



THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

A HUMANISTS OF FORT WORTH (HOFW) PUBLICATION

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Briefs

Davis seeks canvassers

The Wendy Davis gubernatorial campaign committee held a 1-year anniversary celebration of her now famous filibuster at Mimi's Café on Wednesday, June 25th. Campaign representatives sought canvassers and donations, while emphasizing that she is the only clear candidate for reproductive freedom and equality for women in Texas.

The campaign actively needs door-to-door canvassing volunteers to help register voters and get them to the polls. Less than 12 to 18 percent of voters choose to vote in gubernatorial races, so the vote belongs to the party that registers voters and gets them to the polls.

Anyone interested in canvassing, can contact Wanda Foster at 817.944.6312 to sign up.

Member Speaking series to begin in July

We will start a new series of member speeches to get to know our members better. John Fisher, our Secretary will open the series with a personal story about events in his life, which will be presented by Former Chair Dick Trice on July 9th.

Yazmin to speak at August meeting

Yazmin, an atheist and former Muslim, has dealt with extensive retributions for her beliefs. She will speak at the August 9 HoFW meeting.

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Newsletters and Web site allow pseudonyms to protect privacy, avoid discrimination on the Internet

Re-elected HoFW chair announces 2014 election

by Sam Baker, Chair

Our annual election in May was unanimous, and I am pleased to announce the election of two new board members, Wanda Foster, Vice Chair, and Cynthia Williams, Treasurer. Wanda and Cynthia will bring new ideas and fresh enthusiasm to the Humanists of Fort Worth (HoFW) Board, and we are very lucky they agreed to run for office. John Fisher and I were re-elected as Secretary and Chair, respectively.

Wanda initiated and has already hosted several new social get-togethers at Brewed and Chadra's. In addition, since Don Ruhs resigned, Wanda will serve as editor and Adam as assistant editor of our new newsletter, *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly*. We offer many thanks to Don for his years of service.

Cynthia has collected our financial and banking records from our long-time Treasurer Dolores Ruhs and is currently setting up her new financial management system. We would like to thank Dolores for her many years of service.

Democratizing HoFW

Every dues-paying member should have the opportunity to have a voice and a vote in our organization. To promote more participation in choosing speakers, topics for future meetings, and other important matters, I recently created a Planning Committee, which meets monthly. If you would like to become a committee member, I will add you to the list. Everyone is

welcome to submit ideas for future speakers, topics, and events to a member of the Planning Committee whether or not you want to join the committee.

Welcoming Visitors and New Members

On occasion, visitors have told us they did not feel welcome because no one talked to them at the meeting. I believe this reflects the fact that many of us are introverts by nature. While we actively speak to those we know well, we may be reluctant to speak with someone new. Several members have volunteered to be on the lookout for new visitors to make sure they feel welcome. Since we all are happy to have visitors, we all can help with this.

Anonymity and the Web

A former speaker at one of our meetings contacted us recently to express dismay that one of our newsletters posted on our Web site publicly revealed information about her HoFW presentation, and the first item on a Google search of her name is this newsletter. Like many people, she fears she will experience discrimination at work if her bosses and coworkers become aware she is an atheist.

We understand this concern, and we are currently working to take down the newsletter and remove her name from it.

Many of our members may be unaware, as I was, that Google searches for names in every Internet document, including those posted as PDF files on Web sites. Certainly

this fact may raise concerns for many other people.

Even if the concern is not about work discrimination, members and attendees may be concerned that family members will think less of them or worry about where their souls will spend eternity if they learn about their atheism or agnosticism.

The new newsletter will be highly sensitive to these concerns. We hope that members will periodically contribute to this quarterly publication, and we will certainly allow any contributor to use his or her first name only or to use a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

The editor will make sure that each contributor has made an informed choice whether to use his or her full name, first name only, or a pseudonym.

Aside from the newsletter, anyone who would like to retain anonymity on the Internet with respect to the HoFW should join our Meetup site under his or her first name only or under a pseudonym.

This first issue of our new newsletter contains a poignant, self-reflective article from Adam, our new assistant editor. He eloquently discusses many issues atheists face in their personal lives.

Sadly, we know that people in this country face persecution, discrimination, or loss of community standing merely because they prefer empirical evidence and reason to dogma, folklore, and the supernatural. Unfortunately, this is the world in which we live.

Social events attract steady stream of visitors, newcomers to HoFW

By Wanda Foster, Vice Chair

Colliding Summer Solstice calendars reduced member attendance at the monthly social gathering, but some 15 people still participated in rather active conversation at the HoFW Summer Solstice celebration at Esperanza's on Park Avenue. Most attendees were new people, who recently joined the Meet-Up site. One or two young couples had attended a prior meeting, while quite a few others were completely new and had never met any of us before that night.

