

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

December 2004

## Sunday, December 12

### No Justice for Us! (A Personal Story)

#### Special Points of Interest

- Winter Solstice Celebration! (page 1)
- Decisions by KVIE Pledge Volunteers (page 4)
- Last of Series on History of Sac'to Freethought Day (page 6)
- Family Portrait of a Freethinker (page 7)

The December AOF meeting features **Rena Lowry**, the parent whose daughter's school had posted, soon after 9-11, a "God Bless America" statement on its marquee. Rena saw the statement as unconstitutional endorsement of religion by the "supposed-to-be-secular" public school, and so she complained to the school administration. That complaint, coming as it did amidst the tide of post 9-11 religiosity, set in motion a series of events Rena had not anticipated. She will be describing her life-changing experiences of social stigma and unfair treatment. See page 7 for a brief background bio of the speaker, in her own words.

## Winter Solstice Party—Y'all Come!

### AOF and HAGSA plan to celebrate together

For the second year, AOF's celebration of the winter solstice will be a joint effort with HAGSA, the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area. We all had such a grand time in 2003, we will repeat the event on December 19 (same hour/same place). The details on time and location are on page 8.

*It is a potluck, so if you plan to come, please call Beverly Church (359-5423) to say you will be there and what dish you plan to bring.*

If, for some reason, you'd want to attend but are unable to provide a dish, don't be embarrassed. Call and come anyway. We do need to know you are coming, though. Here's why. For a room setup *with tables*, the Fire Marshal's maxi-



mum legal capacity of the room is 48. If more than 48 people turn up, we may have to fold up some of the tables and place others against two of the walls. If it's clear in advance that more than 48 will be turning up, then we'll be able to modify the layout accordingly. Either way, we don't want to leave anyone out and want to make sure that it's an enjoyable experience for everyone.

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# The AOF Line

By Kevin Schultz

This month I would like to communicate the contents of the 2004 AHA (American Humanist Association) Grassroots Manual chapter on "Organizational Issues." This chapter discusses documents groups may choose to use to guide organization and activities. The AHA manual discusses the documents "Articles of Incorporation," "Bylaws," "Mission Statement," "Vision Statement," and "Tax Exemption." I will briefly explain the AHA's description of each document, then conclude by discussing AOF's usage of each document.

Articles of Incorporation state the name and basic purpose of the organization, designate scope, and state that AOF will follow the bylaws.

Bylaws cover the organization's purpose in depth, explain the organizational structure, and explain the duties of leadership.

A Mission Statement provides direction and purpose for a group. They typically describe the reason for the group's existence.

A Vision Statement outlines how the group envisions itself in the future. This helps provide direction to members and activists.

Tax exemption allows members to record all contributions as tax deductions, and allows avoidance of income taxes outside of merchandise sales.

The AHA manual states that the documents work together in this way:

"The Articles of Incorporation establish the existence of your group; your Bylaws say how it's run; the Mission Statement explains the purpose; the Vision Statement lays out your goals; and the Strategic Plan helps you get there." (p. III-1)

*The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.*

Which documents does AOF currently use?

*Articles of Incorporation* -- In 2002, as part of the federal tax exemption application process, AOF members voted to approve Articles of Incorporation when seeking AOF 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation for education status.

*Bylaws* -- In 1993, after much discussion, AOF founding members adopted a document entitled, "Articles of Association." This document outlined AOF's basic purpose and organization. AOF used the Articles to obtain official association status from the State of California. Association which allowed AOF to obtain a bank account and rent a room to meet in. In 2002, to gain federal tax exemption status, AOF members voted to replace the Articles of Association with a formal set of documents acceptable to the IRS. Members retained as much of the original spirit of the Articles of Association as possible during this application process.

*Mission Statement* -- Founding AOF members drafted a mission statement as part of the original Articles of Association, in 1993. In 2002, as part of the federal tax exemption application process, AOF retained the original mission statement (minor wording change) as part of the new 501(c)(3) Bylaws. Keep your ears open for that Mission Statement (purpose) at the beginning of each AOF general meeting!

*Vision Statement* -- I plan to work with the AOF membership and board of directors to draft an AOF vision statement in 2005.

*Tax Exemption* -- The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) granted AOF federal tax exemption in June, 2002, as a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation for education. As part of this process, the IRS granted retroactive tax exemption to AOF's founding in 1993.

