

# Manitoba Humanist



*Grant admires August Berkshire's license plate – ATHEIST – during our Fargo visit.*

Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

*“We are beyond belief”*



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

## ***OCTOBER MEETING: Being TransGender in Manitoba***

HAM's October meeting will take place at the Canad Inn Polo Park, at 1405 St. Matthews Avenue, at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 16<sup>th</sup>.

Please join us to hear about the experiences of two Manitoban teens who are in the process of transitioning.

These brave young people were introduced to us through the Rainbow Resource Centre ([www.rainbowresourcecentre.org](http://www.rainbowresourcecentre.org)), which is a long-standing local resource for individuals in the GLBTT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Two-Spirited) community.

The Centre has its origins back in the 1970s, becoming the Winnipeg Gay/Lesbian

Resource Centre in 1988, and changing to its current name in 1999. The Centre moved to its current location at 170 Scott Street in 2008.

According to the Rainbow Resource Centre's website, (Trans) is an umbrella term that represents many individuals who defy the binary male and female "laws" of gender.

This may include drag kings and queens, genderqueers, androgynous folks, intersex folks, two-spirit individuals, cross-dressers, transmen, transwomen, transsexuals, and gender non-conformists.

A trans individual's "[s]exual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender



*Happy Thanksgiving!*

identity.”

A transgendered person is someone whose core gender identity is at odds with their birth gender. Such individuals often go through a lengthy process of ‘transitioning’ to their real gender.

The Rainbow Resource Centre offers services such as counseling and support services, as well as a wide range of educational and professional development courses.

October’s meeting should be educational and interesting as usual. However, these are personal stories, and a topic that some people might find a bit too sensitive or personal, so, since the evening might involve some frank discussion of human sexuality, in the words of some television programming, viewer discretion is advised.

## **LEARNING ABOUT KEPLER AT THE SEPTEMBER MEETING**



*Dr. Rhonda Martens at our September meeting*

The more we learn, the more we realize how little we know!

September’s meeting was extremely interesting, and it was a great opportunity to learn more about Johannes Kepler and his boss & mentor, Tycho Brahe.

Imagine for a moment, observing the planets in the night sky with no telescope. Yet Brahe made detailed records of their position in the night sky. In fact, he was well noted for the accuracy and quantity of his observations.

Then there’s Kepler, the mathematician and astronomer. He had a theory that the orbits of those planets were not circular. But what else could they be? He tried an ovoid at first. But the advanced calculus he’d need to make his work easier didn’t even exist.

So, plug in a number, go through your calculations and come up with a prediction. Does it work? No, it doesn’t. So, you try another number, and repeat the entire process. Still no. So you try again. And again. After at least 40 failed attempts, Kepler hit upon the idea of an ellipse. At last, a shape that fit the data.

It was this work that aided Kepler in developing his laws of planetary motion.

I, for one, learned a lot at September’s meeting, and I thoroughly enjoyed the way the computer generated visual aids contributed to Dr. Martens’ explanations. A super evening! Thanks again.

*- Donna Harris*

## **A REPORT ON THE RED RIVER FREETHINKERS’ PROJECT 42 CONVENTION**



*(L. to R.) Diana, Brian Dalton (Mr. Deity), Grant, Donna, Greg, Rene, and Myrna at the very front*

Several HAM members made the trip down to Fargo, ND for the Project 42 Convention. Here is one individual's reaction:

Attending the first conference organized by the Red River Freethinkers in Fargo, ND was an experience that I will never forget. What a feeling to walk into a room filled to the brim with people who seek reason and value the truth found in evidence. The feelings of belonging and community were there in abundance. As I looked around the room at this diverse group of people of all ages, I wished there was time enough to talk with every one. I would have loved to hear all of their stories, to share with them the steps of their journey to freethought.

The conference began with a warm welcome from Jon Lindgren, the president of the Red River Freethinkers. It was very nice of him to include all of the Canadian visitors in a special welcome. The presentations began with a lively, upbeat talk by August Berkshire, former president of Minnesota Atheists. All of the presenters, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker, PZ Myers, and Brian Dalton, were interesting and entertaining. They each spoke of freethought ideas with little overlap and yet managed to present ideas that seemed to have one theme. My overall impression of this theme was that, although atheism is itself essentially a negative belief, it opens our minds to endless positive possibilities.



We visited the 10 Commandments monument in downtown Fargo

It is easy to think of the more obvious examples of the harm caused by religion and faith in

dogma. Suicide bombings, the murder of abortion providers, witch trials, and deaths caused by the idea that contraception is a sin come readily to mind. As I reflected on this thought throughout the conference, it occurred to me that the greatest harm caused by these ideas are the chains that religion puts on our minds. Throughout history, our overwhelming experience with religion has been that it suppresses human creativity and expression. It has been an obstacle to almost every advance we have made to better the human condition. It has worked against scientific advancements and opposed human rights at almost every turn. Brian Dalton (Mr. Deity) presented a very passionate talk, showing that the values shared by most of us, liberty, equality, freedom and justice, are not the values contained in the holy books of the Abrahamic religions. PZ Myers talked about the importance of asking good questions. Religion's frequent crime has been that it discourages questioning at all.

In my own life I have seen examples of this stifling of the human spirit caused by these beliefs. A Christian friend of mine limits her intake of information to approved Christian reading or Christian music, in the belief that the devil will work through her should she step outside these self-imposed boundaries. I feel overwhelming sadness when I see my teenage Muslim babysitter begin to cover her hair and body in the belief that her beauty belongs to her father or future husband. When I think of all the people who are made to feel shame about their normal sexual functioning, be it homosexuals or teenagers who are taught that masturbation is a sin, I could weep for all of them.