Parties and social life are key to maintaining a fun, vibrant organi-

zation that attracts and keeps members. Today, as single populations of all ages increase, more and more of our potential members look for organizations offering diverse opportunities to meet new people who share their beliefs and ideals. Young families look for a place to bring up their children with other families and like-minded organizations.

Most of our fellow organizations offer constant calendars of ongoing social and civic events created for enjoyment or to promote human progress in the community.

As Humanists come together, new

ideas emerge, yielding a wide range of new possibilities for HoFW. This is an exciting time for our organization. My hope is that we will all enjoy and share the fun. If you have a fun idea or a plan for contributing to our community, please contact any officer or Planning Committee member.

Growth is about building and capturing momentum. As the new vice chair, my objective is to help Sam and the Planning Committee create a welcoming, big-tent environment to serve as a strong foundation for our needs today and in the future.



Book Review: *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby

By Morris Meador

Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism, written by Susan Jacoby, first was published in hardback in 2004. Since that time, the book has become very popular among Humanist, Unitarian Universalist, and other nonreligious people, largely because it narrates so well the somewhat hidden story of our nation’s experiment with secularism.

Indeed, Jacoby’s thesis is precisely that this history is covered up, blurred, by a religion-dominated nation. She says in her introduction, “It is one of the greatest unresolved paradoxes of history that religion has come to occupy such an important place in the communal psyche and public life of a nation founded on the separation of church and state.”

The history recounted in *Freethinkers* informs us of the almost miraculous force of Enlightenment-style thinkers who worked together with very sectarian religious groups to found the United States. These people desired freedom from persecution for their beliefs.

Their compromise, forged at the founding of our country, produced a totally secular government and separation of church

and state for the first time in history. The idea of a government established on the basis of human rights and law rather than on religious beliefs and divine authority challenged the thought processes of most major powers of the world at that time.

Today, as in the earliest days of the United States, people who share the secular thoughts of our founders constantly must face assaults from the religious majority. The book tells the stories of great American heroes, who were nonreligious or antireligious—people who were treated with less importance because they held secular views. Thomas Paine, a prime example, published well-known Revolutionary War tracts discussed in history books. Yet his major works against religion, such as *The Age of Reason*, are virtually ignored.

When he nearly died in a foreign prison during the French Revolution, American revolutionary leaders were slow to rescue him.

Jacoby goes on to recount the vital connections between abolitionist and suffragist movements with secularist thought. In a chapter about President Abraham Lincoln, she tells of writers and biographers, who attempted to portray the great Civil War presi-

dent as a Christian or as a religious man. Yet strong evidence suggests that he was a skeptic or an agnostic at best.

Later Jacoby examines attacks on secularism during the Red Scare, the Scopes Trial, and the McCarthy era. The book highlights the lives of many iconic humanists, such as Robert Ingersoll. As Jacoby’s moves us forward to current times, she reviews assaults from fundamentalist Christians and Supreme Court Justices, such as Justice Antonin Scalia, who has undermined secular government and religious freedom, key elements that made this nation great.

Using eloquent language, Jacoby justifies the importance of her book at the end of chapter three:

“The most regrettable consequence of the discontinuity in the record of American rationalist dissent is that its moral lessons must be relearned in every generation. It is telling that even so voracious a reader as [William Lloyd] Garrison was beyond the midpoint of his life when he discovered his spiritual ancestor Thomas Paine. When your own mind is your own church, it can take a very long time for future generations to make their way to the sanctuary.”

Book Club meets fourth Saturday of each month

The Humanist book club formed by HoFW member Morris Meador meets the fourth Saturday of each month at 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, 76110.

Participants select each of the books to be reviewed and discussed. Twelve people attended the May meeting to discuss Chapters 1 – 3 of the book *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby. Chapters 4 – 8 were discussed at the June meeting held June 28 from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Everyone is invited to participate. Contact Morris Meador at meadormorris1@gmail.com for more information about the July session and the next book.