## AOF Board

**President:** Kevin Schultz  
**Vice President:** Kay Dickey  
**Secretary:** Dave Flanders  
**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

### Directors at large:

Tina Burgess  
 Beverly Church  
 Mynga Futrell  
 Don Knutson  
 Betty Simonsma

## AOF Committees

**Newsletter:** Mynga Futrell, Editor  
 Kay Dickey, Asst. Ed. (Submissions),  
 Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

### Visibility and Impact:

Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz, Jerry Sloan, (more members welcome!)

**Archive:** Jody Craig, Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

### Connections (ad hoc):

Don Shirley (Caring),  
 Ken Nahigian,  
 Tina Burgess (Youth)  
 Betty Simonsma  
 Kevin Schultz (E-mail)

### Darwin Day, Feb. 12, 2005:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian, Ed McConnell, Kay Dickey

## AOF's Voluntariat

### Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI),  
 Hank Kocol (CSH),  
 Betty Simonsma (AA),  
 Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

### Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

### Internet Website:

Pat Kelley

**Meetings:** Dave Flanders,  
 Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

### Membership Database:

Betty Simonsma

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

[aofboard@rthoughtsrfree.org](mailto:aofboard@rthoughtsrfree.org)

# Meeting Recap

## At the Movies

By Kevin Schultz and Dave Flanders

What do people who hold the perspective that "one life is all there is" think about *lifetime actuality*?

The Colorado Coalition of Reason (COCORE) recently attempted to answer this question through the production of a video entitled, "*The Journey of Life from the Nonbeliever's Point of View*."

AOF members in attendance at the November 14th general meeting got the first chance to see the movie in the Sacramento area. The movie lasts 18 minutes, and examines "the expedition on which each of us goes — through life, from birth to death — from the non-believer's point of view."

Narrator and trail guide Timothy Englert leads the viewer along the trail, stopping at appropriate segments of the 77.1 year trail to examine relevant life events from the perspective of the nonbeliever.

At the first stop, Englert interviews a mother and her child, who states,

"Before my own journey ends, I want to teach him how to read life's maps and road signs, so he can make his own route. In the meantime I'll give him lots of love, because I know he will be making the journey on his own someday, making his own decisions, selecting his own path."

At the next stop, Englert takes a break to interview a room full of nonbelievers. In turn, we meet an atheist, an agnostic, a freethinker, and a humanist.



This month it was **Kay Dickey's** turn to announce upcoming AOF events and local events likely to be of interest to AOFers

Returning to the trail, Englert points to the sign -- "Midway Point, 38.5 years to End of Trail."

At this point Englert asks a nearby mountain climber for his interpretation of the meaning of life. While perched upon the rock face, the

man replies, "Meaning of life? I don't think there is an inherent meaning of life. You give importance to your life by the things that you do. Right now, I'd like to climb the 50 highest peaks." A woman pilot, a fellow

hiker, and a "family man" express similar viewpoints.

Englert then takes a second break to visit a nonbelievers' booth at a nearby fair. During this segment, two men in a booth answer questions a woman visitor asks of them regarding atheism, intelligent design, origins of religion, and why nonbelievers attempt to "spread the word" about their worldview.

Englert resumes his journey to arrive at the final marker -- "End of Trail, .25 Years, Life Ends." At this point he meets an elderly couple, resting and sipping a bit of water from a canteen. They state, "First of all, growing old is not for sissies. When you're older than dirt, your body begins to fail you, and your energy deserts you. We're lucky that we're in this together. The bad part for some is the loneliness and the pain...The good news is, all of the songs about life are true. We've enjoyed it, we've made mistakes and we've had our successes. Bottom line: We did it our way."

Englert finishes the discussion by stating, "Some philosophers say that the journey and the destination are equally important. That may be true

*(Continued on page 4)*

### Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is a member society of the Atheist Alliance International. AOF maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

#### AOF's Statement of Purpose

*The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.*

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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.



Ken Nahigian stands by as Bev Church shows off pre-1954 U.S. Pledge posters signed by Mike Newdow

before  
the movie  
←  
  
→  
after  
the movie



Newcomer Liz Fichtner from Davis gets the "what for" from AOF regular Ben Cornforth [Welcome, Liz! AOF welcomes visitors, so tell your friends!]

