



The Ft Worth Humanists meet on the second Wednesday of each month at 7 PM. The gathering site is the Unitarian/Universalist Building 901 Page Ave. Prior to the meeting, several of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria, 2800 8th Ave. at 5:30 P M. All are welcome to join us!



## New Slate of Officers Chosen by The Humanists of Ft Worth

At our April Meeting, new officers were elected to head the Ft Worth Humanists for the coming year. Michael Little was elected chair and Josh Donnoe was chosen as our vice-chair. Suzy Lotven is our new secretary and the position of treasurer will continue in the capable hands of Dolores Ruhs.

Congratulations to the new officers.

**The Humanists of Ft Worth will not hold its monthly meeting at the Unitarian/Universalist building this coming Wednesday.**

Instead we will attend an award ceremony honoring our former secretary Reed Bilz. Reed will receive Civil Libertarian of the year award from the local chapter of the ACLU. The event will be held at the Ft Worth Botanical Gardens conservatory beginning at 6:30 PM see: <http://www.fwb.org/> Our own Russell Elleven will be the principal speaker. Refreshments will be served.

**Only 28% of Americans believe in evolution (and two-thirds of these believe evolution was "guided by God"). 53% are actually creationists.**

## Lizards Undergo Rapid Evolution After Introduction To A New Home

In 1971, biologists moved five adult pairs of Italian wall lizards from their home island of Pod Kopiste, in the South Adriatic Sea, to the neighboring island of Pod Mrcaru. Now, an international team of researchers has shown that introducing these small, green-backed lizards, *Podarcis sicula*, to a new environment caused them to undergo rapid and large-scale evolutionary changes.

"Striking differences in head size and shape, increased bite strength and the development of new structures in the lizard's digestive tracts were noted after only 36 years, which is an extremely short time scale," says Duncan Irschick, a professor of biology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. "These physical changes have occurred side-by-side with dramatic changes in population density and social structure."

Researchers returned to the islands twice a year for three years, in the spring and summer of 2004, 2005 and 2006. Captured lizards were transported to a field laboratory and measured for snout-vent length, head dimensions and body mass. Tail clips taken for DNA analysis confirmed that the Pod Mrcaru lizards were genetically identical to the source population on Pod Kopiste.

Observed changes in head morphology were caused by adaptation to a different food source. According to Irschick, lizards on the barren island of Pod Kopiste were well-suited to catching mobile prey, feasting mainly on insects. Life on Pod Mrcaru, where they had never lived before, offered them an abundant supply of plant foods, including the leaves and stems from native shrubs. Analysis of the stomach contents of lizards on Pod Mrcaru showed that their diet included up to two-thirds plants, depending on the season, a large increase over the population of Pod Kopiste.

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"As a result, individuals on Pod Mrcaru have heads that are longer, wider and taller than those on Pod Kopiste, which translates into a big increase in bite force," says Irschick. "Because plants are tough and fibrous, high bite forces allow the lizards to crop smaller pieces from plants, which can help them break down the indigestible cell walls."

Examination of the lizard's digestive tracts revealed something even more surprising. Eating more plants caused the development of new structures called cecal valves, designed to slow the passage of food by creating fermentation chambers in the gut, where microbes can break down the difficult to digest portion of plants. Cecal valves, which were found in hatchlings, juveniles and adults on Pod Mrcaru, have never been reported for this species, including the source population on Pod Kopiste.

"These structures actually occur in less than 1 percent of all known species of scaled reptiles," says Irschick. "Our data shows that evolution of novel structures can occur on extremely short time scales. Cecal valve evolution probably went hand-in-hand with a novel association between the lizards on Pod Mrcaru and microorganisms called nematodes that break down cellulose, which were found in their hindguts."

Change in diet also affected the population density and social structure of the Pod Mrcaru population. Because plants provide a larger and more predictable food supply, there were more lizards in a given area on Pod Mrcaru. Food was obtained through browsing rather than the active pursuit of prey, and the lizards had given up defending territories.

"What is unique about this finding is that rapid evolution can affect not only the structure and function of a species, but also influence behavioral ecology and natural history," says Irschick.

Results of the study were published March 25 in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. This research was supported by the National Science Foundation and the Fund for Scientific Research in Flanders. Additional members of the research team include Anthony Herrel of Harvard University and the University of Antwerp,

Kathleen Huyghe, Bieke Vanhooydonck, Thierry Backeljau and Raoul Van Damme of the University of Antwerp, Karin Breugelmans of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences and Irena Grbac of the Croatian Natural History Museum.

