

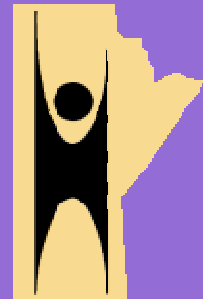
# Manitoba Humanist



Julia Sweeney's film *Letting Go of God* headlines M.A.S.H.fest

Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

*"We are beyond belief"*



[www.mb.humanists.ca](http://www.mb.humanists.ca)

## **FIRST ANNUAL M.A.S.H.FEST IS HERE!**

This month will see Winnipeg's first-ever atheist film festival, when the **M.A.S.H.fest Film Festival** happens at the Park Theatre on Sunday, August 15<sup>th</sup>.

This open and free event for freethinkers of all ages is hosted by MASH (Manitoba Atheist, Skeptics and Humanists).

The Park Theatre is located at 698 Osborne Street, and the event runs from 6:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.

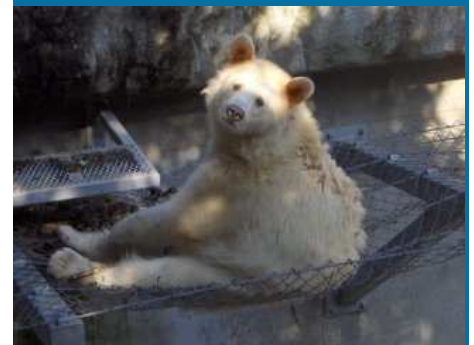
The evening includes comedic shorts, contests and much more. But the main event is a screening of Julia Sweeney's show, "Letting Go of God", the hilarious story of a nice Catholic girl who decides to explore what she

thinks she knows about her church and God.

HAM's own Jeff Olsson has spearheaded this drive, with the help of some dedicated committee members. HAM helped this event get off the ground last year with a financial donation.

Here is a bit more about the film *Letting Go of God*:

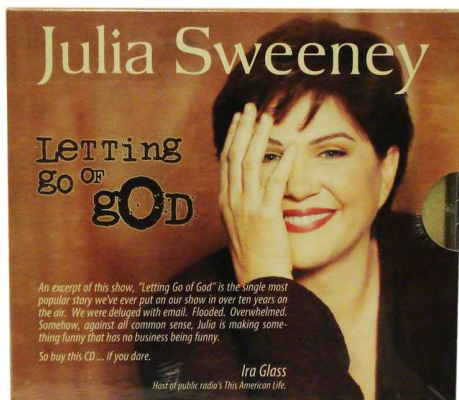
*Letting Go of God is a humorous monologue by Julia Sweeney chronicling her search for God. She begins in the Catholic church, the religion her family raised her in, and takes a Bible study class. What she learns there leads her to new questions, and in search for answers she explores meditation, Buddhism and New Age*



*Stay cool during the summer heat wave!*

*gurus, then describes what she learned from the sciences and from sharpening her critical thinking skills. She discovers that to accept the truth leads to surprising revelations. She concludes by sharing how this effects her family.*

We're sure that it'll be a great time, so mark your calendar and make plans to attend!



## HAM'S SUMMER PARTY

HAM is hosting it's annual Summer Party on Saturday, August 21<sup>st</sup>.

We'll be invading... I mean, we're invited to the home of members Brian Fairbanks and Jan Guinn, in Stonewall, Manitoba.

The party starts at around 4:00 p.m., although Stonewall Quarry Days will also be happening in the area.

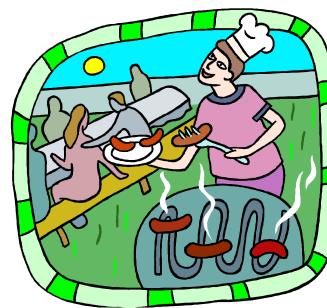
Our hosts are supplying a generous amount of food, but please bring whatever you consider would be a fair complement to the other goodies on the menu.

All of the necessary details can be found on the pdf that was sent with this electronic newsletter (or attached if by mail). If you need any more information, don't hesitate to call or email. ([ham\\_librarian@yahoo.ca](mailto:ham_librarian@yahoo.ca))

### IMPORTANT:

To be fair to the organizers, we're asking that everyone RSVP **no later than August 15**, if

they are planning to attend, so they have some idea of how many to prepare for. Please send an email to [fairguin@shaw.ca](mailto:fairguin@shaw.ca).



And please do come out. The party is not limited to HAM members. If you're within our circle of contact, you're more than welcome to attend!

## SKEPTICAMP COMES TO WINNIPEG



A new local group, Winnipeg Skeptics, is holding our city's first ever Skepticamp this fall.

