

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

September 2008

Special Points of Interest

Two Additional AOF Dinner Socials Planned (page 1)

"A Family Schism", by Ken Nahigian (page 4)

FREETHOUGHT DAY, October 12, 12—5PM (page 5)

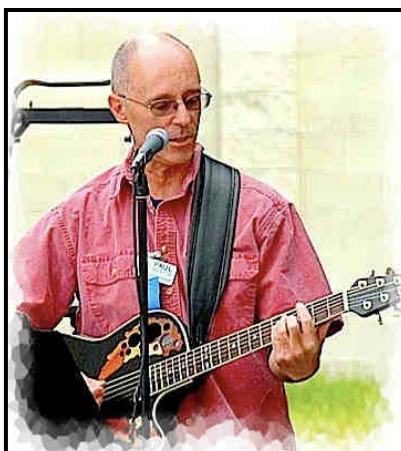
Last Chance! AAI Convention Announcement—September 26-28 (page 5)

Nominations for the 2008-2009 AOF Board Now Open! Elections to be held in November (page 6)

Dr. Vijayam of India's Atheist Centre Trip Recap, by Nancy Gilbert (page 7)

Adopt-A-Highway Event Celebrates Coastal Cleanup Day on Sep 20! (page 7)

AOF September General Meeting Atheist Minstrel Paul Martin To Perform Sunday, September 14, 1:30—4:00 PM



Paul Martin, a singer songwriter (aka: the Aspiring Atheist) is creating a new music genre called Free-thought Folk-Rock. He will be performing songs from his new CD, "Born A Happy Heathen" on September 14th at the monthly meeting of Atheists and Other Freethinkers in Sacramento, CA. This CD is a collection of atheos, irreverent, and sarcastic songs critical of religious dogma, icons, leaders, and rituals. Paul will describe the background and inspiration for each song as they are based on his personal "spiritual" journey, and his motivation for "coming out" in this way.

Lifestyle:

A full-time RVer since 2006 - travels/lives in a 30' Airstream
Home base is at Hart Ranch in Rapid City, SD

(Continued on page 3)

Standard Fare

AOF Line 2

Membership Form 6

AOF Family News 6

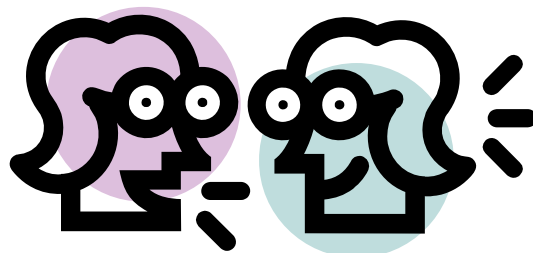
AOF Upcoming Events 8

AOF Dinner Socials Continue: September 4th and October 2nd By Suzanne Donachie

Kick back and relax after a day of hard work (or a day of no hard work—it doesn't matter) on Thursday, September 4th and Thursday, October 2nd with fellow AOFers:

Thursday, September 4 @ 5:30PM
Fresh Choice
535 Howe Avenue, Sacramento

Thursday, October 2 @ 5:30 PM
Maaloouf's Taste of Lebanon
1433 Fulton Street, Sacramento



Keeping AOF Alive For Another 15 Years

AOF Line

By Paul Storey

Our founders formed an organization that brought atheists and free-thinkers in the Sacramento area together, allowing a community of like-minded people to meet and share ideas, listen to interesting speakers, and participate in various activities throughout the year. So far it has lasted 15 years, a notable achievement, something I think is highly worthwhile to continue for another 15 years. I would sure like to see this happen. I like AOF and love the speakers. Many AOFers are the people who think the most like I do, who are the only ones within driving range that I can get together with in any given month and discuss issues near and dear to my heart, and to give me lots of information in return that I may not have known about without them. It keeps me full of cheer that I am not the only atheist in a world gone supernaturally whacko.

