

August 1996

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BETTY SIMONSMASMA ON THE RAD10

Our immediate-past president and AOF founding member Betty Simonsma will be interviewed on the Bob Dunning talk show on radio station KFBK, 1530 on the AM dial. The interview is set for Thursday, August 1 at 7:00 p.m.

Betty has been preparing for the interview by making notes and thinking about what she might talk about and the things that she will not talk about. She said that, given the opportunity she will talk about AOF--our purpose, who we are, and our projects. Betty also said that she will stress the constitution, tolerance, and honesty as opposed to hypocrisy. Helpers are needed to perform small but important

Betty said that she will avoid debating Bible content, although she may discuss the history of the Bible - who wrote it and when they wrote it. She definitely, will not criticize individual religions.

Betty has represented us very well in the past in print and she will represent us just as well on the air. Be sure to tune in!

President's desk

by Karen Abbe

Getting the Word Out

As members of AOF, one of the most important things we can do is let people know we are here. And we're here to stay! During the past three years we have promoted AOF by word of mouth, through classified ads, display ads, posting flyers, news releases, putting AOF information on the internet. We must still do all of these same things, but now with more vigor. Otherwise, fellow freethinkers in our area will not know we exist - that would certainly be a loss for them and for us. All members interested in seeing our ranks grow should ask Board members for flyers to post at their places of business, or at coffee houses and bulletin boards in the area. From personal experience, if I had known there were freethought groups many years ago, I would not have felt so isolated in my beliefs. I cannot be the only person who has had this experience. I cannot tell you how many people have called our voice mail number who say they are so grateful there is an atheist's group in Sacramento. Let's share the experience with others by each doing our part to promote AOF. Another means of getting the word out is under consideration by AOF at this time. This is the proposed project of putting together a cable access program for our local public access channel. The program will be a forum for freethought ideas and will be an excellent way to promote AOF and atheism in our area. The project will require people to staff cameras, do switching and editing, be floor directors, and other jobs. Interested AOF members should contact Board members if they want to take part. A perfect opportunity to spread the word is coming up very soon--the debate on August 13 featuring Dan Barker and John Morehead. What better way to stimulate people's interest in freethought issues? Use this as an opportunity to "proselytize" your atheistic beliefs!

New Newsletter Committee Forming

A new newsletter committee is forming and all types of volunteers are needed from editor to writers, to data entry, to folder and mailer. News & Views has gone through several metamorphoses throughout AOF's history and this is just another. However, the newsletter is one of the most important projects of AOF and must continue.

If you are willing to contribute to this vital connection to AOF members and others in our community and around the country, please call the AOF voice-mail at 920-7834 or approach one of the Board members at the next general meeting,

Next Highway Cleanup August 18

Eight o'clock am will be the start-time for the next highway cleanup session on Sunday, August 18. We should finish-up by 10:00 am so that we can retreat to cooler quarters before the heat sets in. If 9:00 am. seems like a more reasonable time to begin for you, just let Highway cleanup Project Chair Hank Kocol know beforehand that you will be arriving at that time and he will look for you at the cleanup meeting place. Any help you are willing to provide will be appreciated greatly.

If you would like more information on the Highway Cleanup Project, or would like to volunteer, call our voice mail line and leave a message for Hank Kocol.

News Clips and Snips

The following letters were published in Time magazine, July 15, 1996 They were written in response to an article on "Faith and Healing" in the June 24, 1996 issue.

Before you get too carried away with the importance of faith and healing, let me remind you that a good, positive-minded atheist is just as likely to be healthy and to heal quickly as the person who chooses to dwell in the bubble of religious fantasy.

George Crosta - Ocean Park, Washington

If my anonymous prayers can heal you, then my anonymous curses should be able to make you quite sick You can't have this kind of faith healing without opening the door to voodoo.

Rob Eisenberg - Tyron, North Carolina

August Program

The August general meeting of AOF will feature Paul Storey and Dave Flanders and their presentation titled "Evolution Versus Creationism As An Explanation of Life."

A slide show will be presented contrasting Creationism and the theory of evolution. Evidence supporting evolution will come from the sciences of geology, anatomy, physiology, embryology, genetics and immunology in a very understandable and visual manner.

Pictures from geology will illustrate the vast expanse of time which has preceded us. The flow of life through time will be depicted by the fossil record highly visible to anyone who has hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon where you go back a billion years in earth's history. Graphic illustrations from leading publishers will richly depict forms of life throughout earth's history -- roughly from cell to multi-cellular sphere, to worm, to fishes, to amphibians, to reptiles, to primates to man.

The philosophical implications of evolution will also be addressed. At the end of the presentation the audience will have a better understanding of evolution and why it is such a sensible and powerful idea with broad implications of our place as part of nature.

Be sure to attend this very enlightening presentation on Sunday, August 11 at noon. The meeting will be held at the usual place, the Sierra II Community Center, Room 10.

Report - July Speaker

Brian Johnston, the Executive Director of the Human Dignity Institute of Sacramento was the guest speaker at the July general meeting. His presentation was titled "What's Wrong with Assisted Suicide."

Mr. Johnston acknowledged that issues involving death are very emotional issues and that there are no easy answers. He mentioned court cases in the 9th and 2nd Federal Circuit Courts which may be taken up by the Supreme Court. Both of these Courts upheld the right to assisted suicide, which is currently legal only in the states covered by these two circuits. The speaker said that he does not believe assisted suicide should be legal. He believes that in most cases, requests for suicide are a cry for help or attention.