The event is scheduled for Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, with details such as location and exact time still to be determined.

However, it's not too early to sign up, because YOU can help decide on the event's content.

Skepticamps differ from ordinary seminars in that they are informal, community-organized conferences borne from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment. Everyone from casual skeptics to the experienced participate, give talks and get to know each other.

Skepticamp emphasizes the participation of everyone, from the first-time speaker to the experienced hand. For this event, consider giving a presentation on a topic that drives your passion for science and skepticism. Alternatively, help with the event's organization.

At the very least, be an active participant and engage the speakers and your fellow attendees.

If you're interested in attending or even signing up to give a presentation, here is the contact information you need:

Website:

[http://skeptcamp.org/wiki/SkeptiCamp\\_Winnipeg](http://skeptcamp.org/wiki/SkeptiCamp_Winnipeg)

HAM president Jeff Olsson has already signed up, as have Grant Rogerson and myself, so come on out and join us!

It's an opportunity to learn more about skepticism in action, in a fun and interactive environment.

- Donna Harris

## **SECULAR RELIGIOSITY**

We know them when we see them in others. Those religious feelings of awe, wonder, gratitude, guilt, adoration, and so on. But what about atheists? Are they immune to religiosity? Not at all. Carl Sagan clearly felt and communicated a subset to us. Richard Dawkins, Charles Darwin, and many others express the awe and wonder they have for reality as it is.

What of adoration? What of guilt, feelings of superiority over non-believers, a drive to evangelize, a powerful denial of any flaws in ones treasured beliefs, and a hair-trigger sensitivity to heretics? The god believers have no monopoly on these. We need not look to the movers and shakers of science and reason for them. We need only look at such treasured ideological belief systems as communism, capitalism, anarchism and libertarianism – systems that have fervent, worshipful followers who gloss over or outright deny even the most obvious failings that happen when beautiful yet simplistic models meet the world of real people.

Closer still, and with followers just as fervent, is Apple. There is as much to like as to dislike about Apple's president, products, and philosophies. Apple goes about its business like a business. Many of its customers are, however, a different breed of customer. Sports draw their

fanatics. Droid phones, Google and Microsoft attract their fanboys. Apple draws worshippers. The obvious religiosity of these Apple customers attracted the attention of Beliefnet blogger David Kuo who wrote:

Apple isn't a cult anymore, it has become a full blown religion with scores of millions of followers. The frenzy around the iPhone brings to mind the clamoring throngs that greeted Jesus at the height of his ministry.

Read more: <http://tinyurl.com/2f4hxt7>

The obviousness of it has reached deep into language. Recently published: *How the iPhone Became Divine: New Media, Religion and the Intertextual Circulation of Meaning* by Heidi A. Campbell and Antonio C. La Pastina of Texas A&M University (abstract at <http://tinyurl.com/2uawSCO>).

As has been noted by others, religiosity is wired into the brain. No gods required.

- Grant Rogerson

## **BOOK REVIEW**

*Consciousness Beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience*  
by Pim van Lommel, M.D.  
HarperOne, 464 pages, \$27.99 Cdn

Reviewed By Donna Harris

What happens to us when we die? This has to be one of mankind's greatest questions. After all, once you find out, there's no way to let anyone else in on the answer.

Pim van Lommel is a cardiologist from the Netherlands. During his long career, he has resuscitated untold numbers of cardiac arrest survivors, and became intrigued by their stories of Near Death Experiences (NDEs). In addition to reviewing the available literature and past studies, in 2001, van Lommel's interest drove him to lead his own larger study of cardiac arrest patients. While that study was published in the

Lancet, and van Pommel has published scientific papers and authored chapters in other medical works, this is his first book.

The book itself is readable and organized. We're led deeper into the subject, as the author first establishes a historical foundation by recounting a description of the NDE phenomenon, then lays the groundwork for his theory, which essentially applies quantum physics to biological systems. The early chapters on the actual reported contents of NDE's are an entertaining primer through these experiences.

It's easy to agree with his observation that NDE's occur when the brain is essentially stopped. No blood flow, no electrical activity, so how can the cells in the brain continue to register visual and auditory input?

But it's by the time van Lommel lays out his general hypothesis – that consciousness is not just located in the brain, but is a result of electromagnetic fields that hold experiences and are non-local and possibly eternal, that he loses the skeptical reader. Van Lommel asserts that much like a TV or radio station continues to broadcast, even though we have no receiver to pick up the station, our consciousness continues to function.

