

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

April 2010

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Sunday, April 11, 1:30-3:30 p.m. AOF Co-Hosts the 2010 Flying Spaghetti Monster Party

The Flying Spaghetti Monster Pastover celebration will be held this year the week AFTER Easter on Sunday, April 11, 2010 from 1:30 to 3:30 pm.

PLEASE NOTE: The location is changing to **Curtis Hall at the southwest corner of the Sierra II Center** at 2791 24th Street, Sacramento.

As usual, 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. The menu will be vegan but with meatballs and other non-vegan options available on the side.

Suggested donation is \$5 per person.



His Noodliness

(Continued on page 3)

May 9, 2010, 1:30-4:30 p.m. Coming In May: Richard Kowaleski on "What We Could Do Better"

On May 9, AOF is pleased to present Richard Andrew Kowaleski, critical thinker, professional stage magician, Rotarian speaker, bon vivant and hot ballroom dancer.

As we know, even most non- and anti-religious people have little heartfelt affiliation to organized freethought. Why? Does our "movement" cripple itself? Do freethinkers marginalize and ghettoize themselves, and how can they fix this?

With typical grace, humor and intellectual scalpel, Richard will dissect our movement and examine what freethinkers can do to tear down fences without prostituting their beliefs. Richard has spoken to AOF before, as well as performing and serving as Master of Ceremonies at Sacramento Freethought Day. He always has insightful, albeit controversial, presentations. Be prepared to think and be challenged.

AOF Line

Meet An AOF Board Member By Jillian "Zazie" Stanley

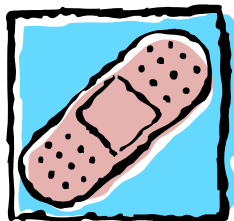
Hello, I am the AOF Board secretary this year. My name is Jillian, but I also go by Zazie. I grew up in Oregon (Salem and Eugene), and as a child attended the Assembly of God church. Although I stopped attending that church when I was twelve, the familiarity with Bible stories and scriptures I gained there has been very useful in life: for example, I understand Biblical references in English literature! When I was fifteen, a friend invited me to attend the Unitarian church. It was thrilling! I had always liked going to church for the social component and the ritual aspect of getting dressed up; now I could have those things along with lectures and discussions about intellectual matters. When I was seventeen, I read Bertrand Russell's Why I Am Not a Christian, a great influence on my life and thought.

Although I moved to Sacramento in 1988, I only learned about AOF in late 2004. Romantic connection: In January 2005 I met a wonderful man, Mike Davis, via Yahoo Personals on the internet; it was only after we started dating that I learned he was in AOF, also!

I am thrilled that in recent years so many public figures (writers, entertainers, etc.) have declared themselves to be atheists. Being an atheist used to be like being a nudist or a tap dancer---one just did not mention it to people! However, I am not at ease with the all-or-nothing attitude that seems to prevail among outspoken atheists---the assertion that atheism is identified with a completely naturalistic and non-spiritual world view. I prefer to define an atheist simply as someone who does not believe in the existence of a supreme being or power. For half a century I have considered myself as an atheist, yet I won't out-and-out reject or deny everything that might be called spiritual or mystical. Since I do not believe in resurrection or life after death, I cannot assert, in the comforting words of the hymn we used to sing, "We will understand it better by and by."

But I do feel that whether we think of life as Wonderland or the Twilight Zone, the unexplainable exists, and adds some spice to life!

Continuing Recovery Wishes to Mynga Futrell AOF Family News



Paul Geisert reports that AOF's VP Mynga Futrell is recovering well from her March 2 breast cancer surgery and wants to convey her thanks to those AOFers who have sent her their cards and good wishes for a fast recovery. (Special thanks to Mike Newdow for sending the card with God's blessing.) And also to Kevin and Dawn for the lovely flowers - very much appreciated! ◇

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert,
Brian Jones, 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, Brian Jones)
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

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 2010: Sunday, February 7

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell (AAI)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)
Hank Kocol (CSH)

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Druids' Talk a "Brain Soother" March Meeting Recap By David Flanders

