

# Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter

June 1999

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## June 13 meeting

The June 13 meeting will feature guest speaker Jeanie Keltner, speaking on "Moving from Information to Action: the Challenges and Rewards of Activism." Jeanie graduated cum laude from Occidental College and received a fellowship to the University of Munich. She married in New Orleans, had two children in Mexico, moved back to Los Angeles, and completed her Ph.D. at UCLA. She is now a professor of English at CSUS. She is the author of The Ballads of the Big California Woman, a novel in ballad-form published by Avon Books (1982). She reconnected with the visual arts during 3-year stay in Paris, and had an exhibition at the Michael Himowitz gallery in 1989. She joined the group putting out Because People Matter in 1994 after several years of activism regarding Central America. The same year, she joined another group doing Sacramento Soapbox, a talk show on Access Sacramento channel 73.

## May Program

The main event on the agenda was a discussion of books and references important to our individual members. However, this event was modified at the very start at the suggestion of Cleo Kocol. Cleo suggested that the two dozen or so members draw their chairs into a large circle. Then Cleo suggested that members take turns to introduce themselves. Each person, including two newcomers, gave a short brief on their upbringing and transition to where they are now, mostly atheist, and all questioning religions, and an idea of how they found AOF.

Many of the personal histories were humorous. Some came to non-religion via education, some via contradictions in their family or experiences, many from failure of strong religions. It seemed that more often than not the members had experienced strong religious training at home or school.

Mynga Futrell pointed out that exposure to many cultures and foreign countries leads to questioning, an idea supported by several well-traveled members. Now however, California is mandating the teaching of standard American religions in schools but with diminished attention to the other major religions in the world.

Then a few people mentioned some important books, including readings from a few.

The sharing of critically important books was cut short by the clock. Several members agreed after the meeting that this event was surprisingly warm and exciting, and that it should be repeated periodically.

## **Quoted**

All religions die of one disease, that of being found out.

John Morley

## **Atheist Alliance Convention**

By Hank Kocol and Kay Dickey

The annual Atheist Alliance convention was held April 2-4, 1999, in Austin, Texas. The Conference opened officially on Saturday morning, April 3. After a welcome by AAI and the hosting society, the Atheist Community of Austin, Adam Butler gave a very entertaining presentation on the "Experiences of an Alabama Freethinker." He described the problems of being a freethinker in a Southern State with a very conservative governor and populace. He has been involved in picketing, interviews by the media, posting of signs at the Capitol, and other activities.

Dr. Arthur Ide discussed in detail some of the problems with biblical sources as references for morality as well as inconsistencies in the bible.

Mike Sullivan discussed a "Freethought Church" established in Texas. Cleo wrote a detailed report that was included in AOF's May 1999 newsletter.

In conjunction with the Freethought Church were workshops on Camp Quest, a summer camp for freethinking children, and Robert's Rules of Order.

A later workshop by Ben Akerly was on "The Bible in the Bedroom," a compilation of biblical references to sex.

Fred Whitehead spoke at a workshop on "Freethought in Texas History." He has really studied freethought in the West in the 19th century.

John Koonz, a local high school teacher presented a workshop on "Teaching Evolution in a Hostile Environment." He pulls no punches about his atheism, speaking out at his first class about that, but ensuring students that he is not there to convert them, but only to teach them science. When religious arguments arise concerning evolution, he leads the students through the scientific process to arrive at a conclusion.

Another pair of workshops included a dramatic reading of a story and, the description of OABITAR by Paul Geisert and Mynga Futrell.

Douglas Krueger gave a talk entitled "The Atheist Attitude". He is the author of the topselling freethought book, "What is Atheism: A Short Introduction". He discussed four arguments atheists can use when discussing religion with believers. He concluded by saying that atheists need to be more aggressive. They have a moral duty to do more, through radio, community access shows, debates, letter writing, and non-tracts.

The evening banquet had Dan Barker doing his freethought songs to the enjoyment of all.