

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

April 2009

Special Points of Interest

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Sunday, April 12, 1:30-3:30PM Flying Spaghetti Monster Party At the Co-Housing Common House

This year, AOF will repeat its co-sponsorship of last year's Flying Spaghetti Monster Party. It will be held on April 12th, 2009, known to many as Easter Sunday. Scheduled to begin at 1:30 PM and run to 3:30 PM, there will be spaghetti and other food and beverages, entertainment, two pirate costume contests (1 for adults and 1 for children through age 14) and a door prize. Suggested donation is \$5 per person.



Location: The Common House of the Southside Park Cohousing Community, 434 T Street, Sacramento.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS EVENT CALL BRIAN JONES (530) 756-8570 or email fsm@hagsa.org

The Flying Spaghetti Monster is a satirical creation. For more information about the Flying Spaghetti Monster, including costume ideas, visit <http://venganza.org>. Suggested donation \$5. Sponsored by: HAGSA & AOF.

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Save the Date! 2009 Atheist Alliance International (AAI) Convention Set

In 2009, the 15th annual AAI convention will be our biggest and best show ever. Hotel: only \$89/night!

Completely redesigned structure will deliver the maximum amount of workshops for you to learn and network, while providing quality time to socialize and have a drink or two for the world free of religious dogma. Where? Burbank Airport Marriot, Los Angeles. When? Oct 2-4.

Top 7 Reasons to Attend AAIC 09

(1) Three Workshop Tracks; (2) World-class speakers; (3) Special events; (4) Evening with Bill Maher; (5) Charles Darwin with Richard Dawkins; (6) Party with friends; (7) Multitude of local attractions

Full details: <http://www.atheistconvention.org/>

AOF Meeting Recap

March 8th Meeting Recap

By Jillian Stanley

Michael Newdow was the guest speaker at the March meeting. Dr. Newdow is most well-known as a freethought activist, but he is also a medical doctor, a lawyer, a songwriter, and performer—not to mention founder of the First Amendment Church of True Science—“F.A.C.T.S.” Following his previous lawsuits to remove the phrase “Under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance and “In God We Trust” from coins, in December he and others, including ten groups, sued to prevent the Chief Justice from using the phrase “So Help Me God” in administering the Oath of Office to the incoming president.

Contrary to popular belief, this phrase has only been an established part of the oath since 1933. In the mid-19th century it was asserted that George Washington had used the phrase when he took the oath of office, but this is untrue. In fact, the first Constitutional Convention had removed two references to “God” from the Oath of Office.

Regarding the difficulties of his court case, Michael explained that under the law, you must show that you are yourself harmed, or stigmatized, in order to bring a suit; only in this way do you have legal standing. The challenge is to persuade the Courts that individuals, as part of a larger group (such as atheists) are “stigmatized” by having “so help me God” in the Oath of Office. “It’s an enigma, this thing they call stigma,” goes one line in Mike’s newest song, marked by his usual verbal agility and a deceptively soothing melody.

A question and answer session brought up many questions and comments from the forty persons in attendance. Mike explained that, contrary to popular parlance, one can’t just “take it to the Supreme Court.” The Court chooses which cases it will hear of the many brought from the Courts of Appeals. Mike also pointed out that politicians are not going to join in on any case like this—after all, they are concerned about getting re-elected. Asked about his experiences with being interviewed on radio and television, Michael replied that a radio program might be only fifteen minutes long, but he would have the opportunity to say quite a bit, whereas on a television program, with all the commercial breaks, he might get in one sentence.



AOF Board (2009)

President: Beverly Church
Board Chair: Don Knutson
Vice President: Mynga Futrell
Secretary: Jillian Stanley
Treasurer: Ken Nahigian
Directors at large:
 Steve Campbell, Rena Lowry,
 Tom Nicolette, Debora Smith,
 Jillian Stanley

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)
 Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct 2009

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Debora Smith, Ken Nahigian, Robert Poeschel

Darwin Day, Feb. 7, 2010:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,
 Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,
 Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Under Review

AOF’s Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell (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

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Wednesday, April 8, 11:00 a.m. @ Country Club Lanes, 2600 Watt Ave.
AOF-Affiliated Inaugural Bowling Event a Success
 By Tom Nicolette