A number of energetic people put a lot of their time into keeping the organization going. Over the years, many of these people cut back their time they chose to give to AOF and became less active, many to where we don't see a lot of them anymore, regretfully. I'm sure this phenomenon is not unique to our organization but happens everywhere. It has to do with changes people go through in life, readjusting priorities, and looking for new stimulus in new friends and new places, all which is very natural. Also, there may be phenomena of burn out. When we put too much time into one activity, sooner or later we reach a point that economists call

diminishing returns, where what you put in doesn't equal what you get out, or where your time could be more fulfilling elsewhere, and the desire to continue breaks. Then you drop out of that activity or direction in life, and pursue the many other fascinating and rewarding possibilities available to us all.

Rather than have any members over commit their time then burn out, I would like to see us have a balanced budget in everybody's time spent participating in, or volunteering to, AOF. Let's call it a 15 year plan. Rather than put in a lot of hours for a few years then get burned out and disappear, I would like us all to think in terms of how many hours per month am I willing to put into AOF for the next 10 years. A steady churchgoer puts in a couple of hours a week, roughly eight hours a month. They can continue doing this their whole life, without getting too saturated, bored or tired of seeing the same church, the same priest, the same people or the same god.

That is what I would like us to do. Think about how much you enjoy being around non-god-delusional people, and how many hours a week or a month you are willing to put in, over the long run, to participate in this group and help to keep it alive. One or two hours a week is usually fine with anybody, ten hours or more is usually a strain everybody.

(Continued on page 3)

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

AOF Board (2007-2008)

President: Paul Storey

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Nancy Gilbert

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz,

Debora Smith, (two vacancies)

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 5, 2008

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

Darwin Day, Feb. 15, 2009:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,

Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,

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: 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

ISSN: 1936-4229

AOF BloodSource ID#: 4857

AOF Federal Tax ID#: 68-0325762

(Continued from page 2)

What I'd like you to do is: make up your mind about how much you like interacting with atheist and freethinker friends, how much time you can invest in it in a steady state over the next decade, and mark your conclusions down on one of our survey cards. Surveys were sent out in the last newsletter, and are available on the web (<http://newsletters.aofonline.org/aof-2008-member-survey.pdf>) and at our meetings. Return a survey to us so we can tally the hours we have that our members are willing to put in, and what activities they want to put their hours into, whether it is at-

tending the monthly meetings, the potlucks at the Solstices and Equinoxes, Darwin Day, Freethought Day or community outreach such as highway cleanup or serving meals to the hungry. After we add up the results, we can make a balanced budget of our members participation and volunteer hours available for various activities. Some of our activities may have to be cut. That way we can avoid members working beyond their long term sustainable levels, then burning out. I would love to hear conclusions or other comments. You can send any completed surveys to me at president@aofonline.org.

(Continued from page 1)

Musical Accomplishments:

Has performed at open mics around the country, Airstream & SKP rallies, and RV Parks Release of first CD, Born A Happy Heathen - July 2008

Musical Goals:

Promote a humanistic and rational view of life
 Bring an understanding about the damage that religious indoctrination does to young impressionable minds
 The message is - to WAKE UP, QUESTION EVERYTHING, and THINK FOR YOURSELF

Previous Career(s):

Multiple careers in engineering, finance, sales, and software
 Most recent as a corporate trainer in the software industry

Other Life Journeys:

Four children, 3 grandchildren
 Over 30 years in martial arts - holds a 4th degree black belt in Aikido.

Web site:

http://web.mac.com/pj_martin/Aspiring_Atheist/Welcome.html



Paul's Airstream camper, sporting the billboard, "Born a Happy Heathen"

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.

AOF News & Views: Copyright © 2008 by *Atheists and Other Freethinkers*, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists and Other Freethinkers.

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.

Historical Figures Series

A Family Schism—Herbert W. Armstrong

By Ken Nahigian

The original Worldwide Church of God, founded as the Radio Church by Herbert W. Armstrong in 1933, a global faith-empire of over 120,000 members, three "Bible colleges" and two public journals, which upheld its founder as God's own spokesman, taught that Anglo-Britons were the true Jews, and evoked cries of cultism, racism and heresy from other Christian groups—that church is gone. Truly gone. By bits it has schismed, splintered and evolved, diluted or cast off its more radical teachings, and melted into the mainstream like an arabesque of ice. But the history is colorful, and scandalous: a story worth telling.