*Note: This story has been adapted from a news release issued by the University Of Massachusetts, Amherst*

### **Depending on who you listen to, the importance of religion in US politics is either on the rise or in decline.**

To some, the death of old evangelical war-horses like Jerry Falwell, and with them the decline of groups like the Moral Majority, has signaled the end of the Religious Right's influence on American politics. Others argue that the attention being paid to religion by candidates on both sides shows that evangelicals have retained their political importance, while no-longer simply falling into line behind the Republican Party.

In the cover story for the May/June issue of New Humanist we asked James Crabtree, director of public services at IPPR, to investigate. Earlier this year James worked for the Obama campaign in New Hampshire, where he gained first-hand experience of the role of religion in US politics. He analyzes how the evangelical movement is changing, and asks whether it's possible they might vote Democrat in November.

Moving from one secular democracy to another, godless Americans should perhaps be thankful that the public face of religion doesn't reach quite the same levels of absurdity as it does in India where Sanal Edamaruku, president of the Indian Rationalist Association, recently challenged a guru to kill him live on national TV. In a televised debate, tantrik guru Pandit Surinder Sharma claimed the ability to strike down anyone in minutes using only tantrik mantras.

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As Sanal recounts he saw the perfect opportunity to expose these claims, and hundreds of millions of Indians tuned in as the guru took up his challenge. Follow the links to see what happened.

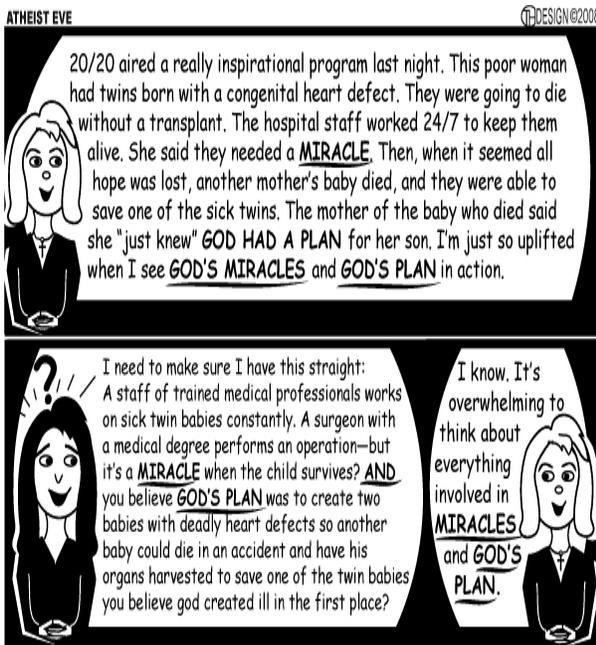
If that was a great victory for rationalism, our new issue shows there's still plenty of irrationality around, and it might be closer than you think. Danish professor Peter C. Kjaergaard reports on the worrying rise of creationism in Europe;

Doug Ireland assesses the doublespeak of Islamic "reformist" and box-office intellectual Tariq Ramadan. Elsewhere, Winston Fletcher travels to Syria and boozes his way around contradictory Muslim attitudes towards alcohol, Sally Feldman reflects on the pain and pleasure of high heels, and Andrew Mueller explains why you should avoid attending a summer music festival, possibly the most irrational act of all.

Follow the link below to enter the full newsletter, and access all this and more.

- \* US Elections: Nailing the faith vote
- \* The night they tried to kill me live on TV
- \* Irrational world: Creationists, drink and festivals
- \* Memories of a promised land: Israel's 60th anniversary **cut and paste the following:**

<http://newhumanist.org.uk/>



## I Am Evolution

*As heard on NPR's Weekend Edition Sunday, May 11, 2008.* I believe evolution. It's easy. It's my life. I'm a paleoanthropologist. I study fossils of humans, apes and monkeys, and I teach college students about their place in nature.

Of course I believe evolution. But that is different from believing *in* evolution.

To believe in something takes faith, trust, effort, strength. I need none of these things to believe evolution. It just is. My health is better because of medical research based on evolution. My genetic code is practically the same as a chimpanzee's. My bipedal feet walk on an earth full of fossil missing links. And when my feet tire, those fossils fuel my car.

