

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

August 2010

Sunday, August 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Video: "The Truth Seeker"

Special Points of Interest

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Who was the **forgotten freethinker of the Gilded Age**? Who was the **biggest thorn in the side of the 18th Century Religious Right**, more than **Mark Twain**, more than **Clarence Darrow**, more than **Walt Whitman**, more even than **Robert**



Ingersoll? Come to our August general meeting to find out more.

AOF will host a free screening and discussion of **D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker**, a new one-hour documentary produced by Roderick Bradford. Based on original sources, it tells the fascinating life story of **DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett** (1818-1882) and his wife Mary Wicks.

A former Shaker, DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett had an intellectual rebirth to become the "American Voltaire," the revered and reviled freethinker, the "blasphemer" and free-speech martyr who published *The Truth Seeker*, and the most successful American freethought publisher

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AOF September 12 General Meeting, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Coming In September: Kel Munger on "Armageddon"

From the mega-best-selling "Left Behind" novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins to films like *2012* and *I am Legend*, the end of the world fascinates us. While the idea of apocalypse is ancient, conservative American Christianity has refined it to a gory, glorious epic, then exported it, with implications for the environment and international relations, not to mention the economy. What is it that leads us toward apocalypse? On September 12, Kel Munger will reprise her recent presentation for the Sacramento City Freethinkers, and offer theories, including her favorite: that Armageddon is true believers' big chance to yell "f*ck you!" at a culture they cannot master.

Kel Munger is a writer and editor at the *Sacramento News & Review*. Her journalism has won awards from the California Newspaper Publishers Association. She has also won prizes and honors for her poetry and fiction, including a Pearl Hogrefe Fellowship. She is the author of *The Fragile Peace You Keep: Poems* (New Rivers Press, 1998), and her first novel is currently under consideration at Southeast Missouri State University Press. She is a recovering Jehovah's Witness.

As usual, we invite AOF members to bring snacks (finger foods only) for the Hospitality Table.

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of the day.

The list of his admirers reads like a litany of freethought heroes. Unfortunately his enemies were stronger. Catching the ire of Anthony Comstock, infamous censor and bluenose, harassed and persecuted in a controversial and widely publicized obscenity trial, Bennett took his fight for freedom all the way to the White House, inspiring the largest protest of its kind until then. Ultimately he failed. And he suffered grievously for speaking out. But few Americans were as courageous in the search for truth and in the cause of “free speech, a free press, and mails free from espionage and Comstockism.”

The video also investigates Bennett’s prominent role in the National Liberal League, his interactions with leading suffragists and the National Defense Association (forerunner of the ACLU), and his flirtation with spiritualism and theosophy.

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August 8 and August 29 HAGSA/AOF Potlucks

These events are open to HAGSA and AOF members and friends. Hosts will furnish the usual supplies (plates, cutlery, napkins, some drinks, and possibly a potluck dish of their own). Your contribution (if possible) is typically a potluck dish (main course, or salad, or dessert, or cookies, etc.) and something to drink.

For full details, visit <http://hagsa.org>.

September 18, 8:00-10:00 a.m. AOF Highway Clean-Up By Don Knutson

Just three AOF volunteers answered the call to cleanup the fabled two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. on Saturday, July 24 which AOF has been cleaning for the last 15 years. Wendy Hoffspiegel and AOF members Don Knutson and Carolyn Lignos collected some ten bags of unspeakables recklessly but reliably discarded by unknown miscreants for ultimate collection by CalTrans. We will return to the scene on Yom Kippur, Saturday, September 18 this time at 8a.m. in deference to the potential heat and to once again do the honorable deed of correcting other's mistakes for the benefit of nature.

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Social Activities (Team Coordinator, *Open*)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)

“Freethought Friends” (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)

Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson

Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair

Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

Freethought Day 2010: Date to be announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It’s a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2011: Date to be announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs

(Save the date! – It’s a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>

Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>

Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>

Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz

Postmaster: Jerry Sloan

Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel (Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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AOF Family News

By Ken Nahigian

1. First, congratulations to AOF President Beverly Church for becoming a grandmother (yet again; quote, "My son needs another hobby").
2. AOF will respond to a donations plea from **Atheist Alliance International**, one of our parent organizations, with a **grant of \$100**.

Any AOF members who would like to support AAI with a personal donation should go to <http://www.atheistalliance.org/support-aa1/donate>, or send a check to **AAI, 1777 T Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-7125**.

3. AOF member **Jerry Sloan** reminds us: July 13, 2010 marks the anniversary of his confrontation with the Reverend Jerry Falwell, which led to a lawsuit and famous victory for the local gay community.

