

# Freethought Today

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Vol. 30 No. 5

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August 2013

## Last Call to FFRF Convention



Dan Savage



Juan Mendez

Turn to back page for details.



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Hemant Mehta, math teacher, freethought activist and author of *The Friendly Atheist* blog, visited FFRF in July and treated the staff and summer interns to pizza. From left (back) are Andrew Seidel, Lisa Strand, Dan Barker, Josh Glasgow, Ryan Dwyer, Katie Daniel, Dayna Long, (front) Scott Colson, Rebecca Markert, Hemant Mehta, Liz Cavell, Lauryn Seering, Sarah Eucalano, Annie Laurie Gaylor and Aaron Loudenslager. Not pictured: Bill Dunn, Patrick Elliott.

## FFRF, ACLU prevail, to settle with Ohio school

### *Portrait of Jesus won't resurrect in Jackson schools*

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio and individual plaintiffs in mid-July agreed to settle their

lawsuit against the public school district in Jackson, Ohio, for displaying a large portrait of Jesus above the entrance to Jackson Middle School. The

district, which had previously removed the portrait, has agreed to permanent removal.

Details of the global settlement of the issues will be released once they are approved by U.S. District Judge Algenon Marbley and by a probate court. Two of the plaintiffs are minors. The parties must file their settlement agreement with the district court within 90 days.

Defendants are the Jackson City School District and Superintendent Phil Howard.

FFRF and the Ohio ACLU first sued on behalf of students and parents over a display in a middle school. The district then moved the portrait to a prominent hallway at the high school. Although the district then removed the portrait, it was mysteriously exhumed for use at a Prayer at the Pole event on the National Day of Prayer. It also made a guest appearance in front of a prayer rally at City Hall.

FFRF and the ACLU filed the federal suit Feb. 6 in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, after FFRF sent an initial letter of complaint Jan. 2 to Howard, who stated "it would take a court order to remove the picture."



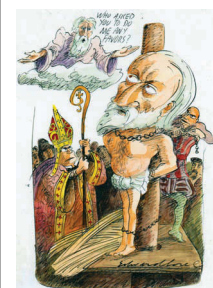
And on the third day . . .

This newspaper rack in Jackson, Ohio, was empty?

### Inside This Issue



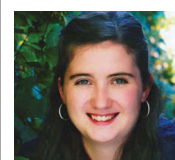
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Empowering Women through Secularism Page 8



Announcing winning high school essayists

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## Meet the Legal Interns



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Aaron Loudenslager strikes a Fearn-like pose. The late Blanche Fearn, for whom the reception room in Freethought Hall is named, was a major FFRF benefactor, officer and longtime supporter.

### Tackling new kind of foe

**Name:** Aaron J. Loudenslager.

**Where and when I was born:** Columbus, Wis., Nov. 6, 1989.

**Family:** Father, Kimball Loudenslager, 59; mother, Marchelle Miller, 48; brother, Benjamin Loudenslager, 25; sister, Ashley Loudenslager, 21.

**Education:** Northern Michigan University, B.S. in economics and political science, emphasis in prelaw; University of Wisconsin Law School.

**My religious upbringing was:** Lutheran.

**How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern:** I applied for the internship through the Wisconsin public interest interview program.

**What I do here:** I research various Establishment Clause legal issues for staff attorneys and write internal legal memoranda. I also draft letters of complaint to government agencies.

**What I like best about it:** Seeing my actions at FFRF effect positive change in the world.

**Something funny that's happened at**

**work:** When I couldn't figure out how to get the copier/printer to work after it had a paper jam (all I had to do was move one part of the copier).

**My legal interests are:** Constitutional law (Establishment Clause and Fourth Amendment jurisprudence) and law and economics, among many things.

**My legal heroes are:** I have many, but some are Ralph Nader, Louis Brandeis, Russ Feingold, Robert La Follette Sr., William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall.

**These three words sum me up:** Tenacious, dedicated, amiable.

**Things I like:** Sitcoms, "The Wire," the Green Bay Packers.

**Things I smite:** Humid weather, intolerance.

**My loftiest goal is:** To become a constitutional law professor.

**Fun fact:** I was all-conference honorable mention as a football offensive lineman (left tackle) in my senior year of high school.



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Ryan Dwyer perches 'twixt two FFRF Emperor Has No Clothes awards.

### No fan of Justice Antonin Scalia

**Name:** Ryan Dwyer.

**Where and when I was born:** Denver, Sept. 22, 1987.

**Family:** Father (Dan), mother (Nancy), sister (Meghan).

**Education:** Regis Jesuit High School, Aurora, Colo., graduated 2006; University of Colorado-Boulder, 2006-08; Metropolitan State University of Denver, 2011 B.A. in history, minor in philosophy; University of Wisconsin Law School, J.D. expected in May 2015.

**My religious upbringing was:** Catholic. I spent 14 years in Catholic school, and my family is still very religious. Around seventh grade, I began to deal with a nagging suspicion that there might be no God. A few years later, I shed religion altogether.

**How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern:** Through UW's public interest on-campus interview program. I interviewed and fortunately received an offer.

**What I do here:** Respond to state/church complaints by drafting and sending letters. I occasionally correspond with complainants. I also perform research on various state/church issues.

**What I like best about it:** I love working with a small group of dedicated staff and interns who believe in the work they do. I also love hearing from complainants whom we help. It's a great feeling to know we make a difference for our members and others.

**My legal interests are:** Constitutional law generally, legislation and policy and criminal defense.

**My legal heroes are:** Any lawyer who uses their degree to bring about change. The world isn't waiting for more attorneys to do corporate mergers or real estate law. If I must be specific, I admire the four staff attorneys

at FFRF, because they are working for the rights of countless people.

I also have great respect for attorneys at the American Civil Liberties Union and Southern Poverty Law Center. Finally, I respect (most) public defenders for their commitment to due process and their willingness to represent people whom society would prefer not to think about.

**These three words sum me up:** Idealistic, dedicated, compassionate.

**Things I like:** My interests vary, from things many 25-year-old males enjoy to things someone 50 years my senior would enjoy. I love books more than anything, and my collection is always expanding. I'll read philosophy, history, science, politics, fiction or biographies. If I'm reading magazines, they're usually issues of Scientific American, National Geographic, The New Yorker, Harper's, The Nation or The Economist.

I also spend too much time watching various sporting events, and I occasionally play Xbox for hours on end. I have an unhealthy love of public radio and podcasts. Musically, I'm all over the place, but the current rotation includes Fitz and the Tantrums, STS9, Phish, Dave Matthews Band, a few symphonies by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Miles Davis.

**Things I smite:** Website/blog comment sections, people who insist creationism/intelligent design belong in schools because they're legitimate scientific theories, people who send us crank mail, Antonin Scalia.

**My loftiest goal:** A tie between getting a Ph.D. in philosophy and running for Congress. One seems more likely to happen than the other. Close runner-up: writing a novel.

### A Note to Members

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August 2013

*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

## Fabio qualifies as brush with fame?

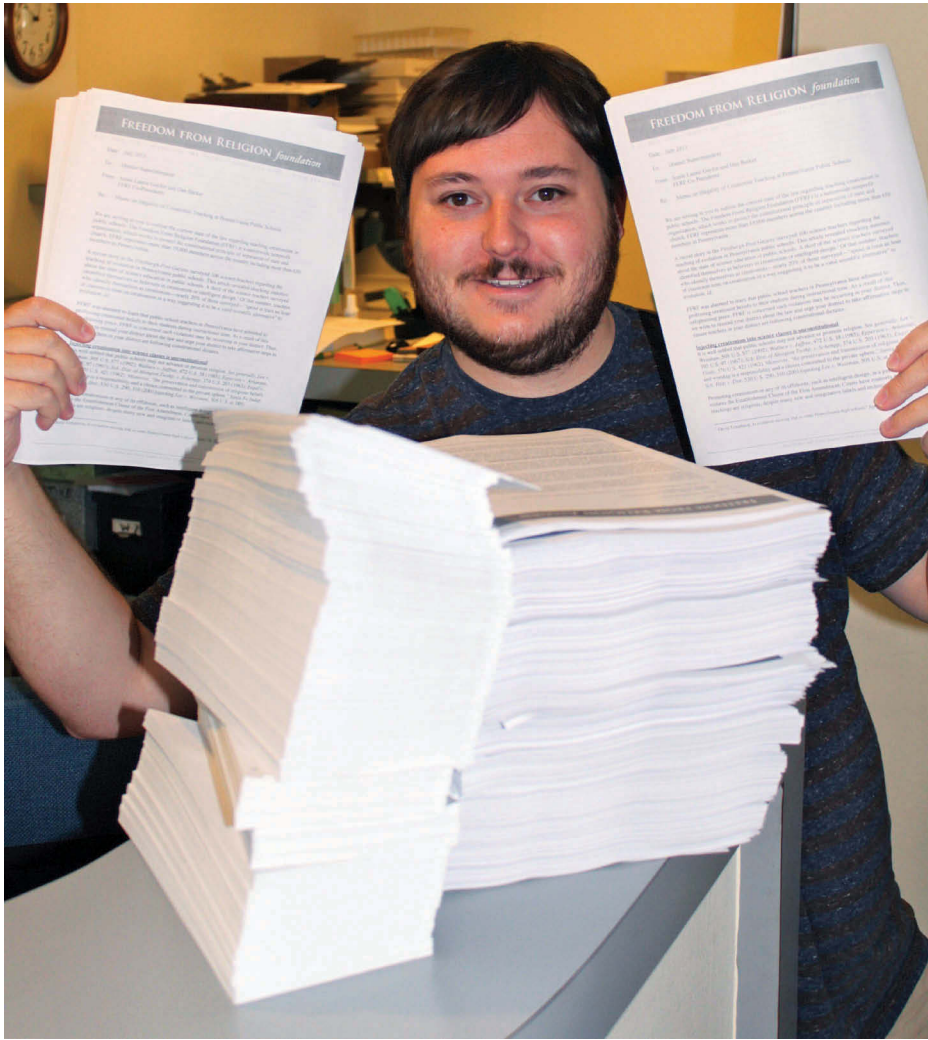


Photo: Andrew Seidel

Josh Glasgow with 500 copies of a memo he helped draft which FFRF sent to all Pennsylvania school districts informing them that the Establishment Clause bars teaching creationism in public schools.

**Name:** Joshua Glasgow.

**Where and when I was born:** Fayetteville, Ark., March 1986.

**Family:** Wife (Holly), mom (Danette), dad (Bill), brother (Matthew), sister (Aubrey).

**Education:** Undergrad at University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; law school at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa.

**My religious upbringing was:** Non-existent. My parents didn't go to church or talk about religion. They didn't express any opposition to it either. Religion was just not a part of life at all when I was a child.

**How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern:** I wanted to get a graduate degree after my wife finished her master's in Slavic linguistic anthropology at the University of Kansas, but I wasn't sure in what field. For a while I was seriously considering graphic design. I often spoke with my wife and friends about how harmful religion is, and through those conversations, I re-

alized that I needed put my words into action.

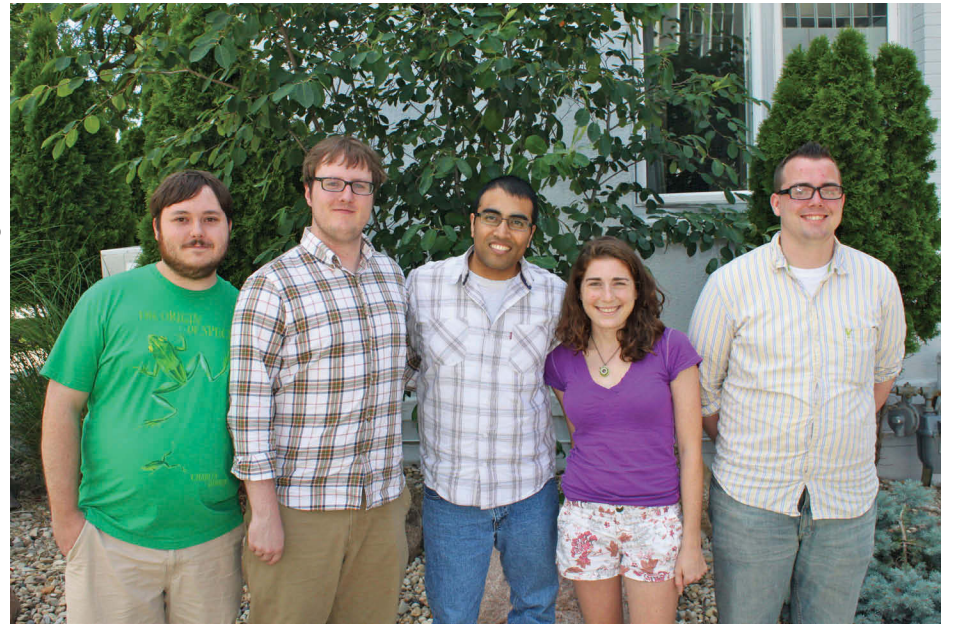
I started law school at Drake with the sole purpose of working with a group such as FFRF, and so it was one of the first places I applied for a summer internship. I think that resolve must have been apparent because I was quickly offered a summer position here. It's been a dream come true.

**What I do here:** Write lots of letters of complaint, mostly to school superintendents. It's sickening how much religious people are trying to erode the separation of church and state in public schools. I do a lot of research, both legal and factual.

**What I like best about it:** Getting responses from complainants after we've sent a letter to their school district, city council, mayor, etc. Even if the government agency doesn't respond to us, or even if they refuse to adhere to Supreme Court jurisprudence, the complainants are uniformly thrilled that we've acted on their behalf, regardless of the outcome. Seeing their excitement intensifies my own.

**Something funny that's happened at work:** During a work lunch, FFRF lawyers were talking about a school district that tried to play the Christian movie "Facing the Giants" for students. The shock on their faces when I exclaimed, "That's one of my favorite movies!" is unforgettable.

I'm not sure they completely un-



Summer interns (left) Josh Glasgow, Ryan Dwyer, Sarah Eucalano and Aaron Loudenslager pose with Hemant Mehta (center) outside Freethought Hall.

derstand why I find religious movies so funny, but I've seen 62 of them to date. Check out "Suing the Devil" or "C Me Dance" and you will understand.

**My legal interests are:** Limited. I'm in law school only to fight religion, and I am working on a constitutional law certificate program. That said, religion is entwined with so many types of law — education, civil rights, employment, real estate, tax, etc. — that it's almost a guarantee I will encounter a religious issue at some point in my career, regardless of where I end up practicing.

**My legal heroes are:** Marci Hamilton, professor at Cardozo School of Law in New York City. She wrote *God vs. the Gavel* and *Justice Denied*, both of which detail the legal protections religious groups demand even as they are sexually abusing children, stealing land (see the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act), and just generally using state-based Religious Freedom Restoration Acts as licenses to be awful. Reading her books was a large part of what encouraged me to go to law school.

**These three words sum me up:** Obsessive, analytical, wry.

**Things I like:** Holly (my better half), Nicolas Cage (I've seen *all* his movies), "Mystery Science Theater 3000," rap, cream soda, gazebos, Mario Kart video games, laser light shows, docu-

mentaries, the bands American Hi-Fi and They Might Be Giants, puns, bad movies, the fact that people dress up in tuxedos to be in the audience of "America's Funniest Home Videos."

**Things I smite:** Ryan Gosling, pickles, "Uptown Girl" by Billy Joel, the film cliché "There's a storm coming," Michael Moore-style documentaries, ants, "standing" arguments for lawsuits, people who use the word "gender" when they mean "sex."

**My loftiest goal:** I'm just dying to see the folks at OneNewsNow [Christian news outlet] react indignantly to something I've written for FFRF. I swear I'll print it out and have it framed.

**My closest brush with fame was:** In our first month in Iowa, my wife and I were at the State Fair and learned that President Obama would be making a surprise visit there. While we were waiting in the area, a woman came up and asked if we would be interested in meeting the president. We and a few others were taken behind the police tape in front of a huge crowd of onlookers, where we were able to talk and shake hands with the president. The whole experience was surreal and only happened because we happened to be in the right place at the right time. (I saw Fabio once in an Arkansas Walmart, but we didn't speak.)

Every time that someone tries to convince me that God exists or that Christianity is the right path forward, it seems that they fall into that same stereotypical pattern where they think if they throw a magical bible verse at me, that is going to do the trick, or that clearly I haven't read the bible — which I have — or if they hand me a [pastor and Christian apologist] Lee Strobel book, that's going to do the trick. We've heard all of it before.

**"Friendly Atheist" Hemant Mehta**  
*The Raw Story*, 7-8-13

It all began when Leah questioned the validity of excommunication of

people. She is stepping back from a regime she thinks is corrupt. She thinks no religion should tear apart a family or abuse someone under the umbrella of "religion."

**Unnamed source confirming actress Leah Remini has quit the Church of Scientology**  
*New York Post*, 7-11-13

Why Bible Prophecy Makes No Mention of America

**Headline that made us chortle at FFRF, above a story about Greg Laurie, pastor of Harvest Church in Riverside, Calif.**

*Christian Post*, 7-15-13

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*Freedom Depends  
on Freethinkers*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation's e-mail address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org). Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org).



**free-think-er n.** A person who forms opinions

about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

# Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## Anniversary

Maybe it wasn't strange to find  
drums and cymbals where  
there might have been violins, maybe  
we couldn't have known; besides,  
would it have mattered?  
See what the years have left behind:  
a thick scar in the palm of my hand,  
a ragged one running along the arm.  
And you:  
I know your scars at midnight  
by touch.

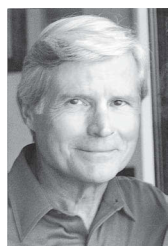
Everything we've learned, we've picked up  
by ear, a pidgin language  
of the heart, just  
enough to get by on:  
we know the value of cacophony, how to measure  
with a broken yardstick,  
what to do with bruised fruit.  
Reading torn maps, we always  
make it home, riding  
on empty.

And whatever this is we've built together,  
we remember sighting it skew, making it plumb  
eventually, and here it stands,  
stone over rock. In the walls  
there are secret passages  
leading to music nobody else can hear,  
earthlight nobody else can see. And somewhere

in a room that's not yet finished  
there are volumes in our own hand, telling  
troubled tales, promises kept, and  
promises  
still to keep.

© Philip Appleman 1996

*New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996*



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin, and the Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National

Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine, The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times, The Paris Review, Partisan Review, Poetry, and The Yale Review*.

## YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

### TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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Annie Laurie Gaylor

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**Slightly irreverent views,  
news, music & interviews**



## Overheard

I have no belief in (or desire for) any post-mortem existence, other than in the memories of friends and the hope that some of my books may still "speak" to people after my death.



**Oliver Sacks, M.D., FFRF Honorary Director, "The Joy of Old Age (No Kidding)," op-ed about turning 80 on July 9**

*New York Times, 7-9-13*

Where 99.3% of women report having been sexually harassed and rape is epidemic — Egypt — it's natural to inquire: What's the predominant religion? "Rape culture" has no relationship to any "religious culture" — how can this be? Religion has no effect on behavior at all?

**Writer Carol Joyce Oates, "Joyce Carol Oates Tweets on Egypt, Rape and Religion Spark Furor"**

*Wall Street Journal, 7-5-13*

I don't have a sense that there are sacred institutions. To me, all religions and all churches are created by human beings. If you thought that women were being mistreated 50 miles from where you are, you might want to go help them. But if you were told it was a religious commune or something, you'd think, "Uh-oh, that's their religion, maybe I shouldn't help them." It's like religion is under a dome. It gives an imprimatur to behavior that shouldn't be tolerated.

**Carol Joyce Oates, on the "furor" her tweets caused**

*New York Times, 7-15-13*

I did have one person who asked me if I was an atheist, and when I told him I was an atheist, he actually told me that he wouldn't have any animal sacrificing on his land and hung up on me.

**Lindsay Burns, on the trouble she had finding a site for a secular Camp Quest in Kansas City**

*KCUR, 7-21-13*

Contrary to the majority opinion, a corporation like Hobby Lobby is plainly not a "person" covered by the [1993 federal Religious Freedom] Restoration Act. In any case, the contraceptive rule still leaves the company's owners free to rail about the different forms of birth control to which they object and to try to convince employees not to use them. As the Justice Department cogently argued, the burden imposed on any religion is trivial in allowing employees to make their own independent decisions to obtain free contraceptives.

**Editorial, "The Contraception Battle"**  
*New York Times, 7-2-13*

In her opening remarks, Julia Loneragan, counsel assisting the commission, said the inquiry will hear evidence that a boy abused by [Fr. Dennis] McAlinden between the ages of 5 and 9 told his parish priest about it during his first confession. "This boy was given penance apparently for his sin in being abused by that priest," she said.

**News story on a New South Wales inquiry into child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy**

*Australian Broadcasting Corp., 7-1-13*

I believe what they wanted to do is make an example of me and say, "See, this is what is going to happen to you if you come after the Catholic Church."

**Monica Barrett, 52, a paralegal who sued the Archdiocese of Milwaukee for her alleged rape in church at age 8 by Fr. William Effinger and then was countersued for the church's \$14,000 legal costs**

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 7-5-13*

Southern Baptists have little by little abandoned public schools and civic organizations. They are too sanctimonious to participate in Easter egg hunts and trick-or-treating. Santa and the Easter bunny are simply the devil in disguise, and cable television and the Internet are his playground. The Boy Scouts are his evil minions.

**Newspaper columnist Angela Thomas, whose Baptist pastor husband was asked to resign because of her comments in Madisonville, Ky.**

*Kentucky Forward, 7-1-13*

I agreed with what she said, and I don't censor what my wife does.

**Pastor Bill Thomas, whose 10-year anniversary celebration scheduled for July 7 at the church was canceled**

*Kentucky Forward, 7-1-13*

We did it, and we did it right, and we did it without those [religious] things. It's kind of like a win. It was still lovely, and it was still special.

**Atheist Alisha Hunt, 32, Columbus, Ohio, on her secular marriage ceremony to atheist Jake Winslow, 33, a former Mormon**

*Columbus Dispatch, 7-6-13*

A lot of people insert God whenever they don't understand something. Anytime there's a gap in scientific knowledge, people insert God. I'm not going to do that.

**Red McCall, an electrical engineer and president of Oklahoma Atheists**

## Legal victory

# President: Creationism doesn't cut it at Ball State

Ball State University's president issued a statement July 31 agreeing with the Freedom From Religion Foundation about the inappropriateness of teaching intelligent design in public universities.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel first alerted officials at the Muncie, Ind., school about biology Eric Hedin's "teaching" style in a May 15 letter. Hedin is an assistant professor in the physics and astronomy department. "There is a serious difference between teaching religion and preaching religion," Seidel wrote.

In her statement addressed to faculty and staff, Ball State President Jo-Ann Gora concurred with the principles FFRF enumerated in its letters. The university appointed a review committee of four professors to review the allegations.

Gora wrote that neither creationism nor any of its derivatives belong in a science classroom. She reiterated that intelligent design is a religious theory and has been rejected by reputable scientists.

Gora stated that academic freedom, while important, is not an issue in this case. "Teaching intelligent design as a scientific theory is not a matter of academic freedom — it is an issue of academic integrity. [Academic freedom] cannot be used as a shield to teach theories that have been rejected by the discipline under which a science course is taught."

FFRF had raised concerns about academic integrity and a possible state-church violation when the same university department that hired Hedin also hired another prominent creationist.

The only outstanding issue is precisely how Gora's principles will alter

## Evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne first alerted FFRF to Hedin's actions.

Hedin's course, "The Boundaries of Science," Seidel said. FFRF has been told that Ball State is working "to en-

sure that course content is aligned with curriculum and the best standards of the discipline."

The prominent evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne first alerted FFRF to Hedin's actions, after a non-Christian student reported the proselytizing nature of Hedin's class to Coyne.

Gora further stated, "The gravity of this issue and the level of concern among scientists are demonstrated by more than 80 national and state scientific societies' independent statements that intelligent design and creation sci-

ence do not qualify as science. The list includes societies such as the National Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Astronomical Society, and the American Physical Society.

"Discussions of intelligent design and creation science can have their place at Ball State in humanities or social science courses. However, even in such contexts, faculty must avoid endorsing one point of view over others. The American Academy of Religion draws this distinction most clearly."

## Survey: Tiny percentage of inmates identify as atheists

Still convinced atheists are bound to be bad people?

The Federal Bureau of Prisons released an April 2013 survey of 218,167 prisoners that reports 0.02% of prisoners call themselves atheists. You read that right. Not 2%, or even 0.2 percent, but 0.02% of American prisoners are atheists.

Hemant Mehta first reported the statistic on his popular blog, The Friendly Atheist. Mehta wanted to corroborate the oft-quoted but dated, statistic that 0.7% of prisoners are atheists.

His open records request to the Federal Bureau of Prisons proves that an even smaller percentage of American prisoners, 0.02%, identify as atheists. Because 2.4% of the general population of Americans are atheists, according to a 2012 Pew study, atheists make up a disproportionately small percentage of prisoners. (Pew shows one in

five U.S. adults identifies as "nonreligious," but doesn't necessary use the term "atheist.")

That goes a long way to debunk the myth that a person can't be good without a god. "Atheists have their own moral compass that doesn't involve a holy book," Mehta wrote.

Another reason for the low representation of atheists in prison is atheists tend to be well-educated and have above-average socioeconomic status. Inmates in general tend to be less-educated and poorer than the average American. This points out a flaw in American society, not in atheists' morality.

Holy books may condemn and vilify atheists as terrible people, but this statistic just adds to the long list of their inaccuracies: 99.98% of people going to prison are *not* atheists.

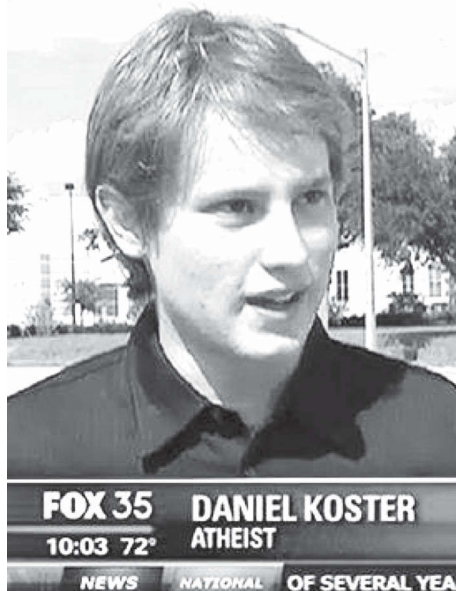
— Andrew Seidel

Frequency of Religious Affiliation  
Data as of April 27, 2013

Religious Affiliation	Frequency
ADVENTIST	706
AMER IND	6865
ATHEIST	161
BAHAI	1
BUDDHIST	2179
CATHOLIC	52412
CH CHRIST	3342
HINDU	316
JEHOVAH	1514
JEWISH	3801
MESSIANIC	1711
MOORISH	2473
MORMON	625
MUSLIM	12106
NATION	3847
NO PREFER	37139
NON-TRIN	371
ORTHODOX	489
OTHER	6584
PAGAN	4373
PENTECOST	146
PROTESTANT	62600
RASTA	4182
SANTERIA	2621
SCIENCE	17
SIKH	74
UNKNOWN	7512

# Florida high school grad honored as student activist

Daniel Koster is the recipient of the Thomas W. Jendrock Student Activist Award of \$1,000. It's endowed for 2013 by FFRF's very kind member Thomas Jendrock.



By Daniel Koster

On Hug an Atheist Day, someone who I thought wanted a hug picked me up and tried to throw me in a garbage can. A crowd of jeering students encouraged him. For a moment

this was amusing, but then it occurred to me that these kids might actually hurt me.

This was our club's first public event, and I began to consider that everything we did might be marked by disapproval and threats of violence. I worried that I might be accosted after school or followed home. As much as secularism meant to me, I was not signing up to be martyred for the cause.

I started Wekiva Atheist and Secular Alliance in January 2012 to gain acceptance for nonreligious students. My excitement that the administration had not blocked us, however, was short-lived. We put up friendly posters (with permission from the school) that reminded students with doubts about religion that they were not alone.

By the end of the day, all had been torn down. We later learned many were removed not just by students but also by a teacher. We know of no disciplinary action taken against the teacher.

Not to be deterred, we put up another round of posters, which disappeared even more quickly than the first. As frustrating as this was, I knew it only proved how important our efforts were. There was real prejudice in the school.

This year we had the chance to send a message not only to schoolmates but also to the school board. When a Chris-

tian group got permission from the board to distribute bibles in our high schools, the club monitored the distribution to ensure they were following the rules (they weren't).

Then, working closely with FFRF and Central Florida Freethought Community, we planned our own distribution of atheist materials. Our goal was to show the board that if they let in Christian groups, they had to give the same opportunity to everyone, even atheists.

This process involved attending school board meetings, participating in conference calls, consulting attorneys, interviewing for the news and writing articles — things that can be hard to balance with homework but are always more fun. But it wasn't all fun.

### Delayed and censored

The school board kept postponing our distribution date. Once it was approved, they censored much of our freethought literature. At Wekiva High, administrators tried to apply rules to students that only applied to outside volunteers, even though they paid no attention to whether the Christian groups were following the rules. Freethought activists can expect every step of the process to be more difficult than it is for anyone else. Our goal is to

get equal treatment for everyone.

Since coming out about my atheism, my relations with parts of my family have become strained. I am extremely lucky to have supportive parents, but even my mother fears (probably correctly) that what I do will cause some of the family to stop loving us. Though plenty of my religious friends still support me, plenty more have cut me off completely.

This was never my intention, but I know that these are the kinds of sacrifices every meaningful activist in history has had to make. Despite what I've lost, what I've gained has been spectacular. I have met the most wonderful people both in the local and national freethought movement and worked with them toward a goal we all believe in. I truly believe our work has had a real impact on how people at this school think.

Far from being a martyr for the cause, I have been able to live for it. I urge all those who believe in equality and secularism to join me.

Daniel Koster, 18, Orlando, Fla., will be attending New College of Florida in Sarasota to major in an undetermined as yet area of science. In high school he founded Wekiva Atheist and Secular Alliance and was active in other local freethought groups.

## 2013 William J. Schultz High School Essay Contest

# FFRF awards \$14,100 in scholarships to graduates

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded \$14,100 to 20 college-bound high school seniors in this year's essay competition. Seniors were asked to write about the "The challenges of being a young freethinker" in 500 to 700 words. There are 10 winners in the top five, with ties for second, third and fifth place, and a three-way tie for fourth place. There are also 10 honorable mentions.

FFRF member **William J. Schultz** left a major bequest to generously endow

this year's contest. FFRF would also like to extend a special thanks to **Dorea** and **Dean Schramm** in Florida for providing each student with a \$50 bonus.

**First place** (\$3,000): **Emily Stephens**, Georgetown University.

**Second place** (tie, \$2,000 each): **Alexis Thomas**, Ohio State University; **Emma Conover-Crockett**, Kenyon College.

**Third place** (tie, \$1,000 each): **Alex Kendig**, University of California; **Anna Cain**, Colorado College.

**Fourth place** (tie, \$500 each): **Colin A. Muller**, Columbia University; **Sara Sheppard**, Lone Star College; **Taysie Savage**, Oregon State University.

**Fifth place** (tie, \$350 each): **Kerry Foerst**, University of North Carolina; **Kamila Buscavage**, Virginia Polytechnic.

**Honorable mention** (\$250 each): **Aaron McLaughlin**, University of Iowa; **Ayla Yener**, McGill University; **Darby Oldham**, Swarthmore College; **Gabriella Johnson**, Stanford University;

**Lindsey Foster**, Georgia State University;

**Marianne Fuentes**, University of Massachusetts; **Meshulum Ort**, Rutgers University; **Nathan Hume Stevens**, University of Oregon; **Sarah Sprenger**, Michigan State University; **Zofia Warpeha**, The New School, New York City.

The 2013 college essay and graduate/mature student essay winners will be announced in upcoming issues.

Read winning essays, pages 11–15.

## Life Members promote freethought poetry, boost scholarships

Dean and Dorea Schramm, Lifetime FFRF Members, have taken their personal activism to a new level. For several years, they generously have provided a \$50 bonus for every FFRF student scholarship winner, a cool \$1,000 for high school scholarship recipients this year alone, not to mention pending gifts to recipients in the two other scholarship categories.

Dean also offers each winner a free copy of his book, "Rhymes for Reason." Phil Appleman, FFRF's poet laureate,

says of the book: "... clever rhymes, witty takes and double-takes, seriously broad knowledge of the Bible and other nonsense books, and endless quotable lines . . . Thanks for slipping this bit of joy into my life!"

The book is now available on Amazon in print and digital format or at [deanschramm.com/](http://deanschramm.com/).

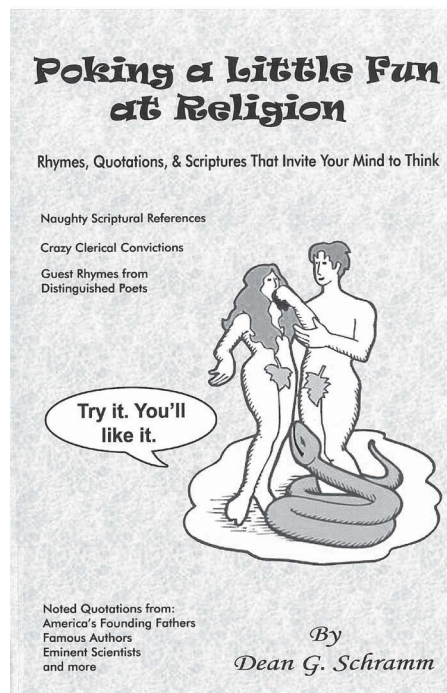
The Schramms' new project, which benefits Student Secular Alliance groups on campuses around the country, is a Freethought Poetry Contest.

Rules are at [deanschramm.com/](http://deanschramm.com/).

SSA groups which encourage their members to submit secular poetry or vote on contest entries have the opportunity to earn cash for pizza. It's a way to help SSA attract members, promote freethinking with poetry and get support for meeting expenses.

FFRF appreciates the Schramms' support for up-and-coming secular activists!

— Lisa Strand



## Judge's ruling a slippery slope

# FFRF to appeal Montana Jesus shrine ruling

A shrine to Jesus is not religious? A ski slope is like a museum?

Those are the conclusions of U.S. District Judge Dana L. Christensen of Montana, who, on June 24, ruled against the Freedom From Religion Foundation's federal challenge of a Jesus shrine on Big Mountain in the Flathead National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service has given the Knights of Columbus, a Roman Catholic mens' organization, a no-cost lease to erect a devotional shrine to Jesus on public land since the mid-1950s.

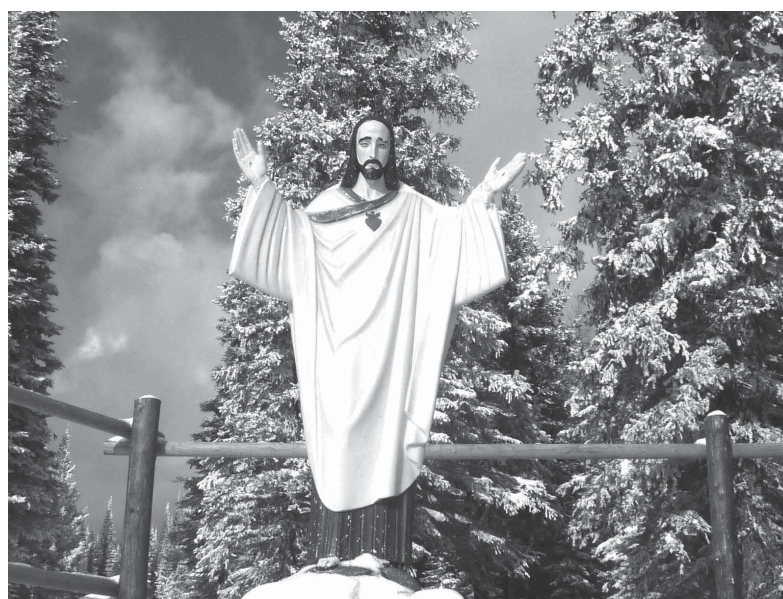
FFRF has announced it will appeal the decision to the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

After the Forest Service made a short-lived decision not to renew the "lease," the Jesus statue was promptly dubbed a "veterans memorial." The judge set aside the government's experts and contemporaneous news reports for the dubious "recollections" of one witness, Bill Martin, who once managed Big Mountain.