To believe in something also implies hope. Hope of happiness, reward, forgiveness, eternal life. There is no hope wrapped up in my belief. Unless you count the hope that one day I'll discover the most beautifully complete fossil human skeleton ever found, with a label attached saying exactly what species it belonged to, what food it ate, how much it hunted, if it could speak, if it could laugh, if it could love and if it could throw a curveball. But this fantasy is not why I believe evolution—as if evolution is something I hope comes true.

After all the backyard bone collecting I did as a child, I managed to carve out a career where I get to ask the ultimate question on a daily basis: "Where did I come from and how?" If our beliefs are important enough, we live our lives in service to them. That's how I feel about evolution. My role as a female Homo sapiens is to return each summer to Kenya, dig up fossils, and piece together our evolutionary history.

Scanning the ground for weeks, hoping to find a single molar, or gouging out the side of a hill, one bucket of dirt at a time, I'm always in search of answers to questions shared by the whole human species. The experience deepens my understanding not just about what drives my life, but all our lives, where we came from. And the deeper I go, the more I understand that everything is connected.

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A bullfrog to a gorilla, a hummingbird to me, to you.

My belief is not immutable. It is constantly evolving with accumulating evidence, new knowledge and breakthrough discoveries. For example, within my lifetime, our history has expanded from being rooted three million years ago with the famous Lucy skeleton, to actually beginning over six million years ago with a cranium from Chad. The metamorphic nature of my belief is not at all like a traditional religious one, it's more like seeing is believing.

So I believe evolution.

I feel it. I breathe it. I listen to evolution, I observe it and I do evolution. I write, study, analyze, scrutinize and collect evolution. I am evolution.

*Holly Dunsworth is a postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Anthropology at Pennsylvania State University. She co-directs excavations on an island in the Kenyan waters of Lake Victoria, where the fossils date back some 18 million years.*

## From People For the American Way

After spending more than 20 years listening to right-wing leaders as both an advocate and journalist, I thought I'd pretty much heard it all. Then came last week's revelations that John McCain backer [Rev. John Hagee](#) had preached that God sent Hitler to "hunt" the Jews back to the land of Israel. I figured that would be enough for McCain to break with Hagee -- and he did, at least [publicly](#). But this week, we learned that Senator Joe Lieberman, McCain's shadow on the campaign trail, was still praising Hagee and still planning to speak at his big conference in July.

So People For joined several other progressive groups and launched a "Reject Hagee" [petition](#) urging Sen. Joe Lieberman to cancel his appearance. Hate-mongers like Hagee

get credibility and validation they don't deserve when public officials like McCain and Lieberman embrace them. Already, 10,000 of your fellow People For activists have joined forces to [send a message](#) to Lieberman that he should distance himself from Hagee like his candidate McCain has.

By the way, you can get great daily reporting and analysis on John Hagee and other Radical Right figures by reading People For's [Right Wing Watch blog](#). The Right Wing tracking on the blog was the source for much of the coverage exposing Hagee's extremism -- it's certainly the best place to look if you want news on the Right several days before it bubbles up to the national press. You can get a weekly "Best of the Blog" e-mail update by signing up [here](#). Or, if you'd like, you can stay updated with the blog's [RSS feed](#).

We are busy working to keep the John Hagees of the world from getting the Supreme Court of their dreams, and we'll have plenty for you to do between now and November. You can start by circulating our [Top Ten Reasons to Save the Court](#) (which I recently posted on the blog OpenLeft on behalf of the People For the American Way Voters Alliance) to your friends. Be on the lookout in coming weeks for a jazzed-up version of the top ten list, video and multimedia tools and online ads to counter the barrage of Court ads being placed on web sites by the [McCain campaign](#) and the [RNC](#).

Things are moving fast and these are exciting times. Together, and with your continued -- *and much-appreciated* -- support, we will do great things, including but not limited to exposing and defeating the Radical Religious Right, protecting Americans' right to vote from right-wing voter suppression and saving the Supreme Court from its dangerous rightward slide in November.

## Parenting Beyond Belief: The "Out" Parent

*(HNN's Parenting Beyond Belief column provides a forum for humanist parents and parenting experts to share their wisdom, advice and knowledge of parenting and family issues. Edited by Dale McGowan, the monthly column features guest writers who provide information and support about issues affecting freethought parents and children in the 21st century.)*

COLUMN By NOELL HYMAN  
For [HumanistNetworkNews.org](http://HumanistNetworkNews.org)

I walked into my child's preschool one day right before class was to let out. There was a lobby full of parents and one of them raised her voice above the crowd to say to me, "I noticed your license plate says AGMOM. What does that mean?"