Along the way, there are questions not addressed that detract from the author's message. The fact that all the research is far from gold-standard double-blind studies, but is instead based on self-reported surveys and interviews – in many cases years after the initial event – casts serious doubt on the accuracy of those memories.

He also mentions an increase in "psychic" or intuitive abilities by NDErs, without even blinking an eye. Since any type of paranormal or intuitive power remains unproven, it's troubling that the author doesn't question these abilities, and just includes them as accepted facts.

Van Lommel's theories of the origins of consciousness are based on theories in quantum physics and the role of DNA. The lay reader can only assume that van Lommel is interpreting the theories correctly, since he

himself is not a physicist or an evolutionary biologist, but a medical doctor. But they make for interesting, if not challenging, reading. Be prepared for your brain to hurt, and some readers may want to review these sections more than once.

Another area that deserves further exploration involves the differences between survivors. In his own study, van Lommel reports that of 344 cardiac arrest survivors, 62 patients (18%) reported a Near Death Experience. However, that still leaves 82% (282 patients) who didn't. And there were no striking differences between the two groups, such as duration of arrest, medication used, etc. If van Lommel's theory is correct, what accounts for the difference experiences?

While he fails to sell his ideas and theories, the author remains sympathetic in that he doesn't take an aggressive, "here's my magic answer" approach. He clearly states that he's presenting an hypothesis, and, as far as the lay reader can tell, it appears to be worthy of more exploration and consideration, even though some may argue the whole idea lacks plausibility.

Overall, the book is an interesting exploration of the phenomenon of the near death experience, and worth the read if you wish to think and be challenged.

- Donna Harris

## **THE BOTTLE OF WINE**

For all of us who are married, were married, wish you were married, or wish you weren't married, this is something to smile about the next time you see a bottle of wine:

Sally was driving home from one of her business trips in Northern Arizona when she saw an elderly Navajo woman walking on the side of the road. As the trip was a long and quiet one, she stopped the car and asked the Navajo woman if she would like a ride.

With a silent nod of thanks, the woman got into the car. Resuming the journey, Sally tried in vain

to make a bit of small talk with the Navajo woman. The old woman just sat silently, looking intently at everything she saw, studying every little detail, until she noticed a brown bag on the seat next to Sally.

“What in bag?” asked the old woman. Sally looked down at the brown bag and said, “It’s a bottle of wine. I got it for my husband.” The Navajo woman was silent for another moment or two. Then speaking with the quiet wisdom of an elder, she said:

“Good trade.....”



## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### ***Sunday, August 15, 2010***

M.A.S.H.fest Film Festival

Location: Park Theatre, 698 Osborne Street

Time: 6:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Speaker/Topic: Feature Film: “Letting Go of God” by Julia Sweeney

### ***Saturday, August 21, 2010***

HAM Summer Party

Location: The Fairbanks/Guinn residence, Stonewall, Manitoba

Time: 4:00 p.m. until ??

Details on page 2 and in the attached pdf.

### ***Saturday, September 11, 2010***

Monthly Meeting

Location: Aqua Books

Speaker/Topic: Dr. Rhonda Martens: Science, Religion and Kepler

### ***Saturday, September 18, 2010***

Red River Valley 2010 Freethought Convention  
Red River Freethinkers

Location: Fargo Civic Center, Fargo, ND

Speakers: **Brian Keith Dalton**, "Mr. Deity"; **PZ Myers**, the writer of Pharyngula himself; **Dan Barker**, co-president of the Freedom of Religion Foundation; **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, co-president of the Freedom of Religion Foundation; and **August Berkshire**, local atheist heavyweight who was the first president of the Twin Cities Chapter of American Atheists.

### ***Saturday, October 16, 2010***

Monthly Meeting

Location: CanadInn Polo Park (tentative)

Speaker/Topic: TBA

**Executive:**

**Jeff Olsson, President**  
**Neil Schipper, Vice President**  
**Helen Friesen, Treasurer**  
**Heather McDonell, Secretary**

**Members at Large:**

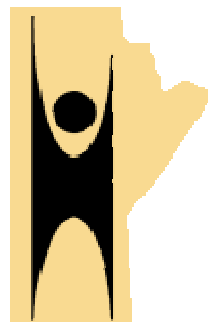
**Myrna Donald**  
**Barry Hammond**  
**Donna Harris**  
**Katie Higham**  
**Jake Peters**  
**Grant Rogerson**  
**Sophie Shulman**  
**Marlene Wallace**  
**Barrie Webster**

Newsletter Editor:  
Donna L. Harris  
ham\_librarian@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

[mb.humanists.ca](http://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.