

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2005

Sunday, July 10

Woe to the Women — Working for Change

Special Points of Interest

- Second of Series: AOF Director Self-Intro (page 2)
- Pictorial Report on June Highway Cleanup (page 3)
- New Feature: "Did You Know?" (page 3)
- Book Review: "The End of Faith" by Sam Harris (page 4)
- Two Movies Reviewed: "Heart of the Beholder" and "The Sea Within" (page 5)

The program at AOF's July meeting will be featuring a panel of presenters from the National Organization for Women. The three panelists will focus on current issues locally and their relation to religion.

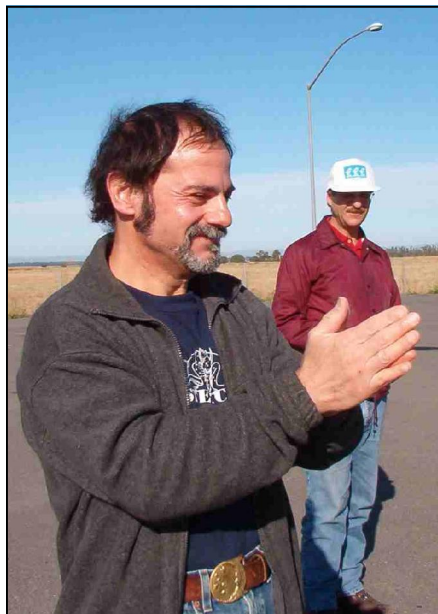
Chelsea Del Rio has been involved with the National Organization for four years. She currently serves as president of the Sacramento chapter of NOW, after two years as its vice president of action. She works at Child Action, sits on the Women Take Back the Night committee and volunteers as a clinic escort.

Mary Bradsberry works at the Bixby Center for Reproductive Health Research and Policy. She coordinates a clinic escort program for Women's Health Specialists, sits on the Women Take Back the Night committee and has been a member of the Sacramento chapter of the National Organization for Women for over four years. She currently serves as co-chair of the Reproductive Rights committee.

Amber Valdez is a student and activist at Sierra College, working on LGBT and women's issues. New to Sacramento NOW this year, she serves as co-chair of the Marriage Equality committee. She works at WEAVE, and volunteers as a clinic escort.

Standard Fare

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Uh Oh! — Is Ken leading an invocation before the highway cleanup or putting on his sunscreen? You decide. More pictures from the June cleanup are on page 3.

August Meeting Summer Sizzler Salad Potluck and Speeches

This year's August meeting means another traditional "hot combo" —AOF's *summer salads potluck with oratory exhibition*. You have a chance to win a prize if you (1) prepare in advance (no shooting from the hip), (2) deliver your talk within the allotted time for the category you select (*two* minutes or *five* minutes) and (3) speak on the topic title you submit in advance (no wandering to another topic). Run overtime, and you strike out. Prepare, and you just might come out the winner. Qualifying entrants have opportunities to win the choice prizes in a drawing at the oratory conclusion. (Pool consists of participants only.) Specifics are on the special color insert in this newsletter.

President's Thoughts

By Don Knutson

I tend to hold grudges for a long time, and I retain one against the newly ordained pope. Sure, he was the power behind the throne the last fifteen years or so as the old pope disintegrated before our eyes, but he could have used his influence among the cardinals to finally give a Black African or a Latino a chance to be a preeminent world leader for the first time in modern history. But no-o-o—he wanted all the adulation for himself, to be noticed whenever he walks into a room. If I have any reason to mention this guy in the future, I will use "Ratzi"(certainly one of his boyhood names) or "Pope Egocentric I".

I just returned from a family reunion trip to Iowa and I visited

Minneapolis for the first time. I was fascinated by the stark and imposing masculine feel of the cathedrals and mausoleums there. I assumed the harsh winter climate there had something to do with it. Ever since I visited Britain, though, I had understood that the religious sanctuaries were built so large to intimidate the parishioners and make them feel relatively small and insignificant. The St. Paul Cathedral in Minnesota, which is within ready view of the State Capitol dome and disturbingly similar visually, was quite impressive in its size. However, peeking inside made me see how heavy the superstition is laid on those desperate for validation.

Meet a New AOF Board Member Vince Wales

Editor's Note: This article is the second of three to introduce readers of *AOF News & Views* to the directors-at-large who are new to the AOF board. The "introduction article" for Phil Lazier in the August issue will conclude the series.

My name is Vincent M. Wales, and I've been a member of AOF since moving to California in late 2000. I was at the Promise Keepers protest at Arco Arena a mere two weeks after arriving. Since then, I admit, I've not been the most visible member.

