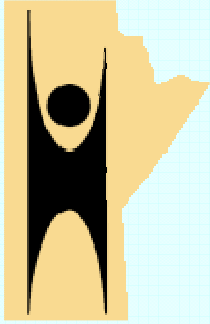


November 2009
Volume 5, Issue 10

Manitoba Humanist



Published by
and for the
Humanist
Association of
Manitoba

We're on the
Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca

Contents:

Chicago billboards	2
Crematorium Tour	3
Some Famous Humanists	4
HC News	4
Niqab - Oppressive?	5
Carl Sagan Day	6

Editor & Librarian:
Donna L. Harris

ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Monthly Meeting
Saturday, November 14, 2009
Park West Inn
525 Dale Boulevard • Charleswood



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: Anita-Maria Janzic
Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology,
Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre

Having graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with a four year honours degree in Paleobiology, Anita is now working towards acquiring her Masters in Paleontology while working at the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre as the Curator.

Winter Solstice Party
Saturday, December 19, 2009

Degree's Diner
3rd Floor, University Centre • Fort Garry Campus
University of Manitoba

Annual General Meeting
Saturday, January 9, 2010

New Billboards Start An Interesting Conversation in Chicago

The Chicago Coalition for Reason is looking for new atheist members and they are looking to improve their image within society. While the story in the Chicago Tribune is very interesting, it was the comments by readers that I found most compelling.

One, (apparently an atheist) reader said this: *"Yes, atheists are misunderstood. The general perception is that we are militant, evil, hedonistic people who promote anarchy and other horrible things. We are said to have no basis for morality at all."*

The truth is just like Mr. Mehta said. We are your friends and neighbors. We contribute to the community. Most of us don't talk about atheism because of the stigma attached to it. That stigma is what these ad campaigns will hopefully impact. It will let people know that we do have morals and a sense of responsibility to promote a peaceful, enlightened society. Hopefully it will let isolated atheists know that they are not alone and that there is a community for them as well"

Not to be outdone, a christian reader chimed in with this ditty,

"I'm laughing my head off. Atheists tyr (sic) to indoctrinate us with their beliefs yet, they want freedom from having to live in a world with others who don't believe as they do. As it is now, schools and other places are now faith-free zones where a person's constitutional right to their belief is trounced upon by these self-titled people of "freethinkers" and "progressives"."

It seems that this christian has forgotten to turn on his TV on a

Sunday morning, where free speech is in full swing, and Christians mount a multimillion dollar marketing campaign every weekend. (That's free speech in action). Freedom of religious belief in society includes the freedom to choose a belief or to ignore a belief. Or even the right to put up one tiny billboard in a city the size of Chicago.

But when it comes to schools and other public places I think the writer forgets that Muslims, Jews, Buddhists AND atheists have to "suck it up" and keep their beliefs to themselves when they are teaching other peoples' children. A public school is meant to be a safe place where parents can trust that their kids are not being tampered with.

My favorite response came from a Lutheran Christian:

"As a Lutheran, I have no problem with this billboard, and why would I? Just as any other billboard, the message is reaching out to a specific demographic. There is nothing offensive, inflammatory or discriminatory about it. Anyone who gets upset by this is making something out of nothing."

Apparently this Lutheran with democracy, free speech, and freedom of religion. Why is it that liberal Christians and I get along so well? Neither of us agree on each others beliefs! But we understand and agree upon the principles of democracy, free speech, and freedom of religious belief.

And those are societal values worth fighting for.

- Jeff Olsson

Reprinted from Jeff's blog, Leaving Faith Behind



Neil Bardal Crematorium Tour

I realize that many people would rather get a root canal done or spend time at Guantanamo Bay, than spend an evening touring a crematorium, but several of us did just that. We joined Barrie Webster for a tour of the Neil Bardal Cremation Centre. The tour was put on by the Funeral Planning and Memorial Society of Manitoba. (www.funeralsocietymb.org)

Janice Dryden of Neil Bardal did an excellent job of showing us around the facility. We saw their new chapel area, which was very open and had cozy furniture groupings of sofas and chairs (and had a definite Starbucks vibe), and then we ventured into the non-public areas of the facility.

