

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

February 2006

Sunday, February 12 Darwin Birthday Educational Gala

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There is no February AOF meeting. Instead of heading to a meeting, AOFers will be flocking to the 2006 Darwin Day gala. It is to be held on February 12, the birth anniversary of a great scientist, Charles Darwin. (See newsletter insert for details.) At Sacramento's **celebration of science and humanity**, there will be a highly informative educational program, merry entertainment, literature tables, and refreshments. The educational presentation is by **Nicholas Matzke**, from the National Center for Science

Education. He recently attended the Dover PA trial and will be speaking about "**The Evolutionary Origins of Intelligent Design.**" This year, we will be adding a dose of music and levity to the celebration! The program will shift gears after the talk into a musical presentation of science songs from **The Big Bang Band** (from Sonoma County). Please make plans to attend. Tell your family and friends, too! It will be a lot of fun...and educational to boot!



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A Musical Freethought Delight

Dan Barker in Sacramento

On Friday, February 3, from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m., the UUSS Public Forum will be presenting **Dan Barker**, an accomplished pianist, record producer, arranger and songwriter from Madison, Wisconsin.

Dan is an atheist, who, early in life, was a Christian evangelical minister. He is now co-president (with wife, Annie Laurie Gaylor) of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Contributing editor to FFRF's "Freethought Today" newspaper,

Dan has been involved with the Foundation's separation of state/church lawsuits. He has authored several books.

The Sacramento presentation is in the auditorium of the Unitarian-Universalist Society of Sacramento at 2425 Sierra Boulevard (between Fulton and Howe, just north of Fair Oaks Blvd.) No admission is being charged.

—Editor's Note: Read about Dan's journey from preacher to atheist on page 6.

AAI Convention

“We’re not in Kansas Anymore”

By Mynga Futrell

The Atheist Alliance International is heading to the Heartland for the first ever joint convention with the Secular Student Alliance! AOF members are invited to attend this annual event, which takes place on April 14-16, 2006 in Kansas City, Missouri. Speakers to date are:

Julia Sweeney, writer-actress, winner of this year's Dawkins Award and author of *Letting Go of God: My Beautiful Loss of Faith Story*.

Lori Lipman Brown, freethought's first Washington lobbyist and Executive Director of the Secular Coalition of America.

Matt Cherry, President of the United Nations NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Executive Director of the Institute for Humanist Studies.

Dr. Fred Whitehead, freethought historian and author of *Freethought on the American Frontier*.

Dr. Ron Pine, Research Associate, Field Museum of Chicago and Permanent Visiting Scholar at the Natural History Museum and Biodiversity Research Center, University of Kansas.

Dr. Paul Mirecki, Professor and past Departmental Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, the first to propose teaching ID as mythology.

August E. Brunsmann IV, Executive Director

of the Secular Student Alliance and Director of Camp Quest Classic.

Sessions on atheist parenting, lobbying for separation of church and state, as well as "Leaving the Fold: How Ex-ministers Did It" by Don Bell, Lee Dietz, and Mark Killingsworth and "Selling Atheism" hands-on training by Woody Kaplan ...*And much more!*

Reserve your space now! Rooms are ready to be booked at the luxurious KC Marriott Hotel Airport (775 Brasilia Ave, KC, MO 64153) for only **\$65 per night**. You can also call (816) 464-2200 and ask for AAI's rate: (code is athatha) Convention rates below include all meals: two dinners, two breakfasts, one lunch and Friday reception Adults, full program = \$175 each (\$195 after March 15)

[NOTE: Other rates, for full-time students under 30, high school and adult students, Camp Quest enrollments for children 4-14, and child care for children under four, are also available.]

You can get more information and/or book the convention at the AAI site: www.atheistalliance.org

AOF Line

Congratulations Received!

The previous issue of *AOF News & Views* reported receipt of a reward.

Apparently American Atheists took note of its state-level California Awards Program (CAP) since we received a congratulatory note from the national office, which read as follows:

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

I just received the *AOF News and Views* and, as Affiliate Outreach Director for American Atheists, let me congratulate the Atheists and Other Freethinkers on getting the Special Events Awards from

the California branch of American Atheists. I am sure that Dave Kong is quite familiar with your work and activism in promoting Atheism in your area. Your group appears to be a good example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts and it is this attitude that will eventually work in our favor. Keep up the good work!

Lance M. Wilhelm Affiliate Outreach Director American Atheists

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, Vincent Wales

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Mynga Futrell (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day:

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, Kevin

Schultz); AOF Finances Evaluation

(Carla Corbett, Beverly Church, Ken Nahigian)

Archive: Jody Craig, Kay Dickey,

Mynga Futrell, Ken Nahigian,

Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)

Hank Kocol (CSH)

Kevin Schultz (AA)

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma, Carla

Corbett

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

Meeting Recap

Dave Fitzgerald Makes “Historical Jesus” Vanish

By Dave Flanders

The January speaker for AOF was David Fitzgerald. He is writing a book that questions the historical existence of Jesus Christ. That book’s title is *The 10,000 Christs and the Evaporating Jesus*.

