AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California  December 2006

Sunday, December 10
Caring for Our Community

This winter season join us for a glimpse into the Children’s Receiving Home of Sacramento (http://www.crhkids.org) via Director Claire Spear. CRH is the safety net for the area’s abused and neglected children between the ages of 1 and 17. As the only emergency shelter of its kind in Sacramento County, CRH acts as the "front door" of the child protective system.

When children are brought to the Home they are frightened and upset because their world has been turned upside down. But soon they show a smile because they’re welcomed with a personal tote full of clothing, personal hygiene products and toys, good food and a safe, warm bed to sleep in. And most importantly, they are shown respect and listened to. With understanding counselors, accredited teachers and other children going through similar ordeals, children soon discover that they’re surrounded with a healing network of friends.

The Children’s Receiving Home was established in 1944, through a joint effort of the Junior League of Sacramento and the Sacramento Rotary Club. Following several

(Continued on page 3)
Resisting Sexual Harassment But Not A Deity

AOF Line
By Don Knutson

Suzanne Swift, an Army Specialist who is being court-martialed for going AWOL when her unit was being redeployed to Iraq, was a guest of Amy Goodman on her Pacifica program, Democracy Now!, in late September. Swift was a 19-year-old recruit in 2003 when she and her platoon were initially deployed to Iraq. Shortly after arriving, she was exposed to constant sexual harassment by several leaders of her platoon and ultimately, yielded to having sexual relations with her Platoon commander on several occasions. When she finally refused to consent any longer and complained about her treatment, she was punished in a variety of ways including being required to carry a wall clock with her wherever she went. Then when her platoon was redeployed to Iraq earlier this year, she expected to see more of the same abuse and went AWOL. Given her exposure to the military way-of-life (at least for attractive young women), Goodman asked her if she would recommend military service to other women and she hurriedly said, "No way". But when asked if she regretted enlisting into the Army, she replied, "No", saying in so many words that everything that happens has a reason and a purpose. I was, of course, incredulous to hear her apparent rationalization that some supposedly benevolent deity had put her through this experience! Now, she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as she is confined at Fort Lewis, WA awaiting trial. She showed such strength and courage in resisting the military's modus operandi and yet she still evidently accepts the traditional shy, modest God (an oxymoron, isn't it?) of her endemic culture.

Dude, Where's My Newsletter?

AOF regrets the interruption of newsletter delivery for the months of October and November. Every month, the AOF News and Views production process moves through a pipeline, step-by-step, until it arrives in your hands via the postal service or the internet. The steps include content submission (everyone), layout editing (in state of flux), delivery to the printer (Ken Nahigian), and finally, retrieval from the printer, labeling, folding, and mailing (Tom Nicolette and Tina Burgess (e-mail)). Board members have filled the layout editor position on an interim basis since July while looking for someone willing and able to commit to a semi-permanent role. This month, board member Kevin Schultz has agreed to take over the layout editor position for a three month trial basis beginning with this issue. Many thanks to interim editors Bev Church, Annette Daniels, and Pat Kelley for giving it their best. Please share your thoughts, ideas, or nominations with us at the News and Views.
Meeting Recap

Media Panel Informs, Enlightens
By Kevin Schultz

AOF’s November general meeting addressed the importance of maintaining a dynamic local independent media. Greater and greater centralization in newspapers and the electronic media nationwide has imperiled objective discourse. Today, multi-national corporations control or at least sponsor just about all national programming and written literature which emphasizes the need to preserve local independent voices. A panel of distinguished local media representatives discussed the challenges of their work. Dorothy Wake, author of “Mother Jones: Revolutionary Leader of Labor and Social Reform” and a former editor of Because People Matter, the longtime local bimonthly newspaper, discussed her views on what constitutions independent media - including controversial forms of protest such as freeway blogging and placing stickers on public property. Ken Adams, cohost of “Soapbox”, a weekly political interview program on cable’s Access Sacramento, shared with AOFers his views on the future of Public Access in Sacramento and his sources of information on the Internet. Finally, Daniel Bacher, a freelance journalist who is widely published locally and on the internet, shared his views on local activism in the Sacramento and Bay Area regions. It seemed apparent from the speakers’ presentations that in order for citizens to make decisions in their own best interest they must have reliable access to information from a variety of viewpoints.

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Olive Schreiner, a Forgotten Freethinker
By Ken Nahigian


Born in Wittebergen, South Africa, ninth child in a missionary family, Olive was willful, assertive and precocious from the start, often challenging her parents’ rigid Calvinism. The family broke up after a string of failures in business and mission work. Aged 12, Olive took three years of formal school, then worked as a governess for eleven, meanwhile reading works of Victorian intellectuals. She also began to write—first an autobiographical novel, The Story of an African Farm, eventually published under a pseudonym, and still regarded as one of the first and best feminist novels; then short stories, allegories, vignettes and dream-fantasies, soft in tone, but with a deep vein of sadness or anger.