Johnston said that historically, our society has not dealt with death well. Before the 1940s, individuals witnessed death more frequently than we do. People died at home with their family members. Death was a part of life in a natural way. We as a society, are missing out on the grieving process. The speaker mentioned a book titled "On "Death and Dying" by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in which the author writes about how all cultures throughout history have dealt with dying. She states that there five emotional stages which a dying person often experiences. Johnston pointed out that many times, when people are in the "anger" stage, they often want to "get it over with." He also pointed out that, according to Kubler-Ross, there are psychological benefits from going through the latter stages, for the dying person and for their family and friends.

Mr. Johnston suggested that most of the people whom Jack Keovorkian assisted to commit suicide were not actually dying.

The speaker said that he does not believe that protection for the medically dependent and depressed individual means keeping them alive needlessly or unnecessarily. He feels that assisted suicide is not about "letting" people die. He advocates letting people die rather than keeping them on life-support machines. Johnston does not believe that assisted suicide is a natural death-- it is lethal and designed to kill and nature has nothing to do with it.

The speaker suggested that poor pain management could be the reason that some people seek assisted suicide. He stated that pain can be managed and if it is not, the patient should probably get another doctor. Modern medicine can deal with pain. Some doctors, however, have had no training in pain management. As of 1987, Medical Doctors in California must be trained to manage pain.

Mr. Johnston pointed out that the AMA is opposed to assisted suicide. He then handed out a quote by Dr. Leo Alexander who worked with the Chief America Counsel at the Nuremberg Tribunal, which draws some comparisons between assisted suicide and the Nazi holocaust. DR Alexander stated that the crimes "started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitudes of physicians...the infinitely small wedged-in lever from which the entire trend of mind received its impetus was the attitude towards the non-rehabilitatable sick."

The speaker concluded by stating that there is a distinction between pain and dying. He also concluded that the deep issue exists as to whether we can kill people who are very vulnerable.

Letters

Who will choose?

Brian Johnston's talk at the AOF meeting on July 14 regarding a person's right to life -- or death -- was thought provoking and brought up important points to consider. What was left un-said, however, but was very much central to the entire discussion, was the assumption that it is the proper role of government to regulate how a person may or may not deal with his own life. Do I own my life? Or does the government own my life? Certainly all the factors relating to continuing or ending one's own life should be carefully considered, and it is healthy to discuss the ramifications. But the right to make the decision belongs solely to the owner of that life. Some people may believe one's decision to be wrong, but it is also a person's right to be wrong -- to make a mistake. Who has the right to make my decision -- me, or the government?

David Long Henderson

Who Knows Everything

Who knows everything?

I found out by coming to a few meetings that I am still an agnostic, not an atheist. At a meeting in a downtown cafe (New Helvetia South), I have been ridiculed by an arrogant male member when I mentioned that our old Victorian house was the host of an elderly lady spirit (which has been) viewed by myself, my children and present tenants. We can't all be wrong, No one has all the answers, not even this male "scientist."

Danielle Y. Tatigne

This letter was sent to AOF in lieu of the ex-member's annual renewal form and dues. - ed

Dan Fan!

Dear Fan!

What a thrill to find out that Dan Barker is coming to Sacramento to debate! This would probably just slay him but I have always thought of Dan as my freethought "lord and savior" because it was seeing him on a Phil Donahue show that really awakened me to my own lifelong held, but never articulated, nonbelief. He is simply a tremendous speaker; I urge everyone not to miss seeing him in person.

Thank you, AOF, for making it possible.

J. Schmidt

"Opportunity Scholarships"

Let's call it by it's real name - vouchers. Hearings for Assembly Bill 3180 took place on July 3, 1996 in the Senate Education committee and was soundly defeated in a 4 to 1 vote. This bill would have given "opportunity scholarships" (vouchers) worth about \$3,200 to students who wish to transfer out of schools which score in the lowest fifth percentile on achievement tests and into a private school.

Introduced by Assemblyman Speaker Curt Pringle, Republican, From Garden Grove, this bill passed in the Assembly earlier in the year. Representatives for 23 groups were listed in opposition to the bill and several spoke at the hearing, including Marty Kassman from the

ACLU, a member of the California Teachers Association and me, a concerned citizen. The scrutiny centered on the fact that public money would go to religious or other private schools. In an effort to emphasize the discrimination that exists in private schools, I asked if the private schools could refuse students - turning away students who were low-achieving, had behavior problems, or learning disabilities. The response was affirmative. If this bill had passed, holders of the opportunity scholarships would have been free to submit the vouchers to private schools which discriminate during the enrollment selection process.

Being a watchdog over what bills get through committee takes dedication and diligence. Initially I attended hearings on June 26 for several hours only to learn that the hearing on AB 1380 was to be postponed. Then on July 3, I once again attended hearings for seven hours before AB 1380 came up and those of us with opinions were allowed to be heard. I could see that electing representatives who share your philosophy is most valuable. There were several on the Education Committee who expressed concern that the public school system should be preserved and improved and not dismantled by charter schools, home schools, or vouchers. While in attendance I noted that this committee voted down at least three bills which included some type of charter school.

With the new state budget, class size will be lowered to 20 students per teacher in kindergarten through third grade. This is excellent news; something I have advocated in letters to the Sacramento Bee for several years. Now, if only the school districts will diligently and quickly put the legislators' directives into operation.

Calendar of Events

August

Thursday, August 1	Betty on KFBK 7 p m
Sunday, August 11	General Meeting
Sunday, August 11	Newsletter Deadline
Tuesday, August 13	Baker/Morehead debate
Wednesday, August 14	Social with Dan Barker
Sunday, August 18	Highway Cleanup
Tuesday, August 20	Board meeting

Sunday, September 8

General Meeting

Friday, September 20

Charity Dinner