

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

January 2007

Sunday, January 14

Religion in the Public Schools: A New Year's Resolution To Support Freedom of Conscience

Special Points of Interest

- Darwin Day 2007 (page 1)
- Happy 100th Birthday to Clara Carlson! (page 2)
- AOF Elections 2007: Know Your Candidates (page 4)
- Adopt-A-Highway Crew or Reunion of The Village People? (page 5)
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- A Teaser of An Atheist Poem by Al Brenner (page 7)

Susan Mogull, Sacramento Chapter President of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, will speak on the topic of "**Religion and the Public Schools — A New Year's Resolution To Support Freedom of Conscience.**"

Ms. Mogull's talk will focus on proselytizing, praying, the pledge of allegiance, religious clubs, celebrating, and studying about religion. What is the role of the public school regarding these activities? How do the free exercise rights of students and the no establishment responsibilities of school personnel intersect?

Americans United (AU) is a national organization with members in all 50 states. AU is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and led by the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director. AU has more than 75,000 members from all over the country. They include

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10th Annual Darwin Day — Mark Your Calendars!

Renowned Marine Ecologist to be Sacramento's Darwin Day Speaker by Mynga Futrell

"I knew what I wanted to be (in life) when I was ten years old. I wanted to be a conchologist, then a biologist, in any case a scientist who does research and who gets to go to all sorts of interesting places."

These are the words of **Geerat J. Vermeij** who, although blind since the age of three, has seen his childhood dream born out in his career

and life experiences. Dr. Vermeij did in fact become a biologist. He became an intrepid field naturalist who has explored coasts on nearly every continent. Currently Distinguished Professor of Marine Ecology and Paleoecology at the University of California-Davis, Dr. Vermeij is

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War Disproves the Existence of a God

AOF Line

By Don Knutson

I was reminded of the absolute absurdity of a flowing white bearded deity watching over matters on Earth with the coupled release of two World War II war movies by Clint Eastwood last year.

"*Flags of Our Fathers*" depicted the American struggle in the taking of Iwo Jima in English with Japanese subtitles and "*Letters From Iwo Jima*" provided the Japanese perspective which was in Japanese with English subtitles.

Now, I haven't been much of a fan of Eastwood as an actor or director because I have a problem with his uninteresting moviemaking style and his conservative political point of view. When I lived in Santa Cruz in the 1990's, I found his "*Unforgiven*"

movie he directed undeserving of the Oscar he won for it and as Mayor of Carmel, CA, he readily sacrificed environmental responsibility to the area for his responsibility to his developer friends.

But seeing these two films together made me think of the conventional omniscient, omnipotent western God I used to believe in who knows everything about everyone — their perspectives, all of their experiences, their individual strengths and weaknesses, etc.

And then he passively observes mankind going to war where millions of combatants as well as innocents on both sides die horrific deaths?

Nope, makes no sense to me at all!

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

Happy 100th!

Clara Carlson: A Path To Follow

By Cleo Kocol

An inspiration to all freethinkers, **Clara Carlson** recently celebrated her **100th birthday**. Given an award at the AAI conference in Sacramento in the year 2000 for her activism, she's never rested on her laurels. She reads many freethought newsletters (including AOF's) looking for activities she can incorporate in the atheist group of which she's a founding member. A resident of Port Angeles, Washington, she's been recognized regionally and nationally by FFRF and has attended many AHA conferences where she always identified herself as a radical feminist. In Port Angeles she started a group she named The Wavemakers, worked hard for the Equal Rights Amendment, was a proud member of NOW as well as the League of Women Voters. She still takes part in International Women's Day events, is interviewed by local media, and has letters to the editor in the local papers.

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

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Kay Dickey (Submissions Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 7, 2007

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

Darwin Day, Feb. 11, 2007:

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)

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

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

Children's Receiving Home

By Kevin Schultz

Claire Spear serves as Development Officer for the Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento, where up to 98 children are sheltered each day.

The Home serves as 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, in effect; the Home acts as the front door of the child protective system.

Ms. Spear shared stories of the children she has met during her tenure at the Home. In one case from many years ago, two sisters escaped their environment of physical abuse by running away. Desperate, they turned to a police officer who initially contemplated returning the children to their home. In reaction to their out-



Claire Spear, Development Officer of the Children's Receiving Home of Sacramento

bursts, the police officer ultimately placed the children in the Home. Both sisters now lead stable lives. Awareness of physical violence among police has since improved.

Ms. Spear related fundraising efforts of the Home, detailing how millions of dollars in capital improvements were obtained through the efforts of one key volunteer organizer with the right connections.