Dave, from San Francisco Atheist did extensive studying of prominent historians who lived 2000 years ago and in the vicinity of Israel seeking information about the Jesus Christ who is said to have lived on earth around 30 years.

The historian Josephus makes a pithy remark about Jesus, but historians of today came to realize it was an obvious forgery inserted into historical account that he was writing. Savior myths similar to the gospel accounts were numerous before the gospels were written, which implies the gospels were plagiarized from other sources.

The gospel accounts, written long after Jesus was said to have lived, have an amazing number of contradictions between them, and Dave gave numerous examples.

The self-proclaimed apostle Paul said he got his information of Christ not from people, but God Himself.

Interestingly, Paul, who says he never met the Jesus on earth, does not write a single word about the human Jesus on earth. What he does write about is a Christ that sounds quite phenomenally similar to the savior

myths of his day. Dave suggests that Alexander the Great, who was the first to bring together a huge number of religious people, was instrumental in the creation of the Jesus Christ myth. Influences include the Persians –

Zoroastrians (Satan, heaven, Good God), etc. Egyptians’ (monotheism) ideas came from China, India, and other countries as well.

Through his studies Dave came to realize that Christianity did not begin with a single God and a single Christ, but rather 10,000 versions of Christ thrown into a melting pot of religious ideas combined and then, from a kind of Darwinian evolution, the Jesus myth eventually emerges. That Jesus myth turns out to be a pagan god – not a Jewish god.



—Photo by Kevin Schultz
Dave Fitzgerald addresses January meeting.



Richard Langley sets up the audio

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.

More members moving to electronic news!

“Get Color! Save Trees!

By the AOF Board

For some time now, AOF has offered its newsletter in electronic format. This form of delivery not only saves the organization money and keeps member dues at a minimum, it offers additional benefits to the member who selects that form of material.

One such benefit the electronic version provides is a more colorful newsletter. Without doubt, the pictures are clearer, too. Of course, one has to get to the computer and view the material online, or print it out on one's own printer, so it's not quite as handy for people who like to read in bed or at the table with a cup of java.

Given the cost difference between electronic and print/ mailing, right now, the organization is initiating a cold hard look at costs. It has been a very long time since we have raised member dues. Two years ago, as we noted the increases in printing and postage costs, the board did a serious cost evaluation. It was decided that a member's dues should cover

the costs of newsletter and of meeting room, and that wasn't quite happening at the time. Still, the decision was made to “keep plugging” at the current dues rate and just hope for the best. Thankfully, due to the generosity of some members sending in donations to the general fund, we have been able to forestall a dues increase.

With the creeping of printing costs and associated cost increases - most recently the boost in first class postage rates - the board is soon going to give another look at the situation. Before we do, however, we'd like to urge those willing to receive their *AOF News & Views* electronically to please speak up. That way, we will have a sure count on member preferences before we head to the charts and figures.

So, if you are interested in obtaining the newsletter electronically, please let us know by e-mailing the board (aofboard@aofonline.org) and saying as much. We will then use your e-mail address for that purpose.

Formation of AOF Ad Hoc Committee on Financial Health — Share Your Talents!

At its January meeting, the AOF board voted to create an ad hoc committee on Financial Health. The committee will analyze the revenue and expense streams in light of 2005 year-end financial data prepared by Treasurer Ken Nahigian. Then, in June, the committee will report its findings to the Board of directors and suggest options for keeping AOF “financially healthy” into the future.



Board member Carla Corbett will chair the Financial Health ad hoc committee. She is looking for a few fiscally-minded individuals who either enjoy crunching numbers or coming up with creative fiscal solutions – or both. Please contact her at Carla@aofonline.org if you would like to serve on the committee.



Highway Cleanup Report

By Don Knutson

A clear, crisp winter's morning greeted AOF's "Adopt-A-Highway" crew for January 22, 2006.

Though the sides of the highway were trash-laden with standing water in many places, the migratory geese honking overhead made us feel more connected to nature.

The crew this time out was composed of **Michael House, Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian, Debra and Richard Prowse and Kevin Schultz**. And we were also joined by Peace & Freedom Party Congressional Candidate **John Rieger** who shook a lot of hands but collected no campaign contributions while collecting three bags of garbage!

All told, the rugged AOF crew collected 24 bags of garbage, and the highway looks a lot better!

AOFers and friends will return on Sunday, March 26 (tentative) to do it again. Consider joining us!

—Editor's note: Please check the March newsletter's "Calendar" to check whether that date holds firm or another is selected.

