

Freethought Today

Vol. 31 No. 8

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

October 2014

CBS rejects FFRF's ad with 'unabashed atheist' Ron Reagan

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's ad featuring Ron Reagan describing himself as "an unabashed atheist" was rejected for airing by CBS, not only by "60 Minutes" (the desired placement), but for any CBS show.

The ad debuted last May on both "The Daily Show" and "The Colbert Report" on Comedy Central.

A CBS agent indicated that the ad was rejected "for words and tone."

The celebrity endorsement features the son of President Ronald Reagan, self-described as "a lifelong atheist," plugging FFRF:

Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I'm alarmed by the intrusion of religion into our secular government. That's why I'm asking you to support the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep state and church separate,



Ron Reagan

just like our Founding Fathers intended. Please support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

The rejection was shocking, since FFRF aired a 30-second spot on national CBS in 2012, rebutting Rick Santo-

rum's remarks dissing candidate John F. Kennedy's pro-state/church separation speech before Houston ministers in 1960. That ad was accepted to run on "The CBS Evening News" and "CBS Sunday Morning."

"It appears that if a public figure makes a simple declarative statement in support of state/church separation, FFRF and atheism, it's too hot to handle for CBS," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"It seems that excess gas, erectile dysfunction and other intimate bodily functions, not to mention ads wherein political candidates viciously attack each other, are acceptable," added Dan Barker, who co-directs FFRF. "But the plain-spoken, witty and slightly irreverent remarks of a well-known figure identifying as atheist are too much for the delicate sensibilities of CBS' censors."

"Why are atheism and freethought still treated as socially unacceptable,

even though fully a fifth of the population has no religion today?" Gaylor asked. "If anything should be socially unacceptable, it ought to be blind deference to religion."

Reagan is an FFRF honorary director who received the Emperor Has No Clothes Award from FFRF in 2004 and gave an acceptance speech at the 2009 national convention in Seattle.

As liberal as his famous father was conservative, Reagan stopped going to church when he was 12 and has publicly stated he's an atheist numerous times.

The New York Times asked him in 2004, in an interview that ran three weeks after his father died, if he'd like to be president. "I would be unelectable," Reagan said. "I'm an atheist. As we all know, that is something people won't accept."

View the 30-second spot at FFRF's website, fff.org.

Ohio elementary school yearbook crossed line

The Freedom From Religion Foundation called on the superintendent of Gallia County Local Schools in Patriot, Ohio, to recall and replace a 2014 elementary school yearbook whose cover features a large Latin cross.

FFRF, which has 21,500 members nationwide, including 600 in Ohio, wrote Superintendent Jude Meyers on Sept. 26, asking him to investigate and take action over a state/church viola-

tion that is "beyond comprehension" at Addaville Elementary. The horizontal arms of the cross on the bible-like cover carry the word "Believe."

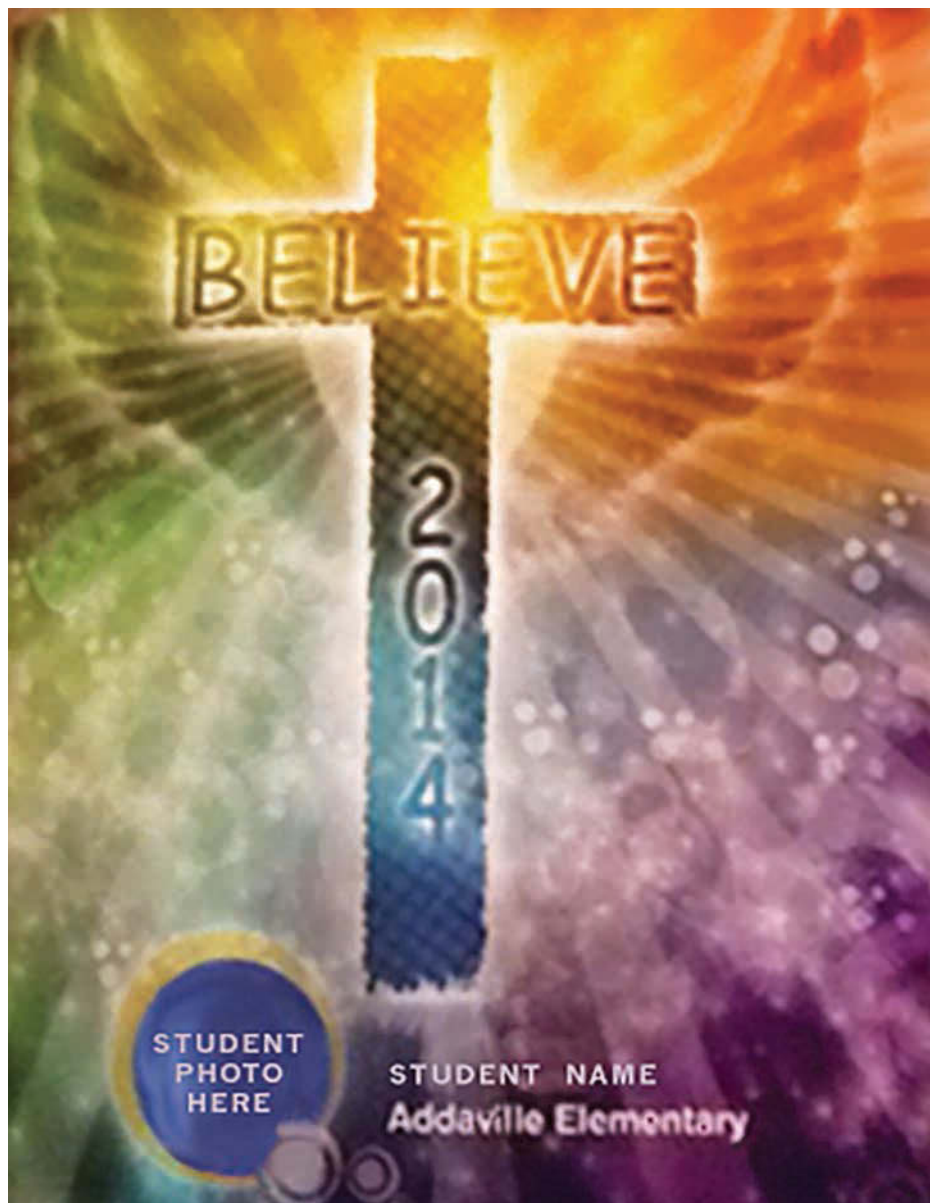
"The inclusion of the Latin cross, which is the preeminent symbol of Christianity, on a public elementary school yearbook is illegal," noted Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney. "It is beyond comprehension that public school officials would have allowed this publication to be printed with sectarian religious imagery and then distributed to young schoolchildren."

"Religion is a divisive force in public schools," Markert reminded the district. More than a quarter of the U.S. population either identifies as non-religious (20%) or practices a non-Christian religion (5%).

She noted that whether or not the yearbook was published by the district or a private entity is "legally immaterial."

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor commented, "The cover of this yearbook would be appropriate at a Catholic or sectarian school, but it's an egregious violation in our secular elementary public schools."

The district contacted FFRF to indicate it would ensure that the Parent Teacher Organization would be told it could no longer use a religious cover for the yearbook. The district said the PTO was responsible for printing the book and that the cover did not have district approval.



Addaville Elementary's yearbook cover.

Inside This Issue

FFRF goes to appeals court

Page 6



Members get active!

Page 9

College essay contest winners

Pages 11-15



FFRF awards girl, 8, \$1,000 for activism

FFRF nixes religion in online curriculum

FFRF sent a letter Sept. 2 to Joseph Olchefske, president of Calvert Education Services in Hunt Valley, Md., about inclusion of religious material in mandatory assignments used in public schools' virtual (online) curricula. It was brought to FFRF's attention by 8-year-old Florida student Emarie Wakefield and Rachel Spiller, her mother.

A complaint letter was also sent Sept. 2 to the superintendent of Lee County Schools in Fort Myers, Fla.. The school district supervises Emarie's online instruction, which uses the Calvert curriculum, including an assignment called "Let's Read a Poem." One poem (actually a hymn) is titled "God be in my head" and starts "God be in my head, and in my understanding" and concludes with "God be at mine end, and at my departing."

Other selections were misattributed and very age-inappropriate, FFRF noted, including passages from the Song of Solomon, the most notoriously erotic book of the bible with its thinly veiled allusions to oral sex such as "he feedeth among the lilies" and "his fruit was sweet to my taste."

Superintendent Nancy Graham had told the family in correspondence that some school staff told her "separation of church and state" is not in the Constitution and is not a legal standard. FFRF noted that the Supreme Court has used the phrase to interpret the First Amendment as far back as 1878. Graham also misinterpreted the Establishment Clause.

In his response, Calvert CEO Richard Rasmus denied any intent to promote religion and claimed content was chosen for its "literary, cultural, historical or other educational value." He closed with, "We appreciate the professional manner in which you have raised your concerns."

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel rebutted the claim of nonreligious significance in a response to Rasmus and again decried the "shoddy scholarship," writing, "In light of your response, we must contact the organizations that have accredited Calvert materials and provide them with copies of this letter and ask them to revisit your accreditation. Of course, if you wish to provide assurances that these four 'poems' will be removed, that will

prove unnecessary."

In his Sept. 25 response, Calvert CFO Todd Frager wrote, "We have removed the selections in question. We will remove the digital text immediately and we will no longer print the selections going forward. Feel free to call me with any additional comments or concerns."

FFRF is proud to announce a \$1,000 student activist award to Emarie and to share what she wrote about her experience:

My Little Voice

By Emarie Wakefield
(with help from Mom)

When I was interviewed by the local news station about my objection to prayers (as well as bible passages and misauthored prayers being passed off as "poems") in my public virtual school's curriculum, many people had a lot to say against me. Many people said I wasn't old enough to have a voice, an opinion or freedom. I'm little, so I'm just learning about history, but so far I haven't found an age limit on freedoms.

Lincoln didn't say "conceived in liberty for those who are over school-aged." I know this. I had to recite the opening to the Gettysburg Address. The First Amendment isn't only for grown-ups.

I live and grow in a humanist home. I'm taught every day that my little voice makes a big difference. I know that some people are told they are too little to speak up, but in my home I'm taught that when I see something wrong, it's my job to speak out loud to change that.

I'm proud of my freedom as an American. Since I do not believe that there is some being in control of everything, I know that it's going to be me that has to do the work to get things done. It's the job of all of us. We have to work together as a big team to make this planet a better, kinder and happier place to live. No one is going to magically fix it for us.

If I had just stayed quiet and "did



ADAM BOUSKA

Emarie Wakefield's Facebook profile photo.

the homework I was told to do," then what about the children that came after me that weren't told that freedom belongs to them, too? Others can do as they are told when their freedoms are being taken from them, but as for me and my little voice, we're off to big places.

When a lot of those little voices come together, it gets too loud to ignore. Humanity, come with me. Let's do big, wonderful things, because even a little voice is equal under our laws. That's a self-evident truth.

I have so much gratitude to the Freedom From Religion Foundation for this scholarship, because education makes little voices louder.

Rachel Spiller writes:

This is incredible news! We are elated! We did, however, eventually remove Emarie from the Lee County School system. It became more and more apparent every day that no one was actually reviewing the materials that were being passed on to our children in the Lee virtual program.

Every day there were serious "mistakes" in their online testing and otherwise that made us realize that to leave her in this curriculum would be disregarding our parental responsibilities. We are currently doing home education while we assess our options.

You'd be surprised at what Emarie endured during the press coverage of this. Of course there were "trolls" that even went so far as to say that they hoped she died, but there were many amazing strangers that encouraged her. One such example was Jonathan

Mann, a musician well-known for turning Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Hobby Lobby dissent into a song. He wrote a song called "Ignore the Trolls" for her, and the blog SheKnows also did a wonderful piece. Please feel free to point to a Facebook "public figure" page that we administer for Emarie: [facebook.com/EmmieOutLoud/](https://www.facebook.com/EmmieOutLoud/). We started the page because she hoped to encourage other young people to become involved in volunteerism. (Her nickname is Emmie, and she chose "OutLoud" after a Coco Chanel quote: "The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud.")

Emarie is also outspoken on LGBT rights and volunteers by my side at the LGBT community center in our area (pridecenterswfl.com/), where she sometimes leads anti-bullying youth rallies.

Emarie is also involved with a charity called "Pushing Daizies" that raises money to send low-income children to art and music camp. She also participated in the "No One Else Can Play Your Part" campaign for World Suicide Prevention Day.

Her first taste of activism was when she, by her own choice and will, decided to march with the Occupy movement in Birmingham, Ala., when she was 5. She woke me that morning and told me we had to go to the march or "the people with all the money and resources will win."

It was a long march on those tiny little legs, but she did not complain a single time. She can still lead the Occupy callback chant to this day and is proud to have taken a place in democracy.

Notify Us of Your Address

Change Promptly!

Email: info@ffrf.org

Don't miss a single issue! If you move, notify us directly and promptly. **The Post Office does not forward third-class mail.** FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing back issues if we have not been notified prior to your move. Back issues, while they last, may be ordered for \$2 each.

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says October 2014 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100-gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

ffrf.org/donate

Freethought Today

published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

info@ffrf.org • FFRF.org

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701

(608)256-8900 • FAX (608)204-0422

Editor: Bill Dunn, ftoday@ffrf.org

Production Editor: Scott Colson

Executive Editor: Annie Laurie Gaylor

Contributors:

Philip Appleman, Dan Barker, Katie Daniel, Lauryn Seering, Andrew Seidel,

Mandisa Thomas, Emarie Wakefield, Maddy Ziegler

October 2014

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF calls for bible-class moratorium in N.C. schools

The Freedom From Religion Foundation told the Rowan-Salisbury [N.C.] School System it must immediately drop unconstitutional elementary school-level bible classes. FFRF is awaiting response to an open records request to determine the extent of the violation.

In addition to weekly sessions of physical education and art classes, the school district's youngest students attend a weekly bible class. FFRF received a report about one such session

in which the teacher presented the bible and seven-day creation as literal fact.

Local churches fund the bible teachers through nonprofit groups set up specifically to promote bible classes. Under firm Supreme Court precedent, such outside funding does not relieve the school of its obligation to ensure secular education, FFRF noted.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to the district Sept. 24 calling the classes "flagrantly unconstitutional,"

pointing out that the Supreme Court had struck down similar classes in 1948 in a landmark case in which the facts "could hardly be more similar."

"It is appalling that the district would take away from instructional time to indoctrinate children in Christian dogma," Elliott said, calling on the district to put a moratorium on the classes involving "young, impressionable elementary school students."

Elliott wrote that the district's ill-advised decision to offer the classes

calls into question the legitimacy of the bible classes currently being taught in the middle schools and high school.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker noted that FFRF resoundingly won a federal court case before the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in 2004 challenging similar weekly bible classes in Dayton, Tenn., area schools.

"It's absolutely shocking," Barker said, "that 66 years after the Supreme Court's *McCullum* ruling, we would still see such a flagrant violation."



A student grasps the sword in the stone on a religious monument at the Madison High School stadium.

Religious monument to be modified/removed

The Freedom From Religion Foundation appears to have scored another victory for secularism in a public high school, after Madison County School District in Danielsville, Ga., announced it will either modify or remove an overtly religious monument at the Madison High School football stadium. FFRF became aware of the monument after a complaint was reported by a resident who is affiliated with the athletic pro-

gram.

The monument was unveiled Aug. 22, and currently sits at the team entrance to the field. It features the school's logo alongside two New Testament bible verses carved on the stone: Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me") and Romans 8:31 ("If God be for us who can be against us?").

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Aug. 28: "Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools." He also noted that religious monuments have the potential to cause religious divides.

On Sept. 24, an attorney representing the district responded: "The Board is currently investigating options available to it regarding the monument, including, but not limited to, removal of the monument or modifying the monument in some manner."

FFRF, which was at the center of a high-profile lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over illegal church electioneering, warned that the seventh-annual "Pulpit Freedom Sunday" that was held Oct. 5 deliberately incited church pastors into flouting the law.

All 501(c)(3) nonprofits, including churches, are prohibited from engaging in partisan politicking in exchange for the privilege of tax exemption. FFRF's federal lawsuit charged that political violations by churches were being selectively ignored. FFRF took the IRS to court in November 2012. After being given assurances this summer that the IRS has authorized procedures and "signature authority" to resume initiating church tax investigations and examinations, FFRF agreed to drop its suit.

