

HUMANISTS

Volume 13, Number 3

Happy



Humanist

of FORT WORTH

April 2012

This newsletter is presented by the Humanists of Fort Worth (HoFW), Texas for its members.

The "Happy Humanist" symbol is presented by IHEU (International Humanist and Ethical Union).

From the Chair:

We need to elect officers for the coming year (June 2012 to May 2013).

In order to better vest the process of getting quality leaders the current board is putting together a nominating committee. This committee will consist of two non-board members, and the current chair person.

We had no members to volunteer for the committee at the March meeting. I think it is important to put this committee together.

I need to exclude myself for consideration for any board or office position for the coming year. We need new leadership to keep our organization growing. Please consider the group and how important the HoFW is to all involved. If you are interested in volunteering for the nominating committee please let me or any of the board members know.

Thank You,
Gene Gwin, Chair

IN THIS ISSUE

Page:

1. Note from the Chair;
A definition of Humanism;
2. **AFFIRMATIONS OF HUMANISM.**
3. Editorial "'tis the Season";
Topic for April meeting: "Free Will"
4. Book Review: **"The Magic of Reality"**
5. Commentary: John Fisher;
6. Commentary: Sam Baker
7. Commentary: Hugh Nations
8. **Church & STATE; BOOK NOOK;**
Invitation to submit items for the newsletter:
9. Minutes of March meeting;
Quote from the Editor;
10. Dues notice; Membership categories;
Treasurer's Report; Meeting schedule;
Board Members.

HUMANISM

Secular Humanism: a secular philosophy. It embraces human reason, ethics, and justice while specifically rejecting religious dogma, supernaturalism, pseudoscience or superstition as the basis of morality and decision-making.



THE AFFIRMATIONS OF HUMANISM: A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES *



WE ARE COMMITTED to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.

WE DEPLORE efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.

WE BELIEVE that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of life.

WE BELIEVE in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.

WE ARE COMMITTED to the principle of separation of church and state.

WE CULTIVATE the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.

WE ARE CONCERNED with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.

WE BELIEVE in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.

WE ATTEMPT to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.

WE WANT TO PROTECT and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.

WE BELIEVE in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.

WE BELIEVE in the cultivation of moral excellence.

WE RESPECT the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.

WE BELIEVE in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.

WE ARE ENGAGED by the arts no less than by the sciences.

WE ARE CITIZENS of the universe and are excited by the discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.

WE ARE SKEPTICAL of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.

WE AFFIRM HUMANISM as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.

WE BELIEVE in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.

WE BELIEVE in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.

* by PAUL KURTZ

EDITORIAL

DON RUHS

'tis the Season . . .

No, I'm not referring to Christmas, but rather to the High Holy Days of the Easter season. April is the month for the Christian observances of the crucifixion and resurrection of their God, in this case Jesus. Most Christians do not know, or maybe they don't want to know, that this story was taken from myths that existed long before the time of Jesus.

Most of those earlier writings were destroyed by the later Christian church fathers because they ran counter to what *they* believed. And, if they didn't believe it they taught that it was a sin for anyone else to believe those "paganistic" ideologies.

So, what was in those myths that were so wrong?

In the book of Matthew, Jesus was condemned to death, presumably by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:26). But Jesus was not the only mythical character to have suffered the agony of execution because of religious ideologies; there were others long before him

- 1) Crucifixion of Krishna of India, 1200 B.C.
- 2) Crucifixion of the Hindu Sakia, 600 B.C.
- 3) Thammuz of Syria crucified, 1160 B.C.
- 4) Mithra of Persia crucified, 600 B.C.

. . . And, there are many more . . .

See: "Sixteen Crucified Saviors" by Kersey Graves (1813 – 1883).

"Only when literal truth is challenged are we able to float in the profound and limitless sea of ultimate truth. I assume that when I explore Easter I will have to explore mythologies, legends, and symbols.