We saw the two crematoria, or retorts, where the actual cremations take place. One was actually still just cooling down, and we were immensely privileged to view the occupant's mortal remains. During the modern cremation process, all tissue burns off. The only thing that remains is bone, and it's a rather small, delicate-looking amount for an adult human being.

Then we made a short stop in what you'd call the processing, or sorting, area, where metal, such as medical implants, is removed from the remaining bone fragments, and the fragments are then ground down into a fine powder.

We toured the embalming room, which included the metal table just like you'd see on CSI, and their garage, where they can now protect their hearses from the elements.

Throughout, Janice answered our many questions, and really impressed me with her concern for the dignity of the deceased and her professional attitude.

For many, it's difficult to imagine their own mortality, and they avoid thinking of their inevitable death. I agree that it's hard to do. At times, I think in that direction lies madness. But for many reasons, it's also a very good idea to have some sort of plan, and an idea of what you'd prefer.

Some topics to think about: are you donating your organs? Do you have a will? Cremation or burial? Do you want a ceremony or not? Do you want your remains to end up in a particular place?

The next important step is to share that information with your family and loved ones, to make sure they're aware of your wishes.

I would recommend seeking out an organization such as the Funeral Planning and Memorial Society, particularly if you're looking for further information, or take advantage of the pre-planning services that many of the funeral parlours have available.

As well, if you're interested in attending one of these tours, you can contact HAM member Barrie Webster at ???. If they prove popular,

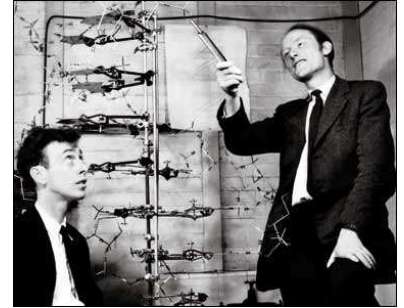
- Donna H

An Assortment of Well-Known Humanists

- **Steve Allen** Allen was a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy of Humanism, and Chairman of the Council for Secular Humanism.
- **Isaac Asimov** Asimov was a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy Of Humanism.
- **Francis Crick** Crick was a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy Of Humanism.
- **Ann Dunham** (1942-1995) mother of the President of the United States, Barack Obama.
- **Albert Einstein** Served on the advisory board of the First Humanist Society of New York.
- **Daniel Handler** (1970–): American author better known under the pen name of Lemony Snicket. Handler calls himself an atheist and a secular humanist.
- **Gene Roddenberry** (1921 - 1991): American scriptwriter and

producer, creator of *Star Trek*. Roddenberry was a member of the American Humanist Association, and has been called "one of the most influential yet unheralded humanists of the twentieth century."

- **Rod Serling** Creator and narrator of *The Twilight Zone*.
- **Peter Ustinov** Ustinov was a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy Of Humanism.
- **Kurt Vonnegut** Vonnegut was a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy Of Humanism.
- **Ibn Warraq** Author of *Why I am Not a Muslim*, and chair of the Council for Secular Humanism's Committee for the Study of Koranic Literature.
- **James D. Watson** Watson is a Humanist Laureate in The International Academy Of Humanism.



James Watson & Francis Crick

HUMANIST CANADA News

Humanist Canada (formerly the Humanist Association of Canada) recently announced that they now have a new President.

Pat O'Brien has resigned a president, and has been replaced by Dorothy Hays.

According to HC:

For the first time in Humanist Canada's history, we have a female president. Dorothy Hays, past Vice President of Humanist Canada, is a

retired social worker and long time humanist activist. In addition to being a member in good standing of Humanist Canada for over 15 years, she is the President of the Thunder Bay Humanists, has served on the local Unitarian Fellowship Board and is the Humanist Canada liaison to the Atheist Alliance International Board of Directors. As a social worker, Dorothy was president of the Thunder Bay Chapter of the Ontario Professional Association of Social Workers and was Editor of the Social Work newsletter.