The stresses and chaos of everyday life can cause some--80% of the world population to seek a brain soothing experience again and again (religion). Four fellow travelers on planet earth, April, Arwin, Kelli, and Dave, spoke at AOF's March meeting, of a desire to return to the ancient ways. For them that path could be Druid, Wicca, Shamanism, etc... the goal is to achieve a brain soothing experience. At their pagan rituals they see familiar faces and go into their chosen trance and in their minds encounter comforting deities. Clearly the brain of the deity they worship must be in the pagans worshipers' "brain" for the mind soothing effect to achieve success. For the pagans, these deities can feel just as real as what they experience in their waking life. Those who fall in love may experience a cocktail of hormones released in their brains and experience a euphoric "high". Perhaps that is what occurred in the minds of April, Aren, Kelli and Dave as well during a chant in front of those present at the meeting. Others may achieve the brain soothing effect via sports. Some AOFers might achieve the brain soothing effect through some type of meditation (deep breathing) without the imaginary deities. Science--an atheistic methodology can help us humans plant our feet back into reality. It does appear that countries that are unable to distinguish reality from



fantasy will become failed states. Science and democracy don't always promise with absolute certainty that they can help humanity to survive forever. But it does appear to be the best thing for human survival thus far. During the question and answer period, it appeared that the four used obscurantist confabulated words to explain their religion. Disciplined, critical thinking can help clarify things and seems to be necessary in today's modern world. Still, civility was very much present during the entire meeting.

On the web:
<http://www.groveoftheoak.org/>

(Continued from page 1)

AOF and HAGSA are sponsoring the event which for the first time will be a fundraiser for Sacramento's Reason House. The vision for Reason House is that it be a place where groups like AOF such as the member organizations of the Sacramento Coalition of Reason can call home. All proceeds net of room rental, which is being partially covered by sponsorships, will be donated to the fund.

The Flying Spaghetti Monster is a satirical creation used to illustrate the fallacy of allowing intelligent design to be taught alongside evolution in Kansas science classes. In the few short years since the original satirical letter was sent to the Kansas School Board, a large following has developed. For more information about the Flying Spaghetti Monster, including costume ideas, visit <http://www.venganza.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

The Great Cagliostro

By Ken Nahigian

Count Alessandro di Cagliostro was a forger and a finagler, a swindler and thief, a charlatan, a sorcerer, an adventurer, a rogue, and a liar who ticked people off. The great lover Casanova was bitterly jealous of him; Johann von Goethe hated him with unalloyed fury; the French King Louis XVI hounded him; Queen Marie-Antoinette wanted him imprisoned for life; Empress Catherine the Great harried him out of Russia; and Pope Pius VI called him a threat to the Church. And yet he glided through life on wings, for the most part, gilded with ebullience and cheer, charm and a *joie de vivre* that won adore from the public, casual friends, and even victims.

In short: he was an epic con man. As is often true, behind the cool façade beat ambition, wild wit, and energy, and a thick, warm, dark passion like the blood of a frightened animal. Looking back, it may be difficult to despise Cagliostro, much as he deserved it.

He claimed noble or royal Christian birth. An orphan abandoned on the island of Malta, he said, he had travelled as a child to Medina, Mecca and Cairo, then joined the Knights of Malta to learn alchemy, the Kabala and magic. "Silly fairy-tales," declared Goethe; the truth was plainer.

Born Giuseppe or Joseph Balsamo to a peasant family in Sicily on June 2, 1743, he acquired an education despite his family's poverty, serving as a novice monk until the Order expelled him. As a novice he learned some chemistry and rudiments of holy rites. At age seventeen, falling in with brigands, he convinced a local goldsmith that he had divined buried treasure at Mount Pellegrino. For seventy silver pieces he would lead an expedition. The goldsmith agreed. But at the supposed treasure site his confederates attacked, leaving the goldsmith dazed and bleeding, wondering what had happened to the boy (for clearly the beating was the work of evil spirits).

Before the goldsmith could get wise, Cagliostro fled to the city of Messina. He then began a world tour—to Egypt, Greece, Persia, Rhodes, India and Ethiopia, so he claimed, gathering alchemical and occult knowledge. By 1768 he was back in Italy, first Naples, where he hooked up with one of his old thug friends. The two men opened a casino to cheat foreigners out of money. Uncovering the ploy, authorities expelled them. Next Cagliostro set himself up as a doctor in Rome, selling forged magical "Egyptian" amulets and making a fair living. An ex-convict friend introduced him to Lorenza Serafina Feliciani, beautiful and just 14 years old. They married. Cagliostro also learned to forge letters, diplomas and other official documents, which he did with artistic skill, and this was lucrative. But he caught the Inquisition's attention, and the couple fled to Spain, then after some years they returned to his home town of Palermo, where the angry goldsmith (now wiser) had Cagliostro arrested. Charmed by the glib Cagliostro, a

nobleman intervened, saving his neck. He then pulled another big con on a local alchemist. Much wealthier, he and his wife went to England, announcing the discovery of a great alchemical secret.

