

Please don't dismiss *Atheist Bliss*



Eric Paul Erickson

Eric Paul Erickson dedicates *Atheist Bliss* to mythologist Joseph Campbell for his oft-quoted advice to “follow your bliss,” wherever it may lead.

It led Erickson, an FFRF member, to envision and complete *Atheist Bliss*, “a photo exploration of atheists in America.” It features 44 photographs — a mix of color and black and white — of “ordinary” freethinkers posing with short statements of their choice.

For example, Bob Kitson, a stand-up comic, chose “Fully Evolved Mammal” for his poster. George Carlin’s words are on the facing page: “Atheism is a non-prophet organization.”

Musician Cris Caplan posed with his guitar and a sign, “Music is my Religion!” His statement: “The absence of religion in my life allowed me to better understand my unique self and creativity. That is why I am happy.”

“I found my subjects in various ways,” says Erickson, “some through ads on Craigslist and other online sources, some through working with freethinker groups and some through word of mouth. There was also a lot of ‘You know, my friend so and so is an atheist. I should ask them if they would be interested.’ ”

The ground rules were simple. Participants were asked to create signs on poster board. The sign could either describe how they refer to themselves, quote a famous freethinker who resonated with them or put forth their own

statement to share with the world.

Erickson, who lives with his wife Shari in Los Angeles, is a University of Southern California graduate who for a time worked in television, film and theater before joining the Roswell [N.M.] Daily Record and later the Chicago Tribune as a journalist. His 2005 freelance investigative piece “Over the Ocean, Under the Knife” detailed medical tourism in Thailand and Malaysia. He co-wrote *The Civil War* and *Weird, Scary and Unusual* for Publications International’s Armchair Guide series.

Now, his Temple of the Cave Photography, a multimedia studio company, crafts images for clients that include bands, theater companies and models. He also started The Marian Project, which helps women from troubled or abusive backgrounds express their natural beauty before the camera to boost self esteem or just replace photos left behind when they were running for their lives. The city of Los Angeles recognized the project with an award in 2010.

The Marian Project “proudly stands as a secular organization working to better the lives of others,” Erickson says.

He says he didn’t quite know what to expect when he started the atheist photo project. He *did* want to counter any perceptions that atheists are unhappy people.

“People for the most part were very open to it. Sometimes I had a problem when people thought they were atheists but were actually spiritualists or had a type of New Age — for lack of a better term — beliefs. I had many requests from New Age believers to participate, but obviously that wouldn’t have worked.”

Erickson said he bonded with some project participants more than others and that he encountered all kinds of freethought outlooks, from strident to more accommodating. One thing he discovered quickly:

“Atheists have many shared experiences. Time and time again, I heard stories that reflected my own history. Relationships dashed to pieces over religion. Parents turning their backs on their own children. Discrimination at work, even the loss of jobs. Public humiliation. Hatred, even violence.”

The logistics: Each atheist was asked to create three signs, one saying how they refer to themselves, another quoting a famous freethinker who resonated with them, and a third with a short statement they wanted to share with the world.

“Some of the shots are done as conceptual portraits,” Erickson says. “Other times it was simply a snapshot, capturing a moment. I wanted to show the differences in people as well as in their own approach to life.”