At the end of the conference we had time for a panel discussion and questions and comments from the participants. As I listened to the insightful comments and quality questions of my fellow freethinkers, I felt a growing sense of optimism and a renewed enthusiasm for this cause of freethought. By promoting the ideas of atheism, skepticism, secularism and humanism, we can help in freeing the enormous potential of everyone to work towards a better world for all of us.

- Diana Goods

## **UPDATE: SKEPTICAMP WINNIPEG**

As I've mentioned before, Winnipeg Skeptics is holding our city's first ever Skepticamp this fall.

The event is scheduled for Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, from 12:30 p.m. til 6 p.m. at Aqua Books, 274 Garry Street.

Participants have been signing up, and the range of speakers and talks is impressive. Here's a partial list:

- "The Pleasure of Figuring Things Out", Gem Newman
- "The History of Homeopathy", Gem Newman
- "How Do We Know Anything?", Jeff Olsson
- "Fad Diets, Detoxes, and Superfruit!", Laura Creek Newman
- "Kitchen Nightmares: Dissecting Reality Television", Scott Carnegie
- "Mormonism: How Conversions Happen", Scott Carnegie
- "The Skeptical Matrix: Where Should We Focus Our Energy?", Donna Harris
- "Why Vaccinations are So Important", Donna Harris
- "Global Warming Skepticism and Belief", Grant Rogerson
- "9/11 Conspiracy Theories and the World Trade Center", Paul and Javier
- "Five Crazy Pseudosciences You've Never Heard Of!", Ashlyn Noble
- "Conversation Stoppers: How People Think Irrationally", Em Tefera
- "How the Media Distorts Facts and Makes People Stupid", Tessa Vanderhart

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. If you don't want to present, you can help with the event's organization, or at the very least, be an active attendee.

If you're interested in attending or even signing up to give a presentation, there's still time! Here is the contact information you need:

Website:

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

- Donna Harris

## **COMING OUT OF THE ATHEIST CLOSET – RESPONSES TO LAST MONTH'S QUESTION**

In response to your request regarding "Coming Out Atheist" in the latest newsletter:

Having left 20+ years of Christianity within the last couple of years, I have had both the positive and the negative. From a marital standpoint, coming out has been a near disaster as my wife is a country raised Mennonite with B.A.'s from two bible colleges. For the sake of the marriage, I've learned to avoid the topic of faith- the only thing she has ever known.

In the positive, I've been able to re-connect with my family who are for the most part non-believers. Faith had always served to separate us and kept me at arms length. Presently my father is dying of terminal cancer. Now that we're on the same page, I'm able to be there for him and he knows he can trust me now that I'm not selling anything.

I had a daily, abiding anxiety about my family going to hell, which I'm happy to say I no longer have. I'm now in a place where I can celebrate my dad's life with no fear of eternal suffering that would have crippled me emotionally. Ironically, you might say I've been "saved" by science.

Regards,  
Rob Daly

Hi Donna;

I had a phone call today to ask me what I thought about the state of the world today, and I said it was terrible. She agreed and said God

will intervene, etc

I told her that if mankind did not put things right, nobody else would.

If god, or gods exist they aren't interested in our antics. I told her a few times that I didn't KNOW for sure if there is a god but I didn't believe so. I said the "Bible" was inspired and written by people like me, and I too am inspired at times and write about the things that inspire me.

There are some beautiful passages in the Bible, phrases, images and language, but because it has been re-written in the past by exceptionally gifted and knowledgeable authors their charm and meaning is delightful, maybe not the gift of the first writer; in some writings the concepts are violent, obscene, or both. I am ashamed that after 2000 thousand years we are not more civilized - the barbarism, violence and obscenity continues.

I tell my friends now what I think of the bible. At one time I believed that Jesus was the Son of God come to redeem the world of "sin". I told my visitor on the phone if a divine creator exists or doesn't exist it is all the same. It has no bearing on anyone's life except where it might affect their culture. It is of no importance to me. People have to work towards a better world - no God will do it. I will not be concerned about something that doesn't support life on earth.

I don't feel I have to argue the god question. It is more important to me to talk about that we evolved from bacteria, and yes monkeys, and we're quite capable of destroying ourselves and life on earth with nuclear bombs because we don't appreciate the marvels of this planet.

Magic, gods, God, fairy wishes, elves and unicorns would be fun, but first let's accept the world we live in, appreciate it, value its resources, be good to all that is in it, and realize its goodness.

*Margaret Maier*

*Thank you both, Margaret & Rob, for your responses!*

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

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

Monthly Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Time: Meet & Greet: 5:30 p.m.

Lecture/Meeting: 6:00 p.m.

**Dinner: approx. 7:15 p.m. \*\***

Speaker/Topic: "Being Transgender in Manitoba", the Rainbow Resource Centre

**\*\*Dinner for the October meeting will be in Aalto's at the Canad Inn. They will block off a portion of the restaurant for us, so you can order what you like, from the buffet or from the menu.**

### ***Saturday, November 13, 2010***

Monthly Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: Gem Newman, Manitoba Skeptics

### ***Saturday, December 18, 2010***

***(date tentative – subject to change)***

Solstice Party

Location: TBA

### ***Saturday, January 8, 2011***

Annual General Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: TBA

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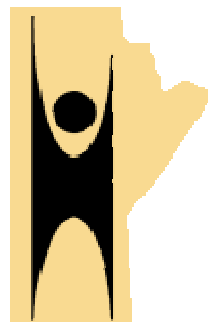
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Newsletter Editor:  
Donna L. Harris  
ham\_librarian@yahoo.ca

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See us at:

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



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\* After July 1<sup>st</sup>, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31<sup>st</sup>, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

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Please make cheque or money order payable to:  
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*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.