

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

February 2007

Darwin Day Birthday Gala— Sacramento's Tenth Annual

Special Points of Interest

- Darwin Day 2007 (page 1)
- Robert Ingersoll's Love (page 1)
- What's in store for the News and Views? (page 2)
- The curious tale of Sister Aimee (page 4)
- Why is Ken's Adopt-A-Highway picker attacking him? (page 5)
- Finding acceptance at Davis Community Meals (page 5)
- A poem by Liz Purcell (page 7)
- Guess who's 80! (page 7)

There will NOT be a February AOF meeting at Sierra 2. The Sacramento community is invited to celebrate scientist Charles Darwin's birthday the afternoon of February 11, and AOFers will not want to miss the opportunity to be there! AOF is co-hosting the event along with several organizations. The celebration features an educational program, merchandise, literature tables, refreshments, camaraderie. The location is La Sierra Community Center, John Smith Hall, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael, CA (at Engle and Garfield, two blocks from Fair Oaks). Tickets are \$10 at the door (\$5 for students with ID).

The Darwin 2007 Committee has invited as guest speaker, Geerat Vermeij, Professor of Marine Ecology & Paleocology at University of California-Davis, an expert on evolutionary processes and world-renowned authority on shells. He is former editor of the journal, *Evolution*, and a MacArthur Fellow. Professor Vermeij, will present: **"How Evolution Shapes History: Shells as a Window on an Evolving World."** Of shells, he says: "I just love the things; they are works of art." (Blind since he was a youth, he uses touch to "see" shells.)

(Continued on page 3)

Standard Fare

Next Meeting	1
AOF Line	2
Meeting Recap	3
AAI Connection	6
Board Meeting Summary	6
Membership Form	6

Robert Ingersoll's Love Wuv, True Wuv...

Love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. It is the morning and the evening star. It shines upon the babe, and sheds its radiance on the quiet tomb. It is the mother of art, inspirer of poet, patriot, and philosopher. It is the air and light of every heart -- the builder of every home, kindler of every fire on every hearth. It was the first to dream of immortality. It fills the



world with melody -- for music is the voice of love. Love is the magician, the enchanter, that changes worthless things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. It is the perfume of that wondrous flower, the heart, and without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than beasts; but with it, earth is heaven, and we are gods.

A Question of Conscience

AOF Line

By Don Knutson

I wasn't surprised to read from the BBC News website late last month that The Equality Act before the House of Commons in Britain was meeting significant resistance from primarily the Catholic Church. The Act, due to come into effect in April in England, Wales and Scotland but already in effect in Northern Ireland, would outlaw "discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on the basis of sexual orientation" and would finally allow British gays the right to adopt children. The Church opposes the bill because it would apply to Catholic Adoption Agencies.

I was struck by a quote from Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor saying that "people of conscience" should not be subject to this act. But his term "conscience" would reflect reality better if it was replaced by the term "indoctrination" for his people

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

have been taught by their endemic culture to think of gays as errors of nature and trash. Statistics consistently indicate that 98% of those who hold the beliefs of a particular established religion acquire those beliefs through their immediate family or their endemic culture. Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament Evan Harris had a good suggestion to avoid this foolish influence of religion which harms families and children in the future-- simply replace religious organizations who provide public services with "secularly-based" organizations. This reminded me of my old idea that we need in American society many, many more atheist grief counselors. I have never had need for such in my life but it would be comforting, if I did, that a counselor would have something other than prayer to help me through!

Please let mee know if you cee mizpellings

Editor of News & Views Named

By Kevin Schultz

In January I accepted the AOF Board's offer to assume permanent responsibilities for the News and Views layout editor position. These duties include about eight to ten hours of work each month, including, but not limited to: laying out the AOF News and Views newsletter content; verifying accuracy of dates and times listed; image and clip-art manipulation; and submission of copy to the print shop for publication. Prior to January, I had accepted the position on a three-month trial basis, ending with the February issue.