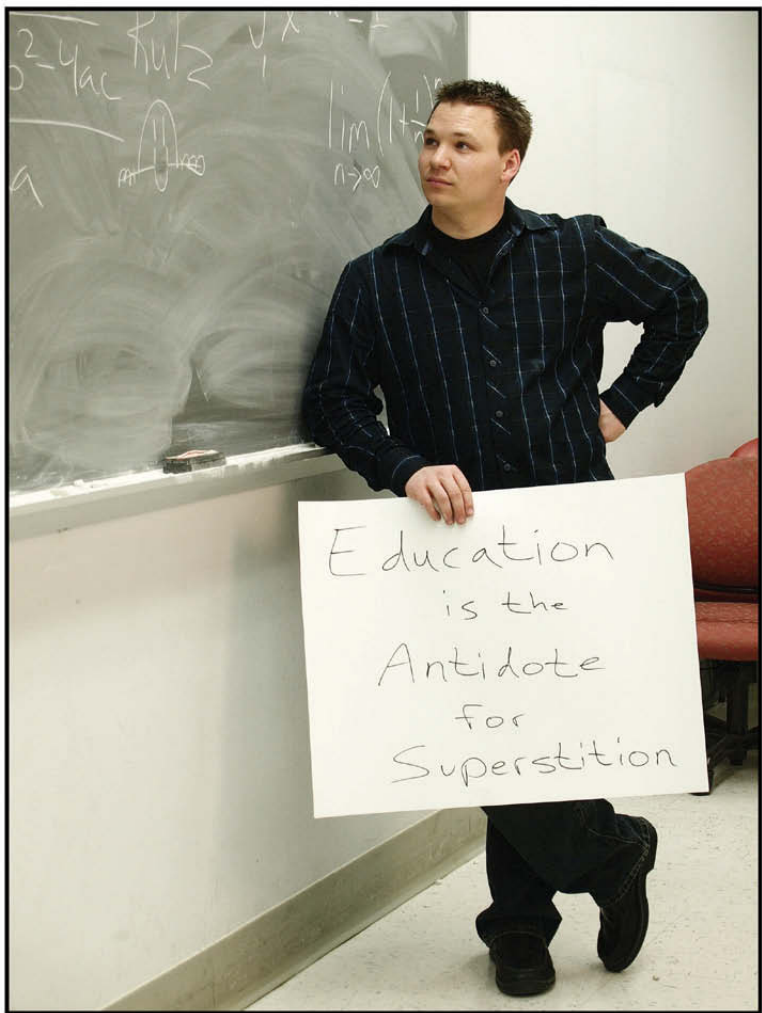
Along with giving a voice to nonbelievers, he hopes to spur discussion. His main goal is “to chip away at the ignorance of how atheists live their lives. The idea that atheists can’t be happy

will eventually be revealed as a myth, just like the myth of the invisible man who sits up in the clouds and reads our minds.”

Because Erickson strongly believes in a strong wall between state and

church, he’s generously donating a portion of sales to FFRF.

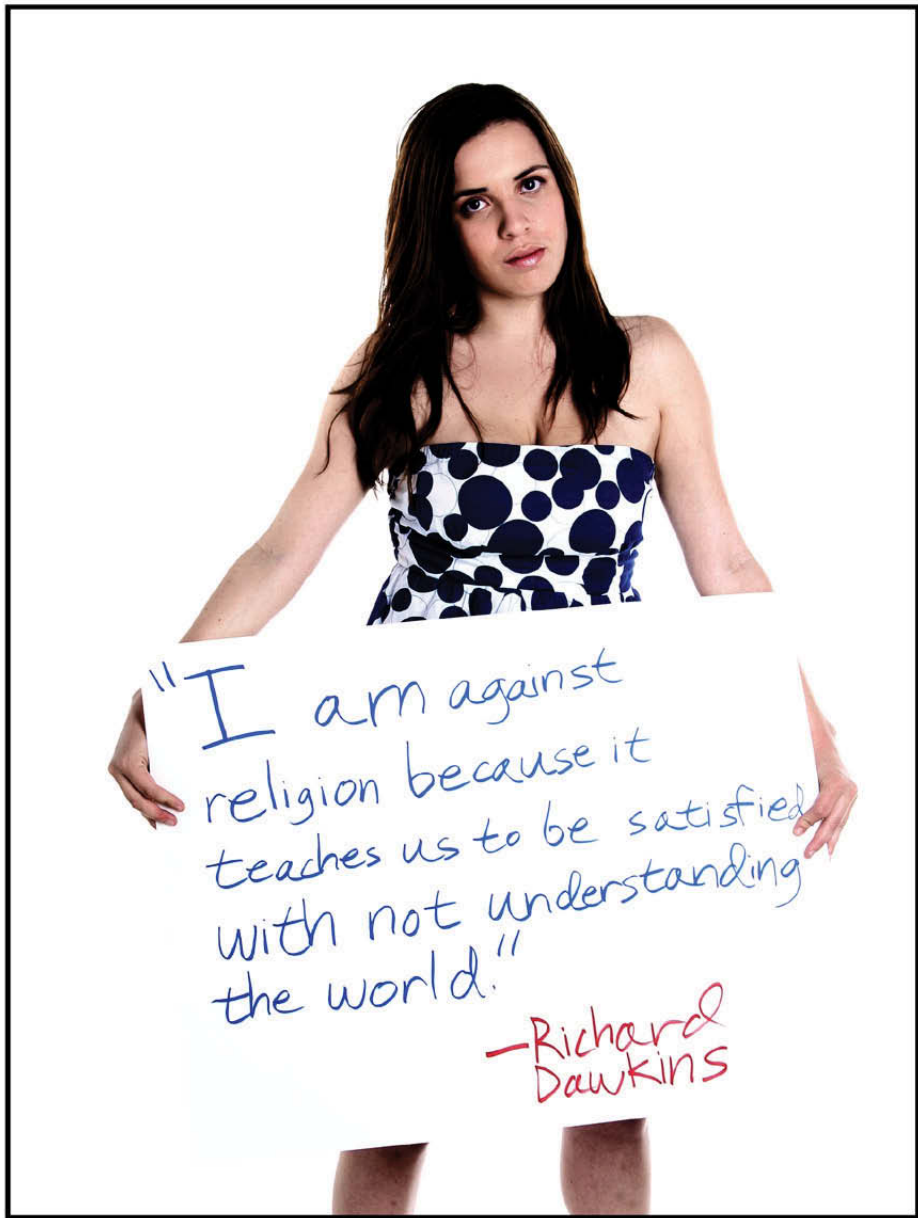
Atheist Bliss (TOTC Press, 2010, 102 pages), is available from templeofthecave.com and at ffrf.org/shop/books/ for \$22 ppd.