## Meeting Recap

*(Continued from page 3)*

if you're going to a vacation spot or moving to a new home. But the destination of this journey is death. Of course, we set goals in life and we try to achieve them, but there's a difference between our goals in life and the end of life. Hopefully, a wise traveler will leave behind a trail marked with good deeds and laudable memories. After all, there are worse things than having people who knew you say you left the world a better place than you found it."

After the movie a discussion period followed. Some expressed dismay that the movie seemed to have been

done by amateurs. Another expressed concern that, with President Bush back in the White House, fundamentalists appear to be gaining power around the world. Also, every time science and secular democracy (as in Turkey) make advances, fundamentalists try to fight back. It would definitely be a shame if the life of an unbeliever becomes the death of an unbeliever due to being caught between the crossfire of a war between two major religions--the Christians and the Muslims. Morality was also a topic. It was extensively discussed. This free exchange of ideas that is open to the public is obviously one of the things AOFers treasure.

## Letter to AOF News & Views

Dear Editor:

*I was very dismayed at some of the criticism which was leveled at the film we viewed at our last meeting. In my opinion the criticisms that the film was "amateurish" or "shallow in content" were very unfair. I thought the film was well thought out and that it gave us a look at atheists as real people.*

*For many years I have had a criticism of atheist and humanist groups (AOF excepted) as too often being long on intellectualism and short on action. In my old church parlance it would be put this way: "Sometime you need to put some feet to your prayers."*

*Colorado Atheists have done just that. Instead of moaning and groaning about the plight of atheists in this country, they sat down, came up with a plan of action, put some feet to it and developed a film that can be distributed on a DVD that gives the non-atheist a quick course in Atheism 101.*

*For this, the Colorado Atheists should be given a hearty "atta person!" and congratulations for their vision and action.*

Jerry Sloan



The public may order the video through EvolveFISH (1-800-EVOLVING). The video is free and there is a \$5 shipping and handling charge. Detailed information on the video, including cast and transcript, can be found at the COCORE Web site: <http://www.cocore.org/journey.html>

# AOF To Work KVIE Pledge Drive, December 12

## Volunteer Planning Group Reaches Decisions!

By Mynga Futrell

As we announced in the November *AOF News & View*, AOF is participating in the upcoming KVIE pledge drive as part of the "Sacramento Community of Reason" (a working title for a loose confederation of local freethinkers drawn from and, for publicity and outreach purposes, representing our local organizations (e.g., AOF, HAGSA (Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area), SAITA (Sacramento Atheists and Independent Thinkers Association).



We must look our best!

A "KVIE Volunteers Planning Session" took place November 30 at Café Bernardo's in Midtown Sacramento. The hottest topic of discussion for the six (of 16) volunteers attending was "what to wear" the evening of December 12, when the AOFer volunteers will join with the other volunteers to answer phones in the studio for the pledge drive.

The meeting was held because online planning discussion had raged for over a week prior to the in-person meeting and generated more issues than answers. All sorts of options were keeping the volunteers' keyboards busy.

Having been encouraged by the KVIE representative to consider various studio factors (e.g., color looks good on camera; the studio can be cold, a group may want to come across as "a group"), the variables regarding clothing selection were generating much heated discussion: Examples: *Shouldn't we order some T-shirts? Long or short sleeve? Sweatshirts? Is there time to order? What printer does good*

*work and quick turn-around? What name will we use? (e.g., Sacramento Community of Reason? "Sacramento Freethinkers") Should we put on the Web address? Can we put on separate name? (e.g., "AOF") What if the volunteer belongs to more than one organization? How much is there room for? How large should the letters be? How legible is that? How high on the shirt? What about the cost? Shouldn't we just get iron-on lettering? Who should pay, volunteers or organizations? Should there be a logo? What about a flying bird (because...)? Why not a freethought pansy? Why on earth a pansy? Who wants to wear whatever we finally decide?*

Yikes! What was finally decided from all the e-mail traffic was that e-mail is quite simply *not* the way to decide such things. And so the in-person meeting was called.