Niqab – Oppressive?

A small shop I go to in downtown Winnipeg has a sign on it that says "No Hoodies allowed in store". The owner of the store has been robbed and will not allow anyone who has their face covered by a large hood to enter, even for a moment. Video cameras point at the entrance and towards the cash register where bright lighting and a large video screen let you know they can see who you are.

When I walk into the shop, usually to pick up a snack, I am always greeted with a smile and a "good evening" from the owner.

Should a woman wearing a niqab walk into the store she is treated the same as me. The owner seems to have no doubts at all that a lady wearing a niqab is not there to rob him.

Even still, a lady who wears a niqab pays a social consequence in western society, she is seen as oppressed by many. When shopping I have heard many people make comments after a lady wearing a niqab walked by. "I wonder what her husband treats her like at home?", "How do they live with a man who would force them to dress like that?", "I cannot imagine having such low self esteem as to have to cover my face everywhere I go," are the three that stand out in my memory.

But then again, an outsider's view is always going to be coloured differently than the view of the person who chooses to wear the niqab. And that is where the problem lies, people generally don't seem to understand why women wear it in the first place. No one I know has ever questioned why we cover our faces when it is -40°, but when it is +25° it does seem a little odd not to enjoy the warmth of the sun.

So why do they do it? The idea seems to be unique to Islamic culture, and

contrary to those who claim face covering is not a requirement for Muslim women there are many who argue that it is.

The most often heard argument for or against the wearing of the niqab (hijab) deals with what Islamic scriptures say. It is not based in any modern social understanding of what is healthy or good. Having looked in many places, I cannot find any argument other than religious ones that basically state that a woman needs to show humility in the way she dresses. I have heard people say that "it's cultural, not Islamic" and yet the debate for and against the wearing of the niqab seems to occur purely within the sphere of religious thinking - Islamic thinking - between Islamic scholars.

If you have any doubt that the religion of Islam gives women the short end of life's stick you only need to look over the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI), an Islamic equivalent to the UN declaration of human rights that has been signed by a number of Islamic states. It is strongly criticized for failing to allow women equal rights and for allowing killing in accordance with religious law. It also fails to allow for freedom of religious expression, the hallmark of western freedom.

Once you begin to understand the CDHRI, a document that clearly states that men are superior to women at home and in the public sphere according to Sharia (Islamic law), a more appropriate line of questioning may be, "How can anyone NOT wonder if a woman is oppressed when she is wearing a badge that says "I belong to Islam" covering her face.

- Jeff Olsson
Reprinted from Jeff's
blog, *Leaving Faith Behind*



November 7 – Carl Sagan Day

I recently received an announcement from the Center for Inquiry in Florida. They're teaming up with the James Randi Educational Foundation and a local college – Broward College, to host a celebration of Astronomy. Here's more from their press release:

Carl Sagan was a Professor of Astronomy and Space Science and Director of the Laboratory for Planetary Studies at Cornell University. He served as an advisor and consultant to NASA and played a major role in the establishment of SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence).

Sagan died in December, 1996. To celebrate his legacy on the 75th

anniversary of his birth (November 9, 1934), and to increase public involvement in the excitement of astronomy and space exploration, local science and reason-based organizations have created the First Annual Carl Sagan Day.

We hope not only to make Carl Sagan Day an annual event, but to have other groups celebrate this day each year. We hope to have November 9th officially designated as CARL SAGAN DAY.

Sound like a worthy goal. I just may have to hunt down a copy of Cosmos to watch on that day!!

- D.H.

Executive:
Jeff Olsson
Neil Schipper
Helen Friesen
Heather McDonell

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

We're on the Web!

See us at:
mb.humanists.ca

Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone#: _____ Cell #: _____

Email address: _____

*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

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

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
 Visa Mastercard Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

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.