My vision for the AOF News and Views includes professional-quality layout design (building on the efforts of my immediate predecessor Mynga Futrell), timely and relevant content geared to our members' communities, a focus on discussing organizational health issues that face AOF in the coming year, and humor and cheer where I can find it among the issues we face today. I welcome your thoughts and contributions: newsletter@aofonline.org.

AOF Board (2007)

President: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jerry Sloan

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, Kevin Schultz, Paul Storey, Susan Vergne

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (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 A New Year's Resolution By Kevin Schultz

Susan Mogull spoke to 40 members of AOF on Jan 14 on the topic, *Religion and the Public Schools—A New Year's Resolution To Support Freedom of Conscience*.

Her talk focused on proselytizing, praying, the pledge of allegiance, religious clubs, celebrating, and studying about religion

Ms. Mogull brought considerable knowledge to her talk. She is president of the Sacramento Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and a member of Americans United's National Advisory Council.



Susan Mogull, President, Sacramento Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

A former teacher, Ms. Mogull is Capital Region Leader of the California 3Rs Project, a statewide organization that provides training for educators on religion and the public schools. The region includes eleven counties. Since her appointment in 1996, she has arranged

training for over a thousand teachers on how to teach about religion and religious issues in public schools. Ms. Mogull served on curriculum committees in the Sacramento City and San Juan school districts and on statewide textbook

adoption committees for history and language arts materials. She is presently serving on a State Board of Education committee dealing with the history curriculum.

Ms. Mogull was Education Chair of the Sacramento Jewish Community Relations Council for ten years. She is presently the senior policy analyst for the Institute for Curricu-

lum Services, Resource Center for Jewish Subject Matter in the Curriculum, a project of the Jewish Community Relations Council of San Francisco and the Bay Area.

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

AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

Dr. Vermeij was born in the Netherlands and spent school years growing up in New Jersey. He received his bachelor's degree from Princeton University and a Masters and doctorate from Yale. He worked at the University of Maryland from 1971 to 1988 before moving to UC Davis, where he has been named by his peers as a Distinguished Research Professor. He has a fascinating career story, as told in Chapter 11 of *Portraits of Great American Scientists* ("**Seeing with His Hands**" by Elizabeth Gilbert). There one can learn answers to the questions she poses: "How could a blind person ever aspire to become a scientist? Of all the sciences, why would a blind person choose to study biology, the most visual of all the scientific fields?"

Here is how Professor Vermeij summarizes his plans for Sacramento's Darwin presentation (I've highlighted my own interest): *The study of evolution is a science of history. The shells of mollusks - snails, clams, and their relatives - offer a window on this history. By examining their architecture and interpreting blemishes on their surfaces, we can deduce which challenges were important in their evolution. Among*

(Continued on page 7)

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 © 2007 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.

Fiery Fundamentalist Fooled Followers for Forbidden Fling?

Sister Aimee

By Ken Nahigian

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944), American radio evangelist of the 1920s and 30s, was an eloquent woman, and young, and cute. In Los Angeles she founded a huge temple and the Foursquare Gospel Church. Each week thousands flocked to hear the Pentecostal preachings of "Sister Aimee": Bible, baptism, sanctification of the Spirit, glossolalia, faith healing and imminent Armageddon, all peddled with showbiz flair and wrapped in a winning smile.

But in 1926, she vanished quite mysteriously. What happened?

Aimee liked to swim. On May 18, she left her secretary on the beach, swam into the ocean, and did not return.

Searches failed to find a body. Followers kept vigil on the shore. Tongues wagged. Newspapers churned out extras. Some thought she drowned, others suggested sharks. Cynics called it a stunt. From across the country came in sightings—more than Elvis got, in fact.

On June 20, McPherson's mother received a ransom note from "the Avengers." It demanded \$500,000.

Three days later, Aimee turned up in Agua Prieta, Mexico, a border town, with a bizarre story. A couple had lured her into their car, she said, with a story of a dying child; chloroforming her, they drove her to a desert shack and held her prisoner. But when they left for supplies, Aimee cut her bonds on a jagged can lid, then trekked across the desert to collapse at the gate of a house.

