

Manitoba Humanist



“Have Atheism, will travel”

August Berkshire, our guest speaker for the January AGM

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“We are beyond belief”



www.mb.humanists.ca

SUMMER RETURNS EARLY! JUST IN TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING! – JANUARY 21ST

IT'LL BE AUGUST IN THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY

And no, I'm not referring to our recent freakish warm spell of weather!

I'm referring to our special guest speaker at this month's Annual General Meeting, who is none other than **August Berkshire**, atheist speaker and activist.

His presentation topic is “Morality with and without God”.

Can we be good without God? Perhaps a better question to ask is, Can we be good *with* God? August Berkshire will examine both of these questions in his 40-minute presentation “Morality

with and without God.” He will demonstrate why it is *impossible* to base morality on either a generic god or the Christian god, and how science and humanism offer our only reliable hope to lead ethical lives.

August Berkshire is the president of Minnesota Atheists and a past vice president of Atheist Alliance International. His website is AugustBerkshire.com and he is the author of numerous pamphlets on atheism and related subjects. He owns the “ATHEIST” license plate for Minnesota and is proud to be listed in the reference book *Who's Who in Hell*.

More on the next page...

UPCOMING EVENTS

All of our upcoming events can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.



Happy New Year! All the very best to you in 2012

HAM's Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday, January 21st, at the Canad Inn Polo Park. The AGM itself, only open to current members, begins at 4:00 p.m. followed by the meal and then the speaker. (Aalto's buffet – individual bills) The general public can join us at the conclusion of the AGM, at approximately 5:30 pm

As always, at our Annual General Meeting, HAM holds elections for places on the Executive Committee.

This is where you, the members, get to participate by voting people into various positions. Not all positions are up (they are 2 year posts).

If you think you fit any position or know someone who does, please notify any of the current execs. To qualify as a candidate, you must be a paid-up member for at least the previous 6 months.

Open positions this year are Treasurer and Secretary.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2011

This has been a remarkable year for Humanists in Manitoba. As our membership grows we find fresh new faces attending our meetings and asking interesting questions about what humanism is, and how it can make a difference in the world. I enjoy listening the answers to those questions as there are so many different perspectives about why being a humanist is fulfilling, helpful, interesting or meaningful.

Some like to count the number of people who attend each meeting, while some focus more on each (excellent) speaker of the month and discuss the science or social issues presented by that speaker. Others simply enjoy the camaraderie that occurs at each meeting. No matter which part you enjoy, we are glad to have you in our midst, and glad you take the time to come out and be a part of things.

The upcoming year will present a challenge for all of us: Christians in southern Manitoba have

flagrantly disregarded the laws protecting the human rights and dignity of those children who do not have religion in Manitoba public schools by instituting mandatory prayer. Meanwhile, the minister of education has washed her hands of the issue, stating that those whose rights have been trampled can 'simply' issue a complaint with the human rights commission.

As humanists, we know all too well that children don't fare well when issuing human rights complaints against adults. Intimidating adults. Minority families whose children are affected by these schools are not likely to stand up when their livelihood is tied to their deeply religious employer.

This is clearly a case where the government has lost the will to enforce its own laws. Laws written after the disgusting discriminatory events that caused abuse and injury to an entire family after their teenaged son refused to stand up for school prayers in southern Manitoba.

It seems like a step backwards to have to fight this battle again, but this issue is the one that will make HAM stand up and speak its mind.

In the upcoming year I encourage you to attend those key meetings where we will endeavor to have speakers address these issues. Be a part of the fight for human rights in Manitoba.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeffrey Olsson, President

FAREWELL TO CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

On December 15, 2011, the world lost a truly remarkable individual with the death of Christopher Hitchens. He died from oesophageal cancer at the age of 62.

Hitchens was primarily a journalist, author and public speaker, with strong ideas on a variety of political and social topics.

According to Wikipedia, Hitchens described

himself as an antitheist and a believer in the philosophical values of the Enlightenment. Hitchens said that a person "could be an atheist and wish that belief in god were correct", but that "an antitheist, a term I'm trying to get into circulation, is someone who is relieved that there's no evidence for such an assertion."



Christopher Hitchens

He will be sorely missed in the atheist/humanist/skeptical community for his sharp words and rapier-like wit. Alongside Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, he was one of the Four Horsemen, advocates of the "New Atheism". Our one comfort at this time, in this information age, is that a vast storehouse of his works remains to inform and enlighten us now, as well as future generations.

If you're not familiar with his works, please do yourself a favor and pick up one of his many books, such as:

- God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything
- The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice
- Arguably: Essays by Christopher Hitchens
- The Trial of Henry Kissinger

Or, alternately, the web is full of Hitchens' videos, articles, interviews and essays. Just go to Google, Yahoo or Youtube and type in Christopher Hitchens and prepare to spend some time.

In the man's honour, I'm currently reading his memoirs, Hitch-22. I'm already amazed at the depth of his influences and his intellect. After that, I think I'll re-read God is Not Great.

My own personal regret is now realizing that he was a speaker at one of the early Amazing Meetings that I attended. However, it was really before I knew who he was, or had read any of his books. And, if I recall correctly, he spoke on the topic of Thomas Jefferson, a topic not that interesting to this Canadian. If I'd known at the time, I certainly would have made a real effort to shake his hand, get a photo, and tell him thanks for just being Hitch.

He will be missed.

- Donna Harris

IS "GOD-FEARING MAN" A COMPLIMENT??

I was asked to review a novel with the topic as eternal as humanity itself: the struggle between the love of his life and the duty toward his family. The author sang the hero's choice of duty as the spiritual feat of his life. On a cover jacket the author used the words "This good God-fearing man..."