With this thought in mind, we must start our search for the truth of Easter by recognizing the presence of mythological narratives in the Christian story. They were designed to capture the meaning of both the origin and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth, who was cast as the mythic hero. The domi-

nant myth of his origin was expressed in the story of the virgin birth-a theme that has been repeated countless times in almost every religious system from Zoroaster to Romulus and Remus. The ultimate destiny of this Jesus was portrayed in the mythological account of his return to God in a cosmic ascension, another theme that is quite popular in many religious traditions. Buddha and Osiris come immediately to mind in this context."

From: "Resurrection: Myth or Reality?" (1994) by Bishop John Shelby Spong.

April 11th Meeting
(Second Wednesday of the Month)

Topic: Free Will

Presenter: Don Ruhs

Don will do a synopsis of how he understands the concept of "free will."

- Do we have *free will*? If so, where did it come from? Do the "lower animals" have *free will*?

Following a coffee and snack break, we will reassemble for a general discussion.

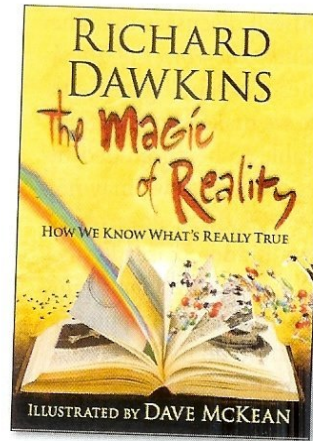
Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

Voltaire (1694-1778)

The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True

by Richard Dawkins;
illustrated by Dave McKean
Free Press, 2011
272 pp.; \$29.99

Review by Ute Mitchell



Who was the first person really? Why are there so many different kinds of animals? What are things made of? Why do we have night and day, winter and summer? Why do bad things happen? These fundamental questions and so many more are answered in Richard Dawkins' new book, *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True*.

All the things a child may inquire about, and all the things a parent, such as myself, may struggle to answer, are explained in vivid yet digestible sections in this book. Each chapter begins with a question, for example, "When and how did everything begin?" Dawkins first explores non-scientific, mythical answers to his questions because, he writes, "they are colorful and interesting, and real people have believed them. Some people still do." He then proceeds to explain what and why things *really* are. Science, he proves, is truly magical, and he takes the young reader (and his or her parents) on a journey of amazing facts, magical myths, and memorable anecdotes.

But for all of its wondrous information and Dawkins' engaging style, *The Magic of Reality* would not be complete without the extraordinary illustrations by award-winning artist Dave McKean. Together,

Dawkins and McKean have created the best science book this home-schooling family has ever seen.

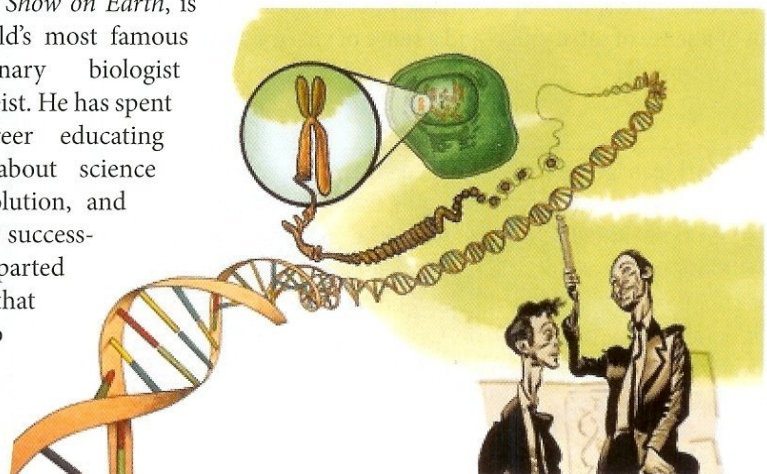
Fair warning: the book is dense and, depending on a child's age, can be a bit overwhelming. So, how should one use a book such as this? After all, it's hardly a bedtime story. In my home, where we share *The Magic of Reality* with a ten-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy, reading a chapter has become a regular Sunday morning activity. We take turns reading and follow up with a discussion about each fact and story. We ask questions, the kids try to answer, and vice versa. Our children offer amazing insights, and we all learn something new each time.