I've been an atheist since 16, though I didn't begin my activism for many years. I was a member of the Free-thought Society of Greater Philadelphia and was set to be plaintiff in a 10 C's case... but then I moved to Utah.

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

Just prior to this move, I became a "guide" for About.com. They had all kinds of sites on religion, but none on non-religion. I had to threaten them with discrimination before they created an Agnosticism/Atheism site. I was the site's first guide, but was replaced due to my long offline period during the move.

The ten articles I wrote for them are available (with over 200 others) in *The Atheist Attic* at <http://up.to/atheistattic>. Currently, I answer questions about atheism on AllExperts.com, About.com's sister site.

In case you had any doubts, Utah is not the most atheist-tolerant state in the nation. Not long after moving there, I began to write letters to the

(Continued on page 6)

AOF Board (2005-6)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Kevin Schultz

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Carla Corbett, Beverly Church

Dave Flanders, Phil Lazier

Vincent Wales

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Jerry Sloan (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 9, 2005:

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 12, 2006:

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

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/

Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian,

Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach

(Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga Futrell); Connections (Kevin

Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing

AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan,

Kevin Schultz)

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

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI),

Hank Kocol (CSH),

Ed McConnell (AA),

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Pat Kelley

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Ken Nahigian

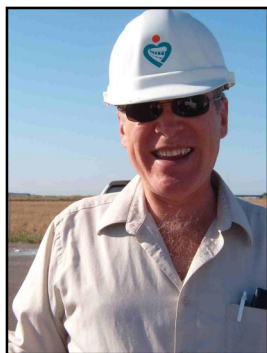
We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at 447-3589 if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at aofboard@aofonline.org

AOFers "On the Scene" for the Highway Cleanup Crew Reports for Duty

By Mynga Futrell



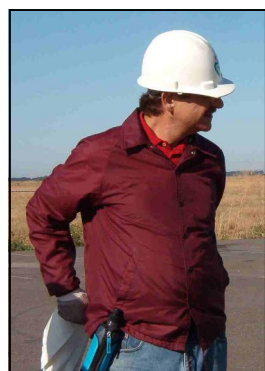
8:00 AM — Ben's right on time and apparently happy to be here.



8:05 — Don BEFORE the shift into "boss man" mode



8:06 — Don AFTER said shift ; all business, but still a nice guy



8:08 — Hey, Mike, Are you ready to go?

Helmet, check
Water bottle, check
4 empty bags, check.

Get your orange vest!
Get your pickup tongs!

It could not have been a more beautiful June day!

Wished you were here!

—photos by Mynga



Did You Know?

By Cleo Kocol



Most of us grow up knowing Percy Bysshe Shelley was a poet admired for his imagery, subtle melodies and inspired lyrics, but did you know that he was a vehemently outspoken critic of Christianity?

Recently four letters he wrote in 1810 were found in the home of two London brothers who died last year. The letters are to be auctioned at Christie's International and are expected to bring up to \$58,000. The letters were the forerunners of his pamphlet, "The Necessity of Atheism." They created a scandal in Britain and led to Shelley being ousted from Oxford in 1811.

Another interesting sidelight, his mother-in-law was Mary Wollstonecraft, famous for writing "The Vindication of the Rights of Women." Her daughter, Mary, Shelley's wife, garnered fame by writing "Frankenstein."

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the Atheist Alliance International ("a positive voice for atheism"). AOF also 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.

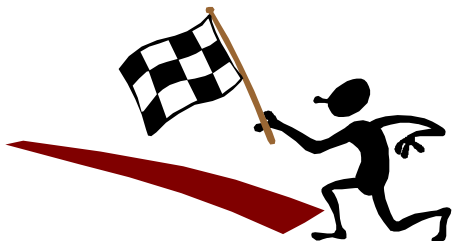
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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

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.

The End of Faith

Book Review by Steve Knapp



The End Of Faith - Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason, by Sam Harris (2004, Norton, New York).

One of the lesser known consequences of the 9-11 terrorist attack is a scholarly investigation into the causes of terrorism by a philosophy graduate from Stanford, one Sam Harris. That investigation resulted in this book, which discusses at length the dangers to human societies presented by many of the major religions, especially those that are monotheistic and paternalistic.

To his great credit, Harris pulls no punches. In the first two thirds of the book, he examines the degree to which most religions are irrational and based on arbitrary and false assertions. While showing that we humans usually depend on the facts and observations in our everyday lives, Harris demonstrates that the great religions are so entrenched in our cultures that their scientific falsehoods and irrationality are never questioned or criticized.

