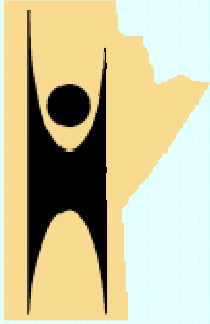


May 2009

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Manitoba Humanist



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Association of
Manitoba

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Donna L. Harris

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Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Monthly Meeting Saturday, May 9, 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: Dan Falk

Award-winning 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

Mark Your Calendars – It Should be Great!

Monthly Meeting / Launch Party Saturday, June 13, 2009

Time: Regular Time

Place: Mondragon Bookstore & Coffeehouse
91 Albert Street

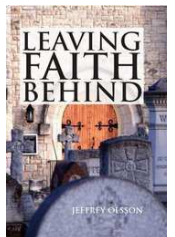
Dinner: Order from Mondragon's menu (vegan)

Guest Speaker: Jeff Olsson

Topic: Official Launch of Jeff's book, "Leaving Faith Behind"

PLUS

Optional afternoon outing to the Planetarium in honour of the summer solstice
More details next month!



End of Life Decision Making

On a talk by Dr Arthur Schafer

We may have heard of Terri Schiavo and Samuel Golubchuk, and perhaps thought these cases were the same. Putting it harshly: the living dead, the switch, and the obvious decision that had to be taken. Obviously, to those of us foolish enough to think such things obvious or ever simple.

And along comes Arthur Schafer to tell us the story of Samuel Golubchuk in considerable detail. Unlike Terri Schiavo, Mr. Golubchuk was not in a vegetative state. He was brain damaged, and he was certain to die in ongoing pain. Yet like Terri's family, Samuel's family could not let go – for religious reasons.

Though 'religious reasons' might seem an empty reason to a non-believer, who among us would find it easy to let someone we loved go? Religion may have played a part, yet it is human nature to hang on to each other. The families demanded heroic efforts to keep their loved ones alive.

So what of the religious argument? There are also religions that would under no circumstances want medical technology preserving life beyond its "natural" end against their God's wishes, not even a blood transfusion. Outside looking in, I see only human caring.

But this was the intent of Dr. Schafer's talk: To cause us to think about and to discuss what it means. He would not be spoon feeding us some right answer where right answers are as much of the heart

as of medical technology, money, law, equality, or ethicist's viewpoints. And of our personal and individual perspectives.

And the matter of "who chooses."

So yes, the doctors had decided that the only medically and humanely sensible course of action was to stop providing external life support. And from their view, and that of many others, doing nothing was the right answer. One could throw in an argument from medical availability for others in greater need within our resource-thin medical establishment. But is that enough? The family thought otherwise, and found a doctor who would go whatever distance was needed to keep blood and air mobile within the dying body of Samuel Golobchuk.

On leaving, Dr Schafer instructed us to discuss his talk. And discuss we did, to the end of the evening. Though we as humanists want the best for people, when 'the best' is not clearly resolvable, we have no edge over the religious. End of life issues will always be a challenge.

- Grant Rogerson

Positive Press: More Atheists Shout It From the Rooftops

Considering the number of times that this recent article from the New York Times has been forwarded, many nonbelievers were pretty happy about Ms. Goodstein's work. Here is just a portion:

unanimously approved a Christian license plate embossed with a cross, a stained glass window and the words "I Believe" (a move blocked by a judge and now headed for trial).

More Atheists Shout It From the Rooftops

By LAURIE GOODSTEIN
Published: April 26, 2009

They are connecting on the Internet, holding meet-ups in bars, advertising on billboards and buses, volunteering at food pantries and picking up roadside trash, earning atheist groups recognition on adopt-a-highway signs.

They liken their strategy to that of the gay-rights movement, which lifted off when closeted members of a scorned minority decided to go public.

"It's not about carrying banners or protesting," said Herb Silverman, a math professor at the College of Charleston who founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, which has about 150 members on the coast of the Carolinas. "The most important thing is coming out of the closet."

Polls show that the ranks of atheists are growing. The American Religious Identification Survey, a major study released last month, found that those who claimed "no religion" were the only demographic group that grew in all 50 states in the last 18 years.

If you want to read the entire article, it can be found at the following link:
<http://tinyurl.com/cazhht>

- Donna Harris

"When I was a kid, I used to pray every night for a new bicycle. Then I realized that the Lord, in his wisdom, didn't work that way. So I just stole one and asked him to forgive me."

- Emo Phillips

CHARLESTON, S.C. - Two months after the local atheist organization here put up a billboard saying "Don't Believe in God? You Are Not Alone," the group's 13 board members met in Laura and Alex Kasman's living room to grapple with the fallout.

The problem was not that the group, the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, had attracted an outpouring of hostility. It was the opposite. An overflow audience of more than 100 had showed up for their most recent public symposium, and the board members discussed whether it was time to find a larger place.

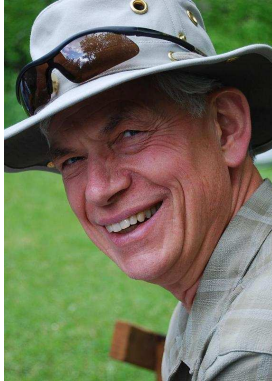
And now parents were coming out of the woodwork asking for family-oriented programs where they could meet like-minded nonbelievers.

"Is everyone in favor of sponsoring a picnic for humanists with families?" asked the board president, Jonathan Lamb, a 27-year-old meteorologist, eliciting a chorus of "ayes."

