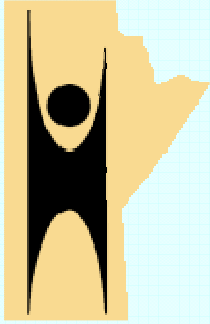


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# Manitoba Humanist



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## Humanist Association of Manitoba

### Upcoming events

#### Monthly Meeting Saturday, March 14, 2009

Viscount Gort Hotel, 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Meet and Greet: 5:30 pm

Meeting / Presentation: 6:15 pm

Dinner (may be ordered from the Coffee Shop menu): 7:00 pm

**Guest Speaker: Azin Nasseri**  
**Topic: the Bahai faith**

Mark your calendars!

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#### Monthly Meeting Saturday, April 11, 2009

**Guest Speaker: Prof. Arthur Schafer**  
Director, The Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics,  
University of Manitoba

#### Monthly Meeting Saturday, May 9, 2009

**Guest Speaker: Dan Falk**  
Science writer and author of "Universe on a T-Shirt" and  
"In Search of Time: Journeys Along a Curious Dimension"  
**Topic: In Search of Time**

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## Charlie Darwin's Birthday Celebration

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, attendees enjoyed an event that was both educational, and a whole lot of fun.

HAM hosted a Charles Darwin Birthday Party, which kicked off with Barrie Webster giving a presentation on some of Darwin's observations. We're already familiar with the ideas put forth in "The Origin of Species", namely that the mechanism for evolution was natural selection. However, in "The Descent of Man", Darwin focused more on human beings, and introduced his theory of sexual selection. Darwin introduced the idea that traits that had no obvious survival advantage (e.g., male antlers, bird plumage), may actually have a reproductive advantage in helping the animal find a mate and pass on his genes.

We were then treated to a short concert from Neil Schipper and Jeff Olsson. Both played guitar while Jeff sang an original tune that he had written, all about the Flying Spaghetti Monster, and they also delivered a mean rendition of the theme to Sesame Street. (I kid you not! It Rocked!)

Heather McDonell's presentation on reproductive strategies in various living things – as promised – was not to be missed. Yes, she did refer to male appendages and such, but she also talked about a wide variety of other life forms.

The evening concluded with a couple of Darwin quizzes, and by simply completing the quiz, attendees were entered into a draw for some great door prizes.

The evening was capped off with not one, but two cakes!

Thanks go out to everyone who took part – either by organizing the event or being a most appreciative and enthusiastic audience.

### THINGS I LEARNED:

From Heather's talk:  
I was reminded that for so many different life forms, reproduction is pretty easy – the simple release of egg and sperm into ocean waters. Reproduction obviously became much more complicated once living beings left the ocean and needed a new strategy.

And yes, I'm also glad I'm not a female Argentine lake duck (the male's penis is about as long as his whole body).

From Barrie's talk:  
Darwin's observations regarding sexual selection were "right on", as he speculated that certain adaptations held a reproductive benefit. However, Darwin was certainly reluctant to publish these views, and learning that he had family members (namely his daughters) review the material, made me realize how much his reluctance had to do with Victorian England's attitude toward anything remotely sexual.

- Donna Harris



*Barrie Webster at the podium*



*Neil Schipper rocks*



*Jeff and Myrna pay tribute to the FSM*



*Heather's delicious Darwin cake*

## Field Trip to Oak Hammock Marsh



*Both garter snakes and ground squirrels hibernate during our winters (the garter snakes actually "brumate")*

On Sunday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, HAM organized a field trip to Oak Hammock marsh, just a short distance north of Winnipeg.

Oak Hammock's naturalist treated us to a presentation entitled "Surviving the Freeze", which was all about the various strategies our local animal friends use to deal with our frigid winters.

Some animals migrate, of course. It's interesting to realize that we're not only a stop on a long journey south, but for some animals, such as snowy owls, we are their southern destination.

Other animals, such as tree squirrels and certain birds, stay active most of the winter.

For others, there are various levels of burrowing away to avoid the deep cold, ranging from actual hibernation, which is a genuine metabolic depression, when the body temperature lowers and

breathing slows down, through a state called torpor or into a super sleep, or super nap.

The three "sleeping" states are not completely clear-cut, and there may be overlaps, depending on conditions and the animals.

For example, those squirrels and nuthatches who are out on nice sunny days may decide to have a long nap when a blizzard decides to blow.

When we visited Oak Hammock, it was a nice sunny day out at the Marsh. We explored all around the Interpretive Centre, which has lots of displays and activities to keep children of ALL ages entertained.

If you've never been, a trip out to Oak Hammock is certainly well worth the time.

## Barrie Webster Saves Darwin Day

As we reported last month, The University of Manitoba offered two public lectures to celebrate Darwin month.

The first lecture, on Friday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, was to have been delivered by Dr. Barry Glickman from the University of Victoria.

Well, apparently Dr. Glickman fell ill just a couple of days before the

event and was not able to travel.

So, the University of Manitoba's Biology Department asked our own Barrie Webster to fill in.

Barrie did an outstanding job and it was fortunate that they found such an able presenter, who was all prepared, on such short notice.

Congratulations, Barrie!

## Getting to Know... Myrna Donald

This is the second in a continuing series that will focus on the members of HAM's executive. Myrna Donald just recently joined the HAM executive as a member at large.