He discusses the basis of religion primarily in terms of the superstitious need commonly felt by members of our species to seek an after-life and to explain seemingly random events, including those that are good, like winning the lottery or finding a parking space. I have to admit that with the current Bush administration I find myself looking desperately for something better! While there may be an innate fear

of dying, I personally found this explanation of religion insufficient and would like to see something about our "hardware".

For example, I think that religions exist in part to promote the propagation of each person's DNA, a process seen in other species. Religions provide for controlling the sexual lives (e.g. insemination) of the women, and the more fundamental the religious sect, the stronger the power, control, and paternalism. I note that tribal or cultural warfare, also strongly associated with competing religions, is another form of control of reproduction because such warfare is really to determine which set of males gets to impregnate the women.

Women, of course, are considered as property by the men. To allow any form of autonomy or sexual tolerance (be it over womens' rights, reproductive choice, or sexual orientation, etc.) necessarily implies the capitulation of the power and control over the (personal, family, tribal) DNA. This is explains the brutal family law found in the bible and koran and other fundamental texts, and the strong hierarchical power structures promoted therein.

Harris devotes several chapters to citations from the Koran, Bible, and other "holy" books, with extensive discussions of not only how violent the consequences can be but also of how the respective cultures tolerate religious aggression and turn it into violence.

One of the delights of the book is Harris' clever and sardonic prose, with which he demolishes the concept of the religions being loving or good, particularly with respect to the intolerance of, and violence toward, competing theologies, which after all, was the motivation for

nine-eleven.

The final chapters of the book contain extensive philosophical discussions of the nature of the human and what it means to be conscious, for example. Frankly, I get bored by the analysis of perception and thought, if there is any. But in the end, Harris quite correctly asserts that the only solution to the dangers of religions is objective facts, i.e., the products of science, which may of course have agitated the fundamentalists into extremes of aggression of late. The truth shall set you free, and it damn well better hurry up.

July Movie Night

Chocolat and
The God Who Wasn't There
A Double Feature !

Beverly Church will show the July films at her home on Friday, July 15, at 7 p.m. The running time for *Chocolat* is 121 minutes. For those who wish to stay on, there will be a second shorter film (62 minutes). Bev lives in North Natomas at 24 Adkinson Court (Take the Del Paso Road exit east off I-5). Her phone number is 359-5423.



Note: Bev can better plan for the number to be hosted if each person who plans to go will phone a couple of days ahead of time. (If you decide at the last minute, feel free to come on; bring your favorite microwave popcorn and beverage.)

The Very Best, and the Very Bad

The Sea Within and *Heart of the Beholder*

Movie Review by Paul Geisert

When a movie is written, directed, and produced by the same person, that person had better be Woody Allen. It takes great talent to do any *one* of those motion picture tasks well. Only someone extremely talented can do *all three*.

The situation becomes worse when all three are attempted by an amateur. *Heart of the Beholder* was done by an amateur and, in short, the movie is a disaster (mind you, I am comparing it with theater films, not TV movies, since I don't have a TV).

The story is based on how Ken Tipton, the aforementioned amateur, lost his family, multi-million dollar video store chain, and his way of life. Christian Citizens for Decency had implemented a boycott to remove videos deemed pornographic from his shops. His shops were closed and then sold.

The movie's first hint of disaster was the opening screen which stated, "Based on a true story." That phrase generally sends me running out of the theatre. But just two days before viewing *Beholder*, I had viewed a "based on a true story" film which was about the best film I had seen in a very long time — *The Sea Within*. (*The Sea's* director, editor, composer (music score), producer, and screenwriter is Alejandro Amenábar.) I was staggered by how well a movie can be constructed.

The Sea Within is, in my opinion, the best film providing a truly secular approach to living and dying ever produced. When you view the DVD of *The Sea*, do not skip the two commentaries on the film. They are the best commentaries I have ever seen on how a film gets produced.

Back to *Heart*.

Tipton's script shows no signs of anything except black and white characterizations. The bad guys are all malevolent, plotting, ranting Christians, and a totally corrupt prosecuting attorney. The good guys are a hard working entrepreneur, a loving and supportive wife, a cute kid, an honest cop, and a chipper employee. Nobody bad does anything good, and nobody good does anything bad. The whole thing comes down to a metaphoric paint ball war between the protagonist and the bad guys. As if one should cower in abject fear when faced by a paint ball. Tipton's directing is tolerable at best.