I said, "I'm afraid, if you say that he chose the duty because of fear of God, you nullify the hero's sacrifice, downgrade and cheapen his feat. It now feels almost like a petty grocery transaction 'take my loony, give me candy': the hero pays with his love for a higher commodity, heaven in afterlife.

And it is only 'almost like' because a grocery transaction is transparently fair: you get what you paid for, while in the bargain with God you

get something nebulous if anything at all (who knows if future afterlife exists to begin with? Is there any reliable evidence? It is only a matter of belief, of hope, of wishful thinking...).

However, you pay for it here and now and the price is formidable, a heavy price of life-long submission: you must ever obey God's orders. And who knows what they could be... History has taught us about the crusades' atrocities, about the religious wars that in the 16 century nearly depopulated central Europe, about the Inquisition, about suicide bombers blowing up school buses, and on and on – all done in the name of God on the orders of God's clergy who 'know God's will' (or rather their own self-interest?).

Let alone a more abstract but no less important, no less spiritual, moral or ethical angle. 'God-fearing' means just this: he is 'good' because he FEARS God, not because his human conscience dictates him that his priorities should be the well-being of his family, his children, rather than his own pleasure even as strong as the love affair of his life; he traded the latter anyway for the 'carrot' of some nebulous promise. This sort of the 'carrot-stick' relations with God is so un-dignified! And what if tomorrow he converts or loses his faith – would it mean an open invitation to become 'bad', immoral, dishonest, evil? If we are 'good' for the price or because of the stick – isn't it totally unreliable treacherous 'goodness' never to be trusted? What if someone (another God?) 'pays better', so to say (think 'seventy virgins!')? If it is a matter of negotiations – then why not? Commerce is commerce.

It is the goodness and decency, compassion and mercy, and sharing that originate from one's own conscience, one's own will and choice that can be trusted and relied upon because they stay with and define the person, never mind any change of the circumstances, as humanism teaches us.

- *Sophie Shulman*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

As I write this, 2011 is coming to a close, the few days off during the holiday season gives me time to reflect on the past year.

It's been a good one, the world didn't end and my wonderful wife and I celebrated our 10th anniversary. At 44 years old I put my feet in the ocean for the first time. I put my hands on the rough bark of a tree, not just any tree but a living organism that was a little sapling about the time King John signed the Magna Carta! My eldest son bought his first house. My middle son has picked up a good job that he thoroughly enjoys and my daughter started a job which could turn into a fulfilling career. She has also met a new fella, a good young man by all accounts (no obscene tattoos and I don't have to worry about my liquor or silverware going missing anymore) but that story is for another time.

2011 also marks the first full year I have been a member of HAM. I'd like to take this opportunity to say thanks to all the good people of our little group. You have expanded my mind and challenged/changed my opinion on some things. I always look forward to our meetings as an opportunity to learn something new. It feels good to engage in a conversation and not feel I have to censor myself, again thank you.

The end of 2011 brings me to thoughts of 2012. More than ever I feel the idea; the principles of humanism are the way to make this world of ours a better place, and how we do this is getting more people on board. I realize in some cases this may be just a matter of getting our name and ideas out there, in others it will be trying to fundamentally change the way some people think. On that note, for what its worth, I would like to offer my suggestions on membership, financial expansion and promoting the principals of humanism.

Increase the use of Skype. If we could bring in names like Matt Dillahunty or Traci Harris (Atheist Experience), Dr Michael Shermer (Skeptic magazine) or Phil Mason (aka thunder00t), with proper (low cost) advertising,

like social media, we could pack the house and maybe help with the bottom line. If financially viable this wouldn't have to be just at meetings, but could be as standalone events.

Increased social gatherings, like the bbq, Canadian Fossil Discovery Center, new zoo trip. Expand on this and make it family friendly.

Get the mayor to proclaim humanist week in Winnipeg this year and every year! (if he can proclaim slurpee or mchappy day he could give us a week eh?)

Sponsor a debate. How about Bruce Clark (atheist writer, columnist, comic) vs Leon Fontaine (Pastor president of the miracle network). The question: Is Christianity good for Canada? If we did this in combination with a university, again we could pack the house.

Engage in the public forum. Get people talking. This can be done by all members thru talk radio and Letters to the Editor. Just let them know you're a humanist or atheist, let them know you're out there.

A bus or billboard ad campaign.

Nothing stirs debate and discussion like letting the religious know we exist.

If we can grow our group we can increase the export of our common values, that are based in reason, science and rational thought. Increased membership would raise our bottom line. In turn, that would help fund our charitable endeavours as a humanist group. Together I think we could affect real change and do some real good.

- Pat Morrow

(Editor's note: The Winnipeg Free Press did indeed print not one, but TWO Letters to the Editor from our members on January 4th. Congratulations to both Pat and Diana Goods! Excellent!)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, January 21, 2012

Annual General Meeting

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

Time: 4:00 pm for the AGM (closed – open to current members

5:30 pm – speaker, and then dinner (Aalto's buffet – separate bills). Open meeting

Speaker/Topic: August Berkshire, "Morality with and without God"

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Regular Meeting

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

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Regular Meeting

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

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Donna Harris, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
Heather McDonell, Secretary

Members at Large:

Greg Christensen
Myrna Donald
Diana Goods
Barry Hammond
Allison Nelson
Jake Peters
Grant Rogerson
Sophie Shulman

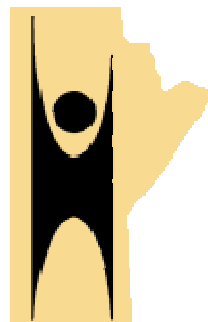
Newsletter Editor:

Donna Harris
ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

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 \$30.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$50.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

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

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. _____

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.