FFRF criticized the Alliance Defending Freedom, which is behind Pulpit Freedom Sunday, for treating church pastors like pawns. ADF, which calls the event a "strategic litigation plan," reported revenue of more than \$50 million last year.

About 1,500 pastors intentionally violated the law this year, the Wall Street Journal reported. That's similar to the number in 2013.

"Rogue pastors who endorse from tax-exempt pulpits are playing dirty pool," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-founder. Such an abuse creates an unfair election advantage. Donations to politicians are not tax-deductible, but donations to churches are. Imagine if tax-exempt churches — which don't have to file financial returns with the government like all other 501(c)(3) groups must — were allowed to openly engage in partisan politics? Church congregations could become political machines, and political donations could be 'money laundered' through tax-deductible church contributions."

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker added, "Pastors are free to endorse from the pulpit, but then their churches need to give up their tax exemption."

U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman's order granting the joint motion for dismissal by FFRF and the IRS left open FFRF's ability to renew its lawsuit if the IRS reverts to previous inaction.

Religion without determined human kindness is an absurdity: "Religion. It's given people hope in a world torn apart by religion." Jon Stewart **Tweet by U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., who says Christians like him have no monopoly on truth and should listen to atheists' challenges** *Camels With Hammers philosophy blog, 9-25-14*

It's important for my children to know that you don't need to go to church to be a good person.

Bonnie Smith, who brought her daughter Grace, 6, to a Sunday atheist assembly in Rochester, N.Y., where the

theme was "wonder" *Democrat & Chronicle, 9-29-14*

We will be notifying all staff about students' fundamental First Amendment rights as they pertain to this issue. [P]lease know that it has been corrected and the teacher will apologize to the student. The parents will also be contacted and apologized to.

Letter from Anthony Knight, superintendent of the Oak Park [Calif.] Unified School District, apologizing for an atheist student's ejection from class for sitting during the Pledge of Allegiance *americanhumanist.org, 9-30-14*

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It's easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

FFRF
P.O. Box 750
Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

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.)



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

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. 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.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Reverend Euphemism Admonishes the Skeptics

You secular humanists say it's a "War
Of Religion," but that's just impertinence:
This isn't "Religious Warfare,"
It's only Sectarian Violence.

You atheists only seem interested in
Something that you can revile, hence
You babble "Religious Warfare"
When it's only Sectarian Violence.

It's true we kill thousands of heathens, because
They're infidels in the most vile sense—
But don't say "Religious Warfare"
When it's only Sectarian Violence.

© Philip Appleman.

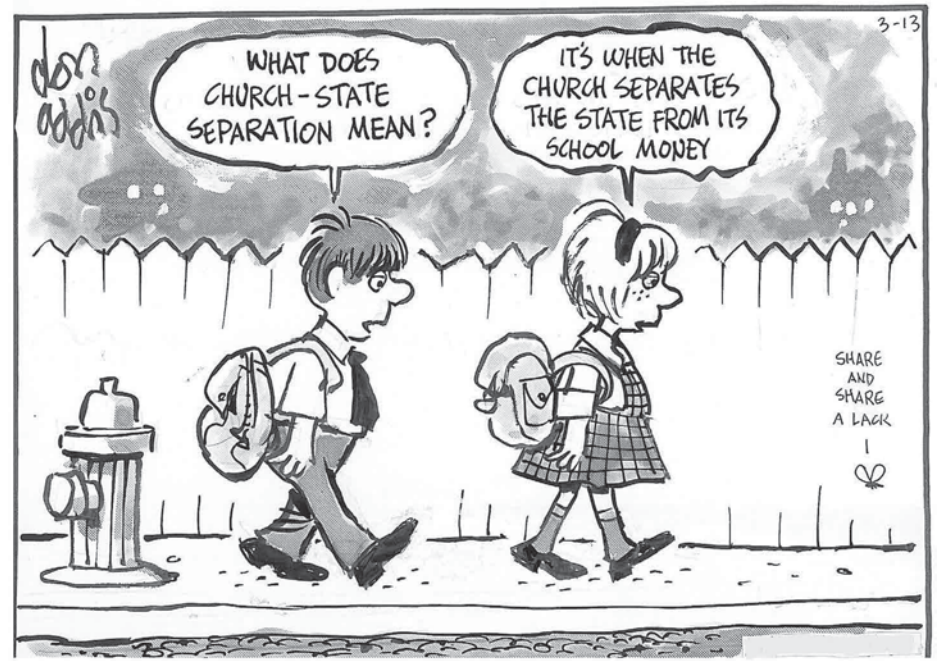
From the book *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems*



Philip Appleman is a 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*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.



Overheard

Atheists feel awe, too. Everyone does. That wondrous sense needn't be described by invoking the sacred. Atheist awe is mind- and heart-expanding. I love seeing this real-world feeling mirrored in works of contemporary fiction.

Barbara J. King, College of William and Mary anthropology professor, reviewing Elizabeth Gilbert's *The Signature of All Things* and Alastair Reynolds' *Blue Remembered Earth*
npr.org, 8-28-14

The Bill of Rights exists to protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. I intensely respect our country, our military and their sacrifices. But I also reserve that right to show respect in ways that I choose and not in ways that are mandated either through legislation or through peer pressure.

Joseph Richardson, Winter Garden, Fla., an FFRF member who was ejected from a council meeting for staying seated during the Pledge of Allegiance
West Orange Times & Observer, 9-12-14

The reluctance by most Kennebec city officials to embrace the thought of starting each city council meeting with a prayer is an indication the idea should be dropped. Religion is personal, and forcing it into a public arena where it is not enthusiastically welcome is bound to cause tension instead of the harmony sought by praying in the first place.

Opinion column, Washington state newspaper editorial board
Bellingham Herald, 9-10-14

Steve Green is standing in the basement of the eight-story Bible museum he's building in Washington. Plans for the \$800 million project are coming together nicely: the ballroom modeled after Versailles, the Disney-quality holograms, the soaring digital entryway with religious images projected on the ceiling, the restaurant serving biblically themed meals.

News story on the building two blocks from the National Mall, which Hobby Lobby owner Green expects to be open in 2017
The Washington Post, 9-12-14

He called for the moment of silence and I started off, "Our Father who art in heaven" and everyone joined in.
Asia Canada, Oneida [Tenn.] High School football cheerleader who led the crowd in prayer after the school mandated a moment of silence in re-

sponse to FFRF and ACLU complaints
WBIR, 9-16-14

A major part of the problem is that spanking your child is a part of many people's identities about what it is to be a Christian, which is why so many conservative Christians love to claim "spare the rod and spoil the child." Because of this, attempts to fix the problem and discourage spanking and even outright abuse are often regarded as attacks on their identities as Christians.
Brooklyn, N.Y.-based writer Amanda Marcotte, "The Adrian Peterson Beating and the Christian Right's Love of Corporal Punishment"
The Daily Beast, 9-16-14

Ave Maria believes that any action "specifically intended to prevent procreation" — including contraception and sterilization — is morally wrong.

Part of a motion Ave Maria University filed in a Florida federal court seeking an injunction against the Obama administration's tweaking of the birth control mandate to accommodate "religious liberty"
Talking Points Memo, 9-23-14

If the justices honor Ave Maria's idiosyncratic objection, then it is unclear that the administration could design any accommodation that will survive contact with the Supreme Court.

Ian Milhiser, Center for American Progress, comment in news story, "Religious Nonprofits Tip Their Hands on Real Goal in Birth Control Fight"
Talking Points Memo, 9-23-14

Before we understand science, it is natural to believe that God created the universe. But now science offers a more convincing explanation. What I meant by "we would know the mind of God" is, we would know everything that God would know, if there were a God, which there isn't. I'm an atheist.
Theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, referring to a statement in his book *The Grand Design*.
El Mundo, 9-23-14

I majored in religion in college. I was very interested, but I just came to a different conclusion. I'm married to a fierce Presbyterian and she raised our kids fierce Presbyterians. I'm an amiable, low-voltage atheist.
Columnist George Will, saying he's "pretty sure" there is no God because there's no evidence
Real Clear Religion, 9-22-14



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign!
ffrf.org/out

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

iTunes or podcasts archived at: ffrf.org/news/radio

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews

FFRF awards \$12,550 in college essay scholarships

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded and congratulates the 21 currently enrolled college student winners of its annual essay competition. Entrants were asked to write about "My atheist/unbeliever 'coming out' story" in 700 to 900 words. Read the top-placing essays on pages 11-15. Winners are:

- First place, Michael Hakeem Memorial Prize (\$3,000): **Bijan Parandeh**, University of Illinois-Chicago.
- Second place (\$2,000): **David Andexler**, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh.
- Third place (\$1,000): **Reem Abdel-Razek**, Onondaga Community College, N.Y.
- Fourth place (\$750): **Audrey Gunn**, Concordia College, Minn.

- Fifth place (tie, \$500 each): **Marcus Andrews**, Ohio State University; **Keith Greer Milburn**, University of Memphis.

- Sixth place (tie, \$400 each): **Aaron McLaughlin**, University of Iowa; **Anvita Patwardhan**, University of California-Berkeley.

FFRF also awarded 13 "honorable mentions," with each receiving \$200:

- **Nathan Hume Stevens**, University of Oregon.
- **Chris Holder**, University of Montevallo, Ala.
- **Joe Magestro**, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.
- **Marina Esposito**, Grand Canyon University, Phoenix.
- **Jennifer Wilson**, St. Olaf College, Minn.

- **Eric Duran**, University of North Texas.

- **Jessie Warne**, University of California-San Diego.

- **Harrison Slater**, Pennsylvania State University.

- **Benjamin Carton**, Lesley University, Mass.

- **Jenny Cox**, California Polytechnic State University.

- **Alexander Andruzzi**, University of British Columbia.

- **Blake Allen**, Louisiana State University.

- **Anna Bridge**, South Dakota State University.

FFRF extends special thanks to Dorea and Dean Schramm in Florida for providing each student who is a member of a secular campus group

with a \$100 bonus. The award total of \$12,550 reflects the additional \$100 bonuses.

"Our student scholarships are among FFRF's most important endeavors and outreach to the next generation of freethinkers," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "All too many scholarship programs reward orthodoxy, but FFRF rewards students for critical thinking and for being willing to make known their dissent from religion."

The late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor whose bequest endows the competition, was an FFRF officer and atheist known to generations of UW-Madison students.

Nothing fails like prayer . . . or succeeds like activism!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation announces that three activists will share its inaugural "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" award this year, reserved for activists who succeed in giving secular invocations to counter governmental prayer.

Following the Supreme Court's injudicious decision "blessing" sectarian prayer last spring, FFRF called on atheists, seculars and other freethinkers to ask for equal time to give secular invocations. In September, after placing 14 entries on YouTube and allowing the secular public to vote, FFRF announced the winners:

- FFRF member **Dan Courtney**, for his historic invocation before the Town Board in Greece, N.Y., site of the



Dan Courtney

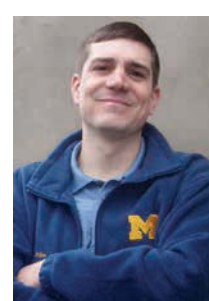


Amanda Novotny

prayer litigation resulting in this year's unfortunate Supreme Court decision.

- FFRF Member **Tim Earl**, who's given three secular invocations before the Park Board in Portage, Mich. The former Navy lieutenant commander is a member of the board.

- **Amanda Novotny**, Brookings, S.D.,



Tim Earl

who is president of Siouxland Free-thinkers and works to increase the visibility of nontheists in South Dakota. Her invocation was before the Sioux Falls City Council.

The three winners are scheduled to deliver secular

invocations at FFRF's national convention in Los Angeles on October 24-25 and received \$500 each and a plaque.

All other entrants were mailed a commemorative "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" certificate as a thank-you and keepsake.

The contest continues until governmental bodies are persuaded to pray on their own time and dime, or until the Supreme Court overturns its *Town of Greece v. Galloway* ruling. New entries received will be considered for the 2015 convention award.

So unbow your head, open your eyes and give your local government a piece of your secular mind! To be considered for the award, those giving secular invocations must submit an official entry, supply a video and a transcript of their remarks. Read the contest rules at:

ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer



Godless oath

Roane County Commissioner Steve Kelley's oath of office Aug. 31 in Kingston, Tenn., ended with "so help me" and not with "God," reported the Roane County News. Kelley, an atheist, said adding God is "just tradition. It doesn't mean anything, because people swear to God and lie all the time." He did, however, lay his hand on a 1972 book called "The Way: The Living Bible." Kelley, who ran unopposed, was the only commissioner to vote against a resolution putting "In God We Trust" on the courthouse and in the commission meeting room.

Newsnotes

Schools head breaks prayer chain

Dave Knight, superintendent of schools in Medina, Ohio, broke the prayer chain at A.I. Root Middle School, the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported Sept. 19. "Public school staff can't use district resources, including email, to promote prayer, especially when the principal, a person in a position of influence, is involved," Knight said. "When it comes to separation of church and state, it's very clear."

The chain was supposedly started to comfort staff members and students facing illness or other problems. Knight said it's fine to send an email "to keep a family in your thoughts and prayers," but when a principal sends a message calling for a prayer chain that "systemizes it, a teacher could feel it wasn't voluntary to participate."

Several teachers complained about the prayer chain email that was sent Sept. 8 and was included in a staff newsletter.

Knight added, "I have seen this type of issue grow into divisiveness and put a school in the middle of a debate between liberal and conservative beliefs.

I'm a man of faith who wants good for all, but I'm also a firm believer in separation of church and state."

Coach suspended for football prayer

A high school football coach in Tempe, Ariz., was suspended for two games in late September for encouraging and participating in prayer at Tempe Preparatory Academy, The Associated Press reported.

Headmaster David Baum said Brittain told players to lead the team in prayer before and after games. He's coached for 12 years at the public charter school.

Baum told a reporter that Brittain "is a man who likes to pray, and I don't object to that. Just, he can't do that with our students. That's the only prohibition."

Baum said Brittain joined students in prayer "in view of everyone. I think I preserved the religious freedom of our students, who have to have the liberty to be able to practice or not practice their religion on our campus, without interference by adults."

FFRF Legal Victories

Proselytizing Texas teacher silenced

Arlington Independent School District in Arlington, Texas, will no longer allow a teacher to proselytize students after a complaint was filed by FFRF.

A concerned parent of a student at James Martin High School reported that a teacher, who is also a local pastor, used valuable time during a world history course to proselytize. The teacher reportedly told students that the stories of the bible are historical fact and that the bible is "about the only information we have" about any ancient civilization and said the first six weeks of class would rely heavily on "the Hebrew history book."

The teacher also told students that "carbon dating is wrong," posted a portrait of Jesus in the classroom and spent parts of several class periods complaining about Supreme Court decisions concerning prohibition of religious indoctrination in public schools and how he gets around the ban.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Sept. 10, pointing out the obvious violations. The school responded Sept. 16: "AISD takes your letter and its contents seriously and has begun an investigation."

The complainant told FFRF on Sept. 22 that the problematic content was removed from the classroom and that the teacher "has not been proselytizing recently."

FFRF pulls plug on loudspeaker prayer

Wise County Public Schools in Wise, Va., will no longer allow school-sponsored prayer before football games. The prayer was delivered before each home game over the loudspeaker by a member of the clergy.

On Sept. 18, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to remind the district that school-sponsored religious messages are illegal and divisive:

The superintendent responded the next day: "We have addressed this issue and will resolve it immediately." The game later that day did not include a prayer over the loudspeaker, a com-



Pictured at the federal courthouse in Chicago is Richard L. Bolton (third from left), serving as litigation attorney for FFRF in its historic challenge of the housing allowance exclusion uniquely benefiting ministers of the gospel. FFRF won a strong ruling last year, which the IRS and Treasury Department have appealed. Oral arguments were heard Sept. 9 before the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. Flanking Bolton were FFRF Staff Attorneys Sam Erickson, Andrew Seidel, Liz Cavell, Rebecca Markert, FFRF Law Clerk Maddy Ziegler, FFRF's new Legal "Fellow" Katherine Paige, FFRF Metro Chicago Chapter Director Tom Cara and Chicago-area member Alan Cosnow. Photo: Dan Barker

plaintant told FFRF.