Young Herbert Armstrong, slim, well-mannered, soft-voiced and handsome, was the stuff of an ideal salesman. Born to a devout Quaker family in Des Moines, Iowa, on July 31, 1892, he attended the First Friends Church. Though studious, he never finished high school. At age 18, on an uncle's advice, he quit to work for a local newspaper. Experience in advertising impressed on him the yet-untapped power of the media.

On a trip he met Loma Dillon, a school-teacher and distant cousin from Motor, Iowa. They wed on his 25th birthday. Settling in Chicago, they had their first child, Beverly, in 1918, then fled back to Des Moines to escape the flu epidemic. A second daughter, Dorothy, was born in 1920. After business setbacks the family moved to Oregon in 1924, where Armstrong found a renewed passion for advertising. Here they had two sons, Richard David and Garner Ted.

About then he began using the middle initial "W." It was a conceit—in fact, Herbert Armstrong had no middle name.

Loma had joined a Seventh-day Adventist offshoot sect. The couple argued over the proper day of Sabbath: Saturday or Sunday? With business in a lull again, Herbert found time for Bible study. Intending to refute Loma, he found himself refuted. Nowhere did the Bible redelegate the Sabbath day! For Herbert it was a revelation, an epiphany. Slowly he grew sure that God had opened his eyes to deep truths most churches had forgotten or buried.

In 1927, baptized, he joined his wife's church; in 1931 it ordained him a minister. As Armstrong preached he continued

his study, uncovering new revelations. Concerned about the growing flights of heterodoxy, in 1937 the church revoked his credentials of ministry.

Armstrong shrugged. By then his radio ministry was in flower. A local radio station had offered airtime for devotionals. After positive feedback, the station had commissioned a new program, "The World Tomorrow," on the first Sunday of 1934. So was born the Radio Church of God. Other stations soon picked it up. Armstrong began publication of *The Plain Truth* magazine, free subscriptions to all on request. With these media vehicles, Armstrong grew his empire.

In 1946 Armstrong moved to Pasadena, California, a conservative community. A year later he opened the doors of Ambassador College, his new Bible college. (It had four students.)

Church and media empire grew over the next two decades, until the broadcasts reached Africa, Australia, the Philippines, Latin America, England and continental Europe. Armstrong interacted with political leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Anwar el-Sadat and Ferdinand Marcos.

In a 1956 booklet, titled *1975 in Prophecy!*, Armstrong wove his own ministry into a florid vision of World War III, end times and Armageddon. Typical of his style, the booklet made heavy use of upper case and bold case words, exclamation points and biblical numerology. The public gobbled it up, but mainline Christian leaders found it troubling and irksome.

A problem was his theology. Beyond standard Adventist ideas such as the Saturday Sabbath, Armstrong taught Anglo-Israelism, the notion that the British Anglo-Saxons were a Jewish Lost Tribe, God's chosen people, and the true heirs of Israel. He denied the Trinity, stressed strict sexual mores, rejected most holidays, rejected medical treatment, demanded "triple tithing," and insisted that much of Mosaic Law, particularly the Levitical food regulations, was still in force.

Loma died in 1967. The next year Armstrong renamed his church the Worldwide Church of God. By 1970 it was clear that Armstrong's prophecy was not unfolding as claimed. Criticisms grew; then scandal

rocked the church. Piece by piece, the empire began to crumble.

First his son: Garner Ted, charismatic, outgoing, the heir apparent. In 1972 Armstrong announced that Garner was "in the bonds of Satan" and was discharged of all church duties. Rumors spread of adultery and gambling. In 1978 Armstrong excommunicated him. In response Garner Ted started his own church, the Church of God International, in Tyler, Texas. They never reconciled; even Armstrong's own official autobiography only mentions his birth.

Next, claims of financial fraud, prompting the state of California to put the church in receivership. Then in 1977, to the shock of church members, Armstrong married a woman nearly 50 years his junior, and worse, a *divorcee*—something church doctrine forbade. In 1980, a former church minister accused Armstrong of incest with his daughter, Dorothy. Neither Armstrong nor the church ever denied this allegation.