Those of you who have read my articles or blog will recognize it as my blog name, Agnostic Mom. While most of my friends know about this, it wasn't something I wanted to shout across a crowded room of parents at my child's preschool. Yet there they all were, staring at me, curious.

I had figured out an evasive strategy for these types of situations. It goes like this.

- 1.) Give a vague, answer, like "Oh, it's just a blog name I used to use."
- 2.) Immediately change the subject. For example, "What are the kids doing? I was so worried I'd be late today because I was..."

My strategy, which I only used in the most threatening situations, seemed to work until the principal of my older children's elementary school took notice of the plates. Thanks to my state's open enrollment policy, my kids attend a progressive public school that is outside of our district.

But don't get the wrong idea. The school is progressive by Mormon-dominated Mesa, Arizona standards, and most of the students are Mormon or active in some other Christian religion.

As I was dropping my kids off at the front of the school one morning, the principal, always happy and enthusiastic, swung the car door open for the kids to get out and asked me, "What does AG-MOM mean?"

I gave my usual "blog name" response, but before I could move on to strategy step number two he asserted, "but what does the AG stand for?"

I had one of those moments where the world somehow pauses for you while a page worth of thoughts and images swim through your mind. This is the argument happening in my mind during that moment:

*He can easily kick my kids out of this school or not allow them back next year.*

*Yeah, but he's progressive and liberal in his philosophies.*

*Progressive or not, he's a Mormon and a believer.*

*But he has filled the school with non-Mormon teachers...he's got a reputation for openness.*

I blurted it out, "It means Agnostic Mom."

He got a look on his face that suggested a realization he had probed in the wrong place; as if to say, "Sorry for making you answer that. It's really not my business."

He waved goodbye, and immediately the librarian stopped me to say hi. "What does your license plate mean?"

I couldn't believe it. Twice within a minute? But the worst was done. The man with the power to end the type of education that is perfect for my children already knows what it means. Nothing else matters now.

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I couldn't believe it. Twice within a minute? But the worst was done. The man with the power to end the type of education that is perfect for my children already knows what it means. Nothing else matters now.

"It means Agnostic Mom," I said, and flashed the librarian a big smile.

Surprised, he let me go, and life has continued as usual. My children were accepted to return to the school next year and even my preschooler will get to start in August for kindergarten.

While Arizona is conservative, the state leans libertarian. Even most Mormons follow a "Live and Let Live" mentality.

Things might have gone differently if we were living in Kansas, a part of the less tolerant Bible-belt where I finished high school. But after five years of telling people I'm atheist or agnostic (whichever term I feel like using at the time) I have not lost a friend and neither have my children. They have chosen to be open about not believing in gods, as well.

Once in a while there is even a surprise response. Like the time my daughter replied to a cafeteria discussion of Jesus with, "I don't believe in Jesus." Her closest friend, whose mother I befriended more than two years prior, answered, "I don't either."

In all those play dates when we swapped ideas on vegetarianism, environmentalism, travel and arts, religion never came into our minds. I had no idea. So when my daughter told me her story, I called and the mother was just as surprised and delighted as I was.

Then last week, my washer repairman asked me what my license plate means and I told him, "Agnostic Mom."

"You don't believe in God?" I laughed, "No." And suddenly he wouldn't stop talking, like I was the first person in years he could share his stories with.

I can't think of a circumstance now where I wouldn't feel comfortable answering a question about my license plate. Venturing into that territory has been a positive thing for me.

Introducing believers to a happy godless person is a positive thing for everyone.

*Noell Hyman is a stay-at-home mom of three children, living in Mesa, Arizona. The once-blogger for AgnosticMom.com, was a regular columnist for Humanist Network News. She is the author of two articles in the book, Parenting Beyond Belief, by Dale McGowan. She now blogs and podcasts on her favorite subject, which is the visual art of story-telling through scrapbooking.*

## The end of my editorship has arrived!

I will be compiling one more issue of The Cowtown Humanist (July '08); then I'll make room for someone else. After more than two years as editor I feel it is time for me to step down and allow someone else to take over the position. I enjoyed my run, but think it's time to let another member edit our publication — Ray

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