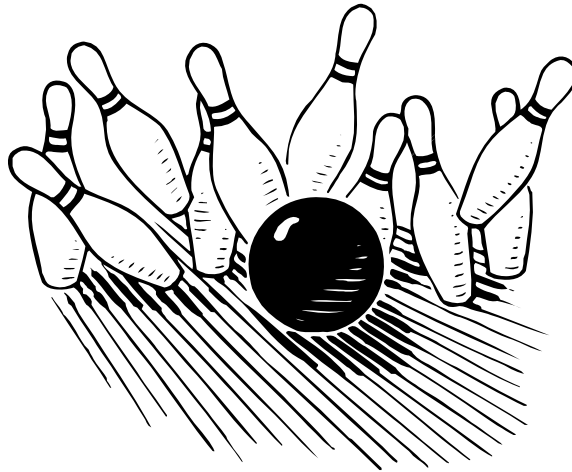
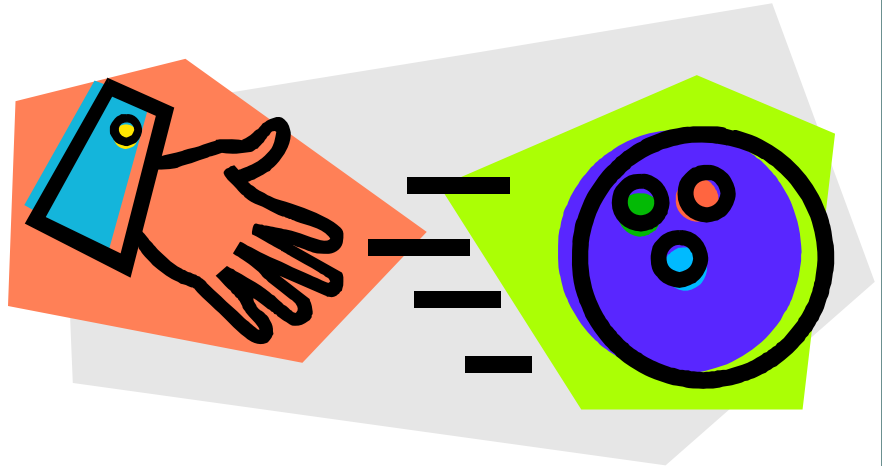
Hi folks!

GEEEEZ! We are knocking them dead at the bowling alley. The counter guy knows us by name now and has memorized our shoe sizes. We are rapidly “evolving” into bowling lizards and our eyes flash and our mouths water at the mere mention of a “Strike”. We are busily honing our skills and some of us have actually broken a hundred!

But really..... the drama! The Pathos... the thrill of victory the agony of a gutter ball!! The triumphs and the depths of despair! All on the cheap by the way. So far we get out of there for a little less than \$6 a person.

So come on out and join us! (You know you wanna). Our next bowling event is on April the 8th Wednesday at 11 a.m. Country Club lanes 2600 Watt Avenue, Sacramento.
 Link: <http://www.countryclublanes.com>.

Feel free to contact me at tom@aofonline.org



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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Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

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

Simon bar Kokhba: Another Messiah

By Ken Nahigian

The Jewish war against Roman rule was three wars in fact, each devastating. The first, 66–73 CE, left the nation in ruins. It led to the burning of the Temple, the mass suicide at Masada, a general diaspora, and a deep anger that steamed and bubbled like secret lava in the earth. Next was a rebellion of exiles, forty-two years later. The slaughter was lavish, but it also failed. Most notable was the last. It has a messiah. And it succeeded, for a time.

The messiah was Simon bar Kokhba (שמעון בר כוכבא) or *Shimon bar Kokhva* or *bar Kochba*. He may have been mad, or brilliant, or both. Sources are muddled: some traces in the Talmud, the Midrash (commentaries) and the Church Fathers. Even his birth name is half a guess. The common spelling means “Son of a Star,” but he probably took that when the Messianic frenzy began to swirl around him. We have no good images. He is a figure seen through smoke.

Born early in the second century, Simon apparently found a calling as a political leader. After the first rebellion, the emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem in Roman style, raising a temple to Zeus on the Temple Mount. This angered the Jews who had remained in the homeland. The promise of a Messiah was on their minds. They were ready for another rebellion.