Dawkins, author of numerous books, including *The Selfish Gene*, *The God Delusion*, and *The Greatest Show on Earth*, is the world's most famous evolutionary biologist and atheist. He has spent his career educating adults about science and evolution, and has now successfully departed from that path to excite

young people with the wonders of science.

"I hope you agree that the truth has a magic of its own," Dawkins writes in the final sentence of the book. "The truth is more magical—in the best and most exciting sense of the word—than any myth or made-up mystery or miracle. Science has its own magic: the magic of reality." I couldn't agree more with this sentiment, and highly recommend *The Magic of Reality* to any parent eager to introduce the subject of science to their child. 📖

Ute Mitchell lives, writes, and homeschools in Portland, Oregon. Check out her blog at <http://humanistathome.blogspot.com> for her latest musings.



CAPITALISM, MEDICINE, AND THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY: THE RESISTANCE TO REFORM, PART ONE

Submitted by John Fisher, Recording Secretary, HoFW

"The crisis in today's health care system is deeply rooted in the interwoven history of medicine and corporate capitalism." [1]

With the progress of the American Industrial Revolution in the 19th century came the rise of a new class of elites: the corporate capitalists, prominent among whom were John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and Andrew M. Carnegie, visionaries who very deliberately began to build a new social order (urbanized and organized around industry), which they intentionally designed for the support and defense of the economic and cultural predominance of capitalism. One problem for the industrialists was how to improve the health of the workforce, whose illnesses were resulting in absenteeism and attrition and eating into productivity and profits.

Medicine had only gained a scientific footing and the respect of the working and middle classes with the work of Pasteur, Lister and others from the midpoint of the century forward. In order to effect the changes that would serve their corporate interests, the men of industry turned, respectively, to philanthropy in the form of corporately-sponsored medical foundations; to the private universities (not the state-funded universities, for fear of excessive government interference); and to the new *science* of medicine itself. Through the funding mechanisms of their medical foundations, and by the agency of those foundations' directing officers, they reshaped and re-birthed American medicine, enforcing the limiting of the numbers of new physicians, facilitating the elevation of the social status of doctors, and standardizing the study of medicine and the requirements for licensure, -- by overseeing the establishment of privately funded medical schools with full-time professorial staff. This was acted from genuinely humane motives, but ultimately to further corporate interests. The history of the sometimes-conflicting but ultimately converging motives of medicine and America's corporate class engendered a profit-driven health-care paradigm that persists through the present day. [2]

"A 1919 State of Illinois study reported that lost wages due to sickness were four times larger than the medical expenses associated with treating the illness (State of Illinois, pp. 15-17). ... The low demand for health insurance at the time was matched by the unwillingness of commercial insurance companies to offer private insurance policies. . . . According to The Insurance Monitor, "The opportunities for fraud [in health insurance) upset all statistical calculations. . . . Health and sickness are vague terms open to endless construction. Death is clearly defined, but to say what shall constitute such loss of health as will justify insurance compensation is no easy task'" [3]

There was not a perceived need in general for health insurance prior to 1920; while commercial insurers did not offer health insurance in this period, a sizeable portion of their business was offering burial insurance to cover funeral costs. Proposals to enact compulsory health insurance in several states, attempting to follow the example of many European countries, were defeated, not only because the demand for health insurance among the American public at that period was low, but because physicians, pharmacists and insurers all opposed the idea because they feared that government interference would limit their fees and/or interfere with their business.

1. Brown, E. Richard, *Rockefeller Medicine Men: Medicine and Capitalism in America*. University of California Press: Berkely, 1979, Introduction.

2. *Ibid*

3. Melissa Thomasson, *Health Insurance in the United States*, EH.NET ENCYCLOPEDIA: Miami University, Posted 2010-02-01.

(CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)

Preying on the Weak: Free Enterprise Health Care and the Uninsured

Submitted by Sam Baker Vice-Chair, HoFW

A hallmark of free enterprise is the right to charge what one wants to for one's products and services. Here's how it works in health care.