The Home still needs help each year to meet commitments to their kids. Special activities such as the Points Program, where children redeem Good Behavior points for prizes, come largely from funds contributed by private donors.

Ms. Spear's talk was followed by a lively question and answer session.

January AOF Program

(Continued from page 1)

people from all walks of life and from various faith communities, as well as those who profess no particular faith. AU receives funding by donations from their members and others who support church-state separation. AU does not seek, nor would they accept, government funding.

The Sacramento Chapter of Americans United meets three times yearly and includes hundreds of members in communities throughout the greater Sacramento area. It is one of 70 local chapters nationwide. Previous AU-Sacramento events have featured speakers such as **Dr. Edwin Gaustad**, Professor Emeritus of History and Religious Studies at UC-Riverside; **Ellery Schempp**, primary student involved in the 1963 case declaring public school-sanctioned Bible readings were unconstitutional; and **Rev. Barry Lynn**, executive director of AU.

The next meeting of AU Sacramento is Monday, January 8, 7PM, at the SMUD Customer Service Center, room Sequoia #3, 6301 S Street, Sacramento. See <http://www.au-sac.org> for full details.

Light refreshments will be provided. The public is invited.

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.

AOF Elections 2007

Candidate Statements for AOF Board of Directors

Candidates for the AOF Board of Directors were asked in advance to provide for the newsletter a statement.

Beverly Church [incumbent]

For the past 3 years I've chaired the Freethought Day committee and will serve as chair again this year. Additionally, I host an AOF movie series. Currently, I serve on the board of directors of the American Humanist Association and as vice president of HAGSA. I'd like to continue on the AOF board and play an active role in both organizations as an enthusiastic freethinker.

Kay Dickey

Kay Dickey has served on AOF's board, holding various offices, during most of the past twelve years. She took the last year and a half off, but feels she is ready to run for the board again in January. She also serves as AOF's co-representative, along with Mynga Futrell, to the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) board of directors and was elected AAI's treasurer in the spring of 2006. She enjoys being part of the decision making process which goes on at the AOF board meetings and serving on various committees.

Mynga Futrell [Incumbent]

A founding member of AOF, I have served in a wide variety of capacities across the years, including president for two years and editor of AOF News & Views for several. AOF must become more vibrant as an organization and better serve members' needs. I'm dedicated to helping our fellow citizens better understand people like us who have a worldview free of supernatural forces and entities (such as deities). AOFers must work in constructive ways to be seen as moral individuals deserving or a role in society,

and I'd like to help us to do so in Sacramento.

Don Knutson [Incumbent]

I have been an active AOF member for 12 years and our President for the last two years. I also coordinate AOF's Adopt-A-Highway program. I find AOF's continued presence and growth in an American societal cauldron of superstition and mythology as absolutely essential. I am a former teacher but today I describe myself as a "world traveler" and everywhere I go, I see the burden people must endure in their having been indoctrinated by their endemic culture into adopting an unnatural view of life on Earth and how their lives could be enhanced by the presence of an organization like AOF.

Ken Nahigian [Incumbent]

Ken Nahigian, incumbent board member, is almost, not quite, an AOF founder. Early AOF members found him living in a makeshift hut, hoarding aluminum cans and shaving dimes for the silver. Joining our group in December 1993, he has served as treasurer since 1995.

After a long-checked history of religious belief, Ken became a free-thinker in his mid-20's so he would not be in the same club as this guy (see pic). Motto: "I started with nothing, and still have most of it left." His vision for AOF is to pinch pennies, sell bumper stickers, and not bounce checks.

Kevin Schultz [Incumbent]

I'm the current Secretary, immediate past President, former Vice President, six year board member, AOFOnline.org webmaster, Program Committee chair, new layout editor of the AOF News & Views, sound system resource, upcoming events announcer, and liaison to

American Atheists. In 2005-2006 I initiated the on-line Sacramento Events Calendar for Freethinkers, completed the indexing of the AOF Library (<http://aofonline.org/library>), served on a committee to update AOF's 501(c)(3) bylaws, captained two months of the AOF/HAGSA Movie Night, captained two months of the Davis Community Meals project, and volunteered for the Adopt-A-Highway project. With your support I hope to continue in 2007.

Jerry Sloan

Jerry Sloan, 69, is a charter member of AOF and has served previously on the board. My goal is to find us a larger meeting hall so we can grow.

Paul Storey

No candidate statement received by press time.