	July	August	September
Key	July 9, Regular Meeting, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX	August 13, Regular Meeting, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth	September 10, Regular Meeting, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth
HoFW	July 22, HoFW Book Club, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth	August 23, 6 p.m., HoFW Book Club, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth	September 23, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth
Events	July 22, 6 p.m., Social, to be announced on Meetup. Com	August 26, 6 p.m., Social, to be announced on Meetup.com	September 26, 6 p.m., Social, to be announced on Meetup.com
Area	FreeThinkers of Fort Worth Volunteer Service, Tarrant County Food Bank, 2600 Cullen Street, Fort Worth, TX, July 2		
Events	Metroplex Atheists, March in Arlington 4th of July Parade, Meet in UTA Parking Lot southeast of the corner of Cooper and Mitchell in Arlington, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Atheist Zachary Moore, Ph.D., Presents “The Blessed Peacemakers,” at Westside Unitarian Universalist Church, 10 a.m. or 11:30 a.m., July 6		
		Events will be added at the following Web site as they are scheduled: http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar	

Letters to the Editor

Future newsletters will contain Letters to the Editor to allow our readers to express their own views and feedback in response to articles in this publication.

Our newsletter policy requires that letters reference a specific article that has appeared in one of the two most recent issues. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Responders should limit their

letters to 150 or 175 words and provide the writer’s address and telephone number. In addition, for those who require anonymity, please provide the name you would like published with the letter. All letters should be exclusive to The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly and should not be published in any other publication.

Anyone who would like to submit a letter can do so by e-

mailing the editor at the following address:
chironent@sbcglobal.net

We have limited space, so we do not guarantee all letters will be published. Letters may be edited or shortened to fit the space.

We request that all content show a respectful tone, even when viewpoints differ from those of *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* or anyone else in or outside of HoFW.

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

Chair: Sam Baker
 Editor and Vice Chair: Wanda Foster
 Assistant Editor: Adam
 Secretary: John Fisher
 Treasurer: Cynthia Williams

<http://www.hofw.org/>

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Opinion

The time may have come for Freedom Summer: 2014

by Wanda Foster

Growing up as a Mississippian with deep roots in Neshoba County, where the three civil rights workers were killed, I learned a few things about racism, religion, social and economic strata, and politics. Watching the KERA public television documentary, “Freedom Summer,” last week brought these issues vividly back into my memories.

Yes, 50 years have passed since brave freedom riders changed some of our world. People everywhere could not believe the separate black and white bathrooms, the separate drinking fountains, and the laws designed to keep blacks from voting. Mississippians felt they were the only ones in the world who seemed to need changing. Although they have

changed, they remain nowhere near perfect. Yet they may have made more progress than the rest of us.

Schools and colleges integrated in 1970 in a way that schools and society in Texas and much of the country never have. After all, the population there is closer to 50 – 50 white and black, and few Mississippians grade themselves by how much money they have. When I moved to Texas in 1972, I realized how much I missed black people in daily life, and in 2014 I still do.

As we saw in a recent primary, Mississippi blacks voted in record numbers—just to block a Tea Party Republican, although we know they will vote Democratic in the fall. The mayor of Philadelphia, Mississippi is black. Yet, the sad thing is that now, 50 years

later, we need a new Freedom Summer 2014. Where? Practically nationwide. Let’s look at our own town, my lovely adopted city, Fort Worth, or its neighboring metropolis, Dallas, two places where practically no integrated social society exists.

Bathrooms, restaurants, and theaters may be integrated, but we all know parts of town where blacks congregate without whites and where whites prefer it that way. We know who is underfunded in terms of tax dollars and socioeconomics. Rationally, we would think Texas would spend more money to improve things there, but it never quite happens.

Nationally, we have our first black president. Everyone knows what is going on in Washington—just beneath the surface. Out front, the Tea Party wears

thinly veiled obstructionist racism, harbored quietly by the unspoken racist, the say-nothings cowering over seats in Congress.

These same people accuse President Obama of doing nothing, playing too much golf, failing to stop all wars. They call him the imperial president. A wise person once said the things we criticize people for often are things of which we are guilty. Let’s see, we have a do-nothing, obstructionist, self-centered Congress sabotaging the people. Those things could be construed as imperialist, lazy, and wrong.

Those things sound oddly like racist criticisms of blacks in Mississippi in 1964. We need to scratch what festers just beneath the surface. We should be mad as hell. Maybe it is time for Freedom Summer 2014.

HoFW Humanist Perspectives

“The easy confidence with which I know another man’s religion is folly teaches me to suspect that my own is also.”

Mark Twain

by Adam

My name is Adam, and I do not believe in God. You will have to forgive the lack of a surname. My belief in the nonexistence of God is not something I am willing to share with most people. If many of my family members knew my beliefs, they would truly expect me to spend an eternity suffering with Old Scratch. To keep them from undue grief, and to keep myself from the same, I am content to keep quiet.