Notary publics need not be believers

A notary public education program in Raleigh, N.C., will no longer let an instructor misinform students. A student who took the course contacted FFRF to report that students were told several times that they "must believe in God to be a notary."

On Sept. 5, Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter to the Department of the Secretary of State: "[The instructor] may mistakenly believe that Article 6, Section 8 of the North Carolina Constitution requires notaries public to believe in God, but this section is unconstitutional and should not be presented as current law. If any instructor . . . is informing applicants that belief in God is a requirement to be commissioned as a notary public, this is a serious constitutional issue."

The Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in 1961 in a case brought by the late Roy Torcaso, an honorary FFRF director of FFRF, against requiring religious tests for public office, spe-

cifically involving a notary public oath.

On Sept. 16, the DSOS replied: "[The instructor] has been informed that the provision disqualifying any person from holding a public office for denying the being of Almighty God is not congruent with the U.S. Constitution and is therefore not applicable to notary applicants in North Carolina and should not be taught. Although this specific provision of the constitution is not germane to notary education, we have taken this opportunity to make sure each of our instructors understand that it is not applicable to notary applicants."

Prayer stopped at Pa. board meetings

The school board in Mercersburg, Pa., will no longer conduct prayer at meetings. Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a complaint letter Sept. 8, noting: "The Third Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over Pennsylvania, has definitively held that school board prayer is unconstitutional."

The board president responded Sept 24: "The Tuscarora School District Board of Directors will no longer open their monthly meetings with prayer."

Texas email worship invites stopped

The Office of Public Affairs at the University of Texas Health Northeast in Tyler has stopped sending system-wide email invitations to employees to participate in bible study events at the Hurst Chapel.

A concerned employee contacted FFRF to report that the emails were signed "From the Office of Public Affairs." In contrast to the bible study invitations, an email that promoted a Weight Watchers meeting contained the disclaimer, "This program is not in any way supported, endorsed, or managed by UT Health Northeast, other than allowing the meetings to take place on campus as a convenience to our staff. Participation in the program is entirely voluntary."

It was additionally reported that

employees were invited to attend bible study sessions in lieu of performing their normal work.

On Sept. 4, Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter of complaint: "While it may be standard practice in some hospitals to offer patients and their families access to a nondenominational chaplain for spiritual counseling, there is no reasonable justification for a public university-affiliated hospital to provide its employees with access to worship services during the workday."

On Sept. 24, FFRF received word from the complainant that "Chapel services are still going on every week, but the emails promoting them have stopped."

FFRF lowers boom on flagpole prayer

A superintendent in Toledo, Ohio, who used Twitter to promote a religious "See You at the Pole" event will no longer be permitted to do so.

A complainant informed FFRF that the superintendent "tweeted" Sept. 24 that "Courageous students will be praying at Whitmer's flagpole at 7am. I will join them, it will be an amazing way to start the day [sic]!!"

On Sept. 26, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter of complaint to the district about the Whitmer High School event: "When the district's employees participate in the religious events of students, they unconstitutionally entangle the district with a religious message."

On Oct. 1, an attorney for the district responded: "I have discussed with [the superintendent] the possible appearance of religious endorsement that can arise from both messages and personal participation in certain student activities, and I believe that our discussion will inform his future approaches to his involvement."

Faux history tracts get heave-ho

Valley View [Texas] Independent School District will no longer let a middle school teacher give students religious handouts. The history teacher



Hobby Lobby discussion panel

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel (left) took part in a Sept. 17 panel at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School on the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision. It was sponsored by Law Students for Reproductive Justice. Also pictured are Everett Mitchell, director of community relations at UW-Madison; R. Alta Charo, professor of law and bioethics; and Lisa Alexander, associate professor of law.

FFRF Legal Victories

distributed tracts about the Declaration of Independence published by the National Center for Constitutional Studies, a social conservative group that promotes religion under the guise of teaching American history.

The NCCS website includes a list of reasons to oppose same-sex marriage and has articles making egregiously false connections between the Constitution and the bible.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Aug. 29. The superintendent responded Sept. 10 that "VVISD intends to fully protect the rights of all our students and will do everything possible to replace the objectionable materials."

S. Dakota football prayer grounded

Aberdeen Central High School in Aberdeen, S.D., will no longer let its football coaches engage in pregame prayers. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter Sept. 24: "The coaches' apparent organizing and obvious participation in a team prayer constitutes an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion."

On Sept. 29, the superintendent replied, "All members of the administrative leadership team and coaching staff have received follow-up correspondence which instructs them not to organize, encourage, or participate in student prayer at any event sponsored by the District."

Second coming of Ohio Jesus shirts

Akron Public Schools in Akron, Ohio, has once again told football coaches to stop wearing religious T-shirts. In 2013, FFRF filed a complaint after Buchtel Community Learning Center staff wore shirts stating "God Rules Buchtel Athletics" and "Jesus Is My Hero." The district reported taking swift action but the shirts resurfaced in September with the football team.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert reminded the district Sept. 25 that coaches, like teachers, are restricted from certain religious activities and expression while acting in their official capacities.

A school district representative responded Sept. 29 that a church donated the shirts: "I will be forwarding them a letter explaining that the T-shirts they are donating to the school's athletic program violate the Akron Board of Education's dress code policy."

The board also met with coaching staff that day "to discuss the prohibition of wearing religious T-shirts."

The board thanked FFRF for bringing attention to the issue and said it will be an agenda item at an upcoming district-wide meeting with all athletic staff.

Coach's meal prayer off the menu

Eustis High School in Eustis Fla., will no longer let a football coach require prayer before team meals in the school's cafeteria. FFRF received a complaint that the coach would often



Just another day at the office(r's meeting)

Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison took part in a hysterical historical reenactment. From left are Cole "Slaw" Dreier, Darcy Davis, David "Mendel" Liu, erstwhile FFRF intern Sam(wise) Erickson, Nicole Niebler, Margaret Babe, Chris(t) Calvey, Mark Pan, Amanda "Manders" Supak, Anna Wright, Tyler "Ty Guy" Centers, Yuhan "Lucy" Jiang and Brandon Frederick.

call upon players at random to offer prayers with the entire team. FFRF also raised concerns about a local resident promoting prayer events at school on an unaffiliated Facebook page titled #PRAYWITHEUSTIS.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Sept. 11 to detail the violations. An attorney for Lake County Schools responded Sept. 12: "Be advised that we are aware of the pitfalls of any coach promoting organized prayer and direct our coaches accordingly. Any misstep that might have occurred at a meal involving [the coach] has been corrected and we do not expect it to occur again."

As to the Facebook prayer promotion, the district denied have any knowledge of it "until we received this correspondence, [so] be advised that we are appropriately dealing with that

situation as well."

Church ads on school fence removed

Elk Grove Unified School District in Elk Grove, Calif., took down signs promoting a church after a complaint was filed by FFRF. Signs reading "AnswersChurch.com" with pictures of a Latin cross enclosed in a light bulb, were posted at Harriet Eddy Middle School. At least two signs were displayed on the school's chain link fence.

Answers Church rents the school on weekends (as allowed by a misguided Supreme Court decision) but displays its signs throughout the week.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a Sept. 3 letter: "If the church wishes to advertise its services on school property, it may only use school property dur-

ing the time it has rented the property — on Sundays. It must put up the banners no earlier than when the rental time begins and take them down when the rental time ends."

On Sept. 11, the district agreed, "[O]ur protocols allow for the sign you reference to be displayed only during the time of the event, such as when the Church has been approved to use the facility, and is not to be placed on the property beyond those times."

The city is the site of the famous *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow* case brought by Michael Newdow in which the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled that the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are an endorsement of religion and therefore violate the Establishment Clause. (Sadly, the case was later thrown out by the Supreme Court on standing.)

FFRF protests pope invites

FFRF called on U.S. Reps. John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi to withdraw their invitation to Pope Francis to address Congress, in part over the pope's decision to harbor a Vatican official accused of sexually preying on minors.

FFRF previously contacted two mayors asking them to withdraw the red carpet to the pope based on the constitutional separation of religion from government. FFRF contacted Green Bay (Wis.) Mayor Jim Schmitt after he invited the pope to make a "pilgrimage" in 2015 to a local Virgin Mary shrine, and St. Augustine, Fla., Mayor Joseph Boles, who invited Francis to celebrate the "birthplace of Christianity in the New World, specifically Catholicism." The "birth" of Catholicism

there included two incidents in which French settlers who failed to convert to Catholicism were ordered slaughtered by St. Augustine Catholic founder Pedro Menendez de Aviles.

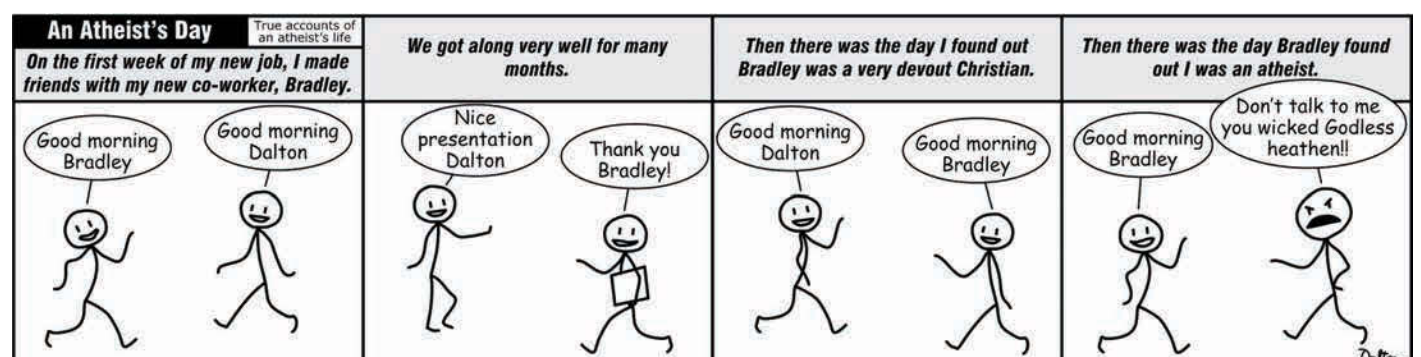
FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor sent a letter to U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi and Speaker of the House John Boehner in late September, asking them to rescind their joint invitation to the pope, issued in March. If he accepts, Pope Francis would become the first pontiff to address U.S. lawmakers at the U.S. Capitol.

FFRF objected on state/church separation grounds and because of the exorbitant security costs, as well as the show of preference for Catholicism

over other religions and nonreligion.

FFRF also lodged vigorous objections to the pope's decision to harbor papal nuncio Archbishop Józef Wesolowski, who stands accused of using impoverished Dominican Republic minors for sex. A riveting exposé by reporter Laurie Goodstein in the Aug. 23 New York Times revealed the Vatican's role in protecting the pope's personal envoy, despite his assurances of "zero tolerance" for clergy who molest children.

Wesolowski was recalled to the Vatican before local authorities could investigate the charges, which include trading medication for sex with a 13-year-old epileptic boy.



FFRF member Dalton R. graphically sums up his interaction with Bradley.

Fond farewell to Sherry Matulis

1931–2014

Sherry Matulis, former secretary of FFRF's executive board and an ardent member since 1981, died in late August at home in Peoria, Ill.

"I was born an atheist (aren't we all?), in the small town of Nevada, Iowa," she wrote. Moving to Peoria in 1942, she married John Matulis in 1948. They had five children.

She wrote about her experience seeking an illegal abortion, "Never Again," for *The Feminist Connection*, a newspaper edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor in the early 1980s, which was later reprinted by *The Progressive* magazine as "Abortion 1954." In 1954, when her husband was out of town on a construction project, Sherry, a young mother, was raped and knifed and left for dead in an attack by a religious fanatic.

She subsequently spoke before a U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee chaired by Orrin Hatch in 1981 about her life-threatening experiences seeking an illegal abortion, as well as before many state legislatures. In 1990, she spoke at U.S. Senate committee hearings on the Freedom of Choice Act.

She served as a state and national representative for the "Silent No More" campaign sponsored by NARAL in 1985. She appeared on many radio and TV programs, including shows hosted by Oprah Winfrey and Sally Jessy Raphael, and spoke for choice on many college campuses. She was featured in "Personal Decisions," a film produced by Planned Parenthood in 1985, and received state and national recognition, including the American Humanist Association's "Humanist Heroine" Award of 1991.

Her column, "The Refractory Relic," appeared in *The Feminist Connection* from 1981-85, and her riveting essays appeared in early issues of *Freethought Today*. Her articles, poetry and short stories were published

in such periodicals as *Redbook*, Isaac Asimov's *Science Fiction* magazine, *Questar*, *Analog* and others.

FFRF's anthology of women free-thinkers, *Women Without Superstition*, edited by Gaylor, reprints one essay by Matulis and two of her poems. FFRF Co-President and resident musician Dan Barker also put her poem "Benediction" to music (recorded on his "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist" CD).

"Sherry was a brilliant and fierce critic of religion and its harm to women and to intellect, and a very dear friend," said Gaylor.

Religion's Child

Aware of light and yet condemned to grope
Through dark regression's cave, told she must find
Life's purpose in that blackness, without hope,
Denied the luminescence of her mind
Until, at last, she finds the darkness kind,
Religion's child — a babe once bright and fair,
Curls up, tucks in her tail, and says her prayer.

"Benediction"

Pride goeth, so the Christians say,
Before a mighty fall.
But me, I've never felt that way;
I never stand so tall
As when I say I'm proud to be
An atheist, Oh, yes!
It helps me stand for so much more,
And fall for so much less.

Poem by Sherry Matulis. Music by Dan Barker.

© 1998 by Sherry Matulis and Dan Barker



Would you believe Sherry at age 12?



At age 20, Sherry was surprised to find herself in the first "Miss Universe" contest after her husband secretly submitted this photo.



Sherry testifying to keep abortion safe and legal.

FFRF member is proof one person can make big difference

The St. Louis Riverfront Times, Sept. 11: “Monica ‘Nikki’ Moungo, an atheist and a mother, made an impassioned plea to the Ballwin [Mo.] City Council, asking it not to put up a planned ‘In God We Trust’ sign on city property. Instead, Moungo told the council she’d like a sign with the motto ‘E pluribus unum,’ and she brought a \$1,000 check to the meeting to fund it.”

FFRF salutes Nikki, an FFRF member and atheist who brought her two children to the meeting, for her activism. Her idea didn’t appear to get much support at the meeting but she didn’t give up and came back Sept. 22 to speak again [see below].

Her speech swayed the board, which proceeded to vote 6-2 against putting four-inch “In God We Trust” letters in the council chambers.

Transcript via Friendly Atheist Hemant Mehta:

Good evening, Mr. Mayor, Aldermen/women, fellow citizens:

Tonight I’m not going to tell you more about being an atheist, about secular humanism or why I feel these displays are unnecessary, even detrimental to our community. Tonight I’d rather discuss the intent behind the Knights of Columbus proposal. In West Newsmagazine, Mr. Strange of the K of C stated these displays are “an appropriate way to promote patriotism.” I beg to question the primary objective behind their proposal.

As a taxpaying citizen, I voraciously question the integrity of aldermen taking money from a religious organization in order to display their religious advertisement in a taxpayer-owned building.

If the mayor or aldermen are members of the Holy Infant Church, perhaps they should abstain from this vote, as it indicates a clear bias. But if



Monica ‘Nikki’ Moungo

this tax-exempt religious organization succeeds in paying city officials to ad-

vertise their religious message on taxpayer property, it must be allowed for taxpaying citizens to also have their various, religious or non, ads placed on these hallowed walls.

If this proposal passes, the aldermen need to bring in their own tools and pry the existing city motto off the wall. An “In God We Trust” plaque underneath “Ballwin: Bringing People Together” — is an unscrupulous lie. “We” implies all, and “we” simply do not all trust in God. Some trust in completely different gods and goddesses altogether. Again, “From many: One.”

Since last I spoke here, a death threat has been made and many prayers have been given in my name, but I’ve also received surprising messages of support from citizens of Ballwin. On their behalf, please don’t speak for the many Ballwin citizens of nonbelief, or who pray to a non-Christian god. They wanted to be here tonight to speak out, but these citizens fear for their jobs, their families and their lives, with good reason.