DARWIN DAY!
SPREAD THE WORD
Post the flyer enclosed with this newsletter. Tell your friends and colleagues!

Activists Meet to Gain Media Savvy AOFers Attend Summit in L.A.

In January 2005, not too long after the reelection of W, the American Humanist Association invited the heads of all the USA freethought organizations to come to what AHA called an "Inauguration Summit" to discuss possible avenues of cooperation and activism. No projects actually developed from the one-day gathering, but it was a good ice-breaking meeting for those who attended, and a list-serve was created to enable these "heads" to share information. It was strongly felt that freethinkers had to stop talking to themselves and get together on activism within the broader public.

The recent meeting (Heads 2) was jovially titled, "Talking Heads," and it took place in Los Angeles on January 21, 2006. The Atheist Alliance had followed AHA's lead and offered to host a second summit. This time, the focus was on media training, fortifying all the participating organizations and providing strategies to better garner notice

and get across their messages in the press and other media. Once again, there was a level of communication across organizations likely to further strengthen the overall freethought movement.

Invited to attend last year were two AOF members, **Paul Geisert** (representing The Brights' Net, an international Internet constituency), and **Mynga Futrell** (representing Objectivity, Accuracy and Balance In Teaching About Religion, an organization that focuses on teachers and curriculum). Both attended again this year. This time they were joined by another AOFer, **Beverly Church** was added to the invitation list as the "head" of freethoughtday.org, at Mynga's suggestion, and also that of Jim Heldberg, national membership chair of American Atheists (who had delighted in Sacramento's Freethought Days 2004-5). Beverly was thus able to inform over 40 national activists about FTD !

AOF Board Meeting Minutes Summary January 15, 2006

Southside Park Co-housing
Common House

November minutes approved by consensus. November and December treasury reports, as well as year-end financial report, approved by consensus.

Board Vacancy: Board will not actively seek to replace vacancy at this time.

Finance committee: Carla (chair), Bev, Ken, Mynga to examine finances and report suggestions to board.

Newsletter editor position: Mynga communicated she will take six-month leave of absence from newsletter editor duties. Vince Wales expressed interest in learning about the position.

Purchase of Mike Newdow CD's: Board approved by consensus the purchase of 15 CD's for sale at AOF events. Bev will determine price.

Reimbursements: Board approved \$21 of expenses from Kevin and reimbursing Ken for ~\$75 of Evolvefish purchases for Darwin Day event.

Greeter: Carla volunteered to greet people at the door and hand out visitor packets.

Next meeting: Sunday, Feb 19, 2006, 09:30, at the home of Vince Wales.



—Photo by Mynga Futrell

Where do you think that charter AOF members **Cleo and Hank Kocol** would choose to celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary? At an AOF meeting, of course. They brought a cake to share with all present.

Greet the Greeter!

Beginning in March, you will notice a "greeter" at our general meetings in the form of AOF Board member **Carla Corbett**.

No, we're not trying to emulate Walmart. Carla will be conducting an informal survey of first-time AOF visitors to assess the effectiveness of recent publicity efforts by asking where they heard about AOF. Results of the survey will help focus publicity efforts.

First-time visitors will be given a visitor packet at the door. They will also be supplied with a red-bordered name badge for easy identification as a first-time visitor.

Please take a moment to introduce yourself to our visitors to make them feel welcome and answer any questions they may have about AOF.

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.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer. E-mail Postal mail

Dan Barker's Story

From Preacher to Atheist

Dan became a teenage evangelist at age 15 and ultimately received a degree in Religion from Azusa Pacific University in 1975.

After receiving his degree Dan served as associate pastor at a Friend's (Quaker) Church, an Assembly of God, and an independent Charismatic church. Dan was a Protestant missionary in Mexico for a total of two years and, for nearly 17 years, he was involved in a touring musical ministry, including eight years of full-time, cross-country evangelism.

An accomplished pianist, record producer, arranger and songwriter in his own right, Dan worked with a wide variety of Christian evangelical groups and music companies. He was piano accompanist for such Christian personalities as Pat Boone, Jimmy Roberts (of the Lawrence Welk Show), and gospel songwriter Audrey Meier, and was a regular guest on Southern Califor-

nia's "Praise The Lord" TV show (Spanish).

One of Dan's Christian songs, "There Is One," was performed by Rev. Robert Schuller's television choir on the "Hour of Power" broadcast. To this day, he receives royalties from his popular children's Christian musicals, "Mary Had a Little Lamb (1977) and "His Fleece Was White As Snow" (1978), both published by Manna Music and performed in many countries around the world.



Dan Barker

To his great credit Dan began reading outside the proscribed areas set out by most religions to protect their beliefs and believers, as well as their doctrines, from critical examination.