It's a great story. Read the Wikipedia entry at <http://bit.ly/9JulgL>. Read the *Reason Magazine* write-up at <http://bit.ly/d4Vbbo>, paragraphs 12 &

13. Or read Jerry's own telling for the *Freedom Writer*, <http://bit.ly/aqn7Am>.

In the picture below, Jerry stands with Marghe Covin and holds a contemporary press clipping entitled, "A bad day for Jerry Falwell."



4. AOF wishes **Brian Jones** all the best as he resigns from the AOF board and moves to Modesto to be close to his significant other.

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After the meeting: a potluck feast at the home of Wayne & Gloria Luney (see events calendar).

"Roderick Bradford reintroduces a significant nineteenth-century reformer whom mainstream historians have unfairly neglected. D. M. Bennett was the most influential publisher during America's Golden Age of freethought. Even more important, through his dogged opposition to morals campaigner Anthony Comstock - and the high price he eventually paid for it - Bennett mounted a heroic defense of freedom of expression, in the process helping to shape twentieth-century free speech standards in ways that few appreciate today. Displaying a masterful command of the historical material, Bradford deftly rescues the memory of D. M. Bennett, truly an American none of us should forget."



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 of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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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.

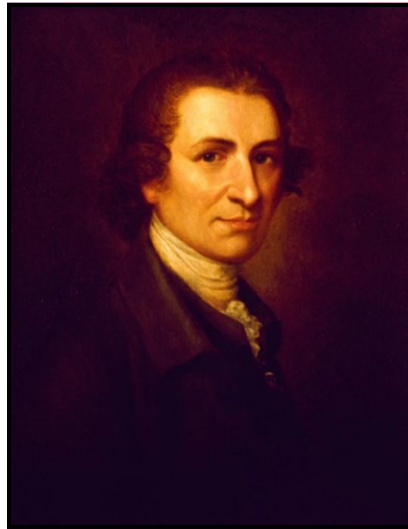
Historical Figures Series

The Bones Of Thomas Paine

By Ken Nahigian

Tom Paine, first patriot and American hero, died half forgotten. On June 8, 1809, crippled by stroke, nearly friendless, he fell out of time. Six mourners came to his funeral. An obituary pronounced that "He had lived long, did some good and much harm." 85 years later, Robert Ingersoll said this:

Thomas Paine had passed the legendary limit of life. One by one most of his old friends and acquaintances had deserted him. Maligned on every side, execrated, shunned and abhorred – his virtues denounced as vices – his services forgotten – his character blackened, he preserved the poise and balance of his soul. He was a victim of the people, but his convictions remained unshaken. He was still a soldier in the army of freedom, and still tried to enlighten and civilize those who were impatiently waiting for his death. Even those who loved their enemies hated him, their friend – the friend of the whole world – with all their hearts. ... death came – Death, almost his only friend. At his funeral no pomp, no pageantry, no civic procession, no military display. In a carriage, a woman and her son who had lived on the bounty of the dead – on horseback, a Quaker, the humanity of whose heart dominated the creed of his head – and, following on foot, two negroes filled with gratitude – constituted the funeral cortege of Thomas Paine.



Portrait of Thomas Paine by Matthew Pratt, circa 1785-1795

And yet the Revolutionaries had loved him. He was their first radical, their propagandist, their prophet. He wrote their dreams into birth. He inspired the petty colonial rebellion into a war for a new republic. He invented the name, "United States of America." What happened?

Paine's error, if you may call it that—his fall from grace—was to remain radical. As his ideas moved to the center he continued to seek the edge. A story tells of a dinner party, how Ben Franklin quipped, "Where liberty is, there is my country," and Paine cried, "Where liberty is not, *there* is my country!" After the war he went on to press his causes in France and Britain. He defended the French Revolution, then nearly lost his head in France for resisting Robespierre and the Reign of Terror. In America he published *The Age of Reason* to try to take down the churches and the clerics. It was all

too much.

Radicals can be useful in crises, tiresome after. Most early Americans were unchurched, but kept a kind of ambient, low-key, folk religiosity. Paine embarrassed them. And so by shades he lost their love.

It's not a new story. The stranger part is what happened to Paine later—after he died.

One of Paine's critics was William Cobbett. He was an English loyalist, a supporter of King George. But by 1810 Cobbett had crossed the chasm to become a radical himself. He now revered Paine. That Paine had died in poverty and obscurity, denied a pension or even a requested plot in a New York Quaker cemetery, shamed him. Paine was buried on his farm, without the simple stone wall around his grave he had wanted. So Cobbett made a bold move. In 1819, without permission, he dug up the body, and took it to London. He was planning a memorial to inspire democracy in England.

Years passed; the memorial never happened. Cobbett died. Tom Paine's dry corpse, stuffed in a wooden box, fell to Cobbett's family. This was in 1835. What became of it then exactly is still much a mystery. But over years, clues have fallen into place.