My father was a carpenter and a preacher as a young man. Does that remind you of anyone? He was neither of those things by the time I came along. He is a believer, but he has been mostly silent on religious issues throughout my lifetime. My mother’s side of the family is more outwardly religious, despite lack of formal religious training.

We attended church regularly when I was little and then stopped when I was about 10. Religion was always in the background, but never was a dominant force in my family. I always fashioned myself as a believer, while never paying it much thought.

In college, I met people who had taken a philosophy class or two and had thus become enlightened enough to discard the religion of

their upbringing. These people seemed cliché to me. I was glad not to be one of them. I was not at all religious in those days, but I still held that familial religious belief in the back of my mind.

I married right after college. My wife was brought up to be much more religious than I had been. We started attending church regularly. To this point in my life, I had never thought hard about whether or not God, the Christian one, existed. I just assumed he did. It was obvious that all of the other gods of other religions did not exist, but the one I was taught about was okay. Attending church for the first time since I was a child, I enjoyed the discussions we had on Sunday morning.

During this time, I began paying more attention to lingering doubts. Noah and the great flood? No, that probably did not really happen. Jonah being swallowed by a fish? Of course not. Adam and Eve and a talking snake? Not likely.

Church gave me the opportunity to meet and talk to intelligent young seminarians. When they described a story in the Bible, there was always something else to be learned. The Bible should not be taken as a literal record of events. This troubled me. If that is what they and other educated pastors believed, why did they fail to say that in front of their congregations? Why were they content to let a significant portion of the congregation believe in a

literal Bible? How could brilliant, reasonable minds maintain intellectual integrity when dealing with people like this? The answers I received to these questions struck me as deliberate obfuscations. On the topic of resurrection I was told, “When we speak of resurrection, we mean something different.”

No, ask the average Christian what they believe about the resurrection, and they would tell you about the actual, bodily one. It seems that young clergy learn a liberal theology that emphasizes love and reason. Then they repress all of that knowledge to tell the congregation the same old stuff they have always heard.

The turning point for me was when my wife read *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins. The book was a national best-seller, and she wondered what all the fuss was about. She read it and shared her thoughts with me. As she recounted each point made by Dawkins, light bulbs went off. He had put into writing so many of the thoughts that had been going through my own mind. Could I be an atheist? To quote Dawkins in the book’s preface, “I didn’t know I could.”

I read the book myself and followed it with other titles by Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris: the Four Horsemen indeed. With each one, I became more willing to admit to myself that I had not a shred of the religious faith I had

From the Editor:

Most HoFW members favor science and rationalism over religion, magic, and dogma. Within that realm, we remain a very diverse group, however, with different thoughts, perspectives, and ways of arriving at our beliefs in a world that often is unfriendly to secular thought. This column presents our stories. Many of the names have been changed or limited to first names to protect the innocent.

always thought I had.

So many people I met in church thought about these same things and came to believe in their own images of God. In nature, there are things that are true. A blade of grass is green. It is not blue just because my neighbor thinks it is blue. Likewise, if God existed, there ought to be some things that are true about him. Every person I came across had crafted his own version of God. I could not find any truth in that.

My wife eventually suspected that my reading selections might be due to more than just curiosity. She has slowly come to accept that I do not share her belief in God. Ironically, my shift away from God has corresponded with her shift toward God.

She is now attending seminary with the goal of becoming a writer. I would not have pictured myself married to a seminary student a few years ago, but she would not have pictured herself married to an atheist either.

Bible and Beer Consortium draws standing-room-only crowd to atheist versus Christian debate at Live Oak Lounge Sunday night



Dr. Justin Bass, Ph.D. seminarian and pastor of 1042 Church, and Dr. Zachary Moore, Ph.D. molecular biologist, share their beliefs in a crowded, open forum at the Live Oak Lounge.

By Wanda Foster

A lively crowd of atheists and Christians came together at the Live Oak Lounge at 6 p.m. Sunday for an evening of debate and an open microphone, question-and-answer session.

The debate began with 25-minute opening statements made by the two debaters, Justin Bass, a Dallas Theological Seminary, Ph.D. and pastor of 1042 Church, which meets in The Colony, and Zachary Moore, Ph.D., a molecular biologist with a long list of atheist credentials, including serving as a member of the Board of Directors for the Foundation Beyond Belief and Camp Quest, a secular summer camp for Freethinking children and families. He also is a past coordinator and a current speaker for the Dallas - Fort Worth Coalition of Reason.