Wrote Christensen: "The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic religious organization, and it appears from the record that some degree of divine inspiration determined the final location of the statue. As L.J. Reed stated . . . 'Our Lord himself selected this site.'"

The Knights of Columbus filed an application to "lease" a parcel on Big Mountain "for the purpose of Erecting a Shrine overlooking the Big Mountain Ski run" and to "erect a Statue of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Could there be a plainer example



of a religious purpose?" asks FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"Unquestionably," wrote the judge, "Big Mountain Jesus is a religious symbol commonly associated with one form of religion. But not every religious symbol runs afoul of the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution. Big Mountain Jesus is one of the only vestiges that remains of the early days of skiing at Big Mountain, and to many serves as a historical reminder of those bygone days."

"If those days are bygone, it's high time to say 'bye bye' to the unconstitutional appropriation of public land for a Roman Catholic shrine," added Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

The judge relied on the Supreme Court's *Van Orden* decision, in which

the court, after previously ruling a Ten Commandments display inside a county courthouse unconstitutional, bizarrely decided a large Ten Commandments monument in front of the Texas Capitol was OK. The court claimed the other monuments at the statehouse turned the grounds into a "museum."

The Supreme Court made a major goof in also claiming that there had been no previous challenges to the Texas statehouse bible marker. FFRF and many others had in fact complained for years about the Eagles monument in front of the Texas Capitol. FFRF took great pains to correct that legal record in filings in its Montana case. Christensen not only ignored correction of the record, but wrote:

"[M]ost importantly, Big Mountain

Jesus has stood unchallenged for almost 60 years. . . . The statue's 60-year life free of formal complaints also tips the scales in this case."

The longer the violation, the worse it becomes, FFRF avers. "Tradition" can be no panacea to a misuse of government authority to promote Christianity or Catholicism.

The judge's lamest argument repeats Martin's contention that the shrine isn't really that religious because skiers sometimes treat it "irreverently" (i.e., "high five" it). The government is no more supposed to further an irreverent message than a reverent one under the Lemon test. Nor could any irreverence toward the statue mitigate the reverence and favoritism the federal government shows the Catholic Knights of Columbus and its scheme to proselytize on federal land.

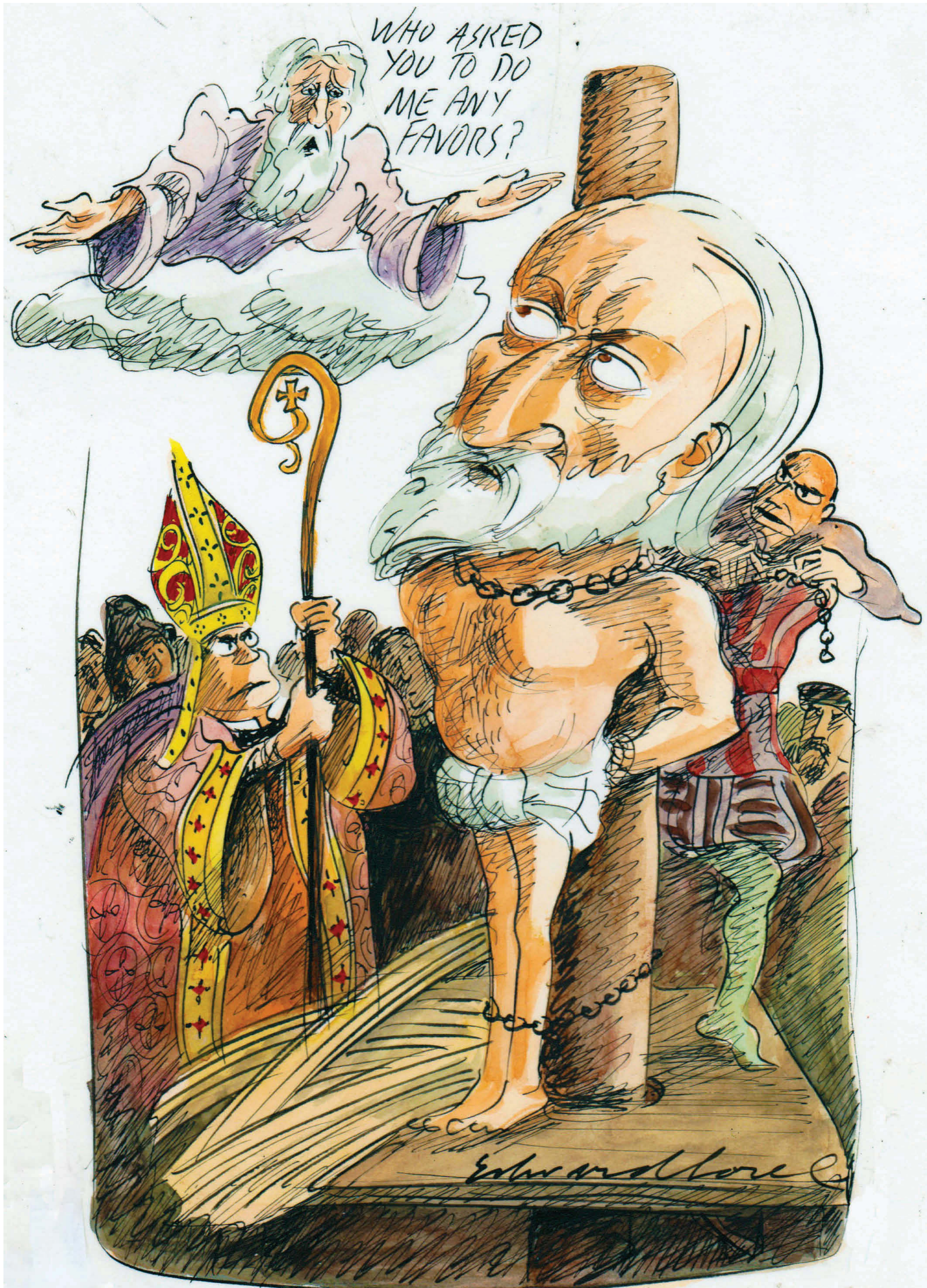
"When I look at that Jesus statue, I see the continuing efforts of this aggressive, missionizing, male-only Catholic club to deny U.S. women the right to abortion and contraception in the name of Jesus. We also see a disturbing irreverence — toward our secular Constitution," Gaylor added. The statue is similar to hundreds displayed on Knights of Columbus property around the nation.

FFRF warmly thanks its Montana FFRF members who gave FFRF standing to pursue the challenge: Pamela Morris, William Cox and Doug Bonham. The case was handled by litigation attorney Richard L. Bolton.

# Memorable Moments in Monotheism: October 6, 1536

by Edward Sorel

Freethought Today is proud to present the first installment of illustrator Edward Sorel's "Memorable Moments in Monotheism." Mr. Sorel, an FFRF member since 1986, is one of America's foremost political satirists and is a regular contributor to The New Yorker. Besides his 41 covers for the latter, his art has appeared on the covers of The Atlantic, Harpers, Fortune, Forbes, The Nation, Esquire, American Heritage and The New York Times Magazine. "Unauthorized Portraits" (Knopf 1997) is the most recent of several collections of his work. Mr. Sorel, who spoke at FFRF's 20th national convention in Tampa Bay, Fla., is also an FFRF Honorary Director. His website is [edwardsorel.com/](http://edwardsorel.com/).



William Tyndale translates the Bible into English so that the common man can read the words of God. Both the Anglican and Catholic Church frown on this endeavor, but Tyndale publishes. Found guilty of heresy, he is burned at the stake, the world's first victim of self-publishing.

## Does the pope rule Ireland, and Wisconsin, and Texas, and . . . ?

By Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-President  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

I had a bad case of déjà vu on July 8, my first day back at work after a week in the Republic of Ireland, when I learned that abortion clinics in our state had been shut down as of that morning. We'd spent a lot of time learning about Ireland's draconian abortion ban at a gathering, Empowering Women Through Secularism, put on by Atheist Ireland in Dublin on the last weekend of June.

While we were in Ireland, its parliament passed the first of two motions to (finally) permit abortions in Ireland if the pregnant woman's life is endangered.

As we flew home, 35,000 anti-abortionists marched in Dublin against the reform. The bill is the weakest possible response to the shocking and brutal death late last October of Savita Halappanavar, a dentist from India 17 weeks

into a wanted pregnancy that went wrong. She was allowed to die, gruesomely, of septicemia after her uterus ruptured at a Galway hospital.

Annually, 4,000 to 5,000 Irish women have to fly to England for abortion care, if they have the funds and connections.

While we were away, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker signed an anti-choice bill requiring physicians to have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of a clinic to perform abortions. This effectively shut down two of Wisconsin's four abortion clinics, until a restraining order was issued July 9.

I had geared my opening remarks at the conference to the circumstances in Wisconsin in the early 1970s, somewhat analogous to Ireland's ban, that indirectly led to the founding of FFRF. As founder of the Wisconsin Committee to Legalize Abortion, my mother (with me accompanying her around the state as a junior and senior high school student) saw firsthand why religious dogma must never be inscribed in our civil laws.

The Wisconsin Capitol was filled with priests, nuns and bussed-in parochial school students every time a bill was heard to liberalize our state's abortion or contraceptive prohibitions.

Visiting Ireland was like stepping back in time — in good ways in terms of the agrarian landscape and culture — but also back to the bad old days when abortion was illegal. Now the clock is being turned back in the United States. Wisconsin is one of several states that have rapidly passed such legislation.

Assaults at the state level on abortion rights continue, with a record 43 restrictions adopted from January through June alone, according to the Guttmacher Institute. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a ban on abortion after 20 weeks (the few abortions at this point are limited to extreme cases).

Legal challenges are ongoing of bans at six and 12 weeks in North Dakota and Arkansas, respectively. Texas, despite Rep. Wendy Davis' heroic filibuster and the impassioned testimony

of Sarah Slamen, passed its own version of Wisconsin's law that would shut down nearly every clinic in Texas.

It's chilling to see the anti-choice camp now turn its sights on contraception. More than 50 lawsuits have been filed by the Catholic Church and fundamentalist groups (including Hobby Lobby) challenging the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate.

The alarming ramping up of the religious war on reproductive rights is a wake-up call for secularists.

Find Empowering Women Through Secularism speeches and panels at [atheist.ie/](http://atheist.ie/).

*Send a tax-deductible contribution to the Women's Medical Fund, the oldest abortion rights charity in the nation (which has helped more than 20,000 Wisconsin-area women without means pay for legal abortions) to Women's Medical Fund, PO Box 248, Madison WI 53701. The fund was co-founded and is still administered by Anne Nicol Gaylor, now 86, principal founder of FFRF and FFRF president emerita.*

## FFRF on the Road in Ireland



From left, Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, with Taslima Nasrin, at the Empowering Women Through Secularism conference in late June in Dublin, Republic of Ireland. Taslima, a Bangladeshi physician turned author, feminist, atheist and activist, now lives in India after her country's "holy men" issued a fatwa against her.



Ann Brusseel (right), a Flemish member of parliament in Belgium, attended the conference with her mother and spoke about European state/church issues.



Annie Laurie at the Ballinspittle shrine in County Cork, which once attracted 20,000 faithful after reports in 1985 that someone had seen the Virgin Mary "move." Thanks to Cork host Charlie Roche for driving Annie Laurie, Dan Barker and their daughter Sabrina to see several sites after the conference. They appropriately visited the grotto after a stop at Blarney Castle.



Jane Donnelly (center), education policy officer for Atheist Ireland, is fighting for secular schools in a country where parochial schools are fully tax-supported. Her daughters, Alison (left) and Rachel, attended the conference with her. Rachel is a member of Galway Pro-Choice.



## Ask a Skeptic

I'm teaching a class in ethics and recently showed students a debate between William Lane Craig and Shelly Kagan on the topic "Is God Necessary for Morality?" After class, a nontraditional student, a woman of about 30, came to talk to me. She was raised Christian and for most of her life assumed what she'd been taught was true. Now she's seeing inconsistencies in her faith and has begun to really think about things. She has, in short, become an atheist.

Her conundrum is she's married to a hardcore Pentecostal. She's afraid if she "comes out" to him, their marriage will fall apart. She worries about the consequences for their son. I told her I couldn't keep such a secret from an intimate partner, but that she would have to decide for herself. Help? — **BVD**

### Dan Barker, FFRF co-president:

My advice is "be yourself." There is no magic bullet, no "one size fits all" tactic or strategy. Every family has its own dynamic, with an infinite number of variations of personalities and histories. Every person has to pick their own path, timing and intensity of communication.

But if you can't "be yourself," then what is the friendship and relationship all about? Who are the "we" if one of them can't be an "I?"

A loving marriage and family thrive on openness and honesty. If those are lacking, then the family is in trouble. It happened with me. I came out openly as an atheist to my Christian wife of 13 years. She tried to understand, made some attempts at bending but said she

could only bend so far without breaking.

We both ultimately agreed that things had changed so much between us that the original commitment was no longer applicable. She could not be "unequally yoked with an unbeliever," and I agreed. She saw her life as a "helpmeet to a man of God." She later married a Baptist minister, and they seem happy now.

But I know of other situations where their love and respect for each other is truly mutual, and they prefer to stay together even with such radical differences of belief. I don't know if there is a way to predict which families that can happen to, but it does happen.

If your student is uncertain and values keeping the family together at all costs, she may decide to keep her head down or keep the volume to a minimum if she can live with that. If she can't live with that, she will have to carefully weigh the cost of integrity in regard to the relationship and family.

If she does admire and respect her husband, she will let him know that she assumes he is big enough to let her be who she is, that the relationship will be *stronger* with honesty and integrity. That is what he should want as an equal loving partner.

If she feels he doesn't want that, she may know they are in serious trouble. If she's afraid of her husband, in *any* way, then that is serious trouble.

My suggestion is to give honesty a test and see what happens. For me, it turned out to be the perfect test. We didn't necessarily like the results of the test, but it was a good test. It clarified

## They Said What?

I did not believe that as a member of that body that I should allow someone to make comments such as he was preparing to make that ultimately were just open rebellion against what the word of God has said, what God has said, and just open rebellion against God's law.

**Pennsylvania state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe, on why he stopped openly gay Democratic Rep. Brian Sims from making floor remarks about the Supreme Court's gay marriage ruling.**

*Cranberrypatch.com, 6-28-13*

Also, boys are sometimes reluctant readers. We are a pretty testosterone-driven publishing company, so these comics and graphic novels are pretty adept at catching their attention and drawing them into the story.

**Art Ayris, Kingstone Comics CEO, on the company's 12-volume, 2,000-page comic book version of the bible**

*The Guardian, 6-28-13*

P. Diddy, Jay-Z, they're not the only ones who should be driving Ferraris and living in large houses.

**Bishop Ron Gibson, Life Church of God in Christ, one of six megachurch pastors featured in "Preachers of L.A.," a new Oxygen network reality series**

*Christian Post, 6-30-13*

I'm about as politically incorrect as you can get. I'm wearing an NRA ball cap, eating a Chick-fil-A sandwich, reading a Paula Deen cookbook and sipping a 20-ounce sweet tea while sitting in my Cracker Barrel rocking chair with the Gather Vocal Band singing "Jesus

Saves" on the stereo and a Gideons bible in my pocket. Yes sir, I'm politically incorrect and happy as a June bug.

**Fox News correspondent Todd Starnes' Facebook post**

*Washington Times, 7-1-13*

Take revenge! Avenge the secularists who have brought this disaster upon us. Avenge the evil associated with this folly. Return them to the bosom of religion, talk incessantly. Restore them and their children to the faith. Do this wisely, with sensitivity and determination.

**Shmuel Eliyahu, chief rabbi of Safed, Israel, on how to deal with anger stemming from the 2005 dismantling of Jewish West Bank settlements**

*haaretz.com, 7-5-13*

We'll break myths that children have, like "I'm too young to make a difference" or "I'm too messed up already for God to use me." We bust the myths using scripture and bible stories.

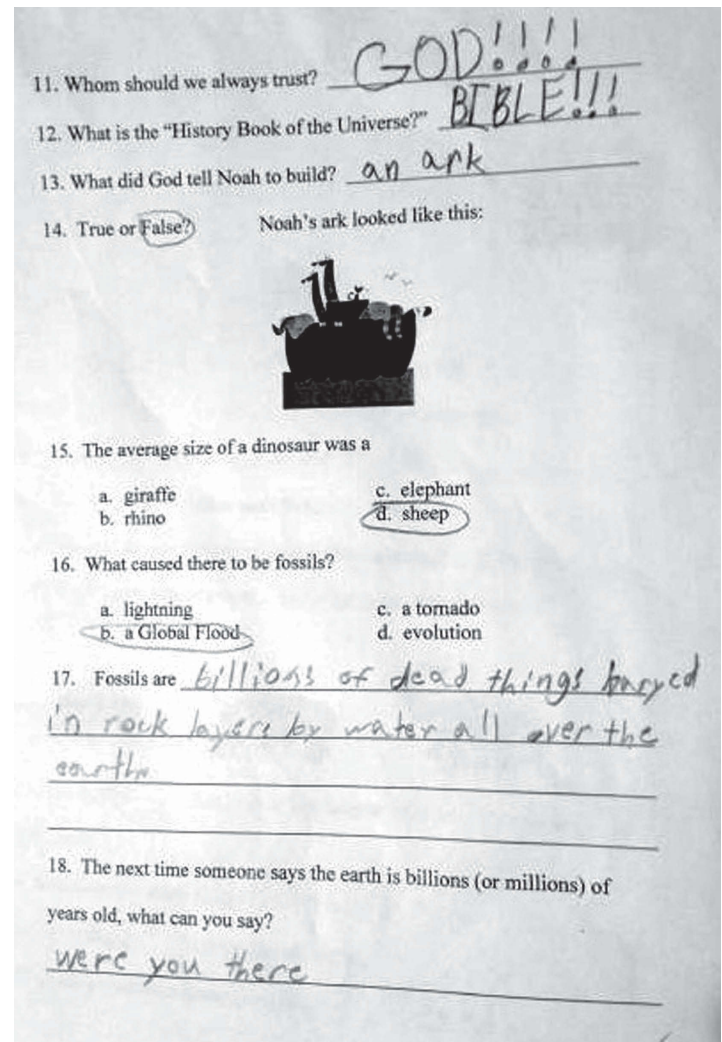
**Rachel Adair, Vertical Life Church preschool director, Dallas, Ga., on vacation bible school for ages 3 through fifth grade held in Abney Elementary [Public] School**

*Dallas-Hiram Patch, 7-9-13*

You have to kill them with a cross before they get into the church — that's the point.