A few years ago an uninsured, self-employed friend went to the emergency room at the urging of his wife because his nose had bled for a disturbingly long time after he had taken a lot of over-the-counter sinus medicine. At the ER he was given an X-ray (to check for tumor or obstruction) and some bloodwork to check cell count. He was told to pay \$2500 within ten (10) days, or they would bill him \$8000 (does the word extortion come to mind?). After paying the \$2500, he subsequently received other bills totalling \$606 for the doctor's services, the X-rays, and the bloodwork. So what was the original \$2500 bill for?

Federal law requires that patients who receive the same services are charged the same amounts, whether they have insurance or not.

But of course there's a free market loophole: hospitals are allowed to accept different payments from different patients, and they just happen to accept much smaller payments from insurance companies. They accept even less from government programs like Medicare and Medicaid. But, by a strange coincidence, they usually only accept the full list price from uninsured people.

Why? Because, they can. Uninsured individuals have no bargaining power--hospitals don't care whether they have their business or not--and usually no resources to contest whatever they are charged. In contrast, insured people have the bargaining power and resources of an insurance company standing between them and the hospital, and the insurance company most likely has already entered into a comprehensive contract with the hospital concerning what prices it will pay for various services.

A 60 Minutes investigation in February of 2009 found that hospitals routinely charge uninsured people four or five times more than what they accept as payment in full from insurance companies.

60 Minutes cited the example of a man who was charged \$246,000 for treatment for which an insurance company would have paid just under \$50,000.

This is what is known as predatory pricing.

Why do the hospitals do it? According to Amanda Thai, author of a University of Iowa law review article on the subject, the hospitals need the money in order to compensate for the low rates negotiated by the insurance companies.

You read that right-- uninsured people with jobs and assets are, in essence, subsidizing the insured here in America. But how do the hospitals collect the money from the uninsured? By garnishing their wages and placing liens on their homes. Carillon Health Care in Roanoke, Va., sued 9,888 patients in a single year, garnishing the wages of 5,478 people and placing liens on 3,920 homes, according to Thai.

But uninsured people could shop around, compare prices at different hospitals, and negotiate the lowest price, right? Not when their appendix is about to burst or when they are having a heart attack.

Even absent a medical emergency, it is impossible to shop prices between hospitals because they keep their price list— known as the "charge master" — secret, and there is no way to compel them to reveal what their list prices are, or, more importantly, what they are willing to accept as payment in full from insurance companies.

A provision in the "socialistic" health care reform law seeks to prevent nonprofit hospitals from engaging in predatory billing practices by requiring them to charge uninsured patients the same rates they accept from insured patients. Hospitals that violate the provision risk losing their tax-exempt status.

Baptist pastor Rev. Dennis Terry recently said, "[T]his nation was founded as a Christian nation. . . [W]e worship God's son Jesus Christ."

Really? Does our Christian nation follow Jesus' commandment to "do to others what you would have them do to you?" Would Jesus charge the uninsured four or five times more than the insured if he was a hospital administrator?

That this is a Christian nation, or that Americans even attempt to follow the teachings of Jesus, is part of our national mythology. Who we really worship is the god of free enterprise who commands us to pursue our own self-interest and to maximize profits however they can be had.

In the 'War on Women's Health,' I'm AWOL

By Hugh Nations

Although I am a vigorous, true-believing liberal who proudly wears and even flaunts that label, I have not enlisted to fight against the Republican "War on Women's Health."

It isn't that I don't believe there are some equities to the claims of those who oppose the GOP's suicidal focus on reproductive issues. However, as a long-time foot-soldier in the gender wars, I have some unpleasant memories of earlier skirmishes. And, frankly, I have reservations, with respect to contraception, about whether women have not brought some of this upon themselves.

This is not a comfortable position for me. I have a visceral, wrenching reaction when I see conservatives trying once again to limit the options of others to their own advantage. It is the same sort of reaction I have when I see vocal women's advocates trying to limit the options of men to their own advantage.