Drew Pruitt



Sandra Garcia



Jessica Parral

More *Atheist Bliss*



Marian Shapiro



Michael Gobaud

‘I ain’t ’fraid of *no* ghost.’ — *Pedrom Adeli*



Stefanie Seng

‘God equals the square root of negative 1.’
— *Alex Jacobson, scientist*

“Happiness isn’t about selectively explaining away sadness and inequality. It’s about addressing it head-on. Believing everything is part of ‘God’s Plan’ isn’t being happy, it’s being oblivious.”

— *Ian Gary, performer and writer*

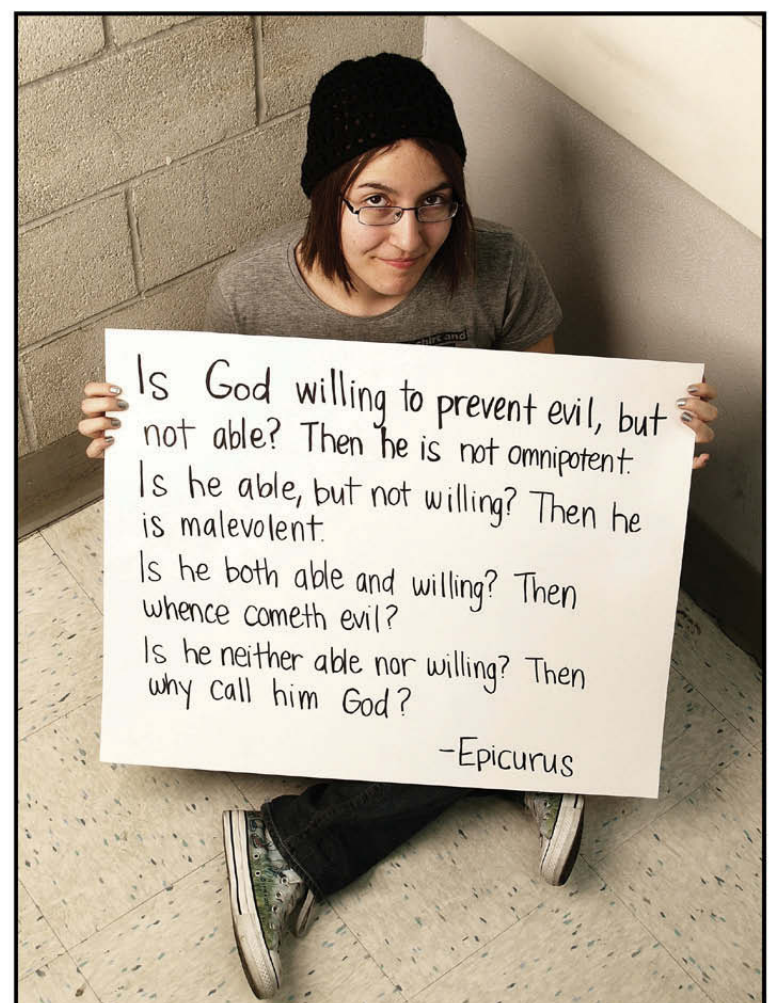
“The most difficulties I’ve had are when the parent of someone I’m dating finds out I’m an atheist. Then sud-

denly I’m not good enough to date their child, even though they thought I was a wonderful person beforehand.”

— *Valerie Macias, social activist*

“My heart and mind tell me that I will never understand a world allegedly governed by one god that allows for so much wrong, cruelty and injustice.”

— *Mark Bedrosian, aquatics industry consultant*



Ronna Humphries