These are the people who live next door to you, all of you. They are your children’s teachers, your trusted physician, your firefighters, EMS, veterans and soldiers and, yes, local law enforcement. “We” are many. “We” are diverse.

Interestingly, I have received support from members of Holy Infant Church, who are also afraid to speak out. May you know them when their tithes begin to wither.

Let’s “patriotize” our community, but not with the use of empty, patronizing, religious slogans. If the city of Ball-

win is truly interested in promoting patriotism, I propose creating a “Citizens for a Better Ballwin” community program to honor citizens for their good works. What embodies patriotism, the desire to improve your community, more than the giving of yourself to that community? Isn’t that what being a patriot is all about? Religion does not a patriot make. I will forward this proposal to your respective emails later for your review and consideration.

I would also strongly encourage the city to host an annual “Cultural Days” festival to encourage awareness of the diversity that exists in Ballwin, which is currently being summarily ignored.

I ask you, where was Ballwin’s sense of community when, in 2012, my 18-year-old neighbor, Matthew Pelligrini, was brutally murdered in Clifton Heights? Why didn’t the Ballwin Christian community or KoC come out in support of a murdered boy and his grieving Christian family who’ve lived here since 2002? Where were the city officials? Ballwin, we really need to work on “Bringing People Together,” and a silly plaque is not going to accomplish this feat.

Know that I support the right of Ballwin citizens to display religious decorative items on their personal property, such as Lewis Greenberg’s Holocaust art display. The city was reported as spending in excess of \$80,000 on attempting to stop Mr. Greenberg from exercising his First Amendment rights. I would further the argument that the allowance of an “In God We Trust” display in city buildings, while pursuing Mr. Greenberg, indicates the city’s desire to promote only a monotheistic Christian god.

Alderman Terbrock indicated to a Ballwin resident in an email that it didn’t matter that people from outside of Ballwin opposed the signs. I would caution him that, indeed, it does matter. These are the people who see Ballwin on top lists of great, safe places to live. This proposal and ensuing debate will tell potential business owners and residents that their taxpaying monies are not welcome here unless they subscribe to a Christian or Catholic supernatural deity.

It would be wise to remember that the Department of Justice is coming to St. Louis County to investigate the civil rights abuses after the travesty in Ferguson; so please keep our diversity in mind and choose not to abuse our First Amendment rights.

In closing, Thomas Paine once proudly proclaimed, “Independence is my happiness, the world is my country, and my religion is to do good.”

If I could state it any better myself, I would. Thank you all for your time and consideration.

Calif. city settles suit challenging prayer breakfasts



Carole Beaton

The city of Eureka, Calif., has agreed to settle a 2013 lawsuit filed on behalf of Eureka resident and FFRF Life Member Carole Beaton. The suit challenged prayers at city council meetings and city sponsorship of prayer breakfasts.

Terms of the Sept. 25 agreement require Mayor Frank Jager to stop using his office and city resources to promote his annual Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, with the city paying \$16,000

in plaintiff’s legal fees.

The court ruled late last year that nonsectarian prayers are legal at meetings. “The city agreed that we can appeal that ruling as part of the settlement,” Beaton’s attorney Peter Martin told the Eureka Times-Standard.

Martin also sought to add Eureka Police Chief Andrew Mills to the suit in May because he allegedly gave a religious devotional at the Peace Officer Breakfast in January. Mills’ scheduled deposition was canceled due to the settlement.

Beaton told FFRF that she was expecting some nasty calls and emails after filing the suit. “Instead I got over 30 calls thanking me for protecting the separation of church and state. Many were from religious people who understand that we are all better off if the government does not get involved in religion.”

The only negative call was from “a very nice man who offered to pray for me. I told him ‘thanks’ but suggested he pray instead for someone sick or dying if he thought his god could help, because I was doing fine.”

What Is a Freethinker?



free-thinker
n. A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

Better believe it: There *are* black humanists

Mandisa Thomas delivered this speech May 3 at FFRF's and the Triangle Freethought Society's regional gathering in Raleigh, N.C. For more information, go to aahumanism.net/. The speech was edited for space.

By Mandisa Thomas

I am one of the founders and president of a growing organization called Black Nonbelievers Inc. I want to talk about a segment of the population that tends to be overlooked by the major organizations. That is changing, but we still have a way to go.

I was born and raised in New York City. I was actually not raised religious, which is a rarity in our community. But I was exposed to Christianity, Islam and different forms of supernaturalism rampant in our community.

I moved to Atlanta at the end of 1997. One of the first questions normally asked by the black folks is, "What church do you go to?" By the end of 2010, the scandal with Eddie Long was in the news, and I was really at a point where I was deciding where I stood with religion. I have pretty much always despised it. I really came back to identifying as an atheist/nonbeliever and thought it was time to start getting out and meeting other people.

Speaking with other black atheists online, I often heard there was a sense of intimidation and apprehension upon attending predominantly white freethought events. We would often be the only black atheists in the room. There was a sense of "I've never met a black atheist" or a sense of being condescended to about issues that we face, especially being a part of a mostly religious black community.

We decided to do something about it and in January 2011 started Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta. There were 15 people at our first general meeting. That is more than the number of black atheists in this room. We can laugh about it, but it actually isn't very funny, because when people say they cannot "see" color, they're absolutely right. You have to ask yourself: Have you really, really thought about this dynamic? It's OK if you haven't, but this is what we are here to help with.

In November 2011 we increased our scope and shortened our name to just Black Nonbelievers because we wanted to establish a base to help groups become established in other cities. We are continuing in the tradition of historic black humanists and freethinkers such as Langston Hughes, who wrote a noble poem called "Goodbye Christ," Hubert Henry Harrison, who was very, very notable at the time of the Black Renaissance, Lorraine Hansberry, who wrote "A Raisin in the Sun," and Asa Philip Randolph, who was the organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington.

I'd also like to acknowledge Butterfly McQueen, whom Dan and I talked about this morning and whom FFRF often acknowledges.

For historical reasons related to legal separation and discrimination in this country, and other injustices, the church and the doctrine imposed upon slaves upon arriving in America, played a social and supportive role in the com-

We know there are many misconceptions about atheists. We seek to dispel those.

munity at a time when government did not. Most black leaders and public figures are religious. When you hear of some of the prominent names in the black community, they often do identify with some religious institution, and so therefore it is assumed that the majority, if not all blacks do as well.

•••

The question comes up a lot — why black or gender-specific groups? We have received some rather nasty feedback saying that we are racist or don't understand why there is a need for our groups. We care that there are so many religious people that do not get the help that they need for the problems that they have. I wouldn't say that religion is the primary problem in our community, even though it plays a big part. But it does tend to mask a lot of issues that people don't get practical help for.

We tend to specific issues that larger groups do not have time to address. I love that FFRF and similar organizations challenge separation of church and state violations. We have groups that focus on education, and science education in particular. We also have groups that focus on support and socialization aspects. All of these are important. There's nothing to be ashamed of if a group only focuses on one area.

It encourages minorities to openly identify as atheist or some similar freethought label. People have told me that they were glad they found a group like ours because it helps bridge that gap.

Finally, it is the best way to increase diversity. That has become such a buzzword in our community. Sometimes I think it has just been "said" to death, but how many people are actually serious about it? How often do you talk to other people of color at these events? Or just in general, how many black atheists do you know? How many of you can Here is some correspondence that I have received over these past few years. The first one I had to clean up quite a bit, grammatically. "What is this, a war against God? I can't believe you have the audacity to try to erase the one who created Heaven and Earth and all things in it including you and me."

They go on to say, "Please change the name of 'Black Nonbelievers' to 'Believers.' Our race has suffered enough."

Actually, most of our correspondence has been really good. One writer says that there is nothing in black history that indicates a god is good. One popular phrase in the community and a popular song is "We've Come This Far By Faith." When you look at the struggles in the black community, it has taken more than faith to overcome them. But it is largely attributed to belief in God, which is really sad.



Black Nonbelievers are employees, students, entrepreneurs, etc., pretty much the same as other groups. Many fear backlash from their families and friends, as well as loss of business from clients. There are many events in the Atlanta area that are considered leadership. There are a lot of women's leadership events, but many of them end up being big church services.

In Atlanta it is definitely a status symbol to be affiliated with some form of church. I am sure every community experiences it, but it takes on a whole new life form in ours. We are seeking better ways to connect and communicate with nonbelievers and believers about atheism and life as a nonbeliever. We know there are many misconceptions about atheists. We seek to dispel those.

•••

We have a service component and are part of Adopt-a-Highway in the Atlanta area. We had a day of solidarity in 2012, co-sponsored the Blackout Secular Rally and have general meetings with speakers such as Dr. Sikivu Hutchinson, author of *Moral Combat* and *Godless Americana*.

We have been featured in documentaries, including "Atheists in the Bible Belt," which was put on by Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters, and "Contradiction" by Jeremiah Camara, which Dan and Annie Laurie were featured in as well. It speaks extensively to the problem of the church in our community.

We have been involved in focus groups. There was a professor who traveled to Nashville to speak to one of the groups in the area. She asked if we would participate so I made the four-hour drive with a few of our members. We are willing to come to you if you would like to talk to us.

I was featured in Jet magazine in the April 30, 2012, edition which had [megachurch pastor] T.D. Jakes on the cover. It was supposed to have been a well-rounded edition about religion and spirituality as it pertained to blacks, but it talked mostly about Christianity. But in all fairness, they did a very good job on the article.

We participated in the African Americans for Humanism billboard campaign, which had a billboard in Raleigh featuring [Triangle chapter member] Veronique Matthews. We also take part in the Atlanta Pride Festival with the Atlanta Freethought Society and the annual New Year's Eve

party with Black Atheists of America.

Our affiliated organizations include the Black Nonbelievers of Dallas with Alex Jewels, who happened to be featured in Ebony magazine in 2011. He was also the face of the Dallas billboard campaign. We have the Black Nonbelievers of Detroit with Bridget Crutchfield, who has become an integral part of our organization. She is also the founder of Minority Atheists of Michigan. We're affiliated with Black Nonbelievers of Orlando with Richard Peacock.

Our future goals: Get used to this name — New Turn, an original concept by one of our board members. This program will focus on combating recidivism, and that is the name of the revolving door of the correctional facility with ex-offenders.

More often than not, they end up back in the system within three years due to lack of opportunity and lack of support. So this is something we will be taking on in the future, including short-term financial assistance for those in need. Many of our members have spouses and are going through issues with their spouses due to their nonbelief, and we all know that has broken up families, sadly.

Last but not least, I love to say, "Ain't no stopping us now." The demographics, the times are changing, the faces of the movement are changing, and we must be ready for it. I appreciate that the level of support that we have been given. We are going to keep growing, and we will keep moving. Thank you.

Overheard

The other little kids on the bus were egging him on and telling him to hit her and kick her, so he did.

Joni Mars, whose 6-year-old daughter was spit on and assaulted by a boy on an Oklahoma school bus for saying she didn't believe in God

The Daily Beast, 9-25-14

I really loved being in [church], but everything I loved about it had nothing to do with religion.

Richard Fortuna, atheist host of "a godless celebration of life" at Sunday Assembly Charlotte, N.C.

Charlotte Observer, 9-29-14

First place: Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Contest

Raised in the Church of Costco

FFRF awarded Bijan \$3,000 for his essay.



By Bijan Parandeh

Religion has always been foreign to me; I was part of neither the club that went to church nor the one that went to temple. When my second-grade classmates asked me where my family went on weekends, my answer was natural: My father takes us to Costco.

I have matured into a committed supporter of the Church of Costco. I worked there for a year during college and even have my own executive card now. Although as a child I was not able to appreciate how witty my answer was, as I grew older, going to Costco on the weekends actualized itself into a rejection of religion in its entirety.

My distaste for religion started early because as a child I could not understand believing in something or someone imaginary. I always loved animals and nature documentaries. I would go to the beach and see and touch the same animals I saw on TV. But how could I have that same experience with something hocus-pocus like God?

The discourse at my family's dinner table was frequently far outside the range of a typical household. Sex, politics, philosophy — I remember one dinner my grandparents discussed whether or not bisexuality could be considered a fetish.

To me, debating confusing or questionable issues was natural, but I learned at school that other students looked to a book to tell them how to think. I never understood how my best friend could be more confident after an explanation from his priest than after debating it for hours at my dinner table. Questioning everything primed me early for atheism.

One major justification for my atheism is political philosophy. I spent my first year of college living with my great-aunt and uncle in California, both of them Iranian leftist activists in the 1970s. Witnessing their discussions with friends, most of whom they had met through political networks in the 1970s, taught me how useless religion is at a political level.

During the Iranian revolution, many intellectual critics of the shah, like my great-aunt, were jailed. Others were executed. Religious leaders were often seen as too sacred to be imprisoned. This allowed them to establish themselves quickly and take advantage of a dissatisfied and religious populace.

Questioning everything primed me early for atheism.

The Islamic dogma became a façade for a political system, and its repercussions are seen in Iran's current human rights abuses. The Islamic system in Iran mirrors that of all religions and the destruction it has created throughout history.

A passion to fight this mentality motivated me to become politically active for the first time with the campus club "Left Alternative." We campaigned for better quality classrooms and lower tuition. As a club revolving around socialist tenets, a secular mentality was critical in order to believe in our message.

My atheist convictions also influenced my decision to finally come out as gay last year. My belief in science and disregard for religious explanations of homosexuality pushed me to confidently say that it is an innate part of who I am. If I were religious, I may have never come out as gay.

I was most nervous to come out to my 80-year-old Iranian grandmother. Although she was not religious, she was from a different generation and culture, and I was terrified she would be disappointed. But as a doctor, she responded in the most loving way anyone could. She told me with elegance, how as a doctor, she knew it was something out of my control and I should never be ashamed of it.

As an ophthalmologist, she treated

all her patients with equal dedication regardless of their backgrounds. This is an excellent example of how secular humanism expands your compassion and love for other people. Perhaps this mentality is what motivates me to become a doctor.

This is epitomized in the statue of Louis Pasteur in front of the Cook County Hospital in Chicago, where I walk to work in a pathology lab studying cancer prevention. The statue reads, "One doesn't ask of one who suffers what is your country and what is your religion. One merely says, you suffer. This is enough for me. You belong to me and I shall help you." (Louis Pasteur)

As ridiculous as turning Costco into a religion sounds, it illustrates how absurd organized religion is. Both are essentially exclusive clubs. You can't shop at Sam's Club with a Costco card, and who would want to anyway? You have to pay monthly dues to become part of a group that touts itself as better than the rest.

For my family, Costco was a place to see our friends and other members of our community, just like a church is. I choose to live my life without religion because dogma limits my thought process, my compassion for others and, ultimately, my happiness.

And I don't need a book to tell me what happy is.

Bijan Parandeh, 21, was born in Vancouver, B.C., and is a senior majoring in biology with a premed focus at the University of Illinois in Chicago. "I love lifting weights, yoga, playing the tombak (a Persian drum), swimming in the wetlands of Illinois and researching cancer in the lab."

Second place: College essay contest

Checking a box marked 'atheist'

FFRF awarded David \$2,000 for his essay.

By David Andexler

It was unusual for a question to bother me in the way that this one did. Ostensibly, the question about my religious affiliation was fair, though possibly irrelevant, for a university application, but my answer would be symbolic of the identity I would assume as I entered the next stage of my life. At that instant, the question had the power to bring my pen to a halt.

I was mildly amused that my inquisitors had been kind enough to provide me with a list of the four most common and, perhaps, the four most acceptable answers. At the not-so-tender age of 18, I was tasked with the minor feat of determining the eternal fate of my soul with nothing more than a checked box. Pick the one that best describes you: Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish.

Since birth, I've had ceaseless exposure to evangelical teachings. I was given the name David, after a biblical

character idolized as a paragon of religious virtue, "a man after God's own heart," and it soon became clear that expectations for me were high.

Twice a week I would be whisked off to spend my evening memorizing bible verses and talking to Jesus. Based on what I was told, he was a pretty decent guy. The dialogues I had with Jesus began to seem more like monologues as I became suspicious of their one-sided nature.

I voiced my concerns to the group leader, who promptly brushed me off with a vague response that temporarily satisfied me.