The current brouhaha began over abortion and "a woman's right to choose." There is a major problem with that phrase, "a woman's right to choose." For me, it translates as "a woman's demand to force her wishes on the other party to a pregnancy." We make no provision whatsoever for the putative father to have a role in abortion. He is given no role in the decision itself, and in fact is not even required to be given notice even afterward, much less before. This, in a country that supposedly wishes to deeply involve fathers with their children. Until conception, men and women are regarded as equal partners; upon conception, however, the male is instantly and forever after rendered a second-class parent. So much is that true that in many states, unless a father formally acknowledges paternity within 30 days of birth, his child can be stripped from him forever by adoption. Understand, the father doesn't even have to know of the pregnancy, and actually could have been lied to about it; he *still* loses his child.

From abortion, the current partisan debate has moved to contraception. My guess is that we would never have reached this point of political disagreement if we had devoted as much attention to men's health as we have to women's health, because by now we would have a male contraceptive equivalent to The Pill. With that advancement in reproduction medicine, women would find that the great majority of men would be their allies in this fight.

We don't have a contraceptive for men, though, probably in part because of those earlier skirmishes I mentioned. Thirty years ago, complaints arose that research into women's health concerns was being done largely on males. It was a valid complaint, though the reasons were mostly logistical and biological rather than based on deliberate discrimination. Men do not experience the frequency or variability of the hormonal changes

that women do, a consideration for much research that requires consistent physiological reactions. And the largest cohorts of available research subjects, the military and prison populations, are mostly male. Nonetheless, the problem was acknowledged, and the research community took corrective measures.

Then arose another male-vs-female hue and cry over health, and this one not only was without substance, it was actually harmful. Strident gender activists contended that research funding by the federally financed National Institutes for Health, the source of vast pools of research money, was grossly skewed toward men's issues. They noted that well under 10 percent was devoted to women's research, leaving the impression that the balance was directed towards men's health. In actuality, the funding for men's concerns was substantially less than that devoted to women's health; the rest was allocated to health issues affecting *both* sexes. That never seemed to get mentioned, though, so the narrative that women were victimized by health research funding took root. As a result, NIH funding for women's health issues rose to consume a larger percentage of the NIH budget; spending for men, already underfunded, fell further behind.

So it is that I find the "right" which occasioned the "War on Women's Health" to be less a right than an injustice inflicted on putative fathers, whose voices are never heard about their unborn children. And the prospective denial of contraceptive benefits is, I think, the result of a health system that is skewed to benefit primarily women and that thus has never seriously sought a contraceptive for men. So I view the attack on women's health care with some bemusement.

Women's life expectancy in this country is five years more than that of men. On an age-adjusted basis, men die sooner or more frequently from a large majority of the 15 leading causes of death in this country. Suicide, for example, is the 11th overall cause of death, but is the eighth leading cause of death for men and only the 25th for women; it claims almost four times as many males as females. Obviously, the "war" being waged on women's health is much more productive for them than is the neglect that men have experienced for long decades now.

Hugh Nations, of Austin, TX, is a retired attorney and journalist, and the former editor of Transitions: Journal of Men's Perspectives.



Church & STATE



the BOOK NOOK

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States—"The Establishment Clause."

From Americans United for the Separation of Church & State

Americans Oppose Preachy Politicians, Poll Shows

March 2012
AU Bulletin

A recent survey conducted by LifeWay Research found that just 16 percent of Americans are more likely to vote for candidates who speak regularly about their religious beliefs.

In fact, religious discussion is a turnoff for many voters. Thirty percent of poll respondents said they were less likely to vote for candidates who flaunt their religious commitments.

"Different people get a different picture in their mind when a political candidate shares or shows their religious convictions," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research, the research arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. "While some Americans warm up to this, many don't see it as a positive."

Respondents who identified as born-again, evangelical or fundamentalist Christian are only 17 percent more likely to vote for the candidate espousing religious convictions compared to voters who do not share their beliefs. Similarly, these self-identified conservative Christians are only 16 percent more likely to choose "depends on the religion" when picking a candidate compared to those who do not identify with these beliefs.