As AOF president Kevin Schultz declared afterwards in his summary report of the discussion to those volunteers not able to attend:

"The t-shirt idea is dead. I repeat, no more discussion of t-shirts. If you would like to know the reasons, please email me individually. I would like to respectfully request we not spend any more email bandwidth discussing pros and cons of t-shirts. Those that violate the rule will receive lashes with a wet noodle. ☺"

He went on to summarize the final group decision and provide a bit of fashion advice: "We have decided to wear hats in lieu of pursuing

t-shirts -- to accent our heads; the place where reason originates. Nancy will design stickers which we may affix to our head-gear. Nancy will provide both light and dark styles, so it will appear visible regardless of fabric color. So please bring your favorite "hat" to wear for the evening."

So, look for our volunteers to be wearing hats with "SCR" lettering sticking somewhere on them. [Unfortunately, the exact geographical location of this lettering remains undecided at press time.]

It is also unclear as of this writing whether the event will be "live" on December 12 or a pseudo-phone-in. Most AOFers would prefer the former. Should the "Community of Reason" be contributing its "acting skills" (as the KVIE representative coaxed) to the ever increasing tendency of public television to resort to "tricks" of the audience? Somehow it's not seemly



In public TV do we trust?!

Looking one's best is not pretending, of course, so to all AOFers who are KVIE pledge drive volunteers, I would point out that our December general meeting occurs beforehand the same day (December 12). Hence, if you are hesitating on that "what to wear" decision, the meeting offers an excellent opportunity to "test out"

your yourhat options on the audience before you wear your attire on camera.

Hmm...Just supposing we make a good impression and draw new members, can we now shift our planning for substantive action on programs and projects?

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

## Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)     Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10)     Patron (\$50)

Single Membership (\$20)     Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_)

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

Please check your preference. We can deliver your monthly newsletter via an attached pdf file to your e-mail address above.     E-mail newsletter     Postal mail

## Freethinkers Cooperate for Public Outreach

Might "Meager Beginnings" Lead Toward "Something Big"? — Part 3

By Mynga Futrell

Below is the last item (somewhat abbreviated) in a 3-part recollection. Prior topics: were HEADING TO THE CAMPUS and HEADING TO THE COURTHOUSE.

### Part 2: HEADING TO THE PARK

What we now call Sacramento's *first* Freethought Day— AOF's 2002 gathering at the Sacramento County Courthouse—was set out as a *public* celebration of freethought. The real thing, though, was not a very public happening.

Except for those attending and a couple of passers-by, our 2002 program ("Delight in Freethinking!") had gone totally unnoticed. Soon afterwards, we made the decision to move it to another outdoor location with greater visibility—one where at least the passers-by would be greater in number. We wanted the following year's celebration to be *seen*.

Where to go for our 2003 event? After some investigation and discussion, we settled on a small

park in Old Towne, Sacramento as the location. There, at least, there would be shoppers who might take notice. Compared to the first rather simple celebration in 2002, AOF's planning for the second celebration was more involved and became a distinctly cooperative endeavor.

To formalize things and add visibility, we asked Jerry Sloan to once again pursue an effort to obtain an endorsement of our Freethought Day proclamation by the Mayor and City Council. (For unknown reasons, but perhaps due to the short timeframe, the 2002 request did not succeed.)

This time we would rent a stage and chairs. Mynga Futrell was to have a large banner made, saying something inclusive that other local organizations would endorse. (We settled on: "Freethought Day: A Celebration of Reason and Church/State Separation" for the wording.)

Kevin came forward with his innovative idea of preparing and hanging on the park grounds a "Freethought Gallery" to display

some of the notables of freethought. He set about to produce some large pictorials in readiness for the event. For that exhibition, Gail Sanders offered her technological assistance and Mynga drafted and produced a printed "programme" with her brief commentary on the eight chosen freethinkers. There would also be an image of Governor Phips to adorn the lectern. For the skeleton of our public program, we would look to our AOFers who had, across the previous year or so of our monthly general meetings, already prepared brief mini-speeches on "famous freethinkers."

We announced our planning for the "new and improved" event in advance and solicited financial support. We offered "ad mention" in our printed program to individuals and groups, and several persons (and a few organizations) "signed on" as co-sponsors. People volunteered to help out for the day of event. Some of us visited the park to decide logistics, feeling that surely we were now "on a roll" to Big Time outreach. Maybe so.