My religious fervor was matched only by my passion for science. I spent every free minute immersed in a science book, learning all that I could about the mechanisms that drive the natural world. My parents went to great lengths to support my scientific education, something for which I'm inexpressibly thankful, despite simultaneous emphasis on religious education.

My grandfather also played a significant role in my scientific education by fostering my love of books. Though



he was not formally educated, he was a well-read and intellectual man. Some days he would talk to me about science, about the beauty of the natural world and the sense of awe that we should feel as we observe it.

Religion began losing its hold on my mind when I was able to recognize that significant tension existed between the tenets of my religion and the discoveries made by the scientific community. After a conversation with my grandfather, this tension couldn't be ignored any longer.

When I was about 11, we were sitting opposite one another in his home, quietly reading our books. "David," he began, "What are you reading today?"

I handed him my book. Something else was on his mind, for he looked at the cover briefly before speaking again.

"Do you know the most important question that can be asked?" he said. I shook my head.

"The most important question that can be asked is the question of 'Why?' If you can give a good answer to that question, that's how you know that what you believe is true. That's why science works. It tells us why the natural world is the way it is."

In that moment he affirmed, perhaps not intentionally, what I refused to acknowledge on my own: The fact

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

that what I believed about religion could not stand up to this fundamental question of “Why?” Science, which advances through the systematic evaluation of evidence for a particular claim, must make a rather large exception for the claims of religion if the two are to exist in harmony. I couldn’t justify making that exception.

In the years that followed this intellectual awakening, I maintained the outward appearance of a Christian, fearing social repercussions and a lingering sense of eternal damnation. For years I was haunted by the phantasms of hellfire, despite knowing, intellectually, that I had no reason to fear such

It wasn’t easy to gloss over the horrific morality of the bible.

torment.

It wasn’t easy wearing the Christian disguise; after all, it wasn’t easy to gloss over the horrific morality of the bible, the conveniently silent nature of God and the terribly convoluted revelation of a supposedly omniscient being.

I knew that prayer was a crapshoot, often being far more effective as an act

of assurance for other believers than as an actual agent of change. I found myself growing tired of crafting excuses to rationalize my beliefs.

But as I sat on the cusp of higher education, I was no longer content with donning the trappings of make believe by masquerading as a Christian, a religion whose adherents desperately wanted to stifle my dissent. I looked down at the four choices listed on my university application, picked up my pen and began to write.

Like my namesake, I made a decision to fight against the proverbial Philistine threatening to conquer that which I hold most dear: my intellectual integrity. On that day, I chose to

remove the mask that I had worn for so long, when, in blue pen, I wrote in the word “atheist” with a checked box next to it.

David Andexler, 21, was raised in the rural community of Rootstown, Iowa, and is a senior at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. He will graduate in 2015 with a B.S. in biology and a B.A. in history. He is vice president of academic affairs for Duquesne’s Student Government Association and vice chair of external communications for the Pittsburgh Student Government Council and belongs to the Secular Student Alliance.

Third place: College essay contest

Memoir of an ex-Muslim

FFRF awarded Reem \$1,000 for her essay.

By Reem Abded-Razek

As the daughter of an Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood family, I spent many summers at Aunt Sabreen’s apartment. She was one of the “sisters” — women members of the brotherhood — who were in charge of our religious education.

“We should all thank Allah for creating us Muslims. We are all unbelievably lucky. There are billions born into the wrong religion, and Allah chose each and every one of us here for the right one,” Aunt Sabreen said at nearly every meeting.

“Why?” I asked curiously. “Why us?” She answered, “You shouldn’t ask these types of questions!” So I stopped asking her and instead asked other grown-ups, but no one seemed to have an answer.

Years passed and theology consumed most of my time. The more I studied Islam, the more immensely I struggled in understanding Allah. At one point I raised my hands to the sky and poured out my heart and soul: “Allah, I can’t understand you! You bless the rape of slaves, wives and children under the guise of marriage, yet you set flogging as punishment for consensual premarital sex! You sentence so many good people to eternal hell because they dedicated their life to worshipping the ‘wrong’ God or no God! Talk to me and help me understand, please.”

Then it hit me. I was talking to myself.

When I announced that I was an atheist, my father believed that either I was possessed by an infidel djinn and thus required an immediate exorcism, or that I had lost my mind and required immediate institutionalization. After he had failed in arranging for an exorcism due to family intervention, he used his connections as a physician to get me thrown into a mental institution.

He said I would leave the institution a believer and that electroshock “therapy” would free me from the “delusions of atheism.” The only way I could get out was by pretending to believe, but I was too proud, stubborn and naïve.

I thought I could get out without compromising my principles. I waited

Living shackled to silly conventions and superstitions is not really living at all.

until I thought the guard was asleep during my walk outside the ward. As soon as I ran, he became instantly alert and ran me down.

“You know what I do to people who try to escape?” he yelled. “I break their legs with my bare hands.” He mercilessly began twisting my feet. I screamed as he dragged me across the flesh-tearing ground into my room. A nurse locked the door and said with amusement, “You’ll never get out of here.”

I slept on the floor that night amid tears and blood, waking to the sound of a loud nurse dragging me to get electroshock. I limped my way there, then all colors faded and so did everything and everyone.

After regaining consciousness, I spent hours staring at the ceiling trying to think but not being able to. I felt someone’s presence. I turned my head

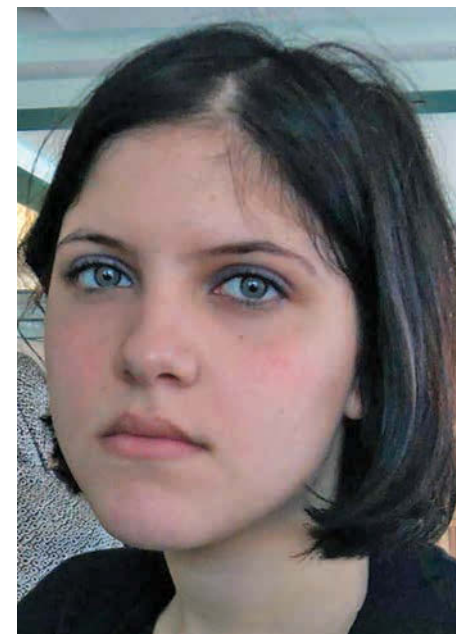
and saw a nurse standing there. I never learned her name. Her face and figure were hidden under layers of cloth, and her actions for the most part revealed no identity whatsoever.

To my surprise, she gave me a glimpse into her personality. “You haven’t eaten anything in days,” she said. Even though I couldn’t see her facial expressions, I heard concern in her voice.

I endured the asylum for a couple of weeks, then got out through absolute conformity; I lied and said that an angel came to my room and we took a tour of heaven together and I knew, I just knew I was a Muslim. I was out instantly.

Almost everything returned to the way it was before my incarceration. The only thing that really changed was me: I was very scared and terrified of going back to the mental institution. I was also terrified of suffering the torment of conformity for the rest of my life.

I realized that by staying silent, I will most probably live longer physically but die “spiritually.” I decided that living shackled to silly conventions and superstitions is not really living at all, and I started writing about my beliefs publicly.



My father was in Saudi Arabia at the time. My mother lied to him about my devoutness, and through her lying, we all managed to come to the United States, where I became an emancipated minor and filed for asylum.

I am excited about my future without religion, I want to dedicate my life to art and music and dance and love and books and beauty and everything that I was told to avoid. I want to ride a bike and swim and draw and dance and play guitar and work and write and love and speak and act and sing and utilize every second of my existence.

I am free.

Reem Abded-Razek, 21, lives in Syracuse, N.Y., and attends Onondaga Community College while studying humanities and professional communications.

Fourth place: College essay contest

‘Heathens and heretics,’ oh my!

FFRF awarded Audrey \$750 for her essay.

By Audrey Gunn

I have always been an atheist. My mother grew up in a strongly Catholic household, the kind that had six kids and prayed at every meal and went to church every Sunday come hell or high water. When she went off to college, my mother stopped attending church, which came as a great relief, as she had stopped believing long ago. Her mother, my grandma, was distraught, but just said that she’d pray. She meant well, I know.

My dad was raised a Scottish Prot-

estant in Ohio, but was more or less indifferent to religion. So I grew up without it, aside from my grandma’s occasional gifts of rosaries and confusing explanations of Jesus. My mother always told me that if I was interested in going to church (or a mosque or synagogue), that she’d find one and take me, but the idea just seemed a bit odd, like Santa for adults.

Most of my best childhood friends were Christian, but the only time that interfered was when they couldn’t sleep over on Saturday because they had to go to church on Sunday. It wasn’t until college, strangely enough, that my atheism became something I had to be careful about discussing. I’d ended up “coming out” at Concordia College, a small Lutheran school in



northern Minnesota, before classes even began.

The entire first-year class had read a book called *Happiness* over the Summer, and my orientation group was invited to our professor's house to discuss it. One particularly religious girl (let's call her Mary) said she felt like the concept of "joy" was minimized in the text. To her, she explained, joy could only come from religion, and from Christianity specifically. Mary was sure we could all relate.

My heart started pounding so hard that my whole body felt like a live wire. I'm a pretty reserved person, even shy, so when I opened my mouth, everybody turned to me, a bit surprised, I think, that I was speaking. "Well, I'm an atheist," I said, and in that moment, you could have heard an ant crawling

across the carpet.

"But I still feel joy. Maybe it doesn't come from the same place yours does, but I feel it — when I go hiking, deep in the woods, when I see the boxes of food I've helped to pack for charity, when I'm painting with my little cousin and she says she wants to be just like me one day."

I paused, but it was still dead silent. "Just because I'm an atheist doesn't mean I experience a smaller range of emotions. Joy might come from different places for me, but I feel it, too." I was trembling. Mary's face was twisted, like I couldn't possibly understand.

I didn't really have to deal with the stigma surrounding my atheism for a while. But in one class, called "Satan in Literature," the topic was bound to resurface. Mary finally took her petty

revenge about a month later.

We were reading Dante's *Inferno*. Mary had designed her own version of the nine levels of hell, which she was describing to us in class. The first few levels were silly — people being penalized for theft and the like with ridiculous, jokey punishments. By the sixth level, we had made it to murderers. "What's on the ninth level, then?" another student finally asked. Mary looked straight at me: "Heathens and heretics."

I wasn't about to confront her again about this ridiculous bias. If she wanted to condemn me to the ninth pit of hell, hanging out with Satan himself, then so be it. As far as I'm concerned, I will cease to exist after I die (the bible is full of fascinating stories, but I fail to see why they're more than just stories).

I worry about being a good person here on Earth, making the most of the short life I have rather than wasting my time condemning others for life choices that differ from mine. Most people I've met at Concordia have been much more accepting of me, and I've even found a couple other nonbelievers along the way.

I refuse to let one closed-minded girl hinder my pursuit of freethought.

Audrey Gunn, 19, grew up in Eagan, Minn., and is a junior English literature major and German minor at Concordia College in Moorhead. She plays clarinet in several groups, is a member of the Secular Student Community and serves on the advisory committee for the college's honors program.

Fifth place (tie): College essay contest

The God who wasn't there

FFRF awarded Keith \$500 for his essay.

By Keith Greer Milburn

I was raised a Southern Baptist, "saved" at the age 8 and washed in the blood two years later. I also suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder, which I believe has helped bring me to where I am today.

Anyone who has OCD is aware that doubt is a major byproduct — not being sure if you turned a light off or if you put your name on an exam after turning it in. One doubt was worse than the rest: doubting if I was going to heaven. I was always a true believer, but my belief never comforted me.

The main thing OCD produces is torment. There were many days I spent hours crying, begging God to help me. OCD creates real fears out of complete

nonsense. I would be sitting there playing a game or watching TV and out of nowhere I would be stricken with thoughts that insisted I had sold my soul to the devil and that I was going to hell for all eternity. With tears in my eyes, I would call out to God to take away these thoughts, but he never did. The only real comfort came from my mother, who suffered similarly.

About a year after graduating from high school, I accepted that most of the bible was false, but my faith still remained in God and his son. Other things about Christianity did not make sense though. I could not believe that a man who does not believe in God but is a good father and husband would go to hell, yet a serial killer or rapist who accepted Christ in prison was destined for eternity in heaven.

Nor could I understand how if homosexuals were an abomination, why would an all-powerful being create

them? A few months ago, I finally allowed myself to realize that under no circumstances could a virgin give birth and a dead man could not come back from the grave. But I still could not let go of God.

For weeks in place of my normal bedtime prayers asking for forgiveness and professing thanks, I simply begged God to show himself to me in even the most miniscule way. Finally the night came where I truly felt I was just talking to the ceiling and great relief washed over me. I no longer felt fear in my heart.

After accepting my atheism, I felt a great thirst for knowledge and started to read the great works of nonbelievers and to truly learn about the world and the universe. It was like a dark cloud had been lifted from my mind and the scales had fallen from my eyes. I was at peace.

I must thank my mother, who, de-



spite being a devout Christian, has accepted me as I am and allowed my inquisitive mind to prosper. She is my favorite person to talk to and she will never know how much our theological debates mean to me.

Keith Milburn, 20, was born in Virginia Beach, Va., and is a junior at the University of Memphis, Tenn. He's majoring in political science and hopes to attend law school and specialize in criminal defense.

Fifth place (tie): College essay contest

Working for human(ist) rights

FFRF awarded Marcus \$500 for his essay.

By Marcus Andrews

I certainly wasn't "raised atheist," as countless people ask me, either out of contempt or ignorance. I was raised to be curious and healthily skeptical and not to blindly follow authority or tradition for their sake alone.

While my parents could be considered atheists or humanists like me, they never pushed me toward unbelief. I did not even know the full meaning of the word "atheist" until my early teens,

when I found it on my own. Simply put, Sundays for our family were not for church, but for trips to the science museum or art museum or zoo, for spending time with friends and family and for seeking out new experiences.

When I grew old enough to consider religion, the natural outcome was atheism, but being that kid whose family never went to church was at best weird and sometimes confusing and uncomfortable. When I went to a funeral or other religious function, often with our extended family, we just didn't quite fit in. My parents had over the years refined the art of respectfully going through the motions and herded my brother and me along, discreetly



Marcus Andrews with his parents, Ron and Deb Andrews.

telling us when to stand up, bow our heads or just sit quietly.

But I was always acutely aware that every piece of the ritual was empty to us, and that everyone else knew that while I halfheartedly moved my mouth, nothing like the Lord's Prayer or what-

ever the psalm of the occasion was, was coming out.

While I always knew that we were different and understood the unease it could create, I'm not sure it ever bothered me enough as to ever want to con-

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

form. At every step in my growth as a nonbeliever, I had at least some sense (along with a stubborn affinity for contrarianism) that I wasn't really missing out.

I still remember what might just be my first solo encounter with unbelief. I have no idea what started this profound first-grade conversation, but it ended with the girl across the table informing me that men who eat pork "go down into the fire." The student teacher a few feet away hurried over to assure us that no one was going to hell just then.

Mixed with a subtle, naïve worry that I just might need to start being more careful with whatever unseen forces were out there, I could not shake the more overpowering thought of how ridiculous and cruel such a belief could be. Is that really what a god does?

First-grade classmate: Men who eat pork 'go down into the fire.'

Punishing otherwise good people for something so arbitrary, that I myself do all the time? Even at that young age I understood that I was fairly alone in my class having no regular religious custom to attend, but that this was the first of many moments to come where I grew much more content with that.

By the end of middle school, I understood that I was in fact an atheist, even if I didn't quite know the full meaning and implications yet. I was comfortable being different, even if I did not go to any effort to advertise it

if I didn't have to, understanding that I was part of a not-so-tolerated minority.

But as I moved through high school, I discovered the intellectual foundations that I had been missing, first in YouTube clips of scholars like Dawkins and Hitchens and later in their writing. I finally understood that I was not alone and that my life was not missing something.

Now there's no stopping me. My rejection of the supernatural and commitment to understanding and advancing myself and humanity, is the absolute basis for everything I do. It guides me to value every second of this one short life, and it directs me to pursue a life dedicated to making society better for all. It is the reason I study international relations with a goal to create a world where opportunity and human rights prevail over artificial national differences and religious traditions.

I never hesitate to express humanist ideas because I know that the only way to attain this ideal world is for everyone to understand that there is much more to this universe than ancient tradition, and that humanity can and must do better.