Notoriety drew the notice of another charlatan sorcerer, the famed Comte de [Saint-Germain](#), who saw in Cagliostro a kindred spirit. He initiated him into [Freemasonry](#) and imparted recipes for the supposed elixirs of Youth and Immortality. Cagliostro went on to establish Egyptian Rite Masonic Lodges in England, Germany, Russia and France. In Paris in 1772, he again peddled elixirs and medicines, and held séances. He charmed King Louis XVI. For many years a court favorite, often entertaining the nobles with "magical suppers," he was even recommended as a physician to Benjamin Franklin when Franklin was in Paris. But in 1785 he was implicated in the Affair of the Necklace, a jewelry swindle that helped ignite the French Revolution. In fact it was probably the one time in Cagliostro's life he was innocent of crime. Even so he spent six or nine months in the Bastille for it, then was banished from France.

Late 1789 saw Cagliostro back in Rome with his wife, practicing medicine and séances. All went well until he tried to found a Masonic Lodge there. Freemasonry was illegal in Rome at the time. The Inquisition soon arrested him, imprisoned him in the Castle of Saint Angelo, and held a trial. The charges were heresy, magic, Freemasonry and conjury. Eighteen months later the Inquisition sentenced Cagliostro to death; the Pope commuted this to life imprisonment. After an escape attempt, Cagliostro was sent to the solitary castle of San Leo near the city of Montefeltro, one of the strongest holds in Europe. He died there, on August 26, 1795.

Poor Cagliostro. *Ouroborus* was his adopted magical sign, the serpent that devours its own tail, with irony, since his life began and ended in a cell (novice monk to prisoner). A devious, parlor-level manipulator, he was often a pawn in larger, more subtle manipulations. He built his life on charisma and exploited hopes, always leaving town when things got too hot; some say it was his wife, weary of the migrations, who finally betrayed him to the Inquisition.

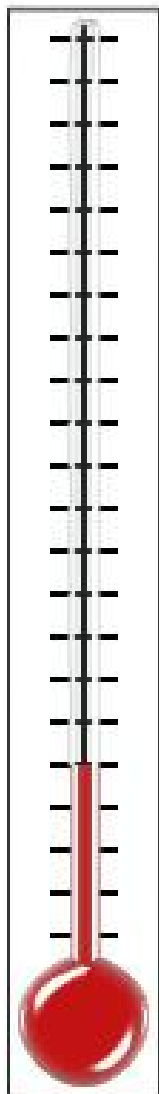
But his bright progress across Europe, which left a furrow of amazed and astounded admirers and enemies, was only a reply to the hunger for novelty, the human urge to believe anything rather than nothing. Many denied his death until Napoleon authorized a special investigation to prove it. And fellow freemason Mozart wrote him into his last opera, *The Magic Flute*, as the enlightened Egyptian Mason Sarastro.

Today Cagliostro is a key figure in theosophy, occult Masonic history, and fantasy romances. His story, retold and recycled, has gathered the glamour and trappings of myth. Clearly the hunger is still with us.

Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

AOF Establishes Reason House Fund Drive

By Ken Nahigian



\$250000

\$47500

\$0

To date, AOF has collected **\$47,500** towards the purchase of “Reason House,” a permanent facility for all groups of the Sacramento Community of Reason to use as a resource and meeting site. **Our goal is \$250,000.**

Can you help?

Send donations to:

AOF (Attn: Reason House Fund)
PO BOX 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational association. All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. AOF’s tax ID number is 68-0325762.

Donate online at <http://www.aofonline.org/support>, or by clicking to <https://www.networkforgood.org/donation/MakeDonation.aspx?ORGID2=680325762>.



Thursday, April 15, 7:15 p.m.

AOF Co-Sponsors Americans United Event on Same Sex Marriage and Religious Liberty

By Roberto Leibman

On Thursday, April 15, at 7:15 p.m., UC Davis School of Law Professor Alan Brownstein will speak on “Reconciling Conflicting Autonomy Rights: Same-sex Marriage and Religious Liberty.” This event will be held at the SMUD, 6201 S Street, Sacramento. For additional details, please contact AU Sacramento at 916-369-1370 or president@au-sac.org. AOF is a co-sponsor of this event.

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).

E-mail letters to: newsletter@aofonline.org

Letters to the Editor



Dear AOF:

I do not know if AOF has a policy re the following announcement being shared in the newsletter but if they allow it this company is presenting serious, thought provoking plays on a small stage on the Delta King.