**Boris Yakemenko, on a video game unveiled at a Russian Orthodox youth festival in Moscow where players score points by "killing" Pussy Rioters trying to enter a cathedral**

*Reuters, 7-11-13*



## Were you there?

Actual fourth-grade science quiz from Blue Ridge Christian Academy in Landrum, S.C.

who we were, and what we wanted.

The four kids had some problems with our divorce, but that happens in all divorces. At least it wasn't over infidelity or spousal abuse or alcoholism or anything like that. Today, the kids are just fine. Most kids are resilient, and they can grow and adjust.

Philosophically, she can tell her husband that they both ultimately want the same thing: love, understanding, morality, family, openness and integrity, but that she doesn't think those things are necessarily found in the bible or Christianity. She thinks there's a *better* way to get to those shared values.

Those shared human values ought to be the glue that bring people together.

**Joan Reisman-Brill, "The Ethical Dilemma" columnist:**

Ultimately, the woman will have to decide for herself. If she decides to keep her secret, she will suffer from being false to everyone, including the most important people in her life. In the interest of hoping to save her marriage and protect her child (and perhaps additional children that come along), she will be repressing her true self and essentially lying to everyone.

This is not healthy for her, her marriage, her family or society. It also means she will have to participate in indoctrinating her child with the same crap she can no longer accept. Taking this path to save the marriage and family may still lead to its demise, since she will be bottling up bad feelings that are bound to manifest in some destructive way.

If she decides to tell her husband, there can be a range of possible reactions: At one extreme, he could throw her out and try to bar her from contact with their child. At the other extreme, he would understand and accept, and even come around to share her views.

Most likely would be a combination somewhere in between — perhaps dismay at first, followed by some level of understanding over time. Or an initial effort to accept that fails, in which case the marriage might also fail.

Only she can even guess what her husband's reaction would be, and she could be wrong in either direction. I would suggest that she prepare to tell him, but first do a bit of preparation if she might find herself instantly rejected and banished.

She should figure out what friends or relatives would support her (emotionally and perhaps financially) if she has to suddenly transition to a new home and life. I'm hoping there's no fear of physical violence, but that's also something to be considered and prepared for, perhaps by having a friendly witness in the next room or a public setting for the big reveal.

She should think hard about continuing to spend her life living a lie. Why should her husband control the family's beliefs? If he loves her, won't he want to try to understand and accommodate her? If not, wouldn't it be better for her to move on ASAP, even if it means sharing custody of their child? Won't it be just as harmful for the child to be raised as a hardcore Pentecostal as to have him deal with the parents' conflicting worldviews?

I would lean toward giving her husband the benefit of the doubt that he might be capable of living with her views, while being prepared to live without him.

She has to bear in mind that she's doing nothing wrong and has nothing to feel guilty about. She's just looking at the world honestly. Unfortunately, we can't be sure even those we love and who love us will do the same.

**Bill Dunn, Freethought Today editor:**

I went through this 16 years ago when our unbaptized children were 12 and 9, although our differences weren't about religion. If only adults could be as resilient as adults claim children are!

Dan nailed it with "If she's afraid of her husband, in *any* way, then that is serious trouble." No person, male or female, should fear their partner. It's also pretty easy to smell when they don't respect you, even though you may want to deny it.

# New donors to Freethought Hall building expansion

Groundbreaking for FFRF's major expansion of its office building in downtown Madison, Wis., begins in late August. The 4-story addition is scheduled for completion by late spring 2014. The library and cupola will be added to FFRF's original building in the summer of 2014.

FFRF warmly thanks its most major benefactors to date:

- Stephen and Diane Uhl: \$255,500  
Named for them will be:
  - Diane Uhl Legal Wing
  - Stephen "Out of God's Closet" Uhl Recording Studio
- Diane Uhl Medium Grand Piano
- Joel B. Landon & Wanda Y. Beers: \$100,000
  - Library named for them
- Very Kind Florida Donor: \$96,862.37
  - Auditorium named for donor

#### Special recognition categories:

- The names of the most generous donors will be etched tastefully in 5-inch lettering on a beautiful silver full wall in the lobby.
- The name of anyone donating \$5,000 or more will appear on a plaque in new Freethought Hall lobby.
- **Naming Rights** (still some spaces unnamed) \$50,000 to \$100,000+ depending on space. Contact FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor at 608-256-8900 about naming rights.

**Also available: Tiles and Paving Stones:** \$2,500 — Name on attractive tile in entry vestibule; \$2,000 — Name or message on 12x12 paving stone (limit 81 characters including spaces and punctuation); \$1,000 — Name or message on 6x12 paving stone (limit 60 characters including spaces and punctuation). Donors should please indicate they want to purchase a tile or paving stone and indicate the name or message with their donation.

Donate to FFRF's building fund using the brochure mailed to you in the spring, or online (which contains details, sketches, etc.) at:

[ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page](http://ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page)

The listing below reports donations to FFRF's Building Expansion Fund received by FFRF from June 21 to July 29, 2013. It is not cumulative except for the total. Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues.

If you gave a gift designated to the building fund by or before July 29 which does not appear to be reflected in this list or previous listings (donations received prior to April 30 were published in the May issue and those received between May 1 to June 20 in the June/July issue), please contact FFRF so that we can check our records and acknowledge your kind gift!

Contact FFRF Bookkeeper Katie Daniel at 608-256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email: [katie@ffrf.org](mailto:katie@ffrf.org). To protect your privacy, no donors will be identified by name without express permission from the donor. (Be sure to check the box giving FFRF permission.)



## Gifts received June 21-July 29, 2013

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 Anonymous, Ontario, Canada, \$100.00  
 Anonymous, TX, \$100.00  
 Anonymous, WA, \$100.00  
 Anonymous, WI, \$100.00  
 Anonymous, WI, \$100.00  
 Liz and Bob Srinivasan, WI, \$100.00  
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 Alice M Kachman, MI, \$20.00  
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 Arlen and Marlene Zinn, FL, \$20.00  
 Alice M Kachman, MI, \$20.00  
 Anonymous, NY, \$20.00  
 Ken Stiegler, SC, \$20.00  
 Jonathan H Phillips, WI, \$20.00  
 Richard and Nancy Corbeille, AL, \$25.00  
 Roseanne Allen, CA, \$25.00  
 Rob Payne, FL, \$25.00  
 Rob Kraft, MO, \$25.00  
 Anonymous, NJ, \$25.00  
 Simon Gillham, WI, \$25.00

**Cumulative Total: \$920,567.29**

**GOAL: \$1.5 million**

#### Updates:

Madison Arnold, NY, was listed as Anonymous, NY, in the June/July issue, but has since granted his permission to list his \$1,000 contribution.

Joseph & Norma Cunningham, IL, were incorrectly listed as Anonymous, IL, in the June/July issue, but had granted permission to acknowledge their \$5,000 contribution.

Frank Dowding, MN, was listed as Anonymous, MN, in the May issue, but has since granted his permission to acknowledge his \$5,000 contribution.

Thank you, everyone!

## FFRF welcomes 27 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome 27 new Lifetime Members. They are:

Dan and Liana Thompson, Thomas Delaney, Sanford Gage, Donald Gibbs, Patricia Hall, Peggy Johnson, Richard Kirschman, Marc Vertin, Linda Shoemaker, Robert Simons, Dr. Mark E McGovern, Dr. Trey Reed, Brant Abrahamson (gift from Frederick C. Smith), Douglas Walty, Glenn Hindbaugh, Dana Wichmann (as well as a Lifetime Membership in memory of his mother, Myra A. Meyer), Dr. Edward G. Janosik, Jon Newquist, Gary L. York, Dennis Connolly, Roger Muzii, Peter Norton, Allison Dodds (gift from Lifetime Member Dianne Centa), John W. Olsen and Mac Russell.

States represented are Alabama,

California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington.

Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated either for individual membership or membership renewal, ensure never another renewal notice and are designated for rainy day savings. Lifetime dues are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF.

Warm thanks to Mac, John, Dianne, Peter, Roger, Dennis, Gary, Jon, Edward, Myra, Dana, Glenn, Douglas, Frederick, Trey, Mark, Robert, Linda, Marc, Richard, Peggy, Patricia, Donald, Sanford, Thomas, Liana and Dan!

### Recruit a Member: Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:

FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701

### Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

## William J. Schulz Prize: first-place high school essay

# Moral standards needn't stem from religion

By Emily Stephens

*Emily was awarded \$3,000 by FFRF for her essay plus a \$50 bonus from Dean and Dorea Schramm.*

I attend a public school, but religion is everywhere. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes has a dominant presence, a page in the yearbook is devoted to summer youth group trips, teachers run a faculty bible study, and Prayer at the Pole draws large crowds. My school has woven a blanket of Christianity tightly around itself — sparks of skepticism are quickly smothered.

And yet, for some, skepticism persists.

I can't remember a time when I ever truly believed in God, yet I dutifully attended Mass until middle school. It wasn't until my sophomore year that I began to embrace what I theretofore had hidden from, embrace the word I didn't think I could say without receiving dirty looks and hearing snide comments whispered from behind hands in the halls of my school: *atheist*.

I read Richard Dawkins and Carl Sagan, two incredibly influential authors, for their eloquent defense of science and critique of dogmatic religion. Then I began to *think*.

Linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky wrote, on a topic wholly unrelated but nonetheless relevant to a discussion of religion, "Verify what I present . . . see what looks correct, what looks wrong, look at other material which wasn't discussed, figure out what the truth really is. That's what you've

got a brain for."

I followed Chomsky's advice, absorbed religious thought and then melded the knowledge into a workable prototype of a moral philosophy. This is a challenging undertaking for any individual, but particularly for a 17-year-old student in a small city surrounded by large, uniformly religious interests.

My speech and debate background gave me a foundation in philosophy that most high school students lack, so my moral standards are a fusion of classical and contemporary philosophy. Once one has rejected the Christian moral system, it is quite liberating to develop one's own, but the process is fluid, slow-going and ultimately the largest challenge any nonbeliever faces.

It is imperative that one does not simply reject a certain mold of thinking. This step alone, while necessary, is more indicative of, so to speak, "a-thinking," just as an action that is neither moral nor immoral is amoral, a-thinkers look only to reject what they do not like. They do not value the exploratory process required to find out what they truly do believe.

In my sophomore year, two friends and I made a documentary on the effects of a heavily Christian community on those who choose to leave that religion. Curiously, I spoke little, despite the fact that the project was partially based on my own experiences. But when another student in the video commented that "Emily and I are pretty much the only nonbelievers in the school," some of my class watching gave an audible gasp.

This was the second challenge that

An obligation based out of religious duty is inherently suspect and less meaningful than one derived from a secular origin.

I faced: sharing my religious views in a way that was not pushy yet still raised awareness of the path open to others who may have been feeling similarly smothered. Ultimately, I think I solved this problem by creating the video, then consistently bringing a secular perspective to class discussions and school events.

This year, I co-founded the Fly Free Anti-Slavery Movement at my high school, a branch of a larger organization based out of [the Christian] Whitworth University that works to stop human trafficking. At an early leadership meeting, we were asked why we chose to start our group. Every other student answered in terms of religion — why their Christian faith obligated them to this community service.

My answer was different: "I feel an obligation," I told them, "but not from religion. I honestly believe our universal humanity dictates our service to each other." The blank stares I saw were disheartening. It seemed as though, to them, moral obligations did not exist if



they were not found in religion.

To me, quite the opposite is true. An obligation based out of religious duty is inherently suspect and less meaningful than one derived from a secular origin. Freethinkers craft their beliefs from everything around them.

I do not seek enlightenment from one narrow corner of a windowpane. Rather, I throw open the shutters and let the light of reason and knowledge flood the room and warm my skin.

*Emily Stephens, 17, Colbert, Wash., will attend Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service to major in international relations. She was an eight-time state debate competitor, competed twice in the National History Bowl and Bee and was her class valedictorian.*

## Second-place (tie) high school essay

# Senior project revealed religious ignorance

By Alexis Thomas

*Alexis was awarded \$2,050 by FFRF for her essay.*

When I first entered the public school system the summer before my first year of high school, I thought I would be escaping the ignorance, hypocrisy and harassment that I dealt with during my nine years of torture at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic School.

My Catholic father had decided it was a good idea to enroll me in a Catholic school at the age of 5 so I could continue to stare wide-eyed at parents and teachers reveling in the "wonder of God" while being spoon-fed stories of a great and powerful man in the sky that even Dr. Seuss would consider odd.

Needless to say, I grew up and out of the religion, becoming the only atheist to walk my school's halls, hated by teachers and students alike because I no longer believed in fairy tales. After



I finished eighth grade, I was finally given a choice between a public or a Catholic high school. It was the easiest decision I have ever made.

But when I came to Teays Valley High School, things weren't how I imagined they would be. Teays Valley is located in the appropriately named town of Ashville [pop. 4,120] in southern Ohio, where everyone seemingly is either a farmer or a drug addict.

I immediately had problems with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes student club that prayed in the lobby every morning before school and then partied, drank and did drugs after school. I couldn't stand the hypocrisy and ignorance anymore.

Getting into arguments with my conservative government teacher about religion's role in the classroom wasn't enough for me anymore. I had to do something bigger, and I finally got the opportunity this year. Every senior must work on a research project based on any topic approved by the teacher, divided into an eight-page research paper, 15 hours of practicum and a 50-minute presentation. I quickly decided to devote my senior project to proving the ignorance of religious followers.

Several of my proposed topics were shot down by my teacher for any silly reason she could think of, but finally I

My survey showed the ignorance of my classmates who were religious.

had approval when I changed my topic to the similarities, differences and religious conflicts of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

My thesis was that members of these religions cannot get along because they do not understand their own religions, let alone the religions they are trying to exterminate. To prove my thesis, I devoted my practicum to creating a survey for the entire senior class, asking them what religion they followed and testing their knowledge of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

My survey showed the ignorance of my classmates who were religious and left many people shocked when I unveiled the results at my presentation. For example, only 45% of the Christians in my senior class knew that Jesus was the major prophet of Christianity.

My project got a lot of people talking, and I didn't let the issue end there. A small group of friends and I had T-shirts professionally made that said "Religion is evolving, will you sur-

vive natural selection?" and wore them to school.

If anyone didn't know about my senior project and its outcome, they knew about it after we made the shirts. Many students and even a staff member asked me if they could buy one. Through my project, many students at my school realized that they were not the only atheists in the hallway, and for the first time I wasn't, either.

Through my experiences, I realized that when being a young freethinker, the challenge is not dealing with the constant harassment we receive from the ignorance of others and the overwhelming feeling that we are the only ones who have decided to put reason above what we were told to believe.

The real challenge lies in letting other freethinkers know that they are not alone. Making religious-minded people think twice about themselves and their religion in the process is an added bonus.

*Alexis Thomas, 18, Orient, Ohio, will attend Ohio State University with an intended major in integrated language arts or English education. Alexis achieved four-year honor roll in high school with a 4.23 GPA and was secretary of the National Honor Society.*

## Second-place (tie) high school essay

### *The godless are not goodless*

By Emma Conover-Crockett

Emma was awarded \$2,050 by FFRF for her essay.

When my Shi'a Muslim host mother realized that I indeed fit the term "infidel," she told me "It's horrible to be a kafra." I was an exchange student in Muscat, Oman, for a year, with the singular goal of engaging in cross-cultural communication between Americans and Muslims.

My host had opened her home to me but had expected a pious Christian girl. Before departing, I had decided to keep my atheism to myself, because I recognized how many fundamentalists strongly oppose it. But over time, my host family grew to recognize that I did not accompany the other American students to church, I did not pray or wear religious symbols. They began to question their assumption that I was religious.

Living in a significantly Muslim culture was painful and confusing at times but helped me to grow and appreciate my own identity. That year, I explored my own atheism in the midst of an overwhelmingly religious culture and found spirituality independent of belief in a deity.

I tossed and turned many nights, ex-

Rather than focusing on an afterlife, a truly good person tries to create the best life while still alive.

ploring reason and religion in the context of each other. Amidst my transfer from a fairly secular family to an extremely religious one, I solidified my belief that there was no God.

Being a freethinker has, for me, meant encountering a constant stream of appeals from religious society. Everywhere I go, I find religion. Oman's national religion is Islam. In the U.S., billboards have Jesus plastered on them. Even our Pledge of Allegiance explicitly refers to a deity.

With religion permeating world culture, it can be ostracizing to fall on the outside, requiring me to explain over and over why I am a humanist. I am constantly asked to justify myself, and then shot down for supposedly being less wholesome or virtuous than religious people.

But to me it boils down to the basic idea that people are fundamentally good, regardless of whether they wor-

ship a deity.

I believe in the true possibility to live a just life independent of religious worship. When I look around the world and see people who are devoting their lives to social justice and change, they rarely do so in the name of religion. Nicholas Kristof, intrepid reporter and crusader for human rights, articulates his views of a tangible and possible world peace and understanding without emphasizing a need for religion.

Kristof inspires me to focus living justly for the *right* reasons, not to please a deity but to create interpersonal and intercultural bonds, to work so that no human goes without basic needs and to care for the Earth upon which we live. Rather than focusing on an afterlife, a truly good person tries to create the best life while still alive. Because I don't believe in a god, this is all the more apparent to me.

But many people in my life cannot understand this. Although their religions preach love, they plainly tell me I'll go to hell. They fear their God's wrath rather than embracing tangible human love.

When I meet this sort of person, I try to avoid argument. Instead, I allow my actions to speak for themselves. By living as justly as I can, I try to persuade people that, in the words of humanist leader Greg Epstein, it is possible to be good without God.



As my year studying abroad closed, the exchange program was searching for new host families, and the director asked my host mother to host a student, a Christian girl, for three weeks over Ramadan. "No," she said. "We would only want a student like Emma. Someone good like her."

I still smile at that milestone in my humanism and life, that through my actions I was able to truly spread the idea that the godless are not goodless.

Emma Conover-Crockett, 18, Beloit, Wis., will be attending Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, to major in political science and international relations with a minor in Arabic. Emma participated in the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Abroad program in Oman and blogged about her experiences.

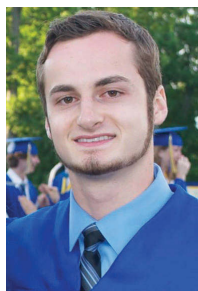
## Third-place (tie) high school essay

### Refusing to take a knee to football prayers

By Alex Kendig

Alex was awarded \$1,050 by FFRF for his essay.