The strongest aspect of the film was the acting. The actors, across the board, did a fine job with the script they had. George Mooradian's photography was quite adequate.

(Continued on page 7)

Get in on the Action!

Freethought Day Committee!

Freethought Day planning has begun in a HUGE way. We've added new sub-committees and have our chairpersons for each. Woo hoo!!!



The Freethought Day 2005 Planning Committee members are:
 Beverly Church, Chair w Mynga Futrell, Program
 Carla Corbett, Entertainment w Tom Ikelman, Exposition
 Kay Dickey, Finance w Jerry Sloan, Publicity
 Kevin Schultz, Outreach w Bryan Krofchok, Logistics

WE'RE STILL LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS TO ASSIST WITH THE EVENT DAY TASKS (picking up and delivering certain items, arranging tables, setting up chairs/stage, cleanup of grounds, assisting with our hospitality, minding the various display tables, etc.) Call the voicemail at 447-3589 to indicate your interest .

AOF's Highway Cleanup

Just five AOF members participated in our June Adopt-A-Highway cleanup. But it was certainly worth the short drive just a couple of miles north of the Sacramento city limits to see the bountiful numbers of wondrous snowy egrets playing about on either side of Highway 99. Of course, you have to keep your distance from them before they take flight but they will give you a couple of dozen feet to get a good visual appreciation of wildlife.

Ben Cornforth, Mynga Futrell, Michael House, Don Knutson and Ken Nahigian enjoyed a perfect Sunday morning doing the cleanup, but such few numbers could not do the thorough cleanup that a highway overseen by our AOF name deserves.

We rapidly approach the *tenth anniversary* of our adoption of this highway (in October), and only our members' generous investment of their time to do this noble task can enable us to continue in this tradition. Since Sundays involve somewhat diminished traffic, we will return to the scene Sunday, August 7 @ 8a.m.

—DK

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

Meet New Board Member

(Continued from page 2)

editor of the local paper, virtually a lone voice to counter the idiocy spouted in those pages. In 30 months there, I had over 50 letters published. Quite a trick, since they had a limit of one letter per person per month and verified every letter published. (The trick was to publish some in my wife's name, and others under the name of a fictitious "cousin" who happened to live with us, and had his own phone number... that number being my cell phone.)

I also started the Freethought Society of Northern Utah, which grew to about 75 members in 18 months. We even got on the front page of the local paper

within sixty days of our inception, challenging a county clerk who insisted on imposing her religious beliefs on those who came to her for a secular marriage ceremony.

It was during those days that I began work on my novel, *One Nation Under God*. For information, go to (<http://www.onenationundergod.info>)



A pensive Vince Wales.

I humbly consider it not only a good story and a great exercise in experimental storytelling, but also a primer for non-theists to use in their "battles" against the forces of theism. I drew heavily from my own encounters with Creationists and others for much of the story.

I was thrilled that Dan Barker of the Freedom from Religion Foundation (I'm a member of nearly a decade) gave an endorsement blurb for the book, as did our own Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell.

"ONUG" (horrible acronym) is my second published novel, and a third is in the works.

I also currently serve as Vice President of Northern California Publishers & Authors, and teach a series of fiction writing courses

for The Learning Exchange. And somewhere in there, I manage to work full-time for the California Hospital Association, supporting two VPs.

HAGSA Invites

AOF members are welcome at the summer potlucks of the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area. Dates are Sundays, July 17, August 7, and August 28, 3 PM. Call the voicemail for details. Potluck info is also at HAGSA's website (<http://hagsa.org/meetings/2004/index.html>)

AOF Board Meeting Summary

June 19, 2005

Home of Beverly Church

Directors present: Don Knutson (president), Mynga Futrell (vice-president), Ken Nahigian (treasurer), Kevin Schultz (secretary), Carla Corbett, David Flanders, Beverly Church.

Directors absent: Vincent Wales, Phil Lazier.

Guests present: Mike Haus, Ben Cornforth, Jerry Sloan.

Bylaws discussion was postponed until July. Vote tentatively scheduled for November.

Motion to send \$400 instead of \$300 to Sacramento Children's Receiving Home. Don made the motion and Carla seconded. Passed by consensus.

Motion to loan \$1,500 to Freethought Day Committee by Don, seconded by Carla. Passed by consensus.

Next meeting July 24, at 09:30 at the home of Carla Corbett.