Just passing it on and trying to support my favorite theater in Sacramento and secure additional exposure.

“Sunday May 2, 2010, 5pm-8pm, Tickets: \$65/person; Reservations: 916-995-5464; Address: Blue Cue, 1004 28th Street, Sacramento, CA 95816. Description: "Capital Stage's "Get Your Bold On!" Benefit Bash is our biggest party of the year! Join us as we celebrate another year of bold intimate professional theatre in Sacramento. Our 4th Annual Benefit Bash returns to the Blue Cue, where the celebration features food and wine, live and silent auctions, live jazz and an opportunity to mingle with your favorite Capital Stage artists.”

—**Karla LaZier**

AOF welcomes announcements of interest to our members. Thanks for sharing.

Decision Upholds “In God We Trust”; Newdow to Appeal Protest of Ninth Circuit Court Decision By Don Knutson

San Francisco Atheists organized a demonstration in downtown San Francisco March 17 in reply to the Ninth Circuit Court's odious decision the previous week denying Sacramento petitioner Mike Newdow's complaint that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" on the currency suggested government establishment of religion. The Pledge, of course, was amended during the anti-communist hysteria of the '50's to add the mention of a deity. Six Sacramento-area residents including AOF President Bev Church and members Tom Ikelman and Don Knutson joined the some 60 protesters at the Browning Federal Courthouse on a blustery, sunny day. San Francisco Atheists leaders Dave Kong and Larry Hicok spoke to the crowd during the occasion reminding us that the secular movement needs more political power to give court justices the means to move out of their "comfort zone" and the courage to restore our

(Continued on page 7)

An Essay

Why I Do Not Self-Identify As An Atheist

By Paul Geisert

Early in life I occasionally attended a Lutheran church, and for some time self-identified as a Lutheran. Later in life I self-identified as a humanist, then as an agnostic. Upon helping to start AOF, I began to use the atheist label, and did so for a number of years under the assumption that a positive organization could put a better face on the term atheist. I am a member of the American Humanist Association, AOF, and The Brights Net.

I no longer personally identify as an atheist because the term irrevocably links my persona to god (and by cultural association religion). Why be linked to gods when there are no gods? Furthermore, why self-identify as what you are not? The term "atheist" literally states "I am without theism". I cannot think of any belief system that goes by a

term that is the negative of what they believe.

I now self identify by a term which represents "all of my positive views", that is, my own naturalistic worldview. The only word which accomplishes that, with no links to manifestos, lists of what I should believe, and veneration of past and current heroes is "bright" (noun). A bright is an individual with a naturalistic worldview, free of supernatural and mystical forces. That fits me perfectly.

Last week two Jehovah Witnesses knocked on my door. After a little banter I stated, "I am a bright." This promptly turned the discussion to me rather than to them. We had a nice talk and they left in a little wiser than when they came.

I have found that saying "I am a bright" inevitably leads to a positive and fruitful conversation. The response is almost always "What is a bright?" and I follow with "A bright is a person with a naturalistic worldview," which is almost always followed by a strange look or "What is a naturalistic worldview?" which presents the opportunity to state, "I believe that the world is totally natural, no supernatural gods or mystical elements." The conversation goes on from there - in a positive vein.

(Continued from page 6)

secular rights. The valid point was made that the Civil Rights movement only began to achieve legal victories after they had become a political force. That means all secularists need to immediately come out of the closet and lose their shyness about being atheist, agnostic or skeptic. A five minute segment of the demonstration can be accessed at <http://www.sfatheists.com>.



Bev Church, Dave Kong, and Larry Hicok outside the Ninth Circuit building.

Photo credit: Don Knutson

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.

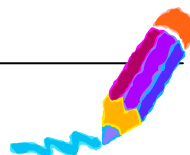
Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Note-pad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

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 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

April/May Calendar of Events

- | | |
|--|--|
| AOF/HAGSA April Spaghetti Monster Party | Sunday, April 11, 1:30-3:30 p.m. |
| AOF Earth Day Tabling Event @ Southside Park,
8th and T Street, Sacramento | Sunday, April 11, 12:00-5:00 p.m. |
| Parent/Child Outing to SF California Academy of
Sciences. Contact: roberto@leibman.net | Sunday, April 18, departing at 9:00 a.m. |
| AOF Dinner Social; location TBA. Contact: 419-
2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net | Thursday, May 6, 6:30 p.m. |
| AOF May General Meeting | Sunday, May 9, 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 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.