In this endeavor, I keep Hitchens' words with me every day: "Take the risk of thinking for yourself, much more happiness, truth, beauty, and wisdom will come to you that way."

I discover more of each continually, renewing my resolve to work for a world ever more wonderful.

Marcus Andrews, 20, was raised in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and is a junior at Ohio State University. He's double majoring in political science and international studies, with focuses in international relations and diplomacy.

Sixth place (tie): College essay contest

Witnessing door to door no more

Aaron received \$400 for his essay.



By Aaron McLaughlin

Acts 17:11, in which the inhabitants of Berea are praised for examining the evidence before believing Christianity's claims, was a verse shared with me often during my childhood. I was raised as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and like the Bereans, I believed that my faith was firmly grounded in evidence.

I was like the Bereans in another important way: The only evidence that I considered came from the bible. I felt that I had strong scriptural evidence for the beliefs that I was raised with. But as I grew older, I felt the need to find evidence for the scriptures themselves. This desire led to a profound awakening, a year of hiding and a liberating confession.

I never planned to walk away from my faith. It happened organically and unintentionally. Since Jehovah's Witnesses are required to proselytize door to door, I was constantly interacting with people who didn't share my beliefs. Despite this exposure, my beliefs were a closed system. The bible translation that I used was published by the Witnesses, as were the magazines and books that told me the correct inter-

pretation of it.

While our beliefs were internally consistent, I was bothered by the over-reliance on scriptures. Almost every line in a Witness publication will have a biblical verse cited at the end. It wasn't as if I was skeptically analyzing the bible then. I simply had no idea how I could convince someone to accept it as truth.

With the goal of becoming a more effective evangelist, I set out to find external evidence for the bible. Over the next few years, I watched as every piece of evidence I clung to collapsed under scrutiny.

Fulfilled prophecies? Too vague. Historical evidence? Sorely lacking. Divine miracles? Unsubstantiated. By the end of my journey, I was one of the people whom I had set out to evangelize: I no longer viewed the bible as accurate.

It took me some time to finally admit to myself that I was an atheist. It took me even longer to admit this to others. Witnesses who disagree with the teachings of the church are guilty of apostasy and are often punished with "disfellowshipping," or complete social exile. For many, that means means losing all family and friends. I was 16 when I realized that I was an atheist, so I couldn't risk such a fate.

For a year, I went through the motions of being one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Living in the closet breeds frustration and resentment. I was extremely hesitant to come out, but it was the right thing to do. I could continue to lie to everyone else and force myself to pretend to be a Witness, or I could tell the truth. As I was taught by my parents, the truth would set me free.

Like most of my peers, the biggest decision I made in my senior year dealt with college. This decision was made more complicated by the Witness position on college. Witnesses feel that college is unnecessary because of the impending arrival of Armageddon, and feel that it is harmful because of its promotion of ideas that contradict their teachings. Most don't go. I was going to be different.

There was no possible way for me to tell my parents that I would be going off to college without explaining myself. Unfortunately, that meant telling

By the end of my journey, I no longer viewed the bible as accurate.

my parents that I had rejected everything they'd taught me. When I finally did come out, it took my parents by surprise. Looking back, I suppose I should have changed the way I told them. But I'm completely sure that telling them

was the right thing to do.

I never chose to be an atheist, but I did choose to be public about it. That was a decision I am confident was the best I could have made in that situation. Living openly and honestly is the most rewarding way of life.

Aaron McLaughlin, 19, spent the first 12 years of his life in Eveleth, Minn., before his family moved to Sioux City, Iowa, and Fayetteville, Ga. As a University of Iowa sophomore, he's pursuing B.B.A.'s in management and marketing. He's the education and community organizer for Secular Students at Iowa.

Sixth place (tie): College essay contest

Refusing to shut up and believe

Anita received \$400 for her essay.

By Anita Patwardhan

One day in class as we were discussing the afterlife and salvation, I asked my eighth-grade Baptist Christian teacher this: "What happens to people who die who have never heard of Jesus? Are they all going to hell?"

She gave me a look that delicately informed me that she thought it was one of the most idiotic questions she'd ever heard. Her eyes scanned the room as though hunting for answers in the air before slowly answering, "Anyone who reaches a certain age will know about him."

What a cop-out, I thought. I pressed, "What if they die as a baby?"

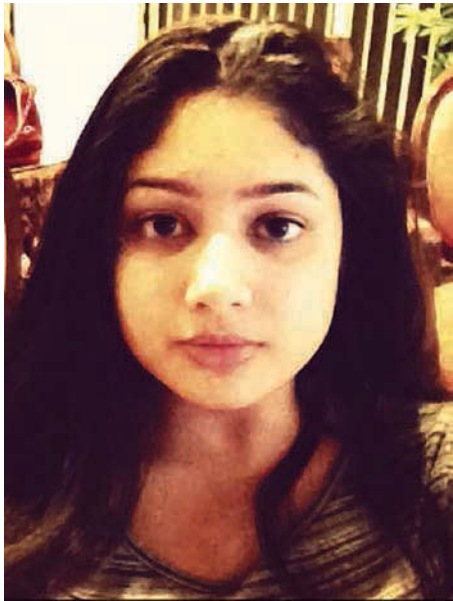
Pause. Another look of loathing. "I don't know everything," she spat.

With that, the conversation died,

but the atmosphere was nuanced by a message that remained very much alive: I should just shut up. Never question what is taught, because it might shake my faith. So naturally, as the year proceeded, I did exactly the opposite. Needless to say, I wasn't too well-accepted. The teacher told parents that I was arrogant and believed myself to be better than everyone else.

I spent most of my life in a private school that taught me to hate. I should hate homosexuals, the poor, transgendered people, Democrats, feminism, but above all, anyone who dares to question the truth of the Gospel. So the ironic statement arises: Why can't I question it? That question lingered with me until the end of eighth grade, when I was selected as one of the top three in my class.

I was given the privilege of delivering a graduation speech, an opportunity to show a voice that I'd never expressed, a voice of rebellion. I was not explicitly an atheist at the time, just a



Questions are the bane of religious fundamentalism.

to me that humor can sometimes be the most persuasive tool in one's arsenal. It was titled "Consequences of gay marriage" with five sector labels in its legend: "Russia invades, Judgment Day begins, Families are destroyed, Ice caps melt, and Gays marry."

Through my laughter, I realized that gay marriage harmed nobody, but that condemning it was an act of immoral discrimination.

Anywhere I could, I spoke out for those affected by the immense, adverse impact of religion of which my teachers never taught, such as the denial of science in an attempt to change school curriculum and restricting condom use and spreading HIV in Africa. I spoke out for the women, homosexuals and transgender people oppressed by religion. I spoke out for the millions of children paralyzed with fear at the idea of burning for an eternity.

Now I understand why my Baptist teacher was so angry with my questioning. It wasn't her religion I was questioning — it was her identity. That dialogue was the catalyst to foster my growing skepticism, which molded my identity to make me the award-winning debater I am today and the law student I aspire to be.

My coming out gave me a voice, a resounding cry of acumen and freethought that indelibly sculpted and cultivated my identity.

Anvita Patwardhan, 21, Newark, Calif., attended Chabot College before transferring to UC-Berkeley, where she's a junior English major.

skeptic, and while I would have loved to have given a speech peppered with expletives before marching out of my eight-year hellhole, I went with a subtler approach.

My speech consisted of nonreligious quotes about saying goodbye, what we can expect in the future and, most importantly, the significance of rationality. "Above all, question everything. Question, else fall victim to gullibility. Question, even if you can't find the answer, but if only to challenge yourself," I concluded.

Questions are the bane of religious fundamentalism. This was my coming out. Perhaps it wasn't as explicit as when I was 16 and decided to tell my Twitter feed that I wouldn't be going to church anymore when I could just attend its spitting image: my school's mythology class.

My transition from skepticism to atheism was sparked by the coming out of my friend as a bisexual, a fact I undoubtedly found hard to accept. True to my education, I wondered if she was only doing it for the attention. She showed me a pie chart that proved

Secular celebrants OK'd in Indiana

In a unanimous ruling, the Chicago-based 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals said couples in Indiana can be married by their own "secular celebrants," Religion News Service reported July 14. An 1850s law required marriages to be conducted by religious clergy or government officials.

Plaintiff Reba Boyd Wooden, a certified secular celebrant (and FFRF Life Member), said, "Whether a person is

atheist, agnostic, humanist or simply doesn't want a religious wedding, this decision means they can now have these wonderful occasions solemnized by a celebrant who shares their life stance."

Judge Frank Easterbrook said the law discriminates against humanists and members of faith groups without a deity such as Buddhists, Jains, Shintos and Taoists.



Hope springs infernal

Ohioan Ron Taggart spotted this gem in Stow and writes, "Thanks for the invite, but, uh, no thanks."

27 definitions of atheist

The following is reprinted with permission from Mr. Wall's Sept. 14 column "An Atheist in Illinois" at Chicagonow.com.



By James Kirk Wall

1. Atheist: No belief in god.
2. Atheist: Lack of belief in god.
3. Atheist: We don't know how the universe began, but we're really sure it wasn't that guy.
4. Atheist: Far more interested in glorifying life than glorifying death.
5. Atheist: At a certain age, belief in Santa is cute. At a certain age it's not.
6. Atheist: Do you believe in Zeus? That's how we feel about your god.
7. Atheist: Don't believe in any gods but your own? We simply take it one religion further.
8. Atheist: Because god sending himself to be sacrificed to himself in order to save us from himself (but only if you believe it) seems a bit irrational.
9. Atheist: We don't hang garlic on our doors just in case vampires are real.
10. Atheist: Because evolution is a successful scientific theory while creationism is a failed hypothesis advocated by idiots and frauds.
11. Atheist: A belief that jealous men creating a jealous god is the more likely scenario.
12. Atheist: The arrogant belief that the universe wasn't created especially for us, or that we have a personal relationship with an all-powerful being who occasionally shows us favoritism.
13. Atheist: Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. (Sagan)
14. Atheist: That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed

without evidence. (Hitchens)

15. Atheist: Integrity in thought is worth more than blindness in obedience.

16. Atheist: When strength of character dictates that the rejection of a morally repulsive myth isn't a choice, but a necessity.

17. Atheist: Rather than pick and choose in a crappy cafeteria, we find a better restaurant, and another, and another, and another.

18. Atheist: There has never been a word of god, only words of men claiming to speak for god. And that's a big difference.

19. Atheist: "We don't know" has never meant, and will never mean, it was magic. Ignorance proves nothing.

20. Atheist: Immoral because we don't faithfully subscribe to a book that condones slavery and murder or believe that everyone else will be burned forever. But we still love you.

21. Atheist: In realizing that we made a mistake in making gods, we drowned them.

22. Atheist: The tide goes in, the tide goes out. We can explain that. That would be the gravitational pull of the moon, and to a smaller extent, the pull of the sun. Google it!

23. Atheist: Science represents an advancing knowledge of the universe, while god represents a retreating ignorance.

24. Atheist: Every supernatural monster winds up being some jerk in a mask.

25. Atheist: Pay attention to the man behind the curtain.

26. Atheist humanist: We rape and kill everyone we want, which is no one.

27. Atheist humanist: Be good for goodness sake. That's all you need, my friend.

Note: Some of these definitions were inspired, if not directly quoted, by Ricky Gervais, Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, Christopher Hitchens, Bill Maher, Bill O'Reilly, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Scooby Doo, the Wizard of Oz, Penn Jillette, Santa Claus and some unknown or forgotten sources.

FFRF member James Kirk Wall, Wheaton, Ill., engages in the battle of reason over superstition along with countless other freethinkers dead and living. He's written two books on secular philosophy and hundreds of blogs criticizing the moral and intellectual flaws of religion and promoting independent thought, science and human progress.

Gerald A. Larue, an ordained minister who became an agnostic, an archaeologist, a religious scholar and a debunker of claims such as Lazarus rising from the dead and the discovery of Noah's ark, died Sept. 17 in Newport Beach, Calif. He was 98.

News story on Larue, a longtime University of Southern California professor of religion and gerontology and founding president of the Hemlock Society

The Washington Post, 9-24-14

I'm willing to be an open book, to have my life exposed — even some of my wrong choices — for the sake of saving just one child.

Jon David Couzens, on the eve of jury

selection in his lawsuit against the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph for alleged abuse by Msgr. Thomas J. O'Brien in the 1980s when Couzens was an altar boy

Kansas City Star, 9-24-14

[W]e must address the cycle of conflict — especially sectarian conflict — that creates the conditions that terrorists prey upon. There is nothing new about wars within religions. Christianity endured centuries of vicious sectarian conflict. Today, it is violence within Muslim communities that has become the source of so much human misery.

President Barack Obama, speech to the U.N. General Assembly

Religion Clause, 9-24-14

Vets lobby Navy to get bibles out

FFRF sent out a nationwide action alert Aug. 15 in response to the U.S. Navy reneging on its decision to remove Christian bibles from Navy-run lodges. The Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM) issued a quiet directive on June 19 in response to a complaint by FFRF, ordering removal of religious material from lodges by Sept. 1.

The alert urged members to voice their support for the Navy's original decision to remain neutral toward religion. The number of responses was overwhelming. Many helped emphasize how FFRF represents real people (with histories of military service).

Here is a selection of some we received, edited for space. Some names/addresses have been omitted by request.

As a retired Navy master chief petty officer with 24 years of active service and as a retired Navy Civil Service employee with 18 years of service, I am writing to thank you for your correct decision to remove Christian bibles from all Navy Lodge guest rooms.

As an atheist/nonbeliever, I'm deeply offended when I go into a hotel room and find a bible there, which sends a message that I need to be converted or am somehow the "wrong" religion. Today, nonbelievers make up about a quarter of active military personnel. So I know how "atheists in foxholes" would feel in encountering someone else's "holy book" in what should be secular military accommodations.

Military service is, in part, about defending the secular constitutional principles on which this country was founded. The separation between government and religion is one of those key principles that has allowed our country to thrive.

Thank you for ensuring secular accommodations, which guarantees that some military personnel are not made to feel like "outsiders" because they are non-Christians or nonbelievers.

Name withheld, CTACM, USN (RET)

I served in the active USNR in 1945- and also in the reserve from 1946-50. I wish to protest the Navy's support of placing bibles or any other religious material of any sort in any facility associated with the Navy. I also protest any religious proselytizing on any occasion by Navy personnel under color of uniform.

Long-held readings of our Constitution clearly preclude the Navy from participating in such activity, it should cease immediately, and in fact it should have not been countenanced at any time in my view. By the way, I have held such a view for the past 75 years.

Kennan C. Herrick Jr.
(Son of the late Kennan C. Herrick, also a Navy veteran.)
Oakland, Calif.

As a proud American atheist and on behalf of my deceased atheist husband, Capt. Maurice Franklin "Bo" Smith, a Navy/Marine fighter pilot (Corsairs, VMF223, South Pacific, World War II), I am asking you to honor the memories of the many atheist, agnostic, and nonreligious veterans.

Bo was 6-foot-4, 223 pounds. When he contracted malaria in Bougainville, he weighed 120 pounds and kept on

fighting, 86 combat missions. Many of his buddies were atheists.

It is so unfair to the myriad of more and more new younger recruits who are nonreligious that they (unconstitutionally) be subject to one of the most biased, evil, torturous, hedonist books ever written, the Christian bible.

Please honor my husband's memory and the many many others who sacrificed for the United States of America and the *freedom* she stands for.

Brigit Clarke-Smith
California

As a U.S. Coast Guard lieutenant j.g. for three years, I felt proud to help our great country protect itself and other worthy countries. As a nonbeliever, it never occurred to me that any governmental agency would promote any religion whatsoever. Thus, to find out the Navy has been providing Christian bibles in its hotel rooms is a disgrace. Every person has a right to believe as they see fit and not be harassed by biased influence.

I expect to hear shortly that the Navy has realized its error and has removed the bibles.

James B. Gordon

I am a disabled veteran and I am writing to thank you for your correct decision to remove Christian bibles from guest rooms. As an atheist, I'm offended when I go into a hotel room and find a bible there, which sends a message that I need to be converted or am somehow the "wrong" religion.

I know how "atheists in foxholes" would feel in encountering someone else's "holy book" in what should be secular military accommodations. Military service is, in part, about defending the secular constitutional principles on which this country was founded. Thank you for demonstrating that the Navy is willing to stand by those principles, not because it is a politically popular thing to do, but because it is the only appropriate course of action.