In London she studied medicine. Then she returned to South Africa, married, and continued to write and speak as a suffragist, pacifist and political rebel, making friends and enemies. In 1920, dying quite suddenly, she was buried without religious ceremony next to her daughter at Buffels Kop.

Dry details; I should like to know more of the woman behind them. Long before my own rebel days, I discovered Olive Schreiner courtesy of a “Little Blue Book” from publisher E. Haldeman-Julius. She seemed to write as if in a fever or trance—tales of obvious and subtle mysticism, contrived and natural symbolism, prose poems, parables, epiphanies and fables—the kind you read and re-read, and they continue to haunt you, not just as stories but experiences, rich and strange, dream-like and disturbing. They are not about ideas; they are singular ideas. They are songs of despair for what we are, and of longing for what we might be. And long after I put down the book, the tales would return to me at odd moments, in little strobes and flashes, leaving an eerie music, and a residue of grief.

Today I commend the writings of Olive Schreiner. She is worth remembering.

There was an artist once, and he painted a picture. Other artists had colors richer and rarer, and painted more notable pictures. He painted his with one color, there was a wonderful red glow on it; and the people went up and down, saying, “We like the picture, we like the glow.”

The other artists came and said, “Where does he get his color from?” They asked him; and he smiled and said, “I cannot tell you;” and worked on with his head bent low.

And one went to the far East and bought costly pigments, and made a rare color and painted, but after a time the picture faded. Another read in the old books, and made a color rich and rare, but when he had put it on the picture it was dead.

But the artist painted on. Always the work got redder and redder, and the artist grew whiter and whiter. At last one day they found him dead before his picture, and they took him up to bury him. The other men looked about in all the pots and crucibles, but they found nothing they had not.

And when they undressed him to put his grave-clothes on him, they found above his left breast the mark of a wound -- it was an old, old wound, that must have been there all his life, for the edges were old and hardened; but Death, who seals all things, had drawn the edges together, and closed it up.

And they buried him. And still the people went about saying, “Where did he find his color from?”

And it came to pass that after a while the artist was forgotten. But the work lived.

[from Dreams by Olive Schreiner (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., undated)]
3rd Annual Joint AOF-HAGSA Winter Solstice Potluck Celebration—Dec 23, 3-6PM
By Kevin Schultz

Winter cheer to relieve sun-deprived blues and cold-induced aches and pains? Yes! This year’s winter solstice potluck celebrates another revolution around the sun, and with it, the shortening of the days and the lengthening of the nights. After the solstice, everything becomes brighter. This year marks the first year that AOF and the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area partake in the created holiday of HumanLight (http://humanlight.org). The HumanLight web site reads: “In Western societies, late December is a season of good cheer and a time for gatherings of friends and families. During the winter holiday season, where the word “holiday” has taken on a more secular meaning, many events are observed. This tradition of celebrations, however, is grounded in supernatural religious beliefs that many people in modern society cannot accept. HumanLight presents an alternative reason to celebrate: a Humanist’s vision of a good future. It is a future in which all people can identify with each other, behave with the highest moral standards, and work together toward a happy, just and peaceful world.” Agree or disagree with AOF participating in such an event? Let us know your thoughts here at the News and Views.

The potluck is to be held at the Common House of the Sacramento Co-Housing community, at T St. & 5th St., Sacramento, on Saturday, December 23, from 3-6PM. Please bring a dish but if you can’t come anyway. Leave your blues and the cold at the door.

Highway Clean-up Washed Up?
By Don Knutson

A perfectly clear day greeted the rugged AOF Highway Cleanup Crew last September as we participated in California's annual Coastal Cleanup Weekend. Dave Flanders, Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian and Kevin Schultz pitched in. Of course, those names sound familiar--they are all AOF Board members. For our organization's continued involvement in these highway cleanups, we need much more of our members to show up at least now and then. Otherwise, the litter and debris surrounding our AOF signs on each side of Highway 99 will suggest to the world a do-nothing organization which cannot uphold its responsibilities. AOF has been recognized several times recently for its dogged 12 years of dedicatedly cleaning up that stretch of highway but that may end soon without more members stepping forward. Our next cleanup will be Sunday, December 17 at 8 a.m. and we meet at the Park & Ride lot west of Highway 99 on Elkhorn Blvd. for a leisurely couple of hours of worthwhile work. Join us!
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

Call for AOF Volunteers

By Kevin Schultz

AOF really, really, really, really, really needs volunteers. While attendance at general meetings remains constant, volunteerism in AOF governance and the Adopt-A-Highway program does not currently meet board expectations for long-term success. Therefore, the AOF board requests your time and energy in helping the organization continue into the future.