Certain areas of society have been ambushed by religion and appear to be past the point of no return. One of the foremost areas



in which this has happened in sports, especially American football. Tim Tebow publicly broadcasts the heavy influence of Christianity on football, but it has existed and continues to exist without his theatrical sideline prayers.

Last fall was my senior season and also my last time ever playing organized football. My team and I performed well, finishing eighth in the state of Michigan. I was awarded the Southeastern Conference Sportsmanship Award and an All-League Honorable Mention certificate.

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes may want people to believe that our success came from the fact that 95% of my football team was composed of white Christian athletes who pointed up at the sky after every touchdown and tackle, but I would not agree with them.

I never participated in the team's pregame prayers or received help from an invisible hand, and I still achieved goals and exceeded expectations. As

I always resented the fact that my team would look upon me as an outsider before we went into battle together.

a linebacker, it took knowledge of the game and quick reaction times to tackle opposing runners at the line of scrimmage, not prayers to God asking that I play well.

Throughout my high school football years, it always astounded me that pregame prayers were the norm in a locker room two minutes before the start of a game. I see them as an obvious declaration of bigotry. I was always even more surprised to see the glaring faces of those who looked back at me as I stood aside from the remainder of my team while they knelt and prayed.

I never joined them because I do not believe in the prayers they were reciting and found praying to be a narrow-minded approach to promoting team unity before a game. How is a group of young boys supposed to feel like a team, a band of brothers, if they are segregated into Christian and non-Christian players two minutes before the start of a game? How could I trust my teammates to have my back if



Gina Harrison Photography

Alex Kendig tackled the issue of his teammates' prayers head-on.

they were upset at my not joining team prayer? How could they trust me?

Pregame prayers have been one of the most difficult things to face as a young atheist, and I always resented the fact that my team would look upon me as an outsider before we went into battle together.

As hard as it was to play together in the face of such enormous cognitive separation, I would not let it affect the way I handled myself during the game. I perceived the situation not as an excuse to play poorly but as a test of my character to overcome adversity and prove to my teammates that I could succeed without religion. I showed respect for my teammates and their beliefs, and I proved that I had their backs on the field despite our differ-

ences.

Eventually, my teammates came to respect my lack of belief. I have learned a lot about other people from being in the spiritual minority, but I have also learned a great deal about myself: I have the ability to think freely and act according to rational beliefs based on logic and reason, rather than conforming to the beliefs of the masses.

The fact that I am a freethinker pushes me to succeed so I can prove that I have the capability to make my own decisions and live a fulfilling life without belief in a "greater" being.

Alex Kendig, 17, Saline, Mo., will be attending the University of California at Los Angeles to major in business economics and minor in music industry.

## Third-place (tie) high school essay

# Atheistic adventures in Bush's backyard

By Anna Cain

Anna was awarded \$1,050 by FFRF for her essay.

My hometown of Midland, Texas, is crafted in the image of its patron saint and favorite son: George W. Bush. His boyhood home is now a museum with a veritable shrine of a gift shop.

In true Bush fashion, our city of 111,000 people boasts 304 churches and four bookstores. Even the atheists here have three biblical names, Anna Faith Cain, for example. As a freethinker in this Baptist paradise, my fall from faith was destined to be exciting.

I began doubting God when I was in fourth grade. At the time, my family belonged to a charismatic Baptist church that ministers to those "struggling with homosexuality" and threatens damnation for every offense from premarital sex to interpreting the bible metaphorically.

Understandably, I was terrified. I had never met a person who was not religious, and I only knew a handful who were not Baptist. So for six years, I lived with the knowledge that those doubts would condemn me to eternal torment in hell.

The summer after 10th grade, I met two atheists. At that point, I did not believe in God but had been silent about it for years. My friends understood that

I needed an injection of courageous freethought. Thus began the most adventurous summer of my life.

We devised an ingenious method of smuggling books: Harry Potter parties. Though this may sound ridiculous, the long robes and elaborate costumes allowed us to conceal books from any watchful adult eyes. And so, under my Gryffindor robe, I smuggled Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens, Dennett, Barker and Sagan past my parents. Within a month, I was out of the closet as an atheist.

When my fears of hell vanished, a profound disgust for Midland remained. My private school praises Christian virtues like tolerance and acceptance but forces all students to attend a daily 30-minute chapel service on penalty of detention. This town of Christian charity uses the threat of ostracism to keep freethinkers silent and invisible.

So we began resisting. I distributed freethought books to a fellow doubter. A number of us regularly sat together in chapel to display solidarity by not taking the Eucharist. And then, we scored one public victory.

Early in my senior year, a congressman named Mike Conaway visited our government class. After a rather forgettable conservative lecture, Conaway closed with a prayer and a declaration that America would be saved when we return to family values and Judeo-Christian morals.

## When I turned to atheism, no lightning bolt dropped from the sky to smite me.

In Texan subtext, return to family values is code for stoning homosexuals and turning feminists into housewives. Accepting Judeo-Christian morals is code for creating a theocracy. Mr. Conaway had turned his political lecture into a Christian soapbox. I was angry. So as a teen columnist for Midland's newspaper, I wrote a scathing denunciation of his speech.

Within a day, the entire school had read and rejected my article. I even heard credible rumors that fellow students circulated a petition to have me expelled. Additionally, a few Christian classmates wrote a letter to the editor defending Conaway.

When the letter ran, one of the authors posted a picture of it on Facebook so I could see the dozens of likes and favorable comments. The firestorm extended past the walls of my school. Almost weekly, a stranger pulled me aside at a restaurant or grocery store to comment on my infamous polemic.

Up until the Conaway incident, I had feared the rich conservatives

who run Midland. These Texan aristocrats are a bit like God. To a young freethinker, they appear both omniscient and omnipotent. The consequences for speaking against them seem dire.

But when I turned to atheism, no lightning bolt dropped from the sky to smite me. Similarly, when I wrote the Conaway article, many people supported me.

God is a myth. So is the notion that these conservative barons, who make their fortunes draining oil from an Earth they insist is only 10,000 years old, can rule by fear.

The Texas aristocracy may seem all-powerful, but a freethinker who has the courage to stand up and speak out cannot be silenced by fairy tales or those who cling to them.

Anna Cain, 18, Midland, Texas, is enrolled at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colo. She's interested in pursuing a double major in English and a foreign language. In high school she tutored sophomores, wrote an anecdotal history of her school, wrote a biweekly column for the Midland Reporter-Telegram and volunteered as a "teen attorney" in Midland Teen Court, defending teens charged with minor offenses.



## Fourth-place (tie) high school essay

# Outrage over preaching teacher conquered shyness



By Sara Elizabeth Sheppard

Sarah was awarded \$550 by FFRF for her essay.

Price, policy, producers, profit, productive resources and property rights are topics of economics, not prayer. Sitting quietly at my desk, listening to anything but economics, I questioned my future role in the atheist movement. My heart was pounding and I felt my hands starting to sweat. To speak up or not to speak up, that was the question.

Did I want to speak up for atheism while suffering judgment or keep quiet and move on with my life? My brain was conflicted while my voice ruptured through resistance. All of a sudden I heard, "How can you compare atheism to smoking? Do you not think that crosses the line of what to say in a public school classroom?"

Someone had finally stood up — then the realization hit me, that someone was me.

Growing up, I always hid behind my parents when meeting someone new. I was the shy little girl who had the face of fright during elementary school plays and never wanted the leading role. I was the student who never spoke up if I felt like something was incorrect because I feared being an outcast. I never saw myself as an activist because I felt as though my quiet voice would drown in the sea of loud and outgoing people.

One day in the summer of 2012, that was tested in my economics class. We were all excited about the teacher and he was excited to see us. As the semester went by, I realized that his passion for passing on his knowledge was not focused on economics but on religion, prayer and spirituality.

Instead of teaching economics, he told us that certain historical people were among the greatest because of their spiritual enlightenment. He said

## This was economics class, not Sunday school.

it was human nature to have a spiritual and religious component, therefore making atheists seem unnatural. He went so far as to compare atheism to smoking, saying how the body originally rejects smoking is just like how "the mind rejects the concept of atheism."

This was the breaking point for me. At that moment my voice felt so powerful and unstoppable, even though part of my brain was demanding to silence the neuron's signals going toward my larynx. After I questioned the appropriateness of making such statements in a public school classroom, he shrugged it off with no reasonable reply.

But he didn't stop. On the blackboard the next week, he drew arrows pointing up like a mountain while describing the positive effect prayer has on the state of mind. I knew something had to be done, but I had no idea where to start, having "come out" only the preceding November.

I felt like I was alone against his strong personality, that everyone else agreed with him. Even though I felt alone in the classroom, I knew I had

the help of the online community group I call family. That night I posted my situation in the Houston Atheists Facebook group. My thoughts were reaffirmed — action had to take place.

I was directed to the Freedom From Religion Foundation, where I was able to get help from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt. After various email exchanges, Stephanie wrote a wonderful letter to the superintendent of my school district.

A few friends in the same class were angry with me, saying I destroyed my teacher's freedom of religion. But in reality, his actions were unconstitutional. This was economics class, not Sunday school.

From this experience, I learned that even though I grew up with a shy personality, I can still have a passionate and assertive voice that fights for what is constitutional.

Sara Elizabeth Sheppard, 19, was born in Houston and grew up in Katy, Texas. She plans to attend Lone Star College in Cypress and eventually transfer to a university. Sara interned as a pharmacy technician and will be certified this summer and will major in pre-pharmacy. She received a Mu Alpha Theta honor cord in high school because of her excellence in mathematics.

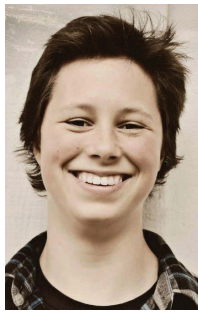
## Fourth-place (tie) high school essay

# Graduation this year is about . . . graduation

By Taysie Savage

*Taysie was awarded \$550 by FFRF for her essay.*

I sat on the hard bleacher two years ago with my head bowed, squirming inside. This was supposed to be a high school graduation ceremony, not a church service.



My uneasiness was like a physical thing, but I didn't feel it would be polite to get up and leave in the middle.

So, like some others around me, I sat in uncomfortable but respectful silence, hoping the prayer wouldn't last too long.

Seniors are responsible each year for choosing the guest speaker for the graduation ceremony. That year, a local pastor was chosen. His three children all graduated from the school I attend, where he coached football for many years and his wife drove a school bus. They are well-known and liked, but I and many others were not prepared for the type of speech he was delivering.

It started and ended with a request to bow our heads in prayer. He prayed to Jesus and to God to prepare students and bless them, to keep them safe and pure in the outside world. To say my family was uncomfortable was to put it mildly. Discomfort and disbelief stirred within me.

There are about 60 students in my

I informed the school that it's a violation of civil rights to use a prayer at a public school event.

high school and 13 are seniors who will be graduating in a few short weeks. I'm anxious about what my future will hold, excited about taking on more adult responsibilities, and relieved to have made it this far. But I'm also anxious about the graduation ceremony itself because of how my community is, what attitudes are sometimes held by students and teachers and what happened at that graduation ceremony two years ago.

All my school years, I have struggled with trying to explain my feeling that there is no God and that the bible is nothing more than an interesting book full of stories that some feel are moral guidelines. I feel the concept of God is a mythology that attempts to explain things humans have difficulty understanding.

I prefer to research things that I find puzzling, finding my own answers and blundering down the path I find, taking responsibility when things go wrong, or right.

There have been many times when my outlook caused hard feelings and defensive attitudes among fellow students, who mistake my questioning nature and rejection of conventional

religious belief systems as being somehow evil. I have never said I am not a spiritual person, just one who chooses not to buy into the conformist ideology that seems so prevalent in the world today.

I once attended a church service and went to an orientation to be a camp counselor, but I couldn't be true to my own beliefs and continue to take part in those events. I felt embarrassed, not for myself, but for those in attendance who seemed to truly believe what was being espoused. I felt like I was disrespectful to myself, and that no one else ever seemed interested in or respectful of my beliefs.

This year I was the graduate. We chose a former teacher for our guest speaker. The school was informed that it's a violation of civil rights to use a prayer at a public school event. I'm not sure if anyone will notice or miss a prayer, but I feel relieved to know I won't have to squirm again on my own graduation day.

I won't feel forced to listen to what I don't believe is true. I know I can attend a church of my choosing to hear such a message, on my own time, if I desire. I know I'm not the only one with this feeling. I'm just the only one who informed the school, using information I researched and presented to the administration.

This was my parting gift to future graduates — to be able to participate



**Taysie Savage is the only female ever to have played on the football team at her high school.**

in a graduation ceremony free from proselytization and which focuses on student achievement, wisdom for the future and best wishes as we begin our adult lives.

*Taysie Savage, 17, Indiola, Ore., will attend Oregon State University to major in forestry management. She served as student council president in her senior year and was inducted into the National Honor Society.*

## Fourth-place (tie) high school essay

# Religious divide crossed by burning bridges



By Colin Muller

*Colin was awarded \$550 by FFRF for his essay.*

The assistant principal's parting words to me after my two-week fight for justice were these: "You've burned bridges in this process, both with me and with the principal." Her words still resonate in my ears as I recall how Walton High School's "Freethinkers for Acceptance Cooperation and Trust" club was first denied and then begrudgingly accepted.

I had diligently met my high school's requirements for starting a club. I drafted a constitution, found prospective members and got a faculty spon-

sor. The day of the proposal went well. I presented my club to a committee of five students and the assistant principal and explained the club's purpose: to bring together freethinking students who are surrounded by a predominantly religious society, with the goal of showing the Walton community that freethinkers (atheists, agnostics, Unitarians, etc.) can lead morally sound lives and be genuinely good people without reporting to a higher power.

The committee rejected my club. At that point I was faced with a difficult decision. I could either give up and accept the discriminatory rejection or stand up for what I believed in.

I read over the rejection letter several times. I felt conflicted. One part of the letter stood out to me: "We cannot accept a club that holds or espouses any particular religious, political, or philosophical belief."

Did this not contradict all that I had ever learned from First Amendment bumper stickers, annual Constitution Day lessons or "School House Rock" songs? What about the long-standing religious clubs at my school, such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Jew Crew?

The rejection seemed like a clear First Amendment violation, but I thought that perhaps public schools were exempt from this rule. So I did

I had poured my heart into what I believed in only to see it quelled without any serious consideration.

some research.

I came across the Equal Access Act of 1984, which states that it's unlawful for any public secondary school to discriminate on the basis of religious, political, philosophical or other content. My suspicions were confirmed. I had to stand up for the club.

The next day I informed the assistant principal that the rejection violated the Equal Access Act, blatantly contradicting it word for word. I told her that the decision was not only unjust but seemingly illegal. She would not hear me out and justified the rejection by saying that "life is unfair."

After this painful second interaction, I was struck with sheer humiliation. I had poured my heart into something I believed in only to see it quelled without any serious consideration. I left her office vowing that I would do

all in my power to give a voice to the freethinkers at Walton who feel alienated for espousing differing views. The assistant principal's intolerance was the catalyst for me to become a change agent.

I contacted a staff attorney from the Freedom from Religion Foundation. He helped me draft a letter to the county superintendent. A week later, the assistant principal called me back into her office and told me the club was now approved. She said I had overstepped my bounds by involving the superintendent and that I had "burned bridges."

I guess I did, but I did so for what I deem a noble cause. I was faced with a situation in which my constitutional rights were being violated, and instead of allowing the school administration to abuse its power and trample freedom of expression, I compromised my previously spotless relationship with the administration in order to stand up for my rights.

*Colin Muller, 18, Evanston, Ill., is enrolled at Columbia University and will major in political science and history with an eye toward law school. In high school he was a member of the Model United Nations, president of the Freethinkers Club and Politically Active Citizens and student body treasurer.*

## Fifth-place (tie) high school essay

# 'Giddy little church girls' missed love memo?



By Kamila Buscavage

*Kamila was awarded \$350 by FFRF for her essay.*

**D**uring the summer of 2010, the cool thing to do was to be a Christian — to wear your cross necklace, to keep a bible on hand, to know every word to the musical masterpiece titled “Our God Is Greater.” The fad caught on like wildfire.

Suddenly, it seemed as if all of my so-called friends were pushing me to convert. In every corner you could

## Cornerstone Chapel seemed to be more of a brainwashing factory than a place of worship.

hear the faint whispers of “He can save you,” and “I’ve seen Him perform miracles.” He? Him? Why are these pronouns capitalized in the middle of a sentence? I was utterly confused. I couldn’t escape it.

On the first day of 10th grade, I witnessed a girl who had just recently moved to the area openly ask people at the lunch table, “So, who here is a Christian?” What? Did I really just hear that?

Because of my own beliefs (or lack thereof), I didn’t say anything, as I wasn’t in the mood to start a full-blown religious dispute. But I thought about those who did follow a religion other than Christianity. Was this girl really that oblivious to the thought of a religion besides her own?

I blamed it on her church. Cornerstone Chapel, the most popular house of prayer in town, seemed to be more

of a brainwashing factory than a place of worship.

Later in the year at a sleepover, the topic came up again. This time, I blurted out “I’m an atheist,” causing everyone in the room to stop and turn simultaneously. I was instantly surrounded with scrutiny and interrogation. There was no way out, I was trapped.

But I stuck to what I believed was right. I had to laugh at some of the questions thrown my way. “Do you worship Satan?” “Do you want to go to hell?” I explained that my refusal to believe in the existence of a god also extended to Satan, heaven and hell.

The looks on their faces were priceless. I further explained that I believed that humans have morals to guide them. When we die, we become one with the Earth. Conception is science, and the Earth came to be by a collision of matter.

The room went silent, but it was as if they were all screaming that I was wrong and that their God would punish me.

The hypocrisy was comical. Wasn’t Christianity supposed to be about loving one another unconditionally? I guess the Cornerstone robots didn’t get the memo.

I had fun with my own variation of a sociology experiment to see which ones actually followed the teachings of their own religion and those who only

thought they did. The ones who were lying to themselves were the ones who relentlessly tried to tell me that I was wrong.

It’s been two years; I’m still waiting.