Marvin (Mark) Jabin

As an atheist veteran (Combat Command B, 2nd Armored Division, Mainz, Germany), I am offended by the placing of Christian bibles in Navy-run Lodges. The implication is more than obvious: The Navy supports the belief that Christianity is better than other religions as well as being better than no religion. Both ideas are false and insulting to many of us in our very diverse society. Let's stop equating patriotism with Christianity. Respect all of us and take a stand against religious intolerance by keeping Christian bibles out.

Instead of bibles, how about putting copies of the Constitution in lodges. That is the document we all served to defend.

Madison Arnold

I served in the military during the Vietnam War. I completely agree with your original decision to remove Protestant bibles from Navy Lodge guest rooms. I am nonreligious. Are you prepared to be pestered to include in your lodges space for the Book of Mormon, the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, the Quran, the sacred writings of L. Ron Hubbard, the various texts of Buddhists and Wiccans, the satanic bible, perhaps the Ro-

man Catholic version of the bible and many others?

I suggest you stick with your original decision.

Timothy L Rauhouse

I am a veteran of the U.S. Army (active duty 1963-66) and I am writing to thank you for your correct decision to remove Christian bibles from all Navy Lodge guest rooms.

My alma mater for a master's degree, Iowa State University, removed bibles from the Student Union hotel. When I trained in ROTC at the University of Connecticut, our commanding officer told us we were defending the rights of those who protested our activities in Vietnam. We were also defending the secular constitutional principles on which this country was founded.

Thank you for demonstrating that the Navy, like Iowa State, is willing to stand by the separation of government and religion. None of us want to live in a theocracy and the Navy has taken appropriate action to stop theocracy from gaining a foothold in this great country.

Name withheld

Religious proselytizing has no place in our nation's military and governmental agencies, by specific declaration by the U.S. Constitution! Our nation can best be protected by standing firmly as an international community member by remaining a secular nation. Far too much mayhem has been visited on our nation by religiously motivated policies of foreign nations.

As a six-year U.S. Army member, I have traveled to at least 50 different countries and used their accommodations and have never had to face "religious promotion" in my sleeping arrangements! As a six-year member of the U.S. Army, I wish to add my displeasure by your agency to delay taking the correct action on what is at the core, a defiance of our Constitution.

I might also add that a youthful friend was among the first graduates of the U.S. Air Force Academy. May he rest in peace. He would stand firmly against this deliberate attempt to challenge our nation's declared policy of fairness and justice in the face of excessive noise from a religious minority.

Donald C. Feller

I was a captain in the U. S. Marine Corps from 1956-1959. It is your constitutional duty to remove these bibles and not replace them at any future time. I should not have to tell you this, but because of your actions, I must. It is none of the government's business what people believe.

Now for my personal assessment: The Universe is huge. We are but an infinitesimal part of it. There is not one iota of evidence that we have a soul that survives after death.

All religions are false. Religion is based on fear of the unknown, and the priests and preachers use the fear of death to control people and make tons of money by expounding their bull.

Please end this controversy now, because if you are sued, you will lose and the taxpayers will have to fund your worthless defense. This letter is not meant to be acrimonious or hateful. Just do your constitutional duty.

James A. Worrell



FFRF's 'Atheists in Foxholes' monument at Lake Hypatia in Alabama.

I am a U.S. Army veteran from the Korean Conflict. The bible can cause great confusion for our military personnel who are confronted by it in their rooms. For example, let's say a bible is in a room, and a service member opens it up and sees a verse in Leviticus which reads, "If a man lies with another man as he does with a woman, both have committed an abomination, they shall be put to death, and their blood shall be upon them." The bible thus teaches us to murder gay individuals, and that seems to be an horrific way to meet the LGBT situation.

Then he or she reads one of the Ten Commandments that says "Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife." But does this mean it's OK to covet thy neighbor's husband? How about I Timothy that says women shall not be permitted to teach, shall remain silent and be in submission. The U.S. Episcopal Church has selected Katharine Jefferts Schori to be its national presiding bishop!

I do not want our military personnel to have their minds cluttered by such confusing language from the bible, and I believe they would be more calm and effective if bibles were kept out of their rooms. Would you not agree?

Theodore M. Utchen

We (my husband and I) were very happy to hear that the Navy had decided to discontinue putting bibles in hotel rooms. But now we have found out that that decision has been rescinded. Please, please go back to no bibles!

I ask this partially because my husband, when attending the Naval Academy many years ago was forced to proclaim a religion. His family had no religion and the only connection he had to any religion was that he grew up in a mostly Catholic community. So, that being the religion he knew the most about, he said he was Catholic. Too late he found out that at the academy, Catholics were forced to get up earliest and march to the chapel on Sunday mornings. He found out that if he had claimed to be Buddhist, he would have been allowed to leave the campus on Sunday mornings. He tried to change his religion to Buddhist but was not allowed to do so.

While bibles in hotel rooms are not as coercive as requiring attendance at Sunday services, they are still offensive to those of us who have no religion. What would many people think if they found the Quran in their hotel room?

Name withheld

FFRF Legal Complaints

FFRF's legal staff sent out 135 letters of complaint in September. Some highlights (more on page 22):

Contact: Allen Independent School District, Bastrop ISD, Texas.

Violation: Prayers at graduation ceremonies.

Contact: William Penn School Board, Montoursville School Board, Pa.; Escambia School Board, Pensacola, Fla.; Overton County Board of Education, Livingston, Tenn.

Violation: Prayers at their public meetings.

Contact: New Mexico Public Education Department, Charter School Division.

Violation: Estancia Valley Classical Academy, a public charter school in Moriarty, N.M., held an open house for students which included a ceremony around the flagpole, after which the principal asked everyone to join him in prayer, which he led "in Jesus' name."

Contact: Richardson Independent School District, Texas.

Violation: Big Springs Elementary School planned a three-day trip to Sky Ranch, a self-described "Christian camp" designed to expose students "to the truths of the Word of God."

Contact: Texas Preparatory School, Austin.

Violation: This charter school mandated daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer and asked students to pray every day before being allowed into the cafeteria. The school's code, which students were also required to recite daily, began, "I believe in God and the right to worship according to my own faith and religion."

Contact: Osceola County School District, Kissimmee, Fla.

Violation: The school board holds prayer, usually Christian prayer, at meetings, even when students are present. East Lake Elementary School also lets a church permanently display advertising at the school and is permitted to send home fliers advertising its events.

Contact: Winchester High School, Mass.

Violation: The "Captain's Parent" of the football team annually hosts a religious worship service at St. Mary's Church, which all football players and coaching staff are invited to attend.

Contact: Florida State University,

Tallahassee.

Violation: Former FSU football coach Bobby Bowden admitted to proselytizing his players in a recent appearance on Fox News. A former assistant coach said that Bowden "presented the Gospel to the team," which convinced him "to go see coach the next morning and pray to receive Christ as my Lord and savior." Bowden wrote in his book that God's "purpose for me was to go into coaching and try to influence young men for Jesus Christ."

Bowden established the position of team chaplain in 1981, eventually hiring as chaplain the pastor from his church, Clint Purvis. Purvis recruited players, accompanied coaches on recruitment visits and led the team and visiting teams in prayer and "devotionals," all contrary to statements made by FSU. The university also told FFRF that Purvis held master's degrees in counseling and psychology. FFRF could not find any evidence that Purvis held any psychology degree, and Purvis's alma mater, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, does not offer an M.A. in counseling but does offer one in biblical counseling, "a 66-hour program of study designed primarily to equip Christian men and women to minister God's Word through counseling in the context of the local church or other Christian ministries."

Contact: Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

Violation: Nearly every event on the base, including mandatory events, starts

with an invocation.

Contact: Mammoth Cave National Park, Ky.

Violation: Guest cottages in this public park contain Gideon bibles.

Contact: U.S. Postal Service branches, Bellaire, Texas, and Copperhill, Tenn.

Violation: The post offices display religious signs.

Contact: Columbus Division of Police, Ohio.

Violation: The police division employs several chaplains, all Christian ministers.

Contact: Montgomery County Court, Texas.

Violation: Judge Wayne Mack regularly opens court sessions with a Christian prayer. He started one with, "We are going to say a prayer. If any of you



FFRF sent a complaint letter about an elementary school's mascot, "The Padres," in San Juan Bautista, Calif.

are offended by that, you can leave into the hallway and your case will not be affected." Mack reportedly introduced a pastor who read from the bible for more than five minutes, after which he asked everyone to bow their heads to pray.

Contact: Buncombe County Schools, Asheville, N.C.

Violation: The instructor of a "Teen Living" course at Clyde A. Erwin High School sent her students home with a printout of "Inspirational Quotes." Students were to pick a quote to be printed on a T-shirt. Half of the printout consisted of bible verses, and it advised students to "Read from the Bible that offer [sic] inspiration and can help inspire you in times of doubt, loss, mourning, sadness or hopelessness."

Contact: Visalia Unified School District, Calif.

Violation: Golden West High School's football coaches lead the team in prayer before and after games. The team also attended a three-day camp at Hume Lake Christian Camp, where a former NFL player told them "the only way to have hope in your life is to follow Jesus Christ" and encouraged players to start a Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter. Coaches let an FCA representative attend several practices, where he invited the team to a church to watch a Christian movie.

Contact: Chula Vista Elementary School District, Calif.

Violation: Corky McMillin Elementary School held its annual sixth-grade graduation at the church next door, Calvary Chapel San Diego, despite having its own auditorium large enough to hold the ceremony.

Contact: Bell County School District, Pineville, Ky.

Violation: The school district hosted a four day Christian "crusade" by the group GO TELL Ministries, holding mandatory assemblies in its schools during the day. The assemblies promoted an anti-drug message but also served to recruit students for religious events after school.

Contact: Cumberland Valley High School, Mechanicsburg, Pa.

Violation: A coach delivered a prayer at the football team's preseason dinner.

Contact: City of Oakland, Calif.

Violation: The city permitted two Buddhist shrines to be maintained on public property.

Contact: East Robeson Primary School, Lumberton, N.C.

Violation: A third-grade teacher asks students to pray when they line up for lunch.

Contact: Itawamba County School District, Fulton, Miss.; Madison Metropolitan School District, Wis.; Lincoln Public Schools, Neb.

Violation: These districts let Gideons International representatives on school property to distribute bibles to students.

Contact: Grand Rapids Public Schools, Mich.

Violation: An Ottawa Hills High School Health Clinic doctor asked a student to sign a "Willing to Wait" card during a mandatory athletic physical. The card asks students to commit to abstinence until marriage. The group behind Willing to Wait says its mission is to "encourage people to embrace a Biblical view of sexuality."

Contact: Manatee County Board of Elections, Bradenton, Fla.

Violation: A voter reported encountering religious messages and iconography at Redeemer Lutheran Church, which is used as a polling place.

Contact: Hudson High School, Lufkin, Texas.

Violation: A student was disciplined for remaining seated during the Pledge of Allegiance.

Contact: Aberdeen Central High School, S.D.; Allen High School, Texas.

Violation: Aberdeen Central's head football coach and assistant coaches and Allen High School's band director organize and lead prayer with students before games.

Contact: Anoka-Hennepin School District, Minneapolis.

Violation: An Anoka High School teacher showed her health class a Christian film in which a student saves a friend from committing suicide by joining a church group.

Contact: Perry Township Schools, Indianapolis.

Violation: Perry Meridian High School held a National Honor Society ceremony which opened with a sectarian prayer.

Contact: Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Annapolis.

Violation: The DNR sponsors a Boy Scouts of America program, which bars nonreligious boys.

Contact: University of Colorado.

Violation: A police officer at UC-Corpus Christi includes a bible quote in his official university email signature.

Continued on page 22



Up north

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover took a trip to "up north" Wisconsin on Oct. 1 to Rhinelander High School for a debate on state/church separation in public schools. Beforehand, Sam met the mythical Hodag that's Rhinelander's official symbol. Sam then proceeded to the audience of about 50 at the school to address another myth, the one that says America is a Christian nation. Representing the other side was Karen Schroeder of Rice Lake, the founder of Advocates for Academic Freedom, which has called for an end to federal involvement in education and more emphasis on religion and morality in the classroom.

Letterbox

New Lifetime Member 'amazed and appalled'

Enclosed is my check for \$1,000 to become a Lifetime Member. Please continue your wonderful efforts.

I read your recent issue of Freethought Today and was amazed and appalled, especially at the black collar crime and crank mail articles.

I most definitely support your position on church and state.

William E. Alexander
Texas

•••

First, thank you for fighting for our Constitution. Second, generally I just send money for you to use as needed. Now I am becoming a Lifetime Member.

I was wondering why our Supreme Court is making what I consider poor decisions. Thus, an added check for legal expenses.

David Johnson
Arizona

•••

In your July crank mail column, the comment by B. Lewis informed me that since I'm an atheist, I was too bent over to have a furnace. After I stopped laughing I became distraught and decided to join up with the rest of the "bent" population. Please accept my membership application in that "spirit."

Carolyn Smith
Arizona

•••

The reason I joined FFRF, and will continue my membership, is simple: Closets are limiting. It wasn't until gays/lesbians came out that the straight world realized we all have beloved friends/family who are gay/lesbian, and we support them and their civil rights.

For this reason, I came out as an atheist to my 90-something aunt. She's old-school Southern Baptist and still loves me. And I continue to come out to others as an atheist when opportunity knocks.

Freedom of religion includes freedom from.

Candace Drimmer
Illinois

Floridian 'member at heart since childhood'



Margaret Smith served in the Women's Army Corps in World War II at Camp Stoneman, Calif., working in physical therapy and as a surgical tech. This is a photocopy of the original, since she lost all her photos in a house fire years ago.

I hope you can read this. I'm 91 years old and can't see what I write without

a magnifying glass and my hands are so arthritic the pen goes where it darn pleases.

Several years ago, when my newspaper's letters to the editor section was having a discussion about religion, I wrote that religion is controlled by expert brainwashers. I also said religion is the ROOT OF ALL EVIL, just look at the condition of the world.

I didn't think they would print it, but they did. Then I looked for a bunch of response letters from all of the Southern religious fans attacking me, but there was not a single one.

I've been a member of FFRF for about a year. I didn't know about you until my twin sister, who lives in Ohio, told me about you. I have been a member at heart since childhood, but that is a long story, too long for my hands to go into.

I'll be renewing in November. My best to all of you freethinkers.

Margaret C. Smith
Florida

Bias against women is just as bad

Sue Mandeville [Aug14] makes a very good point about the Mormon Church having to allow blacks in the priesthood to keep its tax exemption.

I wonder why the practice of keeping women out of the priesthood (Mormon and Catholic) isn't also considered discriminatory.

Ben Hart
Ohio

Ultimate irony: Having to rise for pledge

My wife and I are deeply offended by the video of the mayor of Winter Garden, Fla., grossly disregarding the First Amendment rights of the man in the audience. To have him physically removed because he won't stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and "honor our troops" who are fighting overseas against religious extremists is the ultimate irony. Please use this special donation to right this wrong.

Robert and Cathy Goldberg
California

Editor's note: We're pleased to report that Winter Garden has dropped governmental prayer in favor of a moment of silence and concurred that bystanders need not stand for the pledge.