There is a saying that it takes but a single candle to light the darkness. AOF is comprised of not one but a multitude of candles, each growing the flame and the strength of the organization.

The AOF board of directors currently has three open seats for the January 14 election. Therefore, we request participation from the general membership to lighten the load -- at least three volunteer candidates for the AOF board. Many hands make short work, the more the merrier.

Similarly, AOF’s level of participation in the CalTrans Adopt-A-Highway project currently meets ~50% of board expectations. Having 10+ volunteers show up helps make the event enjoyable for everyone, as people can partner-up instead of walking alone and make it a social event. In September, five board members volunteered. When one considers board members currently plan as well as form the core execution team for the event, you might see how this becomes unsustainable in the long-term. AOF benefits as an organization through two prominent signs announcing our organization to millions of vehicles each year that pass the two-mile stretch of Highway 99 between Elkhorn Boulevard and Elverta Road.

I think Robert Ingersoll’s quote, “The hands that help are far better than the lips that pray,” fits this appeal. I hope you please consider a small personal commitment to ensure long-term organizational health.

AOF - HAGSA Joint Movie Night:
Friday, December 8, 7PM

Russell Crowe stars in this Academy Award-winning drama (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Supporting Actress, Best Adapted Screenplay) about the brilliant but troubled mathematician, John Nash. The supporting cast includes Jennifer Connelly, as Nash’s devoted wife Alicia, and Ed Harris as the mysterious Parcher.

If you’ve seen this movie before, you already know it’s worth seeing again.

Technical: Widescreen, 5.1 surround sound, 136 minutes.
As usual for the even-month movie nights, this will be at Bill and Elaine Potts’ house at 1848 Hidden Hills Drive, Roseville.
**Correction: Ballad of Silver Jack**

By Ken Nahigian

*Note: Due to publishing error, we omitted the last and most important verse in the September issue of News and Views. We republish the last verse here.*

The roots of this long-favorite bit of Freethought Folk Americana are a mystery—author, original tune, date of composition all unknown. In fact about all we know are the words, which first appeared in *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* by John A. Lomax (1910). Dr. Fred Whitehead, freethought historian, recited it at the Freethinkers United Conference in Orlando, 1997.

```plaintext
Then the fierce encounter ended
And they riz up from the ground
And some one brought a bottle out
And kindly passed it round.
And we drank to Bob’s religion
In a cheerful sort o’ way,
But the spread of infidelity
Was checked in camp that day.
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**Storage Space Update at Sierra 2**

By Kevin Schultz

In July, the Sierra 2 Community Center informed AOF that two cabinets used for storage in Room 10 will require a monthly rental fee, effective immediately. Sierra 2 discovered AOF’s usage of the storage cabinets during remodeling of Community Room 10. AOF began using the two cabinets sometime between 1995 and 2000, without fee.

After reviewing Sierra 2’s proposed rental fee of $25 per cabinet, per month ($300-$600/year), the AOF board judged this expense as an unreasonable use of AOF funds.

As a temporary work-around, AOF board members Ken Nahigian and Kevin Schultz volunteered to store the AOF inventory contained within the cabinet and transport it to and from general meetings each month as needed.

Two other AOFers transport materials to general meetings each month: Betty Simonsma brings nametags and refreshment table items (including her trusty coffee pot) and Mynga Futrell brings literature table information and new visitor packets. Next time you see them please let them know how much you appreciate their contributions to AOF. AOF depends on our volunteers to help make every month a valuable use of member dues.

**Humanists of Sun City Potluck, Dec 9, 3PM**

The Humanists of Sun City invite members of AOF to their December potluck, held at the home of Rena Lowry in Rocklin, 2811 Catalina Drive, Rocklin, CA 95765. Please bring a dish, join the fun. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, contact Rena: 916-632-2376 (home), 916-207-1890 (cell), or send an e-mail: doosiebaha@starstream.net

**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!
December Calendar of Events

**AOF General Meeting**  
Sunday, December 10, 2:30 - 5 PM

**AOF's Highway Cleanup**  
Sunday, December 17, 8 - 10 AM

**Next AOF Board meeting**  
Monday, December 18, 6:30 PM

**AOF-HAGSA HumanLight/Winter Solstice Potluck**  
Sunday, December 23, 3 - 6 PM

**Davis Community Meal**  
Tuesday, December 26, 6 - 7 PM

**Save the Date! - Darwin Birthday Educational Gala**  
Sunday, February 11, 2 - 4:30 PM

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**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.