The least surprising finding was that nonreligious Americans don't like overly religious candidates. Sixty-seven percent of respondents who do attend

This space is intended to focus attention on books, authors, subjects and articles that may be of interest to humanists, agnostics, atheists, and freethinkers.

Some personalities and authors whose writings are known to favor, or influence, the humanist philosophy:

Sam Harris (1967-): "The End of Faith"; "Letter to a Christian Nation"; "The Moral Landscape"; "Free Will"; "Lying"

Daniel C. Dennett (1942-): "Breaking the Spell"; "Elbow Room"

Robert Wright (1957-): "The Moral Animal"; "Three Scientists and Their Gods"; "The Evolution of God"

Victor J. Stenger (1935-): "Quantum Gods"; "God-The Failed Hypothesis"; "The New Atheism"

Of course there are many others; these are *some* that I've read and are *some* of my favorites. Who are your favorites?



! NOTICE !

Members of HoFW are encouraged to submit items for inclusion in the Monthly Newsletter.

All items submitted will be edited for space and relevance to Humanist principles. (See page 2)

worship services said repeated religious rhetoric would make them "less likely to vote for a candidate." Just 3 percent would be more likely to vote for the candidate.

For more articles from AU go to: www.au.org

**Humanists of Fort Worth
(HoFW)
Monthly Meeting, March 14, 2012**

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. By Chair Gene Gwin.

The Chair called for the Secretary's Report. The report was presented by John Fisher, and approved by the membership as read.

The Chair called for the Treasurer's Report. The report was presented by Dolores Ruhs, and approved by the membership as read.

The Chair announced that it is time to form a Nominating Committee to provide a list of candidates for our upcoming election of officers. The Nominating Committee is to consist of the Chair and two non-board HoFW members; nominations will be announced in May, elections to take place in June.

The Chair called on Past Chair and HoFW Newsletter Editor, Don Ruhs to introduce the speaker for the evening.

This month's speaker was Mary Jane Themudo, B.S.W., with The Women's Center, who spoke on their services for women, men and children in transition or who have been victims of sexual assault or abuse.

After a short break for refreshments, there was a Q&A session. Literature from the Women's Center was made available to all present.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

There were twenty-three members present, including two new members.

Respectfully submitted,
John Fisher, Secretary

**There was never a time when
there was nothing,
If there were, there would be
nothing now.**

Don Ruhs (1935-)

NOTICE

Membership dues were scheduled to be collected in March.

See below for explanation of membership categories.

Dues will be graciously received by your Treasurer.

NOTICE**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:**

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| 1) Single Member | \$25.00/yr. |
| 2) Couple | \$40.00/yr. |
| 3) Patron | \$50.00/yr. |
| 4) Student | \$10.00/yr. |

Choose the category that best fits your needs. See the Treasurer or member of the Board for an application.

Pay in cash or mail the application, with your check, to the Treasurer.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Report Date: **March 14, 2012**

| | |
|--------------------|------------|
| Beginning Balance: | \$1,003.98 |
| Credits: | 0 |
| Debits: | 0 |
| Ending Balance | \$1,003.98 |

Dolores Ruhs, Treasurer

The Humanists of Fort Worth (HoFW) meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM at the Westside Unitarian Universalist Building, 901 Page Ave.

Our officers and Board Members:

Chair: Gene Gwin

Phone: 817-723-3444

Email: tgwin@att.net

Vice Chair: Sam Baker

Phone: 817-994-8868

Email: sambaker@hotmail.com

Secretary: John Fisher

Phone: 682-556-9894

Email: jmfthird@hotmail.com

Treasurer: Dolores Ruhs

Phone: 817-249-1829

Email: ruhsdol@sbcglobal.net

Recent Past Chair: Dick Trice

Phone: 817-446-4696

Email: trice933@att.net

Newsletter Editor and Past Chair: Don Ruhs

Phone: 817-343-3650

Email: laidback935@sbcglobal.net