James Paul Cobbett, William's son, knew the historic value of the remains. He inscribed his name on the skull and some of the larger bones for identification. In January 1836 the family put Cobbett's effects up for auction at his Sussex farm. They did not auction the box of remains, though Cobbett's publisher requested this. Apparently the estate's trustee then took possession of the box for nine years. At the end of the receivership, he turned it over to Benjamin Tilly, Cobbett's secretary, who also admired Paine ardently.

Here a gap occurs. In 1849 a writer claimed to see the nomadic bones "in a box in the house of John Chennell, a corn merchant in Guildford"— someone had bought it in a public sale, and passed it to the merchant. But the story has discrepancies. Supposedly Chennell later kept the remains in a porcelain jar, labeled "The Great Paine's Bones." It contained "only a very few bones."

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Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

Some Reasons for a Reason House

By Mynga Futrell

Although space here doesn't permit me much length, I'll dash off a few [what I think are] pretty solid reasons for Sacramento to have a "Reason House." (That is, a community center for the freethought community.)

For now, I'll focus *solely* on advantages that come to mind when I think about the two established organizations in Sacramento, AOF and HAGSA. These formally organized groups have been around for quite a while and, in my opinion, both have long needed more stable accommodations fitting with that status.

The contributing members of each organization voluntarily store materials for their groups in homes and garages, and then they have to tote items to and from their homes for meetings and events. Official documents are passed along from officer to officer after each election (with all that implies). Planning takes place online or in members' homes. Meetings require rental of facilities, and lots of setup and take down.

At the most basic level, both AOF and HAGSA have been paying rental fees for a meeting place about as long as I can recall (which is 22 years for HAGSA, and 17 years for AOF). All that time, both groups have been paying their members' dues and donations *away from* the freethought community to hold their meetings, with little effect that I can see to strengthening either the organizations themselves or the Sacramento community of reason. These are funds we could and should be putting INTO strengthening the organizations, the freethought community, and the community at large.

There would be several advantages to these groups if they were paying for the privilege of having a "home" in

a building that had not only meeting space with kitchen and toilet facilities, but also some storage space. Each organization could arrange for the usage and selected amenities it might require.

For example, if there were a Reason House:

✦ The meeting room could be fitted with audio and projection equipment (along with better audio accommodation for the hearing impaired) or, at minimum, there could be secure storage for the microphones and speakers, projectors, etc. already owned by the groups that are now transported back and forth. Either situation would reduce the wear and tear on members as well as equipment. (The transportation, setup and takedown endeavor and routine tasks are so consuming of energy and time in advance of and after meetings.)

✦ Each group also could be "in on" a usage arrangement for common amenities or could arrange for separate storage of its coffee pot and cups, brochures and other literature, office supplies, and/or perhaps a desk and file cabinet for official documents, tax records and archives, etc. Perhaps a small office!

✦ There'd be a "home base" for board and committee meetings, planning sessions for large events like Darwin Day and Freethought Day, event preparations, to say nothing of social activities like Solstice parties and small-scale entertainments involving members and friends (performance/skit rehearsals, poetry readings mini-speeches) or just plain casual socializing and discussion. RH might be a location for holiday celebrations and spe-

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In Honor Of Martin Gardner

Answer To Summer Puzzler: "Reversed Trousers"

Each end of a 10-foot length of rope is tied securely to a man's ankles. Without cutting or untying the rope, is it possible to remove his trousers, turn them inside out on the rope and put them back on correctly?

Answer: To reverse a man's trousers while his ankles are joined by a rope, first slide the trousers off onto the rope, then push one leg through the other. The outside leg is reversed twice in the process, leaving the trousers on the rope right-side out but with the legs exchanged and pointing toward the man's feet. Reach into the trousers from the waist and turn both legs inside out. The trousers are now reversed on the rope and in position to be slipped back on the man, zipper in front as originally arranged but with the legs interchanged.

Have puzzlers of your own? With answers? Send them both our way and if appropriate we will share with the AOF membership: newsletter@aofonline.org. Thank you.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to groups similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductable as permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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In 1853 or 1854 a Rev. Robert Ainslie in London claimed to have Paine's skull and right hand. Much later the Reverend's daughter reported seeing these relics in the household, but they were lost amid various movings. "I can find no trace of them," she wrote.