Since then, most of those same giddy little church girls have grown to realize they’re not the perfect little angels they thought they would always be. In fact, most of them don’t even attend Sunday services anymore. Who knows if they even still consider themselves Christians?

That has been the difference between them and me. I’m still an atheist. Don’t get me wrong, there have been times when I have been close to considering a Christian denomination to follow. But brain power and deductive reasoning have always triumphed. I’m proud to say that I have stuck to what I believe is right, unlike those who fell into the perpetual teachings of past generations.

Today, I have but one question for those who pushed me so long ago to follow the crowd: Is your God really that much greater?

*Kamila Buscavage, 18, Leesburg, Va., is entering the visual arts program at Virginia Polytechnic and State University. She received her high school’s Outstanding Art Student award for three consecutive years.*

## Fifth-place (tie) high school essay

# Helping normalize rational disbelief

By Kerry Foerst

*Kerry was awarded \$350 by FFRF for his essay.*

**B**eing a young atheist in North Carolina’s bible belt is challenging. Atheism is reduced here to merely a negation of a “normal” theism. When I have presented my worldview, I have been ridiculed and ostracized.

Even worse, I have been coerced to publicly attest to beliefs I do not hold — in other words, to lie — to gain recognition for community service.

Last year in my advanced placement U.S. government and politics class, our teacher asked us to raise our hand if we thought “under God” should be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. Mine was the only hand raised. The fundamentalist Christians surrounding me argued the pledge could not be changed because it is “tradition” and “God” can refer to any faith’s deity.

I explained that I was an atheist and that “under God” implied that any American should have theistic faith, therefore fundamentally yoking government with religion and disrespecting any secular worldview. I also countered that God was not originally in the pledge, shooting down the “tradition” claim.

Unfortunately, my peers shunned me for my honesty, ridiculing me as

a “crazy left-wing extremist,” which shows how punitive the bible belt can be toward atheists. I grew up with a secular-atheist father and a Buddhist-atheist mother, but because these classmates had grown up with no atheists, they automatically labeled me an aberration.

When I informed them that about one-fifth of Europeans are atheist, they still could not accept my disbelief. As far as I could tell, I was never again taken seriously on any issue in government class, my favorite high school course.

My atheism led to even greater challenges in the Boy Scouts of America. I enrolled in Cub Scouts with a friend and enjoyed it. Although heavily Christian-themed, the program taught many practical skills and citizenship. I would just be quiet during prayers or scripture readings, so my atheism did not affect my acceptance into Cub Scouts.

But years later as a Boy Scout, I was required to take an oath to God at the start of each meeting. Although I would silently mouth the words, I learned something that ultimately led me to leave the group: To become an Eagle Scout, one must subscribe before a committee to belief in God.

I asked my secular friend from Cub Scouts how he planned to address the Eagle committee’s faith requirement. He said that he would simply lie and say that he was Christian. On hearing this from my close friend, I became completely disillusioned with the Boy

## I countered that God was not originally in the pledge, shooting down the ‘tradition’ claim.

Scouts.

They were bullying children into lying about their core views. Incredibly, the issue was not even allowed to be discussed. My research showed that many people, both secular and religious, thought the requirement should end. Some Eagle Scouts even mailed back their medals in protest.

Not willing to abandon my values, I left scouting without my Eagle medal.

Both of the above experiences taught me that being secular, especially in a zealously religious region, can not only cause altercations with my peers, but can bar me from positions in American institutions.

When I relinquished my Eagle rank, I joined the Obama reelection campaign, hoping to forge a new path of public service. Even so, I know that admitting I do not believe in God may jeopardize even being heard, much less elected or appointed.

Nevertheless, I meet that challenge here, because normalizing rational dis-



belief has to start somewhere if we are to be a truly ethical nation “with liberty and justice for all.” Let it begin with me.

*Kerry Foerst, 18, graduated from Green Hope High School in Cary, N.C., and will attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study strategic communications in the School of Journalism and Communication. He hopes to attend law school after completing his undergraduate degree with a view to eventually working in politics.*

## FFRF Legal Victories

### Church trailers forced from Arizona school

FFRF action got trailers covered with church ads out of a parking lot at Vista Grande High School in Casa Grande, Ariz., where Sun Valley Christian Church rents space on weekends. The church was leaving its trailers in the lot all week.

A local FFRF member sent a letter to Superintendent Shannon Goodsell on June 19. The letter outlined why it's inappropriate to give a church free space and advertising access at a public school.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted Goodsell on July 17 after the district ignored the citizen's complaint. Seidel stressed that the trailers should only be present during rental hours.

Goodsell responded the next day that the church had removed its trailers.

### No more baccalaureate, graduation prayers

FFRF caused an Arkansas school to disassociate itself from future religious baccalaureate services after Dardanelle High School officially invited graduating seniors to attend the May 19 service. The school let a minister hold a 15-minute mandatory assembly where he told students about the service. The school advertised the service in its official list of important "senior activities" and teachers promoted the program in school announcements.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott contacted Superintendent John Thompson on June 26, requesting the district not promote, coordinate or organize the service.

Thompson responded July 19 that less than 20% of graduating seniors attended the 2013 baccalaureate. "We will take steps to completely disassociate the district and school from the services. There should be no perceptions of any role played by the school, no sponsorship, and no student has been or will be compelled to attend such."

•••

Attendees at Ross Beatty Junior/Senior High School graduation in Cassopolis, Mich., contacted FFRF after the ceremony opened and closed with a prayer, both led by students. The prayers were scheduled in the program.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert contacted Superintendent Tracy Hertsel in a May 22 letter, explaining that by scheduling graduation prayers, the school district was promoting religion.

Hertsel responded July 11 that FFRF's concerns were shared with the senior class adviser, who oversees graduation. "We do not anticipate a recurrence [of the prayers]," Hertsel wrote.

### Faux Constitution classes canceled

An FFRF complaint resulted in cancellation of two Constitution summer classes in Springboro, Ohio, that had religious ties.

FFRF's first letter to Springboro Community City Schools in 2011 warned the district that a proposal to teach creationism wrapped in history to counter the alleged "controversy"



around evolution was unconstitutional. The board tabled the plan.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote another letter June 4 to School Board President Kelly Kohls about proposed changes to the board's "Controversial Issues" and "Religious/Patriotic Ceremonies and Observances" policies. Included are gun rights, pro-life/abortion, contraception/abstinence, legalization of drugs and evolution/creation.

Kohls, who is also a Warren County tea party activist, told the Dayton Daily News after the June 4 meeting that "We're going to leave it on first reading for quite a while." Springboro is a city of about 18,500 people, with about 1,900 students at Springboro High.

Kohls stated earlier that "Creationism is a significant part of the history of this county. It is an absolutely valid theory, and to omit it means we are omitting part of the history of this country."

Markert wrote another letter June 26 to the board after learning about two proposed summer school courses. The first was a 12-week Constitution course developed by the Institute on the Constitution.

The flier said participants would "learn [their] Godly American heritage and birthright." David Barton of Wallbuilders and John Eidsmoe of the Foundation for Moral Law in Montgomery, Ala., were video instructors for the course. Both consistently have stated the false notion that America is a Christian nation.

Barton, a Texan, has been described as a "Christian historical revisionist." He often teams up with conservative commentator/author Glenn Beck. Eidsmoe has a law and theology degrees and is an ordained pastor in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations. He's said publicly that Alabama had "a constitutional right to secede" and that "Jefferson Davis and John C. Calhoun understood the Constitution better than did Abraham Lincoln and Daniel Webster." He was "disinvited" from a 2010 tea party rally in Wausau, Wis., because of those statements.

The second course was titled "The Making of America," and was organized by the National Center for Constitutional Studies. A daylong seminar was scheduled for Aug. 3. The flier said participants are "invited to help Springboro Schools evaluate this nationally renowned course on the U.S. Constitution."

News outlets in the area reported July 4 that the school board had canceled the not-so-constitutional classes due to FFRF complaints and community opposition.



"Before" picture of an Arizona high school parking lot where a trailer from Sun Valley Christian Church was parked. The "after" photo, at left, shows FFRF'er "David" and his daughter.

### Wisconsin school buses go Gideon-free

FFRF formally complained about a bus driver for Medford Area Middle School in Medford, Wis., making an unauthorized stop to let a Gideons International bible pusher board the bus to distribute bibles to students. A concerned parent reached out to FFRF. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott contacted District Administrator Pat Sullivan in a May 16 letter, telling him courts have ruled that giving Gideons access to the students is illegal.

Sullivan responded July 3 that Elliott's letter had been sent to the contractor responsible for the school's bus service. Sullivan asked the company to "please make sure that this type of activity does not happen in the future."

### FFRF keeps sushi discounts secular

A couple dining at Tokyo Japanese Restaurant in Fairhope, Ala., informed FFRF about a sign hanging in the door advertising a 10% discount on Sundays only to diners who bring in a church bulletin. Staff Attorney Liz Cavell contacted restaurant manager Adam Hwang on July 16, informing him such a discount violates federal law.

Cavell asked that the discount either be discontinued or made available to all.

The manager responded July 16 that the restaurant removed the flier advertising the discount. "We hope you understand that we not only respect all religious but also nonbelievers," he said.

### FFRF downs cross at Texas school

After getting a local complaint, FFRF Staff Attorney Liz Cavell wrote Brock [Texas] Independent School District Superintendent Richard Tedder on June 13 about a framed cross at Brock Elementary.

Tedder answered by email July 15: "The cross was located in the elementary office and removed. Have a BLESSED day!"

FFRF wishes Tedder and his school district a secular school year.

### Church lady banned from N.H. school

A concerned resident of the Concord [N.H.] School District contacted FFRF about a woman who prayed loudly outside Concord High School and held her hands toward students to pray

over them as they entered the school. She also recited bible verses for at least 15 minutes each day at the entrance. Both activities were approved by the principal.

On July 2, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter of objection to Superintendent Christine Rath. Shortly after FFRF received the local complaint, the Concord Monitor covered the woman's antics in a front-page story.

Rath responded July 12 that the woman is no longer allowed to pray on school property. The complaint generated much media coverage.

### Religious song goes off the program

Action by the Freedom From Religion Foundation ended a public school's promotion of a religious song.

An elementary school in Rancho Cordova, Calif., promoted the song "America" as their song of the month late last year. The song includes several appeals to the Christian God, including reference in the last verse about "Our fathers' God to Thee/Author of liberty/To Thee we sing" and ending with "Protect us by Thy might/Great God our King."

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted Superintendent Deborah Bettencourt in January about the religious song.

Bettencourt answered July 10, saying that the song has not been used since the district received FFRF's letter.

### Last graduation prayer at Arkansas academy

A concerned local resident in Fayetteville, Ark., contacted FFRF after Haas Hall Academy's 2013 graduation began with a prayer. After Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote a letter of complaint to Superintendent Martin Schoppmeyer, the school's counsel emailed Elliott on July 2.

"There will be no prayer at the upcoming Haas Hall Academy graduation," the attorney wrote. "The program will reflect a moment of silence or something similar (i.e., not an introductory prayer)."

### FFRF complaint deflates basketball prayer

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert contacted the two Kentucky school district superintendents responsible for a pregame prayer circle at Monti-

*Continued on next page*



## FFRF Legal Complaints

FFRF's small but efficient legal staff kept extremely busy in midsummer churning out complaints to shore up the wall of separation between state and church. Many of the complaints got a lot of publicity and stirred up local hornets' nests at the thought of "outsiders" suggesting that theocrats should abide by the Constitution.

Some of the notable complaints follow. For more information, go to [ffrf.org](http://ffrf.org) and click on "News/news releases."

### FFRF fights school 'prayer caravan'

An Aug. 10 "prayer caravan" that entails public school district personnel going to every district school in Cullman County, Ala., to say a 10- to 15-minute prayer is being challenged by FFRF. The district's event description online ended with, "It will be a time to lift our schools up to God and ask His blessings for the upcoming school year."

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint July 22 to Superintendent Billy Coleman, saying that the event should be canceled. Hours later, the district removed all information about the event from its website and Facebook page. But since then, Coleman has said publicly several times that the event won't be canceled and denied it's school-sponsored.

In a follow-up letter to a school attorney, Seidel wrote, "Wishing or stating that 'the school system doesn't sponsor' the event does not make it so. This event was organized by the superintendent, who used his official power to post the event on the official district website, to post the event on the official district Facebook page, and the event bears the title 'Cullman County Schools Prayer Caravan.'"

Since its initial letter, FFRF has received reports from seven local families about additional violations, mostly regarding unconstitutional prayers. Complainants say schools allow daily recitations of the Lord's Prayer during the school day, including over the loudspeaker system, have teacher-led prayer before lunch, at graduation ceremonies. One student said every school event starts with a prayer.

Schools often hold school events in churches instead of at school. It's also alleged that Coleman frequently schedules a student investment dinner and school meetings at various churches around the area.

The most disturbing information is that every Tuesday, according to a complainant, a preacher visits West Point Elementary to proselytize. Teachers reportedly have told student their teachers "would be disappointed" if students chose not to listen to the sermons.

### Mayor uses civic pulpit to bully

FFRF is asking Mayor Rita Stephens of Hawesville, Ky., to stop using her civic 'bully pulpit' as an actual pulpit. Stephens writes a column called "Hawesville City Hall Happenings" once a month with religious content sprinkled through every column.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert's July 22 letter of complaint detailed Stephens' references to Christianity in the Hancock Clarion:

- "We started out the month celebrating our Chief of Police 'Buz's' birthday. I believe God wants us all to celebrate the day HE created us."
- "We have had so many small water leaks this month, one of which caused a major mudslide on town hill. The good Lord works all things out."

- "Jackie Logsdon and Amy Powell from the Kentucky Division of Water conducted our first Sanitary Sewer Survey. They will send the results next month. Say a prayer."

- "My husband just celebrated two years free of addictions. Good job! Praise the Lord! We are so thankful."

- The mayor cannot in her official capacity, Markert noted, "make religious statements, quote biblical scripture or exhort citizens to pray."

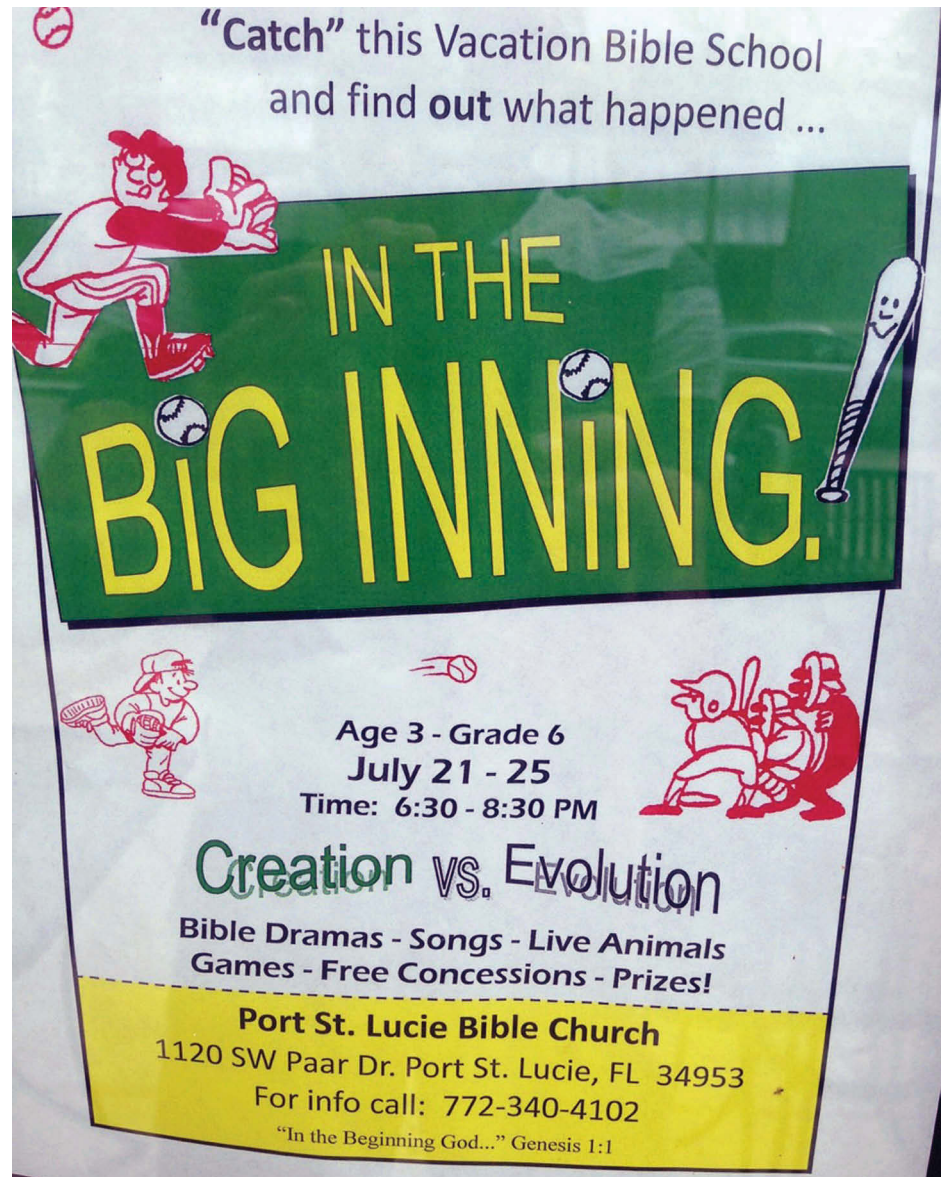
The letter, on behalf of a local complainant, also asks the city to stop scheduling prayer at meeting.

### Challenge to church discount continues

FFRF continues to challenge a discriminatory admission policy by Festa Italiana in Milwaukee, which offered free admission to Catholic Mass attendees for its festival.

FFRF sent its first letter of complaint Feb. 28 after the fest's website posted "FREE admission to Festa when you attend High Mass at 11 a.m. in the Marcus Amphitheater." The normal gate price is \$13.

An attorney for the fest later told Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott that the



### Not dead animals?

A Florida member shares a flier posted in a local ice cream shop.

fest would end the discount before the July 21 event. But the July/August issue of the Italian Times again mentioned free admission and said Mass would be "followed by a religious procession through the [Summerfest] grounds."

In a July 18 follow-up, Elliott again pressed the legal point that state law bars such preferential treatment. Most ethnic festivals in Milwaukee, at FFRF's behest, have changed their similarly discriminatory policies, including Irish Fest, Polish Fest, German Fest and Mexican Fiesta.