Bass answered the question, "Why I am a Christian," and Moore answered the question, "Why I am an atheist." After both opening statements, numerous people came to the microphone to ask questions of either Dr. Bass or Dr. Moore, with rebuttals permitted on either side. At the end of questions and answers, each of

the two debaters then presented closing statements.

Dr. Bass described himself as a friend of Dr. Moore, but said they both agree on only two things: a belief in civil dialog and a view that Lord of the Rings was one of the best movies ever made. While atheists and Christians are different, he said we can agree that "we are not Hitler." He said more open, civil dialog is needed between the sides. He urged people to study Jesus because he was "The Tiger Woods of Compassion. Let's start there." He also urged Christians to attend Free-Thinker events and atheists to participate in Christian events to increase understanding.

While Dr. Bass grew up in a Christian home, he said he first experienced a conversion when he was 20 years old on his way to a fraternity party in Deep Ellum with his girlfriend, now wife. One of them was dressed as Satan and the other as a devil, when he saw and heard a street evangelist talking to someone nearby about Christianity. He describes that event as a life-changing moment for him.

He used the Bible and his belief

in its miracles and prophecies as the basis for his Christian views. He described that the Bible foretold Christ hundreds if not thousands of years before he was born. While other people presented themselves as Messiahs in that same time, he said only Christ seemed to have a transformative effect on the world, changing the beliefs of even Roman emperors and erasing popular Roman gods of the time.

In his own experience, he said Christ alone satisfied his longings and transformed him. At various times in his discussion he urged people to read C.S. Lewis, originally an atheist who became a Christian.

Although Dr. Moore is an atheist today, he also grew up in a Christian home as a Reformed Baptist. He said the Bible itself was his chief reason for becoming an atheist. As a child he read it cover to cover annually for some 5 years and discussed it with his father. Later, however, in college, he was asked to read it as literature and compare it to other religious and philosophical texts.

That was when he began to recognize inconsistencies in the history of the Bible and its various texts. He pointed out that the Gospel of Mark contains completely different words about the same events than other Gospels. That is when he said he discovered that some of it was "more human than divine."

"The more I began to look at that, the more I began to wonder how I did not see these things before," he said. He pointed out that the death of Christ was the most important moment to the Christian religion, and yet no one seemed to be able to remember exactly what he said when he died, and the gospels end in different ways. Part of the problem he said is also the process of how the Bible

came to be accepted as gospel. People in human institutions decided what should be included in the Bible and what should not. The process of canonization appeared to be a human method, rather than a divine process, he said. While the gospels are considered the most sacred Christian scriptures, he began to detect political and psychological influences at work in the processes of approving the works as gospel.

During worship services, he started opening his eyes and looking at all of the people in prayer. Rather than seeing people communicating with God, he said he saw people looking desperate to communicate with God, but unable to reach him.

Besides these issues, he also expressed concerns with the character of the god and the key personalities of the Bible.

"The characters Adam and Eve were set up to fail," he said. "Why did the tree have to be there?" He described the moral problem of being all powerful and all knowing and yet putting Adam and Eve in potential peril.

Another story, the near-sacrifice of Isaac also pointed out problems with the faith. "Father Abraham is not a paradigm of fatherhood," he said, because he was willing to kill his son for the faith. He also pointed to God's commands to Moses asking him to commit genocide against the Midianites, killing even women and children, but taking the young girls for the men of his tribe. "I cannot reconcile this with a moral deity," he said.

Other Beer and Bible Consortium events may be scheduled this summer. As events occur, we will post them on the HoFW Meetup Web site at the following link:

<http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/calendar>.

Treasurer's Report

Cynthia Williams, new HoFW Treasurer, expressed gratitude to outgoing Treasurer Dolores Ruhs for her years of service and for the now-completed transition of funds for the new term.

As of June 30, 2014, HoFW has a balance of \$1,064 in the bank. The Meetup account fee will be due for payment in July.

HoFW currently has 40 paid members.

"Since member dues are our sole income source, increasing membership improves the vitality of our organization and is our only method of funding activities.

"Please share your ideas for increasing membership or bringing in new funds to support us," she said.

During the new term, we will explore any work required to organize as a nonprofit.

Minutes: Humanists of Fort Worth Monthly Meeting, Wednesday, June 11, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Chair Sam Baker. There were 20 persons present.

Our speaker was our newly elected Vice Chair, Wanda Foster, who gave a talk on her humanist philosophy and her world travels, which have been extensive. She focused on Ireland, its beauty exhibited through some stunning photographs, its troubled history going back centuries, and her adventures plus some of the friends she made.

After her talk, the meeting was adjourned for fellowship and refreshments. The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Fisher, Secretary