**Board Meeting (Nov.)**

- August and September board minutes were approved.
- *Treasury Report* - September report was approved. Overall compared to last month, the treasury is ahead due to additional donations.
- *Freethought Day* - The board reflected on Freethought Day.
- *Newsletter* - Board members need to submit their articles to Mynga and Kay.
- *Programs* - Future AOF programs and speakers were discussed.
- *Board contact* - A new email address for the AOF BODdirectors will be set up at [freethoughtday.org](http://freethoughtday.org)

## AOFer Visits England Attends Brights' MeetUp in London



On November 22, AOF board member **Bev Church** (2nd from left) took part in the camaraderie (and ale?) at the monthly in-person gathering of Brights at the Pitcher and Piano pub. These Brights-UKers typically communicate via Internet, having registered at the main Internet hub (<http://the-brights.net>). They have also created their own list-serve in order to engage in "Brights' Action" endeavors to advance the social acceptance and civic situation of all persons holding worldviews free of supernatural (brights). The Internet constituency was initiated in 2003 by AOFers Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell. There are now Brights in 115 nations.

**Newsletter Submissions**

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor, Kay Dickey, at this e-mail address:

**[frethnkr@mindspring.com](mailto:frethnkr@mindspring.com)**

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material submitted online in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

## A Focus on My Family

By Rena Lowry

Having been married twice and divorced twice, right now I am a 45-year-old, single mother of a 19 year old boy and an 11 year old girl.

As you will learn from my story, I am a firm believer in equality and am allergic to hypocrisy. I have taught the same to my children through my actions. I have little control over my reaction to unfairness; hence I am always getting in some form of trouble with presumed authority figures. I have taught the same to my children through my actions, and they also have felt the sting of the hammer that weighs down on those of us who chose to stand up for our rights. Here's a little bit of background on the three of us:

I graduated college, dabbled in acting and music. I am ex-owner of successful screen-printing company and physically challenged with cervical disc disease. I am currently working toward becoming a professional artist and author while taking art classes at Sierra College.

My daughter is a "little me," or so I've been told by many people. She is in the 6th grade, has been tested and qualifies for gifted in the 98 percentile, reads at a 10th grade level, will be getting her Black-belt in Tae Kwon Do this spring, plays guitar and loves to sing, swims competitively and plays Baseball in the minors with Rocklin Little League every spring. She visits with her father every other weekend in Sacramento.

My son is living with his partner in his own apartment for the first time, is the youngest manager at Blockbuster, started the first Gay/Straight Alliance at his high school, and he was chosen to be an active participant/member of the Capital Unity Council organized when the Jewish Temples were burned, and before he retired at the ripe old age of twelve he was the Regional Ice Skating Champion. His father lives in Florida,

I am an active volunteer in my daughter's school. I received national attention in October of 2001 when I protested my daughter's previous elementary school for displaying "God

Bless America" on its marquee after the 9-11 attacks. After seeking the ACLU's help, I was forced to remove my daughter from the school, and then never return her due to threats stemming from the school posting my protest/absentee letter in public. I home schooled her for 3 months before enrolling her in her current school. She is very happy there.

I see this country falling into an oppression, led by those whom I will never recognize as "leaders." I have been told, and do see at times, that resistance is futile, but I know no other way. The reaction I received to my small town objection was proof of the direction our country is currently headed.

**Newsletter Freebie Policy**

*We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!*



P.O. Box 15182  
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!  
[www.rthoughtsfree.org/aof.htm](http://www.rthoughtsfree.org/aof.htm)

## December Calendar of Events

**AOF General Meeting**      **Sunday, Dec. 12, 2:30 - 5 PM**

**Winter Solstice Party**      **Sunday, Dec. 19, 3 PM**

AOF Board Meeting (open to members)      No meeting in December

Atheist MeetUp (*Mountain Mike's Pizza*), phone for Tina at 447-3589      Thursday, Dec. 16, 7 PM

Brights MeetUp (*location TBA*, phone for Paul at 447-3589)      Monday, Dec. 27, 7 PM

### Directions to Winter Solstice Celebration

The Fahs Room is part of the building complex of the Unitarian Universalist Society, located at 2425 Sierra Blvd. (between Fulton and Howe) in Sacramento. Turn into the driveway, follow the drive to the parking area behind the church building. From any portion of the parking area, look toward the long ancillary building (not the church itself). The Fahs Room is at the west end of the building.

### Fun and Frolic

You won't want to miss it. Come for secular music, a skit, lots of good food and good company and plenty of good cheer. What better way to enjoy the season!

