulted at Ryerson University

Following is the text of a press release put out by the Freethought Association of Canada on Friday, March 30th.

Young atheist leader assaulted at Ryerson University Police investigating hate crime provoked by postering for controversial event

In what appears to be the first violent hate crime against an atheist, Justin Trottier, Director of the Center for Inquiry Ontario and President of the Freethought Association of Canada (a national body composed of secularist student groups including the UofT Secular Alliance and the Freethinker's Association of Ryerson) was attacked around midnight on March 27 on the campus of Ryerson University. Ryerson security is treating this as a hate crime.

Mr. Trottier and his colleague Peter Aruja were placing posters for upcoming events at Ryerson University and the University of Toronto, featuring physicist Victor Stenger, author of the New York Time's Best Seller "God:

The Failed Hypothesis", set to take place on April 5. While postering, two assailants took offense to the religious implications of the posters advertising for Stenger's book. About fifteen minutes later when Trottier and Aruja were in a more secluded area of the university the two reappeared and initiated a verbal argument.

According to Mr. Trottier "The first individual smacked me in the face twice and said "watch your smart mouth." I said "don't touch me" at which point he head butted me hard in the face, causing my nose to bleed profusely."

The attack targeting an individual for his beliefs clearly represents a hate crime and is being treated as such by Ryerson security. This also represents a disturbing trend of targeting individuals who visibly question the legitimacy of religious dogma. Just last week Toronto Police were involved in the highly publicized threats against Mr. Fatah and Mrs. Hassan of the Muslim Canadian Congress. Here the anonymous individual

swore to "slaughter" the two MCC members, in the name of god, for belonging to an "apostate" organization.

The Humanist Association of Canada spokesperson, Pat O'Brien, responded to this shameful incident: "Atheists have never been accorded the same respect as those with religious beliefs even though our position originates in logic and reason, not myth and superstition. This escalation of a systemic, although till now hidden, discrimination is very troubling."

"I think I discovered the hard way the boundaries of freedom of speech," said Justin Trottier. "The fact that an atheist should fear for his well being while advertising for a university event that seeks to promote free inquiry is alarming, and though I feared for my life briefly, I've never felt as strong about my atheism. My colleagues and I have only strengthened our resolve to forge ahead with our agenda to push for secularism, science and freedom of thought."

cont'd next page

"I think I discovered the hard way the boundaries of freedom of speech"

Assaulted...(cont'd)

The perpetrators were last seen on the north side of Gerrard St., midway between Church St. and Yonge St., walking northward through a pathway, at about 1am. The first perpetrator was about 6', black, with short black hair. He was slim build and clean shaven. He was wearing dark

jeans and a blue and white hat. He had on prescription glasses. The second perpetrator was of Middle Eastern descent, 5'4"-5'6" with short, curly, black hair. He was clean shaven with a stalky, muscular build. He was wearing a grey golf shirt, with beige pants. He had prescription glasses.

Anyone with information is encouraged to contact the Toronto Police about incident #1255906.

www.secularalliance.ca

HAM Leader Participates in Radio Forum

On March 5th, our own president, Barrie Webster, participated in a forum on spirituality and religion. Held at the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), the forum was broadcast on GodTalk on radio station CJOB.

The other panelists were Joe Boot, Christian apologist and Sensei Fredrich Ulrich of the Manitoba Buddhist Church. The major question posed to the panelists was "Is there meaning and purpose in life".

If you'd like to hear the entire broadcast, CMU follow the link below and go down to the bottom of the page.

www.cmu.ca/news/GodTalkForum07.html

New Editor Signs On

"To you I'm an atheist; to God, I'm the loyal opposition."

- Woody Allen

Somehow it seems fitting, in this season of spring, renewal and new beginnings, to take on the role of HAM's new newsletter editor.

Your former editor, Catherine Ousey, has sold her house, packed up her belongings, and will soon be living amidst the scenic splendor that is our West Coast.

We wish Catherine only the best of everything as she sets out on her own

new beginning.

Even after a couple of days of arm wrestling with Microsoft Word's templates and text boxes, my enthusiasm hasn't waned. Do I really know what I'm doing and what I've let myself in for? Nope. I figure it'll work out as we go along.

Do I have any new ideas? You bet I do.

My brain has been working in overdrive, considering all of the possibilities. But there are only so many hours in a day, and so much space available on these pages.

So keep watching this space over the coming months as these new ideas take root, and don't hesitate to let me know what you think.

Donna L. Harris

Letters to the Editor

What About Personal Responsibility?