Other Matters — Check 'Em Out

Movie Time: July 15 (see box, page 4)

- *Chocolat*: An iconoclastic single mother (Oscar-nominee Juliette Binoche) and her young daughter move to a village in France and open a chocolate shop -- that's open Sundays -- across the street from a church. (Also stars Judi Dench, Lena Olin, and Johnny Depp)
- *The God Who Wasn't There: Bowling for Columbine* did it to the gun culture. *Super Size Me* did it to fast food. Now TGWWT does it to religion. Holding modern Christianity up to a merciless spotlight, this bold and hilarious new film asks the questions few dare to ask. And when it finds out how crazy the answers are, it dares to call them crazy. Your guide through the bizarre world of Christendom is former fundamentalist Brian Flemming, who unflinchingly explores the absurdity of belief and believers. Faith is in for a bumpy ride.

AOF's General Meeting for August

- Summer Sizzler with Salads! A tradition. Decide on your speech topic now!

Roger Williams Video (now in DVD)

- *Karen Scott*, of the Interfaith Religious Liberty Foundation, informs us that the video on she and *Walt Pontenyn* showed at their presentation to AOF a couple of years ago is now out in a DVD format. Some at AOF had been wanting to have it in that format at the time, but the product was available only in VHS at the time. Either way, it's \$19.95 + \$1.55 CA sales tax + \$7.00 shipping and handling and available from IRLF at 2351 Sunset Blvd., #170-453, Rocklin, CA 95765 or phone: (877)721-4200. (Color; Running Time: 45 Minutes)

Thanks to Paul Storey

- Speaking of video, AOF would like to extend its thanks to member *Paul Storey*, who donated his time, energy, and talents to producing videos of some AOF events in recent years. DVDs of a number of events are now available to members who wish to borrow them for viewing. For more information, please contact the AOF voice-mail number, 447-3589. Paul plans to continue producing and videotaping AOF events as his time permits.

Newsletter Submissions

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

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.

Freethought Day I

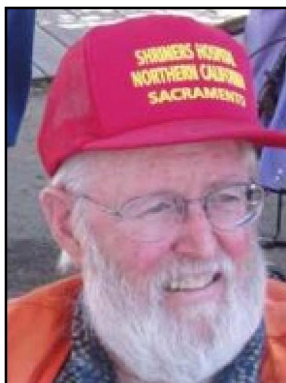
Freethought Day II

Freethought Day III . . . & coming on OCTOBER 9, 2005

Freethought Day IV

Can it be that it's time already to be thinking about *Freethought Day IV*? Well it is... proving the old adage that "time flies when you are having fun." And our Freethought Day celebrations *are* fun...and more so each year. These celebrations have brought together atheists, agnostics, skeptics, rationalists, naturalists in what we like to call the "Sacramento Community of Reason."

It is important for all of us to get involved, whether as a planner, a day-of-the-event volunteer, a sponsor or, most important on Oct. 9, the a person sitting in the audience enjoying the program of top notch entertainment and short speeches.



Jerry Sloan (who authored the surrounding article) says these Freethought Day celebrations are *fun*. Here he is at FTD III (last October). Don't take his word for it, though. Better to attend and check out FTD IV out for yourself Oct. 9.

So far, in the way of entertainment, the FTD Committee hopes to bring you the music of Roberta Chevrette, James Israel and Terry Haggerty. We are still working on speakers, but they will be riveting and entertaining.

This year our event hopes to spark a Revival of Reason. If at anytime in the history of our wonderful homeland we have a greater need for a Revival of Reason and a moving away from religious superstition and oppression, it is now.

Your support of Freethought Day IV will help spark that Revival of Reason, so set aside Sunday October 9, 2005 in Old Sacramento at Waterfront Park.

Movie Reviews: "The Sea" and "Heart"

(Continued from page 5)

Everyone who made a pre-production investment in the movie should be in high spirits at Executive Producer Darlene Lieblich's decision to pay off all backers (after inheriting enough to clear the debts). Whether seeing the final product had given her a guilty conscience and led her to think she had better clean the slate and her good name, I don't know. I do hear that she is highly regarded by her investors. So, how she went about the process of getting funding for the film was admirable. Too bad she had to rely on an amateur for the actual production.

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.rthoughtsrfree.org/aof.htm

July Calendar of Events

Freethought Day 2005 Planning Committee	Saturday, July 9, 10:30 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday July 10, 2:30 PM
Movie Social - "Chocolat" (see page 4)	Friday July 15, 7 PM
AOF Board Meeting (open to members)	Sunday, July 24, 9:30 AM
AOF Highway Cleanup	Sunday, August 7, 8 AM
AOF General Meeting	Sunday, August 14, 2:30 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 2:30 - 5 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor faire in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (10/9/05), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2/12/06). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