A final scandal came in 1982 when Armstrong divorced his wife in a lengthy, ugly legal battle. Despite it all, the church continued to grow, at each turn redefining or interpreting some basic teachings, drifting into the mainstream, and disaffecting older members.

In August 1985, Armstrong's published his last work, *Mystery of the Ages*, a "synopsis of the Bible" and summary of his theology. The next month, health failing, he dropped from public view. On Jan 16, 1986, nine days after naming a successor to run his church, Armstrong died, age 93.

Since then, the church has splintered and schismed. The "main" (largest) body has renounced most of Armstrong's stranger doctrines. Over a dozen groups now claim to represent his true ministry, accusing each other of compromise and heresy.

It's an old story, faith a soil for division and factionalism. But after all, "heresy," from the Greek *hairetikos*, "able to choose," and *hairesthai*, "to choose," had a simpler original meaning: a heretic was one who decides his own way. Freethinkers will understand. To think for yourself—what can be more tempting?

At least, Herbert Armstrong thought for himself. We'll give him that.

SAVE THE DATE: 7th Annual Freethought Day, October 12, 12—5 PM, Old Sacramento

Time to plan ahead!

At the Sunday, October 12 spot on your calendar, put "FTD, Sacramento" so that when that date arrives, you'll be heading to Sacramento for our 7th Annual Freethought Day Fair.

Freethought Day is a celebration of reason, freethought and church-state separation featuring speakers, live music, education expo, and children's activities.

Free admission. 12-5 pm, Waterfront Park, Front & L Streets, Old Sacramento.

The event is an opportunity to celebrate values and actions we take for granted today which were once seen as radical and to commemorate the bold and independent thinkers who led our nation to its policy of governmental neutrality toward ultimate beliefs of citizens.

This year Freethought Day is proud to have as its featured speaker Matthew LaClair, ACLU's 2008 Youth Scholar. As a high school junior in New Jersey, Matthew confronted a history teacher who promoted creationism and other personal religious beliefs in the classroom. Despite opposition and harassment, which included

death threats, Matthew worked with the ACLU to make sure First Amendment rights were respected and upheld at his school. Thanks in large part to Matthew's courage and tenacity, a Student Education Assembly on Religious Freedom was created at the school.

Lori Lipman Brown, Director and Lobbyist for the Secular Coalition for America, takes time out of her busy schedule to emcee the event.

<http://www.freethoughtday.org>
chair@freethoughtday.org
 916-447-3589

Last Chance! AAI Convention Sep 25—29 on the Queen Mary in Southern California:



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 (e-mail address required).

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

Sharing and Caring Info About Our Members AOF Family News

- Longtime AOF member and board member, **Kay Dickey**, will be **moving to the Bend, Oregon, area** around the end of August. She and her husband sold their house in Diamond Springs and are moving to be closer to their children and grandchildren. Kay will remain a member of AOF and looks forward to hearing news about the group and it's members. She will continue her duties as treasurer of the Atheist Alliance International and hopes to discover free-thought groups in Oregon. Feel free to drop her a line at frethnkr1@gmail.com.
- **SORT** (the Sacramento Or-

ganization for Rational Thinking, <http://home.surewest.net/kitray/> is ailing because **Kit & Ray** are ailing. Any who want to help Sacramento's premier and original skeptical society get through this period of difficulty should contact **Richard Kowalski** at kowaleski@earthlink.net.

- **September birthdays:**

- Pat Kelley
- Phil La-Zier



Did we miss your birthday or do you have an important date you wish to share? Send it to newsletter@aofonline.org

- **AOF 2008-2009 Nominations for Office Open**—elections take place in November, only two months away. Your participation keeps AOF going!!!

Did You Return Yours? Survey Says...



AOF Board Member Nancy Gilbert writes:

We want to see AOF thrive and meet member needs and its purposes. To this end, surveys have been developed and have been sent out to all. Please help by taking a few minutes to put down your thoughts, needs, & desires regarding AOF.