Dear Editor,

Another tragic case was reported in the media lately: fatal shooting by the father of Jadah Walker, her drug dealer-boyfriend James Hayward. It was the father's desperate last ditch attempt to save his daughter's life – thanks to Jadah's drug addiction due to poor judgments she had exercised as a teen. But now she is twenty, yet, as J. Wood reported, she still "feels the system failed her parents".

It is always the society, the system, the school or street, the government, perhaps even an evil spirit – but never oneself, the person who had created this mortal situation. It is so incomparably easier to look for someone to blame!

But what about personal

responsibility?

J. Wood quotes a stepsister of the slain James Hayward, saying "...regardless of the way he earned money...James was ...caring, funny..." Huh – funny? REGARDLESS – really?! But James had been slowly murdering people! And not in an insanity, not in a blind rage, not a particular person – at random and the more the better! And – in cold blood, just for mere cash in his pocket!

"Jadah Walker says she would have died if she had continued living with Hayward for even a few more weeks", Mr. Wood witnessed. How many lives of our other children had been crippled by James' drugs just for cold cash he craved for? How could you say so, respected stepsister?! Again, what about personal responsibility?

My first reaction to Jadah's statement that it was 'the system' that failed her parents was: yeah, sure, just like the McDonald chain was guilty for their spilled hot coffee. But then again...maybe, there is something in it? Our society brings up astonishing numbers of extremely immature self-indulgent people; we must teach and preach to them about personal responsibility, emphasize it, make it their priority option in life, in fact a necessity, make them proud of it. After all, lack of it does look like a flaw in our general public attitude, in their upbringing...doesn't it?

Sophie Shulman,
M.D.

"It is always the society, the system, the school or street, the government, perhaps even an evil spirit – but never oneself, the person who had created this mortal situation."

Book Review

Ever Since Darwin**Ever Since Darwin:
Reflections in Natural
History**

by Stephen Jay Gould
W.W. Norton & Co., 285
pages

*Reviewed by Grant
Rogerson*

When Donna took over the Ham library, I was pleased to discover a Stephen Jay Gould book I had not read. *Ever Since Darwin* is a collection of essays, in the same style as *Eight Little Piggies*, *The Lying Stones of Marrakech*, and *Dinosaur in a Haystack* that are also part of his 'Reflections in Natural History' series. However, *Ever Since Darwin* is more focussed.

Gould takes us on a tour of the influence Darwin's formulation has had on science and society. It is not what you would expect if you are looking for a tale of progression from Darwin through Watson and Crick, through to modern biotech, evo-devo and other modern specialties. Instead, Gould focuses on the misperceptions and misuse of Darwin's work. Although the book was published in 1977, the same issues Gould describes recur to this day.

He opens with a look at Darwin, including how he came to be on the *Beagle*, but not as its official naturalist. Darwin's theory had competitors, and we

are given a look at the alternatives – theories and people both. Gould describes the social, cultural and political effects on the new science. The context, Gould tells us in *Ever Since Darwin* and in many other books, matters as much as the scientific evidence. Science may be about facts, but scientists are people subject to cultural and political influences.

He moves on to the unsurprising discovery that it is not only politicians who will bend scientific theories to support their agendas. Scientists are also prone to influence – culture can impose social agendas on us we may not recognize. Gould shows us again and again how all aspects of Darwin's theories were used to support notions of racial superiority and justify social stratification as a genetic given. Both scientists and politicians gave evidence of selective readings, and happily viewed it through the frame of their pre-existing biases.

In the section *Science in Society – A Historical View*, Gould in his most user friendly style shows scientists taking the same evidence to mean one thing, then something quite the opposite only a few decades later. And as Gould can do so well, shows them spinning

conflicting evidence to mean the same thing at different times, with no new factual information to justify it. He points out that these were not stupid people by any standard, but people caught in the frame of their own society's standards and beliefs.

Gould also speaks to us as the evolutionary biologist, describing some of the true oddities of life – to our human perspective – in essays like *Organic Wisdom, or Why a Fly Should Eat Its Mother From The Inside*. He also discusses punctuated equilibrium, extinctions, the impact of size on potential, evolution of the brain, a rationale for altruism and others. With each essay, Gould describes the Darwinian logic of it, and discusses some of the people involved and how they came to their various conclusions.

Stephen Jay Gould died on May 20, 2002. He was one of those brilliant and expressive scientists who always leaves me wondering who will carry on the work of illuminating science for the rest of us. In *Ever since Darwin* and his many other books and essays, he carries on. Filled with knowledge and insight on many levels, written with wit and authority, this book is gold.