**What is your favourite color?** *Blue. No yel-- Auuuuuuuugh! (courtesy Monty Python).*

**If you had one word to describe yourself, what would you choose?** *Others might use 'iconoclast'. 'Farmer' as a euphemism for 'fertilizer refresher' (which would be a euphemism for something not mentionable in mixed company, fits.)*

**What is your middle name?** *Anne.*

**Do you have a hero? If so, who and why.** *The cult of heroism is close to god worship, but that being said, Socrates works for me.*

**Do you have a favourite meal or dessert?** *Watermelon or dark beer (Guinness, Fort Garry Dark, etc.) on a hot day.*

**Were you named after someone?** *My father's mistress at the time of my birth. Seriously. My middle name is the same as my mother's middle name. By tradition on the distaff side, I should have been named Janet.*

**Who is your favourite author and/or**

**book?** *Impossible to narrow my admiration to just one author or book. I have appreciated Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Toni Morrison, Nail Gaiman, Terry Prachett, Margaret Laurence, Thomas Hardy, Camus, and many others.*

**Pets. Do you have any? If so, what kind?**

*Had a cat. Had a pony. Both are deceased. I now live in a pet restricted building. Do Pharaoh ants count as pets if they are uninvited visitors?*

**If you could travel to anywhere in the world, where would it be?** *Tough to limit to one place! I'd like to return to Russia.*

**What is one thing that really irritates you?** *Bigotry and stupidity. Although that seems like two, I feel the first is just a member of a subset of the other.*

**Are you a morning person or a night owl?** *Owl by nature, but I've adapted to the day world. Before travelling to New Zealand, I was sleeping in the day and awake at night. Within 2 days of arriving, my system wanted to sleep in the day, but as I did not want to miss out on anything, I adapted to the day again.*

**What's the last thing you bought yourself, just for fun?** *An Ugly Doll calendar. I waited until mid-January to take advantage of the lower prices, and couldn't find a Sponge Bob calendar.*

**Do you like to dress up for Halloween? If so, what was your most memorable costume?** *Tough, tough questions. It's probably just a three-way tie, all memorable misfires, between: the Freckle Fairy (in honour of the boyfriend I had at the time) – the outfit was a red polka dot dress and my skin was dotted with red eyeliner. People who did not know us thought I*  
**(cont'd next page)**

## Getting to Know... Myrna Donald (cont'd from pg 4)

*was doing an impression of a person afflicted with measles; KKK Winnipeg Charter Member (the material was black rather than the traditional white) – alas, I was mistaken for Death frequently, despite not having a scythe;*

*a zebra (a political statement completely missed by the other party goers) – the outfit was an ankle length sundress with a zebra print. My arms, neck and face were painted with stage make-up by a student of The Emily Carr School of Art and Design. It took him a long time to do, but it was a very good job. Very realistic rather than stylistic.*

*I have no aversion to the number 13, having been born on the 13<sup>th</sup>. But, as this is possibly amusing, and maybe enlightening, I add a freebie piece of data. A question asked by a chef, on the weekend: what is the title of your MSc thesis?*

*Answer: A Feasibility Study of the Application of Knowledge-Based Expert Systems in the Domain of Physiotherapy. I couldn't make it any shorter and still have it understandable and descriptive.*

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*“Does it really matter what these affectionate people do – so long as they don't do it in the streets and frighten the horses!”*

*-- Mrs. Patrick Campbell*

## Dozens of Manitoba Youngsters Pledge to Guard their Virginity Until Marriage

Dozens of Manitoba youths have decided that that they are going to wait until they are married before they have sex. On its face it seems like a wonderful idea, but there are problems brewing below the surface of a similar movement in the United States. The problem is – it doesn't work.

In the worst cases, where students have not been educated about disease or pregnancy prevention, they run the risk of contracting a serious illness or becoming pregnant when they finally give in to their desires.

Frankly, if it is so easy to prevent teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, we would all be flocking to Chris Jordan's church in Beausejour. But that's just not the case.

In a recent study in the US, Rosenbaum found, "82 percent of those who had taken a pledge had retracted their promises, and there was no

*significant difference in the proportion of students in both groups who had engaged in any type of sexual activity, including giving or receiving oral sex, vaginal intercourse, the age at which they first had sex, or their number of sexual partners. More than half of both groups had engaged in various types of sexual activity, had an average of about three sexual partners and had had sex for the first time by age 21 even if they were unmarried."*

A Columbia University study found that teenagers who vowed abstinence acquired sexually transmitted diseases at the same rate as the general population. It seems like all that the True Love Waits program produces is hypocrisy.

**Wear a Condom! Teach your kids about how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases.**

*- Jeff Olsson*

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# The Amazing Meeting 7 – a conference on critical thinking

July 9 - 12, 2009  
Las Vegas, NV  
South Point Hotel, Casino & Spa

Presented by : The James Randi Educational Foundation (JREF)  
Keynote Speaker: Bill Prady, Executive Producer and co-creator of the CBS sitcom The Big Bang Theory.

Guest Speakers include Phil Plait; Joseph A. Albiets III, MD; Dean Cameron; Daniel "Chip" Denman; Harriet Hall, MD (aka The Skep Doc); Dr. Steve Novella; Emily Rosa; D.J. Grothe; Joe Nickell, Ph.D.; Adam Savage from the Mythbusters; plus many more!

For more information, go to [www .randi.org](http://www.randi.org) and click on the link for "The Amazing Meeting".

**Executive:**  
Jeff Olsson  
Neil Schipper  
Helen Friesen  
Heather McDonell

**Members at Large:**  
Myrna Donald  
Randy Gibson  
Barry Hammond  
Donna Harris  
Katie Higham  
Jake Peters  
Dan Roach  
Grant Rogerson  
Sophie Shulman  
Marlene Wallace  
Barrie Webster

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- Individual Limited Income                      \$10.00
- Household Membership\*                      \$45.00
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\*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

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4. \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make cheque or money order payable to: **Humanist Association of Manitoba** and mail to: *Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane, Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.