Susan Vergne

I am Susan Vergne. I have been a member of AOF since 2000, when I discovered, to my amazement, that there actually were groups of similarly-thinking people. People who actually expect to find a rational basis for their beliefs, rather than choosing to close their eyes and mind and accept superstition and faith, no matter how irrational. I have always believed, since early childhood, in that necessity for a rational basis and that if something must be taken simply on faith, then there is no rational basis. AOF was founded and continues because of the efforts of dedicated individuals who provide intellectually stimulating speakers and programs. I can't think of anything more important than the advocacy of critical thinking, logic, reason, and education. I hope I will be able to contribute to such a worthy cause.

Darwin Day 2007

(Continued from page 1)

the speaker for Sacramento's 2007 Darwin Day educational gala on Sunday, February 11.

As a scientist, Vermeij uses his sense of touch to study the shape and surface features of shells, and in doing so throughout his long career, he has overcome the formidable obstacle of blindness to become a preeminent evolutionary biologist. In 1992, Vermeij won a MacArthur Fellowship. His remarkable career has been described in numerous places. At the PBS website section on "Scientists," one can read about some of his achievements and how much he has learned through an acute sense of touch. One segment there concludes: "Vermeij probably knows more about mollusks and their shells than anyone alive."

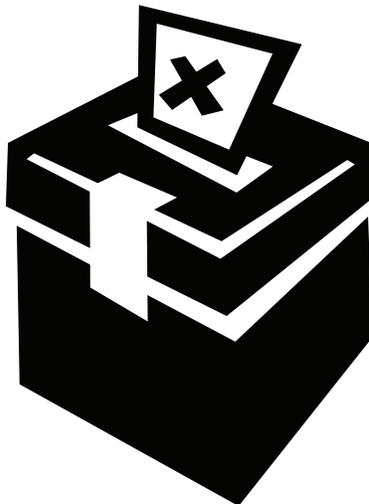
Geerat Vermeij has described his own career studying shells (and the fossil and living animals responsible for building them) in his autobiography, entitled *Privileged Hands: A Scientific Life*. He has published over a hundred scholarly papers and three other books, including *Evolution and Escalation: An Ecological History of Life* and *A Natural History of Shells*. He served as editor for *Evolution*, the field's foremost journal. He has a world-class collection of shells, too.

I met Dr. Vermeij and his wife in Florida in November 2005, where he was invited guest at an anniversary celebration event at "The Shell Museum" on Sanibel Island, a US coastline location long considered one of the world's best shell-collecting areas. (Paul and I had just *perchance* attended that event.) I was delighted to discover there an eminent scientist actually located so close to Sacramento! And, with such an inspiring career story, what a marvelous resource - someone to motivate teachers and students of science as well as to educate us all!

Please mark your calendars for February 11, 2-4:30 PM, and plan to attend **Sacramento's Tenth Annual Darwin Day** (\$10 adults; \$5 students). The location will be La Sierra Community Center (John Smith Hall) in Carmichael. AOF members will receive a special mailing with advance purchase ticket reservation information for this event. *Look for it to arrive in the early part of January.* We look forward to seeing you there! Invite your friends, too.

Note to members on voting (facing page)

According to the by-laws of AOF, it is the members of the organization who elect the directors to serve on the AOF Board of Directors. It is the task of the board of directors itself to select the organization's officers. There are 9 openings for directors, and at the election on January 14, there will be exactly that many candidates on the printed ballot. Any member whose dues are paid up may vote for one to 9 of the candidates. You must attend the meeting to vote in the annual election.



2007 AOF General Meeting Schedule



January: Elections/Susan Mogull
February: Darwin Day
March: to-be-announced
April: to-be-announced
May: to-be-announced
June: to-be-announced
July: to-be-announced
August: Summer Sizzler/Sound Off/Potluck
October: Freethought Day
November: to-be-announced
December: to-be-announced

Please Check Your Renewal Date

Please take a moment to check the renewal date on the label attached to this newsletter.

In December, the AOF Board agreed by consensus to reimburse News & Views subscribers (\$12/year plan) for two missed issues in 2006 by extending existing subscriptions two months. *Other plans' renewal dates remain the same.*

AOF on Deck for Davis Community Meals Volunteers Wanted!

AOFers will be doing everything — set-up, serving, and clean-up — on **Tuesday, January 30** at the meal for the needy in Davis, and we need some volunteers for the **4 PM** (to 7) event! Carpooling is offered, along with a fantastic hot meal. This is one of the ways that AOF contributes to the community, and we depend on our members to help. It is so worthwhile. If you haven't done it before, give it a try. You will be glad you did! Please phone the voice mail at 447-3589 to volunteer, or sign up at the January meeting.