### 'Holiday' strikes fear in Texans' hearts

Grandstanding pols in Texas passed the "Merry Christmas" bill, which was signed into law June 13 by Gov. Rick Perry, who was surrounded by Santa Claus impersonators ringing sleigh bells.

The law is supposedly meant to protect the right of public school students and staff to express "Merry Christmas," "Happy Hanukkah" and similar religious sentiments.

But as MSNBC commentator Rachel Maddow put it, "Thanks to Governor Perry, it's not illegal to say Merry Christmas. Was it ever illegal to say Merry Christmas in Texas? You know,

you never can be too careful, but saying Merry Christmas is now doubly, triply, merrily, Rick Perry-ly protected in Texas."

"Holiday" seems to be a dirty word to the Christian Right, noted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who strongly suspects the law's real purpose is to put nativity scenes into public schools. At the bill signing, Perry said, "Freedom of religion doesn't mean freedom from religion." Attending were several Kountze High School cheerleaders wearing red "I cheer for Christ" T-shirts. They recently sued for the right to hold up bible banners for football players to run through at games, a case that began with a letter of complaint by FFRF.

The law the pols are lauding encourages schools to display religious symbols, including nativity scenes, on school property — providing that either a secular symbol is next to it or two religious symbols are erected together. "If a school puts up Frosty the Snowman, it can then erect a crèche depicting the supposed miraculous birth of the Christian savior," Gaylor said.

Co-President Dan Barker added, "Putting a menorah next to a nativity scene in a public school setting to 'secularize' religious displays is like saying two wrongs make a right."

## In Memoriam

### Maurice Rapkin, 1917–2013

Maurice Rapkin, 95, died peacefully on June 14, 2013, in San Diego. He was born Nov. 16, 1917, and was an FFRF Lifetime Member, as are his daughters Aleksi and Ellen.



Maurice, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wayne State University, had a long career as a civil engineer. He was a World War II veteran,

Bronze Star recipient and retired Army Reserve colonel. As a humanist Jew and staunch Democrat, he was very involved in his community and supported LGBT and women's rights and Planned Parenthood.

Survivors include his daughters, Aleksi Rapkin (Kevin Barre) and Ellen Rapkin (Duane Buck); grandchildren Manon Barre and George Buck; great-granddaughter Lilliana Buck and special friend Natalie Moynihan.

FFRF offers its sincerest condolences to Maurice's family and many friends.

### FFRF stops basketball prayer

*Continued from previous page*

cello High School, in which a basketball coach led the prayer.

"The district must educate [the coach] and all district employees that they may not lead, encourage, or participate in student prayer," Markert wrote.

State Department of Education counsel responded July 1 that she instructed the staff not to participate in student-led prayer or lead prayer themselves. "It is our hope that the separation of church and state continue in all our school districts."





## Letterbox

### FFRF ad countering Hobby Lobby a hit

Wonderful ad in the July 4 New York Times! I can't resist any longer — please update my membership to "Life."

**Richard Kirschman**  
California

•••

Excellent ad in the Los Angeles Times. I have been a member for more than 25 years. Enclosed in my \$200 contribution to the legal fund. I hope that the next issue of your newspaper will describe the success of the ads that appeared in all the other cities and Los Angeles.

**S. Chic Wolk**  
California

•••

Doreen and I were so proud to be members and supporters of FFRF today. In our July 4 Arizona Republic, Hobby Lobby, a Christian Right group published a full-page ad entitled "In God We Trust." It gave their "evidence" for our being a Christian nation.

A few pages later was the FFRF full-page disclosure presenting clearly convincing evidence that our beloved country is celebrating our *godless* Constitution. Thanks for the convincing, timely and well-crafted publication.

**Harold and Doreen Saferstein**  
Arizona

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Thank you so much for running the terrific July 4 ads. We saw it in three newspapers this morning — Boulder Camera, Denver Post and New York Times. Really made us happy!

**Tim Helton**  
Colorado

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Many, many thanks for your full-page, full-color message "Celebrate Our Godless Constitution," which appeared July 4 in the Seattle Times. I was thrilled to see it. While I have been aware of the message's contents for many years (as was my father before me), I'm also aware that almost no one else is.

I showed the ad to two other people who also were in agreement. I also phoned the Seattle Times to thank them for publishing your message.

**Marie Martin Hall**  
Washington

•••

Great ad in the papers July 4. We picked up several copies. I really like the three strong messages: "Celebrate our Godless Constitution" and "In Reason We Trust" with the original Pledge of Allegiance, too. The quotes by our founders were well-chosen, and I hope they got the attention of some "Christian nation" promoters.

The ad ran on page 7 of the Albuquerque Journal right after the Hobby Lobby ad on page 5.

We continue to work on state/church issues here as we get better educated on the subject. We plan to follow up with some letters to the editor on some key points. We have prepared a simple video with our basic principles and hope to launch it next week.

Thanks for all the great information in Freethought Today. I am now reading *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children* by Katherine Stewart. She did a great job and provides additional inspiration and talking points to support our action.

**Ron Herman, Chapter Director**

FFRF Albuquerque, N.M.

### Members add support for FFRF's work

Please renew my membership and use the remainder for your legal fund. I wish your organization had been around when my *public* school day started with a compulsory prayer (New York state, 1955-1961). Our legislature mandated it so we could prove we weren't "Godless Communists."

The good news is that it didn't convert me, but rather just made me angry at church-school entanglement.

**Rodney Goetzel**  
California

•••

Enclosed is a check for \$1,000. I appreciate the efforts of FFRF and am impressed by your energy. Keep up the good work. Use the check for any of your projects.

**Hal Strayer**  
Michigan

### Religious shrine needs to be moved

*This letter from FFRF Life Member Steve Uhl was originally published in Tucson's Arizona Daily Star on July 3. It's an excellent example of how members can influence public opinion via letters to the editor.*

The "A" Mountain religious shrine issue has generated a lot of interest and enthusiastic expressions of widely varying opinions. Personal opinions range from "if you don't like the shrine, live somewhere else" to "it's junk littering our desert, get rid of it."

What's a wise City Council to do as it weighs its options on how to react to the complaint by the Freedom From Religion Foundation? In my view, the City Council should follow the law while showing sensitivity to Catholics who consider the shrine holy, to others who see it as integral part of our community's heritage, and to secularists who want public areas free of religious symbolism.

Our Founding Fathers knew of the centuries of bloody religious wars that tore Europe apart, as well as the decades of colonial sectarian strife among settlers on the eastern shore escaping from European dissent. These men recognized that faith-based issues could have similar consequences for our new country. An attempt to defuse this destructive potential was the purpose of the opening sentence in the First Amendment to our federal Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Thomas Jefferson interpreted this phrase to mean a "wall of separation between Church and State"; the Supreme Court interprets it to mean that government shall neither favor religion over irreligion nor one religion over another. Our government must be neutral to religion. Accordingly, multiple court decisions affirm religious shrines such as those on "A" Mountain are unconstitutional because they violate these principles.

These are facts, not opinion. The claims that religious objects on public property are not health or safety hazards, or that they should remain because they've been there for a long time, or that the complainants should "get a life" and find better things to do,



### Good luck with that

A Florida member sent this along as an example of how some folks seem to have put their critical thinking skills on permanent vacation.

will not fly in the courts.

As the Tucson City Council considers the legitimate request of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to remove the "A" Mountain shrine, it should bear in mind that many other municipalities have received similar requests from FFRF. Those cities have found it much less expensive to remove religious displays from public property than to fight this group that has settled constitutional law on its side.

The City Council needs to reflect on the fact that faith is a personal, private and subjective matter. Everyone has the right to believe or not believe whatever one chooses so long as it does not violate the rights of others or our Constitution. This leaves untouched the right of faith-based groups to have their symbols on their own premises or on private property.

When such groups, however, insist on placing their religious displays on government property, land belonging to the entire community, they flaunt their personal belief systems, disrespect the beliefs of others and violate both our Constitution and the golden rule, both of which work for believers and nonbelievers.

Atheists and believers alike should insist that Tucson City Manager Richard Miranda and the City Council do the mutually respectful thing, the constitutional thing, the right thing. Move the Catholic shrine off public property.

*Stephen Uhl is a former Catholic priest, a retired psychologist and a friendly atheist. Contact him at [author@outofgodscloset.com](mailto:author@outofgodscloset.com).*

### Maintain focus on these three issues

I strongly agree with comments in Sue Gibson's letter in the June/July issue that said "just because Christians are against [a thing] doesn't make it a bandwagon for atheists to jump on. If we do things just because Christians are against them, our actions are still being determined by them."

Exactly! This includes, to my view, all of FFRF's attention and efforts with stem cell research, abortion, birth control, euthanasia, and various homosexual issues, especially those involving something as peripheral as Boy Scouts. Those are all social issues which will be handled one way or another by the zeitgeist, as they should be.

If the pope inveighed against tattoos, or if Rick Perry tried to pass anti-tattoo legislation, would tattoo rights be yet another bandwagon for us to ride off in all directions on? Please focus on nontheism, defense of the Establishment Clause and fighting discrimination against atheists, and not

dilute our efforts with secondary and tertiary issues. Thank you for allowing me to have my say.

**Allen Cosnow**  
Illinois

### Author: Read book before judging it

In her letter [June/July13], Sue Gibson says because men leer at women in exotic dance clubs that a segment of the Christian Right wants to shut down through the agency of government, nontheists and feminists should pay no heed: "If we do things just because Christians are against them, our actions are still being determined by them."

However, as I pointed out when my article ran [April13], nontheism does not exist in a vacuum. Quoting Nadine Strossen: "Once we cede to the government the power to violate one right for one person, or group, then no right is safe for any person or group. So when we defend sexual expression, we are really making a stand not only against a specific kind of censorship."

Regarding the objectification of women, men do gaze at dancers — and models, athletes, media stars and women on the street and beach. Some feminists believe in women's choice to express themselves free from male-dominated government and church interference.

I strongly urge people to read *Naked Truth: Strip Clubs, Democracy, and a Christian Right*, which is based on 15 years of research nationwide to learn about the views and realities of stakeholders in the exotic dance industry, and also to read the history of the First Amendment.

**Judith Lynne Hanna, Ph.D.**  
Maryland

### Better motto: 'In Treasury We Trust'

A June/July letter headlined "Keep currency neutral regarding God" stated that an atheist position would be to put "There Is No God" on our currency. I believe for most atheists, the position would be the neutral position the letter writer describes: no religious motto at all.

Lacking any evidence on which to base a belief in any god, I feel it is gratuitous to make any declaration about God or gods. The issue is moot.

If we want to have an appropriate money motto, it could be "In the U.S. Treasury We Trust."

**Gary Garb**  
Pennsylvania



## Welcome to FFRF

More than 700 people joined FFRF as a direct result of the July 4 ad (held by Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, at right) that ran in 24 newspapers nationwide. The ad countered the annual Hobby Lobby “Christian nation” claim (held by FFRF staffer Katie Daniel). FFRF’s ad was censored only in Oklahoma City, Hobby Lobby’s headquarters.

## Lamponing the bozos works for me

You all do a great job. The first thing every morning, I “faithfully” read Freethought of the Day. I love it!

The work that your “fringe outsider group from militant Madison, Wis.” (home of the friendliest people in the U.S., in my opinion) is great in going up against the bozos. Religion is losing its battles for the pews, so it’s politicizing its message and trying desperately to federalize its precepts.

I love getting my newspaper in the plain white cover. I feel a bit like I did years ago when reading my older brother’s copies of National Lampoon in the ’70s!

**Tracy Long**  
North Carolina

## Update ‘atheist’ with new description

There’s a problem with coming out as an atheist: negative reactions. It’s automatic, and most of the time, the reactors can’t actually tell us what the word means. (If this weren’t true, we wouldn’t have to come out to begin with.) Words are powerful images in religions. As one commentator stated it, religions are all about words, as in “the word was made flesh.”

Atheists are looking for an acceptable image. The word “Brights” has been suggested, with mixed reactions; likewise, “post-theological.” I was looking for a positive image to counter a negative one and noticed the commonly used designation “Christian” ends with “ian.” So I checked with the dictionary under “ian” and it’s defined as “belonging to, relating to.” We can use it ourselves.

The trouble, as I see it, is that “atheist” ends in “ist,” and that ending has negative connotations, as in, “terrorist, communist, fascist, socialist, anarchist.” (I left out Baptists, but notice: their numbers are declining.)

With that in mind, I suggest “Atheian” or “A-Theian.” Or, as Dan Barker might jokingly suggest, “Atheistian.” And think of the opportunity of answering those who might ask, “What the hell is an A-Theian?”

All right, yes, there is a rich and proud tradition of atheism. Maybe it’s

time to evolve our name to make it more adaptable, Darwinian-style.  
**Carl Scheiman, Lifetime Member**  
Maine

## A Norski decalogue: (King Olaf Version)

There’s a granite stone bearing the Ten Commandments at the back door of the Clay County courthouse. Why not request that this helpful translation be placed beside it?

1. Der’s only vun God, ya know.
2. Don’t make that fish on yer mantle an idol.
3. Cussin’ ain’t Minnesota nice.
4. Go to church even ven yer up nort.
5. Honor yer folks.
6. Don’t kill. Catch and release.
7. Der’s only vun Lena for every Ole. No cheatin’.
8. If it ain’t yer lutefisk, don’t take it.
9. Don’t be braggin’ about how much snow ya shoveled.
10. Keep yer mind off yer neighbor’s jente [girl].

**Bill Treumann**  
Minnesota

## Wollstonecraft was freethinking feminist

I wish we could have thrown a birthday party April 27 for freethinker Mary Wollstonecraft, an early advocate of women’s rights way back in 1792.

Mary was born in England on April 27, 1759 — 254 years ago. Her father was a drunken farmer, her mother a cold woman raising six children. Her unhappy childhood included friends and neighbors who helped her learn to read and write. She taught school as a young woman and later was a governess to wealthy families.

At 20 she moved to London to write and met a publisher named Joseph Jefferson, who became a mentor. Mary wrote reviews, a novel and a children’s book. She learned French and German to be able to do translations. With Jefferson’s help she met Tom Paine, Joseph Priestley and other important people of the time.

At 31, intrigued by the politics of the French Revolution, she sailed for France. Her feminist bible, *A Vindica-*

tion of the Rights of Women, was published in 1792. It was there she met and fell in love with a questionable character named Gilbert Imlay.

Two years later, Mary bore their love child, Fanny (who would commit suicide at 22). She returned to London in 1795, her unhappy love life leading to a suicide attempt which was thwarted by Imlay. That year she traveled on her own with year-old Fanny to Scandinavia on behalf of some of Imlay’s business dealings, an effort that failed.

One rainy night in London, she walked around until her clothes were soaked, then jumped into the Thames, only to be rescued by a stranger who saw her jump. Returning to work with Joseph Jefferson, she renewed an old acquaintance with William Godwin. A slow courtship led to a brief taste of happiness.

Then Mary got pregnant again. She and Godwin married in March 1797 to legitimize the birth of baby Mary, who would become Mary Shelley of Frankenstein.

One story has Mary’s midwife panicking and sending for a doctor, who, with unwashed hands, probably infected Mary with septicemia, which caused her painful death 12 days later.

The story of her life that I like was published in 1978. Written with love by Claire Tomalin, it’s called *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

**Del Roy**  
Oregon

*Editor’s note: You can read Wollstonecraft’s and other Freethought of the Day entries at [ffrf.org/news/day/](http://ffrf.org/news/day/), where you can also sign up to receive them by email.*

## Agnostic shouldn’t be four-letter word

When I read in your publication that there was no evidence of the existence of God — therefore there was no God and that was proof that God did not exist — I nearly flipped. You can’t prove that God does not exist. But the theists have the same high bar to clear, and they are no nearer than you are.

There are still so many questions which are not answered, and I think can’t be answered, because we are finite and cannot understand infinity, so I remain agnostic. Some insist that that position is weak, that we just don’t want to stick out our necks, but I don’t accept that.