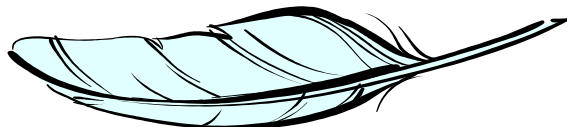
Benjamin Tilly died in 1860. He was with a family named Ginn at the time. Amid his effects they found the bones, minus skull and right hand, with a wax death-mask and other small bits (Cobbett had made a face cast to prove it was really Paine's body). The Ginn daughter mentioned this to the family's minister, who was immediately interested. The Ginn mother later claimed she had sold the bones to a rag-and-bone man for a paltry sum, not knowing they were human—in fact she may have sold them more profitably, none know. Remaining were a brain stem fragment and lock of hair, which Tilly had secretly abstracted in 1833; the death mask; and some papers. The minister purchased the brain piece and papers, and resold them later. The trail then fades again.

In May 1914, the President of the Thomas Paine Historical Association located the brain stem, hair lock and death-mask. He brought them to America for a Thomas Paine memorial celebration, to be interred in the Paine National Museum at New Rochelle.

But what of the rest? Part of Paine's body may still be in England, likely as buttons made from his bones. A man in France claimed to own one of his ribs. At one time an English Bishop was said to have Paine's right hand and skull on his mantelpiece. A man in Australia, who claims descent, says he now has the skull. An English woman said she had his jawbone. Rumors and myths abound, mostly untraceable.

The full story is much more complex, of course; the historic whirlpool around those peripatetic bones has draw in many researchers, touched many remarkable lives, and inspired books and a folk song. The Citizen Paine Restoration Initiative is still trying to track down bits and pieces.

But, "it's poetic," said Gary Berton, president of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association, "the fact that his body is scattered to the four corners of the Earth. This is the man who said 'The world is my country.'" So it is for old Tom Paine: his bones and sinews now blown and dusted through the world, lost as plankton, lost as thistledown, while his ideas have tintured our thought, and stand like mountains.



(Continued from page 5)

cial life events like weddings, funerals, baby welcomings, parties, commemorations, gala day celebrations, and so forth. That is, depending on the nature of the building purchased, there could be space for more ambitious things than are possible within the current limitations.

Compared to what we are doing now, if there were a Reason House asset, there'd be some payoff in terms of redirecting the available volunteer time and talents of officers and members of AOF and HAGSA to something more substantive. The groups could more readily identify and engage in some significant contributing activities, projects, or programs to serve the "outside" community (tutoring of children, for example).

I am well aware of reasons why some are genuinely skeptical about the idea of a Reason House. And, I am fully understanding of that skepticism. There isn't a lot of shared confidence in the wherewithal of the freethought community to follow through on the management aspects, for example. And there would need to be some serious front-end planning, more than serious capitalization, and continuous follow-through.

However, I can't be cynical. Don't freethinkers have the gumption, the fortitude, the follow-through to do what others do? Aren't we supposedly fairly educated and capable people?

If members of itsy bitsy churches can dedicate themselves to building a future for their community, why shouldn't we? If we continue to fail to do that, shouldn't we be embarrassed that we can't? Aren't we putting a stamp of ineptitude on our community? Don't we want to invest in the future?

Dianetics and Scientology Examined

AOF July Meeting Recap

By Ken Nahigian

On July 11, Gary "Signup" (he prefers the pseudonym to shield himself from litigious harassment) kept AOF members spellbound with his exposition on the history and precepts of Scientology. Not an ex-Scientologist, Gary is an interested critic, who works with former Scientologists. He is a local member of "Anonymous" (see: <http://www.kar120c.com/cos/april.html>), a loose-knit collective dedicated to exposing the truth and "tech" of this curious church. With humor and flair, Gary walked us through the story of the founding of Dianetics and its reinvention as Scientology.

He traced its history, took us into its dark, cobwebby corners, and introduced us to its more outspoken proponents. His PowerPoint-aided presentation was fun, often laugh-provoking, occasionally shocking and sad. Even those of us who knew about Scientology learned something new. If you missed this show, you owe it to yourself to catch Gary on his next presentation.

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.

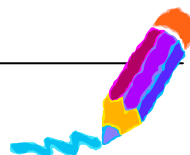
Preference is given to material in a word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF 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.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail **newsletter@aofonline.org**





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

August/September Calendar of Events

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| AOF Dinner Social: Sugar Plum Vegan Café . Contact:
419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net | Thu, Aug 5, 6:30 p.m. |
| AOF August General Meeting: "The Truth Seeker" | Sun, Aug 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m. |
| HAGSA/AOF Early August Potluck; see http://hagsa.org | Sun, Aug 8, 3:30 p.m. |
| HAGSA/AOF Late August Potluck; see http://hagsa.org | Sun, Aug 29, 3:00 p.m. |
| AOF Davis Community Meals Volunteer Event | Tue, Aug 31, 4:00-7:00 p.m. |
| AOF September General Meeting: | Sun, Sep 12, 1:30-4:00 p.m. |
| AOF Highway Cleanup | Sat, Sep 18, 8:00-10:00 a.m. |

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" (Oct 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2011). 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.