The tinder-spark was the collapse of the traditional Tomb of Solomon from Roman excavations. Once kindled, the fires spread quickly. By 132 CE, rebels had seized several small towns, adding walls and escape passages. Rome felt the pain. Simon stepped up and called for

open war.

Thousands of local and foreign Jews, even hostile Samaritans, rushed to join him. In 134 CE his army took Jerusalem, mauling the Roman Egyptian Legion. Simon raised an altar on the Temple Mount and began to build a wall around the city.

The chief rabbi of the day, Akiva ben Yosef, hailed Simon as the long-awaited Messiah. Miracle stories



Coins of Jewish Rebel Simon Bar Kochba: "Year One of the Freedom of Israel".

circulated, as they often do, drawing more support. Perhaps opportunistically, he took the title *N'si Yisrael* (Prince of Israel), claimed Davidic descent, and even minted his own money.

With the world watching, Emperor Hadrian had to act quickly. He recalled his best general from Britain and sent him out with 35,000 men. But the general hesitated to meet Simon's rebels in the field—rather, his strategy was to surround their strongholds and starve them out.

Thus by bits he forced the rebels into the mountains. The last fortress was Betar, southwest of Jerusalem. It held for a year. In 135, in a massive battle there, Simon died.

The devastation was terrible: perhaps 580,000 slain on the Jewish side, discounting deaths from hunger and disease, and Roman loss so heavy that in his report to the Roman Senate, Hadrian omitted the customary phrase, "I and the army are well," and refused a victory march.

Fearing another revolt, Rome exiled the last Jews from Judea and changed the name to Syria Palaestina (it has been Palestine ever since). As for Simon bar Kochba, to this day he is a folk hero to some, while others deride him with the name *bar Koziba* ("Son of the lie").

He was vague, he had charisma, he was a paradox. The Christian Father Justin Martyr called him cruel and oppressive, yet he drew far more support in his day than did Jesus. In 1952 and 1960–61, archaeologists uncovered caches of his letters in the Judean desert. These spoke of a rebel full of anger and reproach, but also strict devotion to Jewish law, and attention to practical issues such as logistics, civil government and land ownership.

One legend even vests him as the creator of the parlor game "Twenty Questions." Supposedly he investigated the case of a mutilated man; assailants had cut out his tongue and cut off his hands. By asking simple questions to which the dying man could nod or shake his head, Simon was able to apprehend the killers.

Mystery, charisma, paradox. Cleverness. And martyrdom too. For a messiah, it was the ideal recipe.

Can you help as you are able? Let us know!

AOF “Meeting Success” Team Members Needed

By Tom Nicolette

Hi folks!

Well they told me my loafing days were gone here at AOF and they are going to put me to work. (Damn I hate that word).

But in order to make me feel good they put me in charge of my very own Team (yesterday I couldn't spell it and today I am one). Hey I will take whatever I can get at this stage of the game. So I am now “Chief cook and bottle washer” of the “Meeting matters Team.

I could recite all the wonderfully crafted details of what my team's responsibilities are but then I doubt if you would read it. Basically it comes down to setting up and tearing down: the sound system, the refreshment table, the literature table and the hospitality tables along with greeting the new people and making out name tags, membership questionnaires etc.

Personally my hat is off to Betty Simonsma. I now appreciate all the hard work she has done for us.

All of the chores assigned to this team are not hard nor particularly time consuming. Where the real pinch is, is in the time constraints in which to do them in. We only have a small bit of time before the meeting and even a less amount of time after the meetings in order to get things done.

What I am asking for you great folks to do is to pitch right in and help us out before and after the meetings. It would be great if we could have an individual step up to the plate and to commit themselves to one particular task. However I DO understand that many of you have full and busy lives and cannot make a commitment like that since you might or might not be able to attend all the meetings. So if you could just pitch in to help whenever you can I would greatly appreciate it.

I am going to be pitching for a committed “greeter” however. The person who has this job would not have to do anything physical at all except to greet the folks and get to know them. I am sure with all the professional people out there that are “people persons” we can find somebody who can appreciate the important value of this job. This would be our AOF ambassador.

Well thank you for hearing me out. I can be contacted at tom@aofonline.org.

Sincerely yours

TOM (Chief cook and bottle washer) (hey it's a living)

Volunteers Needed for Saturday, April 18th Adopt-A-Highway Event

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Celebrates 14 Years!