No one could locate the shack,



Aimee McPherson, date unknown. Source: Library of Congress, call number LC-B2- 5355-9[P&P]

though. Also, after the long hike, Aimee was not dehydrated or sunburned, her shoes unscuffed, her dress unstained. The story had other flaws. Police investigated and reporters dug for dirt.

Finally someone found that Aimee had spent ten days in Carmel, California, with her radio engineer, apparently engaged in carnal communion.

A grand jury hearing became an inquest. A woman claimed Aimee and her mother had bribed her to say that she, not Aimee, had been with the secret lover. Despite protestations, the jury indicted the evangelist for obstruction of justice. The story grew into an embarrassment for Los Angeles civic leaders. Finally the district attorney dropped all charges, saying evidence was too conflicted and confused for prosecution.

What *really* happened? After a 1970s TV movie starring Faye Dunaway, and another film in 2006, the sense of it is still thin. The kidnap-yarn was silly, but if Aimee only wanted a tryst with her secret boyfriend, she could have found easier ways. Beyond the guesses, no one knows.

Later the same year, mystery-writer Agatha Christie pulled a similar vanishing stunt. Many have wondered if she took a hint from Sister Aimee.

Aimee McPherson returned to preaching, but the controversy dogged her. In 1944, she died of an overdose of barbiturates. Rumors whispered suicide, though most called it accidental—at least that is what the coroner ruled.

As for the International Foursquare Gospel Church, it continued under the direction of her son. Today worldwide membership tops three million.

Free Food and Drink for Adopt-A-Highway Crew By Kevin Schultz

Beverly Church welcomed Adopt-A-Highway volunteers into her nearby home on January 28 for free refreshments and a chance to socialize after the event.

Weather that morning felt *perfect*—windless, 60° F, flocks of blackbirds chirping, with a light fog adorning the adjacent fields. The crew collected 20 bags.

If you're curious about the event or maybe haven't volunteered in some time, why not come out and help out with the next one? Watch your March newsletter for details or call the AOF voice-mail at 447-3589.

Top left: Rich ?, Kevin Schultz, Mynga Futrell, John Reiger, Don Knutson and Ken Nahigian (struggling valiantly, hee hee). **Top right:** Beverly Church hosts the post-clean-up social. **Bottom-right:** Mynga Futrell seems full of cheer after enjoying the delightful repast. **Bottom-left:** Fresh fruit, freshly-baked cranberry-orange cake, coffee, orange juice, and tea. Yum!



Davis Community Meals Commends AOF Efforts By Kevin Schultz

I had several personal wins on Jan 30 at the Davis Community Meals event. The volunteer coordinator and the meal head-counter both reacted positively when I shared that we represented the token atheist group that volunteers all the way from Sacramento. Later that evening, one person who I've sensed tension with due to our team's naturalistic worldview warmed up and we shared a positive exchange. Our efforts *do* make a difference.

AOF volunteers four times each year with the Davis Community Meals Program. Remaining 2007 dates: Apr 17 (set-up & serve), Jul 24 (set-up & serve), and Oct 30 (all).



From Left: Derek and Janet O'Meara, Kevin Schultz, Dawn Hustig, and Ken Nahigian with mop (Ken is consistently a joy to photograph)

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.

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

An Atheist Alliance International News Update

The AAI Connection By Kevin Schultz

AAI Convention 2007

From the AAI web site: Insofar as the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) is a democratic organization, all major decisions are voted upon by member groups after hearing pros and cons from all who choose to participate.

On October 1, 2006 a tally of votes revealed that a great majority of member groups want to hold the annual AAI convention the last weekend in September 2007 instead of the traditional weekend that Christian's refer to as "Easter."

Please mark your calendars now and plan to attend the AAI 2007 Convention which will take place on the east coast. Pre-convention activities will start on **Thursday, September 27**. The convention will end the afternoon of Sunday, September 30, 2007.

The Atheist Alliance Inc. (AAI) is a democratic association of independent, autonomous atheist societies.