**Robert Stephens**  
Washington

## Sharing the Crank Mail

**Prayer & Religion:** How dare u try to stop prayer b/4 public mtgs! I’m appalled by people who don’t live in our state try to cause problems where there r none. U hav a right to say whatever u want, u can claim peaceful measures, but I hav a right to protest U! I wish u would read the Bible. It is the good book. — *Jim Anderson, Tennessee*

**You and FFRF may face legal action:** So the point is that creation is a fact of science, not only a dogma of religion. When you deny the existence of God, you deny your own existence, because you deny the existence of human life. — *Kazmer Ujvarosy*

**YOU:** The fall of the Soviet Union must be hard for you to rationalize, and I look forward to your explanation of how freedom from religion was not able to create a utopia on earth in such a purist Soviet vacuum of religion. — *Jim Jackson, Indianapolis, Indiana*

**Prayer before city meeting:** If you don’t like prayer you can choose to do so and burn in hell too. DO NOT think you will come to TX and push your crap on us. That will be your worst mistake you ever make in your life you bunch of idiots should all drink some antifreeze at your next meeting. — *Jay David, Spring, Texas*

**your sick views on my personal life:** I think that the individual should be the one to decide what they want, no some cockeyed group of idiots. I try to mind my own business, why can’t you? my business ends at the end of my nose, and so does yours. Fight the good fight, like getting illegals out of the country so Americans can work. YOU ARE SICK. I suppose you will have a hit time out for me now that you know who I am and where I livve. — *William Seekings, Tucson, Arizona*

**NEWTOWN, CONNETICUT:** Aren’t you glad there is a HELL where this mass murderer of innocent, young children is already receiving his just punishment? Aren’t you glad that there is a Heaven where these young children are now in Glory with God? Aren’t you glad that there is a Heaven where these grieving parents will someday be with their children? When you die, will you be with the mass murderer or will you be with these children? — *Only Believe, Lexington, Ky.*

**You people should NEVER interfere with GODs work! EVER!** This is the reason why kids now are so under disciplined. Have no skills, no compassion, no self worth, anything!! No one has control over them because you say it is ok, heck, better that no one say go to church. You won’t do away with everything religious! When the LORD returns, and HE WILL!! You all will be the ones standing there saying, why did we do what we did? STOP THIS TURNING PEOPLE AWAY FROM JESUS AND WANTING TO PRAY AT SCHOOL, DURING GRADUATION, DURING SEND OFFS FOR OUR TROOPS!! — *Jack Hammand, Grand Rapids, Mich.*

**Deny the Truth:** Do the research. Jesus is for real. And Jesus loves you. Jesus gave you life, and He gave His life for you so that you could live forever in heaven. The Truth is that God loves you very much, so much that Jesus was sent to die on a cross for your sin so that you could be forgiven and be restored back into a relationship with your Creator. If you would like more information, or would like to know how to give your life to Christ and be forgiven of your sin, then please do not hesitate to contact me. — *Gunn de Paul*

**ASSHOLES:** Fuck You — *jesus@christ.tld*

**QUIT CRYING AND GROW UP:** What a waste of money. The cost of an entire back page just to whine about your lack of religion. Shut up, grow up, and stay dumb. Sure, Christian people think you are crazy. But your lack of concern does not stop God from loving you. He loves the lame-brains as well as the smart people. — *George Wells, Alabama*

**Our mayor of our town commands us to go to church:** I want Dan Barker and his wife and daughter to stop wearing sneakers forever. They can wear any enclosed laced footwear they want except sneakers. Sneakers serve no purpose to our kind. Any other type of enclosed laced shoe is better than a sneaker. I will sue your foundation if you don’t comply. Not every new thing we have in society is needed. Soda is a new invention (1800s) but we know it is bad for us, same thing for oil refineries, steel mills, coal plants etc. Same thing with sneakers too. tell danny this. — *Michael Donaldson, Kissimmee, Florida*

**Hello:** I just wanted to say how worthless you pieces of shit are. Jesus Christ created this world, and how dare you try to remove him from this world. You all are worthless COCKSUCKERS. Fuck off. How’s that for your freedom of speech BITCH? — *Jeremy Smith, Michigan*

**Your oppression is good material for me:** Roy Costner, a valedictorian at Liberty High School, recited the Lord’s Prayer. That sent you comrades into a tailspin. Check the dosage on that bottle of Xanax, Che. — *Roy Adcox, Roanoke, Va.*

**Partnership:** Hello Friends. Praise King Jesus, am so happy to read about you and my pray is that if can be in partnerships with your team would be great in the Kingdom of God. — *Edward Odongo, Lira, Uganda*

**South Carolina Laughs At You:** We are a Christian state. Nobody here cares what you people think in California. Come setup shop in our state. We dare you. — *Victor Webster, Florence, SC*

**Freedom:** Here’s another freedom for you, freedom of speech. Kindly go f\*\*k yourselves, twice! And no, I’m not a Christian, I’m an atheist who respects others rights to live the way they want to. So again, go f\*\*k yourselves. — *John A.G. Keil*

## Elliott offers secular suggestions, not commandments

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott discussed state/church issues at the July 7 meeting of the Lake Superior Freethinkers, which is an FFRF chapter that meets in Duluth, Minn. Elliott's speech, titled "Honor Thy First Amendment," offered "10 suggestions" for improving state/church separation.

Noting that the region has had its share of controversies surrounding the Ten Commandments, Elliott said that a list of "10 suggestions" for understanding or advancing the First Amendment is fitting:

- 1) Understand motivations.
- 2) Understand "the script" (how communities react in a predictable fashion to state/church complaints).
- 3) Ask for information.
- 4) Be diplomatic.
- 5) Encourage sunshine.
- 6) Challenge bad ideas.
- 7) Coordinate efforts.
- 8) Emphasize equality.

- 9) Recognize judicial limitations.
- 10) Be persistent.

"Understanding the motivations behind government preference for religion is beneficial," he said, adding that "state/church conflicts often involve 'territory marking,' where symbolic importance is the primary motivation above any true desire to indoctrinate in religious matters."

For example, FFRF's 2010 complaint in Hawkins County, Tenn., involved a juvenile court judge who was granted approval to place a Ten Commandments plaque in the county's Justice Center. The judge, the county commissioners and the community did not notice that the proposed plaque only included nine commandments. The motivation for the plaque seemed to be for its symbolism and to put on the appearance that the judge was pious, not to actually teach the decalogue. (Notably, the judge was sentenced to three years in prison in 2012 for theft of state

funds and faces additional charges for alleged theft and money laundering.)

Understanding the true motivations behind government action can help inform freethinkers about ways to counter violations, Elliott said.

He encouraged people to be vocal and visible when state/church issues arise in their community. "Even a small minority can help prevent violations when public officials become aware that 'majority rule' does not apply to constitutional issues."

It's important to be persistent. Because instant fixes are rare, repeated contact with government officials is often necessary to address Establishment Clause violations. Elliott said that FFRF routinely has to contact government officials multiple times before an issue is resolved.

The Lake Superior Freethinkers describes itself as "a friendship group in support of rational thought, morality without superstition, freedom from



Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott

religion and separation of church and state." Meetings are the first Sunday of each month at the Radisson Hotel in Duluth.

Photo: Timothy Hughes

## Hearing Jack's courageous deathbed confession

By Sarah Jones

I met Jack (not his real name) in the assisted living portion of a retirement community. Although ravaged by a stroke and the rapidly progressing physical and cognitive symptoms of a neurological disorder, he still had finely sinewed arm and neck muscles that spoke of a lifelong routine of fitness.

He was still quick with a snappy comeback and had a fiery glint to his eye. Jack was ex-military through and through, a problem solver by nature and profession. He thrived on chasing down answers and solutions and took great satisfaction from getting the expected results from following proper procedures.

A man with a temper not far beneath the surface, Jack became very unpredictable as symptoms of dementia crept in. He replayed past and recent wrongs over and over in his mind, not realizing which were already resolved and which were not.

He was unable to tell if a conversation he was quoting took place yesterday or last week or last year. His bulldog nature would not let his mind rest or allow him to accept it when even his children told him to just let it go or let them take care of it.

He lashed out at nursing staff helping him with personal care needs. He was ashamed one moment, in violent denial the next and an apologetic gentleman the moment after that.

He and I bonded over dry cleaning and a shared heritage.

Soon after meeting, I helped him sort out an issue with being overcharged by the dry cleaner. He was so happy that I took him seriously and we got to the bottom of things. In retrospect, it was the last time in his life he was successful at such an endeavor.

In a state below the Mason-Dixon line, we were both Yankees who knew

about towns that boomed when coal was king and floundered when only cinders were left. We knew of neighborhoods that, even two generations later, were divided into European ethnic subcultures, each with their own Catholic church, annual church picnic and mouth-watering Old World cuisine. We talked about halupki, halushki, potato pancakes and pasta fagirole, and our friendship was sealed.

I became the one the nurses called whenever he was having a really hard day. They were afraid of him on those days. He never scared me, even when he was trying to. I was part of the team that arranged his move to the nursing home when he needed more care. That move ripped apart the last shreds of his grasp of time.

### 'You figured it out!'

Then one day he revealed an old war he was fighting that he'd never spoken about to anyone before.

He'd been raised to be devoutly Catholic, and as someone who liked formulas and results, he took well to Catholic ritual and routine. There were plans for what one should do and avoid and how to be forgiven when mistakes were made. There were days to celebrate and to repent with the right God-pleasing words.

There were prayers for peace, for marriage, for soldiers and prayers to find your lost keys. Jack learned all the rules from his fastidiously Catholic mother and followed them to a T. But he didn't get the promised results. Jack and his wife had serious problems over the years. He had strained relationships with his children. And finally, he admitted to me one day, he just didn't feel it.

Jack spoke to me with great clarity and honesty about the moment and his internal struggle. He didn't feel what he was told his whole life he was supposed to feel about a relationship with God. That led him to two possible logi-

### Jack was dying and he knew it. This was a dying man's furious lament.

cal conclusions: Either he did it wrong and therefore the lack of the promised result was his fault, or, he was, as he put it, "duped."

He gave himself the proper credit in that he felt he did go through all the motions properly. That only left the other option, and Jack was mad.

I sat with him as he seethed over the profound betrayal of the whole "racket." He was mad at his mother for indoctrinating him and mad at the church for being the reason he denied himself life experiences he now wished he had pursued.

He was mad at himself for being "So stupid!" as to go along with it for so many decades, hoping for something magical to happen that never did.

He was mad at being pressured by his Catholic upbringing to marry so early, because maybe he would have taken his time and found a better match. He felt guilty about "dragging my kids into this mess" of also believing. He went on and on.

It was like the anger over the realization lit up his brain. He spoke with such lucidity and expressiveness. The atheist in me wanted to enthusiastically grab him by the shoulders and yell, "Yes, you figured it out! It is all just shit!"

I wanted to welcome him to the club and congratulate him for putting the pieces together for himself through honest introspection. But I was trained to not interject my opinions into the experiences of those who confided in me. So I held his hand and reflected back his thoughts to him to validate that I was listening.

### No crisis of faith

I was happy that it was me there with him instead of one of the chaplains, who would have seen this as a "faith crisis" and would have tried to assure him he was mistaken and it would all be OK. Jack probably would have punched them.

But there was no joy or celebration for him in this eye-opening experience. Jack was dying and he knew it. This was a dying man's furious lament.

If I had been the type to pray, I would have prayed for Jack's dementia to sweep his brilliant and devastating epiphany back into the dark corners of his awareness. The air around his bedridden form crackled with his pain.

Eventually he was exhausted, and I was able to take my leave. The next time we saw one another he did not speak of it, and I didn't bring it up. He still had some bad days and good days. I was not there when he died.

Jack's children, believers still, probably made their peace by thinking that he was a good enough man in the end to make it into heaven. Or perhaps, if they diligently followed the letter of certain canon laws, they mourned the image of Jack suffering for his shortcomings in the afterlife.

Jack and I mourned together before he died. We mourned the loss of the lovely lie he tried so hard for so long to convince himself he believed. I was so proud of him and yet so sad for him all at once that day.

Carrying his secret confession for some time now has weighed heavily on me. I decided to write it down and share it with others because I felt it would be a good legacy for Jack.

It turned out that the dry cleaner overcharging him was not the final thing he got to the bottom of after all.

FFRF member Sarah Jones (a pseudonym) lives in Virginia.



Atheist Ireland Chair Michael Nugent (left) with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker at the Empowering Women Through Secularism conference in Dublin June 29–30. Michael adopted Dan’s signature “claiming this world for freethought” pose.



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Callie Bookman (left), vice president of the Secular Student Alliance at Ohio State University in Columbus, and Shannon Ransom, SSA-OSU alum, volunteered to help Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel staff FFRF’s table at the SSA Conference East convention July 12-14. Callie and Shannon’s persuasive talents helped sell over \$500 in merchandise and each got a T-shirt.

# FFRF on the Road



Andrew Seidel (front, center) spoke July 15 at First Unitarian in Louisville, Ky., on the topic “The Greatest Story Ever Sold: America’s Judeo-Christian Heritage.” Organizer Ed Hensley is fourth from the right with his arm around his wife, Mikel, who is third from the right. (Mikel Hensley photo)



God only knows where Andrew “Waldo” Seidel is in this photo of the well-attended SSA Columbus conference. (Actually, he’s way at the top, center, light shirt.)



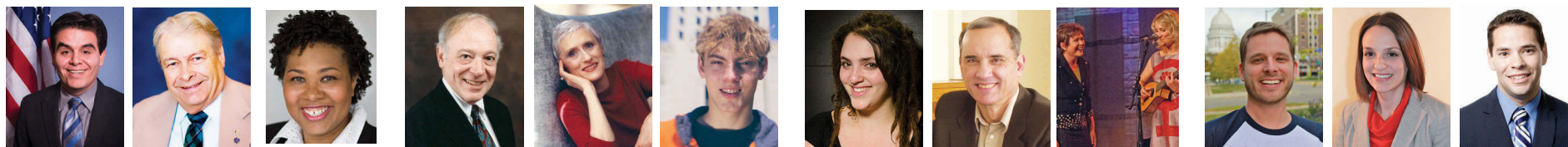
Dan Barker (second row, fourth from left), performed June 21 and spoke June 22 at the Secular Student Alliance Conference West in Las Vegas at the University of Nevada.



Andrew Seidel leads a resume-writing workshop July 14 at the SSA event. Also participating were Amanda Knief (far right), DJ Gregor (top left) and Sharon Moss (out of frame). (Ellen Lundgren/SSA photo)

# Come see '77 Square Miles Surrounded by Reality'

## Register now for 36th annual national FFRF convention Sept. 27-29 in Madison



**Juan Mendez**   **Jim McCollum**   **Jamila Bey**   **Ellery Schempp**   **Sara Paretsky**   **Zach Kopplin**   **Shelley Segal**   **Dan Barker**   **Julia Sweeney**   **Andrew Seidel**   **Liz Cavell**   **Patrick Elliott**  
*Jill Sobule*

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's 36th annual convention in Madison, Wis., the last weekend of September will entertain and enlighten with a captivating lineup of newsmakers, authors, entertainers and FFRF's friendly freethinking staff. But don't forget the setting during what should be the prettiest weekend of the year.

Madison, the home of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, was derisively dismissed by gubernatorial candidate Lee Dreyfus in 1978 as "70 square miles surrounded by reality." Embracing that reputation, Madison Mayor Paul Soglin recently suggested the updated "77 Square Miles Surrounded by Reality" be adopted as the city motto.

His effort failed, but prompted Wisconsin State Journal columnist Doug Moe to reminisce about a previous Madison slogan contest. Among the runners-up: "Even Oz needs a sister city," "Somewhere between livestock and Woodstock," "Madison — Where you can live in any decade you like," and "Plenty of action between two bodies" (with an aerial view of the isthmus between two lakes).

In addition to the freethinking speakers, awardees and entertainers, convention-goers will enjoy the Capitol Square one block from the convention hotel (the free, short Capitol tour

is worth taking); the Saturday morning Farmers' Market on the Square (still going strong at noon) including many coffee, pastry and concession stands; and the array of restaurants and shops on and off State Street, which leads to the University of Wisconsin campus.

Check out A Room of One's Own Bookstore (315 W. Gorham St.). Sample Babcock Hall ice cream at the Memorial Union fronting Lake Mendota. Other attractions are the Overture Center on upper State Street and the Frank Lloyd Wright Convention Center on Lake Monona, three blocks from the Concourse Hotel. You might also sneak a peek at the construction site by FFRF's expanding Freethought Hall!

**Rooms are being held only through Thursday, Aug. 29 at the convention rate of \$149 plus tax single, double, triple or quadruple at The Concourse Hotel, 1 W. Dayton St., 800-356-8293 or 608-257-6000.** Reserve your room now, mentioning the Freedom From Religion Foundation, or register online at [bit.ly/15vxIQp](http://bit.ly/15vxIQp) using **room block 211725**.

Register with FFRF using the slip below or online (where complete details are available) at:

[ffrf.org/outreach/convention](http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention)

Note: Students now register FREE!

### 36th Annual Convention Schedule

*Concourse Hotel, 1 W. Dayton Street  
Madison, Wisconsin*

*Tentative schedule subject to revision.*

**Friday, September 27**

*Second floor reception and registration area outside Madison Ballroom*

**3:00 pm Early Registration opens** and continues through convention

*Complimentary Appetizers (hearty)*

**3:30-4:15 pm Workshops in University Rooms**

2013 Legal Report/Media Coverage Highlights — Staff Attorneys Patrick Elliott & Liz Cavell

**4:30-5:15 "Sweat the Small Stuff — Why It's Important to Challenge State/Church Violations"** — Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel

*Dinner on your own*

**7:00 Welcome**

*All evening events take place in the Grand Ballroom*

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor

Music at the piano — Dan Barker

"2013 Activism/Growth/Media Highlights"

**7:30 Emperor Has No Clothes Award**

Dan Savage

**8:15 "The Jill & Julia Show"**

Comedic improv & songs with Julia Sweeney and Jill Sobule

*CD, DVD and Book signings for Dan Savage and Jill & Julia*

Complimentary dessert reception

**Saturday, September 28**

**8:00 am Non-Prayer Breakfast** (for ticket holders)

*Rooms to be announced*

**9:30 Welcome**

*All Saturday events take place in the Grand Ballroom*

Director of Operations Lisa Strand

Co-Presidents Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor

**10:00 am Richard & Beverly Hermsen Student Activist Award Zack Kopplin**

**10:45 "Sex, Politics and Religion: SPAR with Jamila"**

Journalist and comedian Jamila Bey

**11:15 Freethought Heroine Award**

Novelist Sara Paretsky (booksigning follows)

*Noon to 2 pm Lunch Break/Sightseeing on your own*

**2:00 pm 50th Anniversary Celebration of Schempp decision**

Ellery Schempp, Supreme Court victor

**2:30 Film: "The Lord Is Not on Trial Here Today"**

Introduced by filmmaker Jay Rosenstein

**3:45 65th Anniversary Celebration of McCollum decision**

Jim McCollum, Supreme Court Victor

**4:15 Emperor Has No Clothes Award**

Arizona State Representative Juan Mendez

**6:30 Dinner**

*(for ticketholders; extra chairs brought in for non-diners before 8)*

**8:00 Drawing for "clean" pre-In God We Trust currency**

Entertainment: Shelley Segal (with Dan Barker)

*CD signings follow*

**Sunday, September 29**

*Grand Ballroom*

**8:30 am Complimentary beverage & breakfast rolls**

**9:00 Annual Business Meeting** for current FFRF members only

**11:00 Annual Board of Directors Meeting**

Adjourns by noon

Register online at: <http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention>

Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701



### Freedom From Religion Foundation's 36th Annual Convention September 27-28, 2013

The Madison Concourse Hotel  
Madison, Wisconsin

Make checks payable to "FFRF"



Number registering

_____ FFRF member registration(s) @ \$65 per person .....	\$_____
_____ Nonmember spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$70.....	\$_____
_____ Nonmember registration(s) @ \$110 .....	\$_____
<i>(or join for \$40, save \$5!)</i>	
_____ Student registration(s) FREE! (ID and registration still required).....	\$_____
_____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$20* per person .....	\$_____
_____ Classic _____ Classic Vegetarian _____ Vegan/gluten-free	
_____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$45* per person .....	\$_____
_____ Turkey _____ Salmon _____ Vegetarian _____ Vegan	
<b>If gluten-free, please specify.</b>	
<i>* Meal prices include 20% gratuity &amp; 5.5% sales tax</i>	
<b>Total: \$_____</b>	

Name(s)

*Please include names of all registrants for nametags*

Address

City/State/ZIP

*Please include phone/email (in case we have a question about your registration)*