By Don Knutson

A beautiful February morning greeted five volunteers, **Mynga Futrell, Paul Geisert, Don Knutson, Robert Poeschel and John Reiger**, as they began AOF's fourteenth year of cleaning up the 2-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. At least **18 bags of trash** were collected. We will be returning to the scene **Saturday, April 18 @ 8a.m. at the Park & Ride west of 99 on Elkhorn**. Rainy or wet conditions on the roadway cancels. For details, please call the AOF voice-mail, 916-447-3589.

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: \$ _____

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).

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).

Tidbits, News, and Events of Interest

AOF Family News

AOF member Linda Ofstrosky writes:

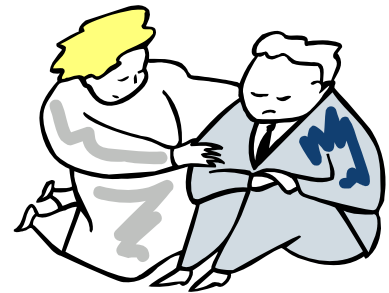
“My name is Jetta (Linda Ostrosky). Perhaps we have met. I have been a long time member of AOF. It’s nice to be around people who believe the same way I do. Perhaps we talked at the last Darwin day celebration.

I was asked to say a little something about my life away from AOF. I am a survivor of Brooklyn NYC. I have two cats. I am an enthusiastic member of a small Improv acting workshop group here in Sacramento. I have been a faithful member of the group for at least a couple of years now. I enjoy this activity very much. I find it creative, challenging and down right FUN. I think it is a great activity for the young and old, adults and children. It keeps your mind sharp and keen from having to interact on the stage with no script but just with a scene outline. Also I was thinking that it might help some people to overcome shyness and

build confidence in meeting people. This could be handy in our present national economic depression to be better poised at job interviews.

If you feel you would like to try it or you would just like to come down and watch the fun as a member of the audience we meet at 7 pm every Tuesday night at the Geery theatre at 1208 22nd street (corner of 22nd and L). There is a \$5 fee for lessons. Any question feel free to call me at 916-483-0360.

Love to See you there!!”



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!**

Family News Exclusive

Cleo Kocol Announces New Novel

By Ken Nahigian

Cleo Fellers Kocol writes:

“Ken, you asked me to let you know when my novel was coming out. It should be listed on Amazon.com in a couple weeks. The name is **FITZ-HUGH'S WOMAN**. While it doesn't address any philosophical/religious problems, it does touch on social problems of the day, slavery, worker's rights, sexual beliefs and hypocrisy. It will be listed at \$20. but I will have a few copies and can sell those at \$18. Here is what it says on the book jacket.”

In 1860, running from the past, Rafeen is catapulted into the fast-moving silver bonanza of Virginia City, Nevada Territory, a place so rich it becomes a state to keep its money in the Union. With determination, Rafeen forges a place in the hurly-burly of a mining town where power and privilege co-exist with struggle and need in ways she never anticipated.

Set against the fascinating history of the Comstock Lode, Rafeen's page-turner story is shared with **Rob Fitzhugh**, a sophisticated high-stakes gambler, **Chris Burnett**, an idealistic miner, **Lizzie**, born in slavery, and the historical figures, **John Mackay**, **Eilley Bowers**, and **Mark Twain** in a city where churches and opera houses vie for attention with saloons and “cribs” of prostitution. Fitzhugh's Woman is the story of a woman and the two men who love her, the story of a place, a time, and a woman who grows and changes as a consequence.

Louise Crawford, writer of romance and mystery and author of the novels Hat Trick, Fortune Cookie Karma and others says, “I was entranced by Rafeen's love story. While many novels are predictable, I never was sure where this one was going. A great read.”

Naida West, author of Eye of the Bear, River of Red Gold and Murder on the Middle Fork, editor and publisher of Bridge House Press, says about Fitzhugh's Woman, “The history and setting were almost as fascinating to me as the story. I was caught up in it and the believable characters from the first.”

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.

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 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

April Calendar of Events

AOF April General Meeting (note: @ Co-Housing) Sunday, Apr 12, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

April AOF Board Meeting Sunday, Apr 19, 9:30-12:00 p.m.

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Event (see page three) **Saturday, Apr 18, 8:00-10:00 a.m.**

AOF May General Meeting Sunday, May 10, 1:30-4:00 p.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 2009), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