Applications for Alliance membership from independent local, regional or international atheist clubs, groups, societies, organizations, and associations are always welcome.

AAI welcomes individual members. In addition, individual atheists who do not have an already established atheist organization in their area may receive a free membership with Atheist Internet Outreach; Established as a member organization of the AAI, our Outreach Program is designed to assist isolated and/or disaffected atheists with free-thought issues of the day...

Atheist Alliance International is registered in the United States as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, educational organization. Donations to AAI are tax deductible for U.S. taxpayers.

AAI Web Site: <http://atheistalliance.org>

AOF Board Meeting Summary

January 21, 2007
Co-Housing Common House

Directors present: Don Knutson (president), Mynga Futrell (vice-president), Ken Nahigian (treasurer), Kevin Schultz (secretary), Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Susan Vergne. Directors absent: Paul Storey

Secretary, Treasurer reports approved by consensus.

Jerry Sloan elected 2007 Secretary.

Next meeting: Sunday, Feb 18, 9:30, at the home of Beverly Church.

Sacramento Community Events Calendar for Freethinkers:
<http://sacportal.humanists.net/calendar>

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!

A Freethought Poem I Want To Live Before I Die

By Liz Purcell

*I want to live before I die.
To learn to walk before I fly.
To hear a child laugh loud and clear
Ere an angel's harp I hear.*

*I want to wake before I sleep,
Though it may mean sometimes to weep.
And to be honest, just and kind
Just for my own peace of mind.*

*And whenever I have wronged a man,
To make things right if I can.*

*And rather than search the stratosphere,
Try to earn forgiveness here.*

*I want to live well instead of long.
To speak out when I see a wrong.
And rather than God's wrath await,
Justice now to create.*

*I want to live before I die.
To learn to walk before I fly.
Some wait for an afterlife, but I—
I want to live before I die.*

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor, Kevin Schultz, 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.

Cleo Kocol Celebrates 80

By Hank Kocol



Cleo Kocol at her 80th Birthday in Sun City. We all wish you continued health and happiness.

(Continued from page 3)

the most important perils to which mollusks and other life forms must adapt are predators, whose nature and importance have changed in predictable ways through time. The study of mollusks reveals important historical trends in how organisms adapt, and **these trends in turn teach us a great deal about our own future.** One of the greatest challenges to life is unpredictability, a phenomenon that is highly resistant to adaptation; yet life has survived through many rare, unpredictable crises, and its strategies of adaptation to everyday phenomena teach important lessons about how life copes with the unforeseen events in history.

There are plenty of perils today. Do "lessons learned" at the Darwin Day 2007 educational gala have anything to say to us about forthcoming chapters in the story of human history?

Common experience shows how much rarer is moral courage than physical bravery. A thousand men will march to the mouth of the cannon where one man will dare espouse an unpopular cause.

—Clarence Darrow



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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

February Calendar of Events

Darwin Day Birthday Educational Gala **Sunday, February 11, 2:00 - 4:30 PM**

AOF Board meeting Sunday, February 18, 9:30 AM

HAGSA Second Semi-Monthly Meeting Sunday, February 18, 3:00 PM

American Atheists National Convention *April 6 - 8, Seattle, Washington*

Save the Date! - Davis Community Meals Event Tuesday, April 17, 4 - 7 PM (set-up and serve)

Secular Student Alliance National Convention *April 19 - 22, Cambridge, Massachusetts (Harvard)*



Directions to Darwin Day Education Gala — February 11

The Darwin Day celebration takes place at the La Sierra Community Center (John Smith Hall), 5325 Engle Road, in Carmichael. This location is just two blocks west of Fair Oaks Blvd. At Engle and Garfield. There is plenty of parking. **Important: Doors will open at 2 PM (not before). The formal program does not begin until 2:30** so that those who wish to visit the literature tables, register for the door prize, and see the sales merchandise will have the opportunity to do so. If you seek more specific information about the gala, please phone AOF's 24-hour answering recorder at 447-3589 and leave your name and telephone number for a return call. Advance tickets until 2/4/07: \$8.