After five years of reading, Dan gradually found that he had outgrown his religious beliefs. "If I had

limited myself to Christian authors, I'd still be a Christian today," Dan says. "I just lost faith in faith." He announced his atheism publicly in January, 1984.

Dan became PR Director for the Freedom From Religion Foundation for the period from 1987 to 2004. In 2004 he was elected co-president.

Dan continues his composing and piano playing under the heading of freethought concerts and in a rather different direction from in his previous years, as you might expect. Here are a few of his titles: "My Thoughts Are Free," "Reason's Greetings," "Dan Barker Salutes Freethought Then And Now." He also has a 2-CD album, "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist," and his newest CD is "Beware of Dogma."

Dan has also authored several books: *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*; *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children*; *Maybe Yes, Maybe No: A Guide for Young Skeptics*; *Maybe Right; Maybe Wrong: A Guide for Young Thinkers*.

President's Corner

By Don Knutson

The new year 2006 has started well for international women politically with the presidential elections of Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia. The unique aspect of their political success is that neither came to power through their connection to powerful men. Incidentally, Bachelet has been reportedly described as either "agnostic" or "atheist".

The rising success of women leaders internationally is attributed to the greater number of women involved in their respective political systems. But in the U.S., we remain static in the level of female involvement with only 13% of the seats of both houses of Congress held by women, virtu-

ally unchanged since the so-called "Year of the Woman" in 1992. California is a little better with 30% of the Assembly and 25% of the Senate.

I blame the anemic progress of women in this country on the ongoing neo-con evangelical revolution which is so determined to return the American woman to the home as they were in the '50's. Of course, the overturn of Roe v. Wade is their ultimate target followed by the elimination of all contraceptives. Making distinctions about a person's abilities based on gender is so obsolete and last century. This country's falling behind the rest of the world in the advancement of women is to our detriment.

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.



Did You Know?

By Cleo Kocol

Cleopatra had four children, including a daughter, Cleopatra Selene who married King Juba of Mauretania. Their son, Ptolemy, was born about the time of the biblical Jesus.

When Ptolemy became king, Jesus (who probably didn't exist) was said to be speaking of and to the poor and disadvantaged in Judea, Ptolemy was speaking about the mistreatment of slaves and animals in Mauretania.

Absent Roman landlords paid little attention to how slaves were treated. Usually prisoners of Roman war, slaves were housed in dungeons, worked in chains, and lived in filth and squalor. Also wild ani-

mals penned underground were kept half-starved and ferocious. Ptolemy was shocked at the treatment of both. Although horse racing and other sports took place in Hellenistic Egypt when his grandmother was queen, Roman-type games and gladiatorial combat were never part of Egypt's culture. Ptolemy's maternal heritage demanded disgust for the Roman games. His father never encouraged blood sports either. Juba had been a scholarly man not interested in the Roman spectacle.

Although Ptolemy could not stop the gladiatorial contests, he declared that nobody was to be killed in the "sport," not even condemned criminals. He ordered better treatment of slaves and safeguarded African wildlife by passing the first conservation law in history. Romans were incensed, but nothing was done because Emperor Tiberius liked Ptolemy.

Tiberius and Cleopatra Selene, Ptolemy's mother, were childhood playmates. But when the Emperor Caligula took over the Roman Empire, he had no such memories. He had Ptolemy killed in a most brutal fashion.

What if a cult of Ptolemy rose instead of Jesus?

It's possible Ptolemy would have called upon a trinity of Egyptian gods: Isis the mother, Osiris the father, and Horus their son. The slaves Ptolemy had befriended could conceivably have broadcast his name, preached his good news and told and retold his last words. Someone could have written that Osiris so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, Ptolemy. People today could be worshipping Isis, weeping over Ptolemy.

If you can rationalize one thing, why not another? All one needs is history wed to a good imagination.

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!
aofonline.org

February Calendar of Events

AOF General Meeting	No Meeting in February (Darwin Day)
Darwin Birthday Educational Gala	Sunday, February 12, 2 - 4:30 PM
Movie Social	No Movie in February
Next AOF Board meeting	Sunday, February 19, 9:30 AM
Next AOF General Meeting	Sunday, March 12, 2:30 - 5 PM



Directions to Darwin Day Education Gala — February 12

The Darwin Day celebration takes place at the La Sierra Community Center (John Smith Hall), 5325 Engle Road, in Carmichael. This location is just two blocks west of Fair Oaks Blvd. At Engle and Garfield. There is plenty of parking. **Important: Doors will open at 2 PM (*not before*). The formal program does not begin until 2:30** so that those who wish to visit the literature tables, register for the door prize, and see the sales merchandise will have the opportunity to do so. If you seek more specific information about the gala, please phone AOF's 24-hour answering recorder at 447-3589 and leave your name and telephone number for a return call. Advance tickets until 2/5/06: \$8.