More than ever, America's atheists are linking up and speaking out - even here in South Carolina, home to Bob Jones University, blue laws and a legislature that last year

Getting to Know... Barrie Webster

This is part of a continuing series that will focus on the members of HAM's executive. Barrie Webster is our past president, although he is remaining on the executive as a member at large.



What is your favourite color? *I like many colours, often in combination. Depends on the situation, mood, environment. I'm not particularly happy with bright pink or magenta, or lime green or flame orange.*

If you had one word to describe yourself, what would you choose? *I usually express myself in more than a singular word. :-)*

What is your middle name? *I don't have a middle name. I have two forenames before the one I use. That gives the US Homeland Security people a bit of a nightmare since their simple minded software doesn't allow for distinctive names like mine or, for that matter, Hispanophone surnames that record both mother's and father's surnames. My first two names are Godfrey Robin. I had generous parents. The "Godfrey" is the name of the first-born son of the first born I use and goes back many generations.*

Do you have a hero? If so, who and why. *Many. How much time do you have... ?*

Do you have a favourite meal or dessert? *Not really. But I enjoy good food of all sorts.*

[Ed. Note: Sure it's not a quesadilla?]

Were you named after someone? *see above - middle name and all that*

Who is your favourite author and/or book? *I have many books. The favourite one depends on the moment, company, environment, or mood. It might even be a map or a piece of sheet music, or a CD of "classical" music or a comedian.*

Pets. Do you have any? If so, what kind? *We have a Dutch rabbit - very formal - dressed in his very own tuxedo, and friendly to boot.*

If you could travel to anywhere in the world, where would it be? *Changes with the opportunity, company, interests to be satisfied. I have travelled to many places and enjoyed most of them.*

What is one thing that really irritates you? *Poor grammar on the radio; Julie Nezrallah, the current host of Tempo on CBC Radio 2; ignorance; rock music in doctor's offices; commercial radio in general; Fox TV; drivers who don't signal before they change lanes or turn.*

Are you a morning person or a night owl? *Usually a morning person, but sometimes a late night (for me) person. But I like to be in bed before the house gets cold...*

What's the last thing you bought yourself, just for fun. *Spore - it's supposed to reflect evolution, but there's an intriguing element of intelligent design in there too.*

Do you like to dress up for Halloween? If so, what was your most memorable costume? *Dressing up in a white strapless gown belonging to a friend, in the gang I used to go with when I was a graduate student at UBC (I was 22). The hairy armpits and black dress shoes made it an interesting overall presentation... but it freaked me out when a guy I didn't know tried to pick me up at the bar in the Graduate Students' Centre!*

In Search of Time: Journeys Along a Curious Dimension

Book Review

In Search of Time: Journeys Along a Curious Dimension, by Dan Falk, McClelland & Stewart, 296 pp

Reviewed by Donna Harris

I have to admit that I was initially afraid to read this book. I was concerned that the topic would be complicated or, worse, uninteresting.

I was wrong.

Falk is not a scientist, he's an award winning science writer. And that's a good thing. In addition to being the winner of the 2002 Canadian Science Writers' Association Science in Society Journalism Award, he writes for major Canadian newspapers and is a frequent contributor to the CBC television program *Quirks and Quarks*. Having a genuine interest in the topic, but not the detailed technical knowledge, Falk has a similar perspective and asks the same questions that many of us would, given the opportunity.

He starts out at the beginning of mankind's first observances of the passage of time – night and day, the waxing and waning moons, the four seasons – through our efforts to create calendars that actually worked and didn't eventually lead to holding spring celebrations in the autumn (28-day lunar cycles don't evenly divide into a solar year).

Next are our efforts to increase our time-keeping precision by counting time down to hours, minutes and seconds, eventually leading to atomic and cesium clocks that are accurate down

to the nanosecond. (which is a billionth of a second.)

Where the topic becomes more mind-bending is when Falk ventures into the human memory and our concept of time, and then into the very nature of time itself.

Human beings demonstrate episodic memory, or an ability for "mental time travel", but are we the only animal with this ability, or are there others?

Next, Falk discusses Newton and Einstein's theory of relativity and delves into philosophical issues. In this section, he takes us all the way from the Big Bang and the very beginning of time, to the far future and the final end of the universe itself.

Since some of these ideas are new to me, I'm planning on re-reading these parts. However, personally, the philosophers can talk all they want about time not being "real". (Sorry... I'm pretty sure that Elvis and Napoleon are really dead). To my simple brain, children always get older, seeds turn into flowers, and (alas) I'm never going to experience Van Halen again like I did back in 1984. Time may not "flow", but I'm pretty certain it does travel in only one direction.

The book serves well as an introduction to these various topics, and there is a bibliography included, for those who wish to read further in any area that strikes their fancy.

It may be unimaginative of me, but I have to conclude that [In Search of Time](#) is definitely worth the time it takes to read it.

Upcoming Events

REMINDER:

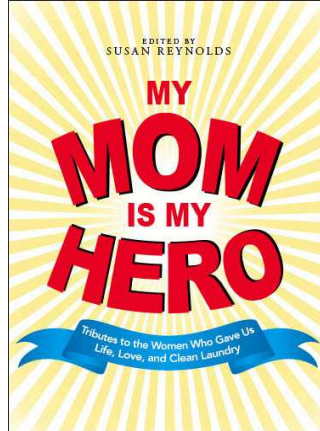
Sunday, May 3, 2009

2:00 p.m.

McNally Robinson, Polo Park

HAM member, Sophie Shulman (Levina) will be signing copies of *My Mom is My Hero*, an international anthology celebrating mothers.

Sophie is one of the contributing writers to this collection of stories.



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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1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

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Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

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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.