And, then send them back, whether received by snail mail or by email (see page two of this newsletter).

Please don't forget. Put it on your to do calendar! We cannot promise you Heaven or Virgins, but we will be better for it! Lost it? Download the survey: <http://newsletters.aofonline.org/aof-2008-member-survey.pdf>

Do you have any info that you'd like to share with the AOF membership?

Please submit items to: newsletter@aofonline.org and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the Family News section. **Thanks!**

AOF Hosts International Atheist Humanitarian

Dr. Vijayam of Atheist Centre, India—June Visit Recap

By Nancy Gilbert

AOF DID SOMETHING NEW FOR US IN JUNE- we enabled the visit to Sacramento by The Director of the internationally known Atheist Centre of India. Donors paid his airfare from MN, where he had been hosted by Atheists for Human Rights. We hosted his lodging and his food. We arranged for our Free Thought community to meet him, and we arranged for him to speak at The Forum. We would have liked to see more public turnout for the latter.

We arranged an interview of Dr Vijayam by our own Mynga Futrell, which was shown on Channel 17 in Sacramento. In addition, we raised \$450 for the work of the Atheist Centre.

I think all of us who were involved got as much out of this as we gave. It was inspiring to see what can be done when there is a common purpose and devoted commitment and focus, as there has been by Dr Vijayam's multi-generational family since 1940. They have created an effective social reform institution that is a model of Humanism in action, and one very committed to advancing secular rationalism in society. And, one that has gained acceptance and recognition by their government and around the world.

Advertisement of this type of work under the banner of atheism or secular humanism can be one way to help change the Public's attitude toward non-theism. Thanks to those who participated and helped!

Adopt-A-Highway Continues With Celebration of California Coastal Cleanup Day—September 20, 8—10 AM

AOF board member Don Knutson writes:

"This year, AOF will be participating in the annual **California Coastal Cleanup Day (CCCD)**, Saturday, September 20, an event where groups statewide cleanup designated coastal areas and highways to prevent litter from finding its way into California tributaries and ultimately, into our already heavily-polluted oceans. So, we will gather at our regular spot, the Park & Ride lot west of Highway 99 on September 20 @8a.m. from which we will embark to apprehend, arrest and capture any litter lying along 99. A typical crew of 7 can collect more than 100 pounds of refuse but we wish to do a more thorough job for CCCD so please join us if you can. Questions can be directed to (916) 447-2169."

Additional information on the Sep 20 event: <http://aofonline.org/node/53>

Newsletter Submissions

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

newsletter@aofonline.org

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

Preference is given to material 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.

Lectures of Robert Ingersoll

AOF board member Ken Nahigian writes:

"Volume I of The lectures of Col. Robert G. Ingersoll is now available online for listening (or downloading) at LibreVox (<http://librivox.org/>), a volunteer website that posts audio books on the Web.

Lectures include: "The Gods," "The Ghosts," and "The Great Infidels."

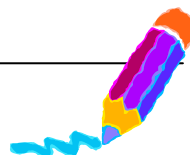
So far the collection constitutes over fourteen hours of spoken-word audio, all free. More work from Robert Ingersoll is in progress.

Link: <http://librivox.org/lectures-of-col-r-g-ingersoll-vol-1-by-robert-green-ingersoll/>

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!

Want the latest AOF board minutes?
E-mail aofboard@aofonline.org





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

September Calendar of Events

Sept. Dinner Social @ Fresh Choice, 535 Howe Ave	Thursday, Sept. 4, 5:30 PM
Sept. General Meeting—Atheist Minstrel Paul Martin	Sunday, Sept. 14, 1:30—4:00 PM
AOF Adopt-A-Highway Event—Volunteers Needed	Saturday, September 20, 8—10 AM
AOF Board Meeting	Sunday, Sept. 21, 9:30AM—12:00 PM
Atheist Alliance International Convention	Sept 25—29 (see page five)
Freethought Day (in lieu of October general meeting)	Sunday, October 12, 12:00—5:00 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 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" (2008-10-12), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2009-02-15). 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.