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)
- Low-income Member (\$10)
- Single Membership (\$20)
- Family Membership (\$30)
- Patron (\$50)
- 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

Highway Clean-up

By Don Knutson

AOF carried out its obligations to its Adopt-A-Highway program on Sunday, December 17 cleaning up the two-mile stretch of Highway 99 between Elkhorn and Elverta we have been doing for 12 years. Board members Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian and Kevin Schultz were joined by AOF member John Reiger and newcomers Jack Kastorff and E.C. Vickland — an all male cast. We collected more than 20 bags but left quite a bit of refuse behind. It used to be that during wintertime, we wouldn't find so much litter because car windows stayed closed but with increasing urbanization in the area, there is now no discernible seasonal variance in amount. Much sentiment



Left to Right: Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz, E.C. Vickland, John Reiger, Ken Nahigian, Jack Kastorff

has been expressed that pairing up instead of working alone would provide a more fulfilling experience and a more thorough cleaning but that would require at least ten people turning up so we could address the entire section. Your willingness to participate will ensure AOF's continued involvement in this program and you can show your commitment to a clean environment by joining us **Sunday, January 28 @ 8a.m. at the Elkhorn Park & Ride.** Rain or wet roads cancel.

AOF - HAGSA Joint Movie Night: Friday, January 12, 7PM

Antonia's Line

In January, come and bask in the light of "Antonia's Line," a 1995 comedy/drama written and directed by Dutch filmmaker Marleen Gorris. Antonia's Line received the 1995 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

In the film, a Belgian matron establishes and, for several generations, oversees a close-knit, matriarchal community where feminism and liberalism thrive. The movie covers topics such as death, religion, sex, nurturing and love.

Location: Home of Beverly Church, 24 Adkinson Court, Sacramento. Call for directions: 916.447.3589

Clara Carlson

(Continued from page 2)

Dignity and intelligence sparkled from her eyes in a photograph accompanying a September 22 interview by Peninsula Daily News following a 100th birthday party attended by 100 friends, admirers and family. Following are quotes from the article.

“Monuments to war are plentiful, but none to peace,” she wrote in a recent letter to the editor. She’s active in the local peace group.

Born in 1906, she remembers when women had no vote and few other rights. When universal suffrage was adopted in 1920, she said her mother “hitched up her little mare to her buggy and went to the polling place to cast her ballot. She always voted, never missing an election.” She says she owes her longevity to her genes, having had a relative who lived to 110.

Regarding population, she said, “I have no wish to swell the population.” A great grandmother to eighteen, she is passionate about abortion rights, militant about women’s rights and peace, and outspoken about her philosophical beliefs. Asked to speak about humanism at a high school class, she explained to the Peninsula Daily News, “They didn’t ask me back. I think it was because of the parents who objected to my being an atheist.”

A story-teller, she was a featured “teller” in October at Peninsula College. As she states, she comes from sturdy stock. One of her ancestors, Penelope, was taken by Indians in the days before US Independence and eventually escaped back to her family. A lively, silver-haired and knowledgeable woman, Clara Carlson is certainly an inspiration to all freethinkers.

A teaser poem

I Am An Atheist

Submitted by Tom Nicolette, Written by Al Brenner

I found something on the internet. A poem by a fellow named Al Brenner that I enjoyed a lot. I asked him if we could use it in our newsletter and he told me we could. Apparently Al Brenner has been reading his poem at his local UU churches. — Tom

I am an atheist
 Let me make it clear
 Right at the beginning
 The now and the here
 Are the only things certain?
 And they don’t last.
 The future is hidden behind a Curtain
 The past is in the past

I am an atheist
 No little old man in the sky for me
 No Baptism, No Trinity
 I’ll say it loud enough
 For you to hear
 And let you know that
 I have no fear
 Of lightning bolts
 Crashing around me....

View the 21-minute video of Mr. Brenner reciting “I Am An Atheist” at <http://alseye.com>. Tom also has made a text-version of Mr. Brenner’s poem available. Contact AOF (page 2) to get in touch with Tom.

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.

AOF Board Meeting Summary

December 18, 2006
 Home of Beverly Church

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

Secretary: October, November minutes approved by consensus.

Treasurer: October, November treasury reports approved by consensus.

Next meeting: Sunday, Jan 21, 9:30, at the Common House at T & 5th St.

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

January Calendar of Events

AOF/HAGSA Joint Movie Night: "Antonia's Line" Friday, January 12, 7 - 9 PM

AOF General Meeting and 2007 Elections Sunday, January 14, 2:30 - 5 PM

AOF Board meeting Sunday, January 21, 9:30 AM

AOF's Highway Cleanup Sunday, January 28, 8 - 10 AM

Davis Community Meal Tuesday, January 30, 4 - 7 PM

Save the Date! - Darwin Birthday Educational Gala Sunday, February 11, 2 - 4:30 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 fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (2007-10-07), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2007-02-11). 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.