•••

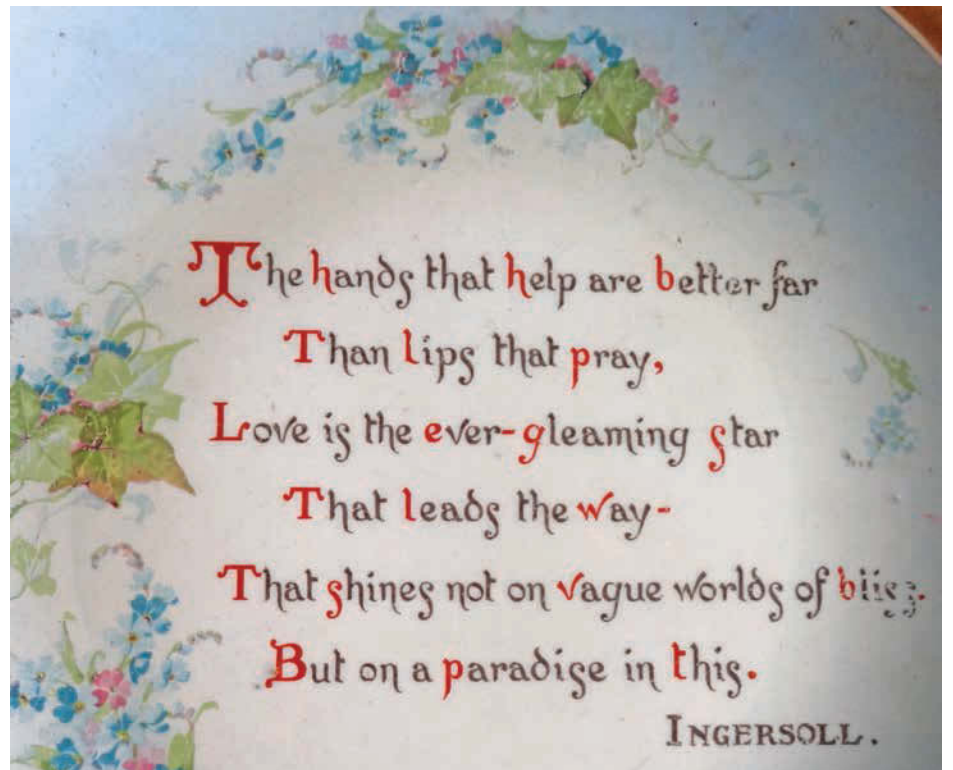
Regarding "John Thoreau," who refused to stand for the pledge, I thought you might be interested in this statement by Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson in an official opinion in 1943:

"If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith thereon."

George Gjelfriend
North Carolina

Morality of 'blind fathers' is false

I think "In God We Trust" is a horrible motto because the Christian god, according to their bible, could not fix anything, so he decided to wipe out every living thing. Ain't no god I would



Linda Josheff, Wisconsin, found this dinner plate treasure at a thrift store in Madison: "It was a bargain, \$1.99. What a steal!"

trust. It's time to tear down this bible that the "blind fathers" claim gives them morality.

Let's remind them that their own god did not obey the 10 Commandments. He impregnated a woman without her consent and she was not his wife, and of course he murdered or had his helpers do it throughout the book.

Christians past and present are the biggest hate group known in history. Most so-called Christians have never read the bible; they just listen to some pastor or priest mom or dad and accept it.

All I can say is if you let 10 Christians read a passage, you would get 10 different answers.

Tom and Betty Gogan
Missouri

Sizzling for all eternity? No thanks!

My mother and I went to the Sizzler restaurant in Stockton, Calif., where

the TV was showing a religious revival. I spoke with the manager, who said that it was a corporate-sponsored station. We did not stay to eat there.

Sharon Sanguinetti
California

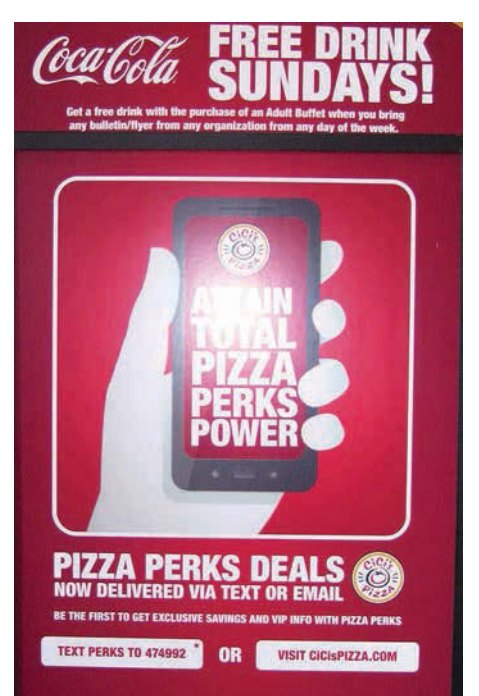
Atheists, Christians can work together

I received the September issue of Freethought Today and have been delightfully spending the last hour on my patio on this beautiful day reading it.

I found among the complaints an item about Farmington, Minn., schools taking their students to Feed My Starving Children. As an atheist married to a Christian, I have found that helping out at FMSC is one of the most rewarding service activities I've ever participated in.

While the item correctly described FMSC as an overtly (they don't hide it) Christian charity, I have felt completely at ease at their Libertyville, Ill., location. Yes, they pray over their ship-

Members' action bring positive change



Before . . .

A franchise owner of Cici's Pizza in Canton and Green, Ohio, eliminated the "free drink" deal for customers with a church bulletin, thanks to FFRF, Ohio FFRF members Tom Reke, Charles Wright and Nancy Dollard and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. FFRF sent an Aug. 1 letter of complaint on Nancy's behalf to the Canton Cici's. There was no response, so Tom and Charles went to the Cici's in Green on Aug. 18 to see if Tom could get a free drink with a copy of Freethought Today. No dice. The Civil Rights Commission was then contacted and agreed with Tom that he was denied goods/services from a public place of business and that Cici's had to remove their discriminatory discount.

. . . After



God's love not on Calif. atheists' agenda

One good turn deserves vandalism apparently, going by what happened to an Adopt-a-Highway sign noting the Atheists of Butte County's road cleanup efforts. The sign is by the side of Highway 99 near Chico, Calif. "God loves" was added above "Atheists of Butte County."

The vandalism was discovered Aug. 25 by George Gold, group president (and a Sustaining Member of FFRF).

"This shows loud and clear just how necessary our group is," said Gold. "Whenever an atheist is public about her or his identity, there are others who will seek to impose and proselytize their opposing views. This is why our group seeks to offer a safe space for freedom of conscience."

This is the second year that Atheists of Butte County, working with the Butte County Coalition of Reason, has sponsored this section of highway, completing the required 12 trash pickup sessions in 2013 and expecting to exceed that in 2014. This is also the second time their Adopt-a-Highway sign has been compromised. In June 2013 someone pasted the word "Pray" on the pole holding up the road sign.

In December 2012, a billboard placed by the coalition was also vandalized. It bore the slogan "Don't believe in God? Join the club." "Don't" was cut out of the vinyl, along with part of the Web address. — Butte County Coalition of Reason

ments and, at that point, my wife participates while I look over the things in their gift shop. They make it very clear that the prayer session is completely optional. It is also my understanding (after asking about it) that FMSC does not require recipients of their food to pray or suffer through any proselytizing before getting it.

It is my hope that Farmington schools continue to help FMSC as long as every parent gives permission and every student is given an outright option to decline the prayer session without penalty. It is also my hope that more people get involved regardless of belief.

Thank you for your work!

Don Birren
Illinois

Taking my nonbelief to Catholic students

Sept. 18 was freethought heroine Catherine Fahringer's birthday. How ironic that I was asked to address a Catholic high school club at Incarnate Word in San Antonio on that day. My friend and Catherine's is a teacher there and is in charge of a small club. He's trying to expose his students to different beliefs, or nonbeliefs. He expected 30 girls (ages 14 and 15), but 50 students showed up to ask me a myriad of questions.

Afterward, my friend walked me to my car and said that it had gone well and that his students never stay that long, which shows how interested they were.

He said it hadn't been easy to get the school to allow an atheist to speak,

but he was prepared and showed them a picture of the pope talking to some atheists.

I used 10 questions from FFRF's bible quiz. That gave me a way to discuss some of the terrible consequences of religion (in a nice way). I was asked whether I had ever been ridiculed for being an atheist. I told them of my negative experiences and showed them a picture of Jessica Ahlquist and told of her experiences.

I hope I was able to give the students some food for thought. I wish Catherine were still with us.

Sally Chizek
Texas

How I snail-mailed a crank mailer

On a whim, I decided to bring positive secular attention to hardened fundamentalists after reading the crank mail. I arbitrarily chose a Ms. Southall, who sent FFRF this tirade: "You people need to stay in WI and leave our schools alone. I will be taking this to the Supreme Court."

Lacking Southall's email address, I snail-mailed her. (Physical addresses are usually easy to locate online.) I did not expect a reply, though I included my email address, and didn't get one.

Dear Ms. Southall,

My wife and I are two of the 20,000 members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. I am a retired choral music teacher and my wife is a retired professional actress (Google Nina Shipman.) We both would convert to believing in God, and will, as soon as

incontrovertible evidence is found showing that there exists an actual Christian God, since belief without evidence is actually pretending to know what you don't know.

I read with interest your published correspondence to FFRF wherein you stated, "You people need to stay in WI and leave our schools alone. I will be taking this to Supreme Court!!!!"

The only time FFRF is concerned with public schools are when they are involved in unconstitutional activities such as giving preferential treatment to students of one religious belief over others. Public school classes are captive audiences. They represent many diverse beliefs as well as nonbelief, all of which must be protected from coercion by those in the majority. This is the American way.

I believe that peaceable coexistence can be achieved through tolerance of others' views. Respecting the rights of others with whom you disagree is basic to our democratic principles.

I hope this is helpful to good folks who appreciate the need for tolerance, especially regarding personal choices related to religion or nonbelief.

Cordially, Don Bremer
Don Bremer
Hawaii

Spreading doubt with email signatures

I have decided to "come out" (not that I was ever "in") by means of a short message at the bottom of my emails. The current one: "The biblical concepts of sin and salvation are an integral part of Christian doctrine. Christianity first creates a problem (sin) and then offers a 'solution' (salvation). This is not unlike the protection racket; you either buy 'protection' — or else." — Rev. Donald Morgan

A previous one: "Religion is the human response to being alive and having to die." — F. Forrester Church, Unitarian Universalist minister

Both of these are by theologians, which I think helps. There are many such quotations available on the Web. If we all used them, we could make a strong statement.

Richard Andersen
British Columbia

Nun finally managed to escape abuse

We were featured in the May 2011 Freethought Today when we were 94 and 96 respectively. Now at 97 and 99 and looking forward to our 78th anniversary in November and my 98th and Marge's 100th birthdays in February, I thought the following would prove interesting and informative. What I'm about to relate will correct the thinking that only priests are pedophiles.

In the 1940s we became friends with Germ and Gillis, now both deceased, whom we met at summer camp. It wasn't until our friendship became very close that Germ related that she had once been a nun.

She was born in Montreal and had been primed to become a nun as a child. The greatest honor for a French Catholic family was to have at least one son a priest and one or more daughters nuns. When Germ, short for Germaine, and her twin sister were 15, they were sent to the monastery to meet with the monsignor to determine if they would qualify for the nunnery.

Germ described how the monsignor held them between his spread legs as

he questioned them. Germ was readily accepted, but her sister, who wanted no part of the nunnery, said to the monsignor as he held her between his legs, "Will you hold me like this when I become a nun?" The monsignor laughed and said, "I guess you shouldn't be a nun."

Germ related how on her first night in the nunnery she was no sooner in bed than an older nun jumped in with her and began sexual activities. Germ, completely ignorant of such activities, fought the nun off in sheer fright.

One day, on opening a door to a room she was to clean, she encountered a handsome young priest and an equally pretty young nun in bed. She was troubled, since her final vows were due to be made and entailed confessing all her sins and anything that was bothering her. When the day arrived, she blurted out her story to the monsignor. The priest ended up being reduced to a lower echelon position and the nun to cleaning toilets, but Germ was transferred from the monastery in New Hampshire to one in Montreal, where her life became intolerable.

Deciding she didn't want to be a nun any longer, she told the Mother Superior she wanted to leave. She was stunned by the response ordering her to stop such nonsense and return to her duties. Thinking she could just walk out, she went to the front door only to find it locked. She went back and asked her to open the door. In a rage, the Mother Superior said, "You are *not* leaving."

This was repeated over several weeks. Germaine realized she was being held captive. She finally managed to get to a phone without being detected and called a friend to rescue her.

Alton Eliason
Connecticut

Indefensible child abuse

Indoctrination of each new generation with religious dogmatism guarantees perpetuation of egregious fanaticism.

Mary Vahmet
New York

Overheard

I understand the teachings of my church. I've gone to Mass for 46 years and I'm Catholic, but I don't see my job as a public official to impose everything the church teaches as a matter of law. There's a difference between, in my opinion, what the church that I attend happens to teach and what I am going to be comfortable imposing on everybody else.

Ed Fitzgerald, Cuyahoga County executive and Democratic candidate for Ohio governor, on keeping his religious beliefs to himself

Columbus Dispatch, 8-12-14

We have a long and proud tradition in America of having leaders who recognize this is a nation that has been truly blessed by God from the very beginning.

Iowa Republican Gov. Terry Branstad, who signed a proclamation recognizing "Pray 7/14/14" at the Capitol, a Christian "solemn assembly" that went from 7:14 a.m. to 7:14 p.m.

Des Moines Register, 7-14-14



Rowlett, Texas

About three dozen freethinkers took part Sept. 16 in a protest organized by the Metroplex Atheists of the Rowlett City Council's refusal to allow a humanist invocation at its meeting. Atheist (and FFRF member) Randy Word told the council they met the required guidelines of a well-established community group: "What this mayor and city council have done is cover the city of Rowlett with a dark and ominous cloud of discrimination, hypocrisy and Christian bias which violates the Constitution, is un-American and goes against the values, freedoms and rights this country was founded on. You should be ashamed."

Right: The protesters certainly disagreed with one man's statement to a reporter: "Our country is based on a Christian backbone." Chad Aldridge of Metroplex Atheists responded that "I see it as a bully on the playground."

Sharing the Crank Mail

This limited edition (we got hundreds) of crank mail, printed as received, was more profane than usual, and we've spared you the worst.

your evil: You guys are nothing but bullies and evil. I read all the stories from across the country about you threatening law suits for any one Christian. Grow up. — *Jacob Hazlett, Washington*

Concerning Churches: I am a high school student who is also a Christian. Your organization is making it hard for me to express my religion in public. This makes me very angry. I would really appreciate it if you let us believe in our God, the God who holds the universe in His hand, let us be pro-life, and let us not believe in the life style of homosexuals. — *Alycia Sikes, Hastings, Fla.*

Statue in Indiana Park: Why don't you people just go and blow your fucking brains out and leave us alone. — *damifinoone@aol.com*

Tennessee Cheerleaders Sidestep Prayer Ban: The picture of those girls holding hands is a perfect example of Good vs. Evil. But, unfortunately, you're too evil to see that. The "black hats" in our society. No, thanks to the ACLU-less and company doing exactly the wrong thing this country has been going right down the shitter. I've written before, and I guess you're too evil, lazy or too stupid to take my advice. Again; this country is becoming a shit hole thanks directly to your efforts. Congratulations. (I'm the Apartment with the Israel flag and "Stand With Israel" sign in my window anytime one of you cowards want to knock on my door.) — *Larry A. Singleton, Riverside, Calif.*

Christian plaque on Midlothian school: You idiots should mention the Freemason plaque beside the Christian plaque, but it's obvious your too stupid to know its a religion too. Freemasons have an alter, holy books and they pray to the great architect of the universe (Lucifer). If you don't believe me Google it. This country was started by Freemasons and is still controlled by the Masons. — *David Alley, Grand Prairie, Texas*

Arkansas State University: A bunch of football players put a tiny cross on the back of their helmets in honor of two people who passed away that were involved with the team. And you monsters start crying about it. Saying their uniforms are paid for by the state. But everyone knows that if they were to buy their own uniforms you miserable Christ haters would still attack them. You people need to keep your fucking mouth shut and keep your advice to yourself. So here is my advice too you go over to Switzerland where youth in Asia is allowed and have it done on yourselves. — *Ryan Mucko*

Destruction: My goal is to destroy/dissolve this organization. 75% of Americans claim to be of Christian faith., which makes us the majority, and in a traditional democratic republic, the majority rules. When the majority unites we will smash this website/ organization/ or company like a sledge hammer to an ant. — *Andrew*

Figuroa, Virginia

Santanic rituals: They are having one in Oklahoma City at the convention center. What are you going to do about that? — *Concern citizen*

indiana white water state park: if you don't like the statue don't look at it or stay the hell away indiana don't want you or the fags here anyway all the veterans are proud of fighting for our country and you people want to tear our country down go live in irac — *larry yoder*

Morons: You really should all just take a bullet in the head and stop causing problems for people. Rot in hell. Every last one of you. — *Chris Ford*

Scum: It's not freedom from religion it's freedom of religion you jew hating hippies. — *Christopher Hogue*

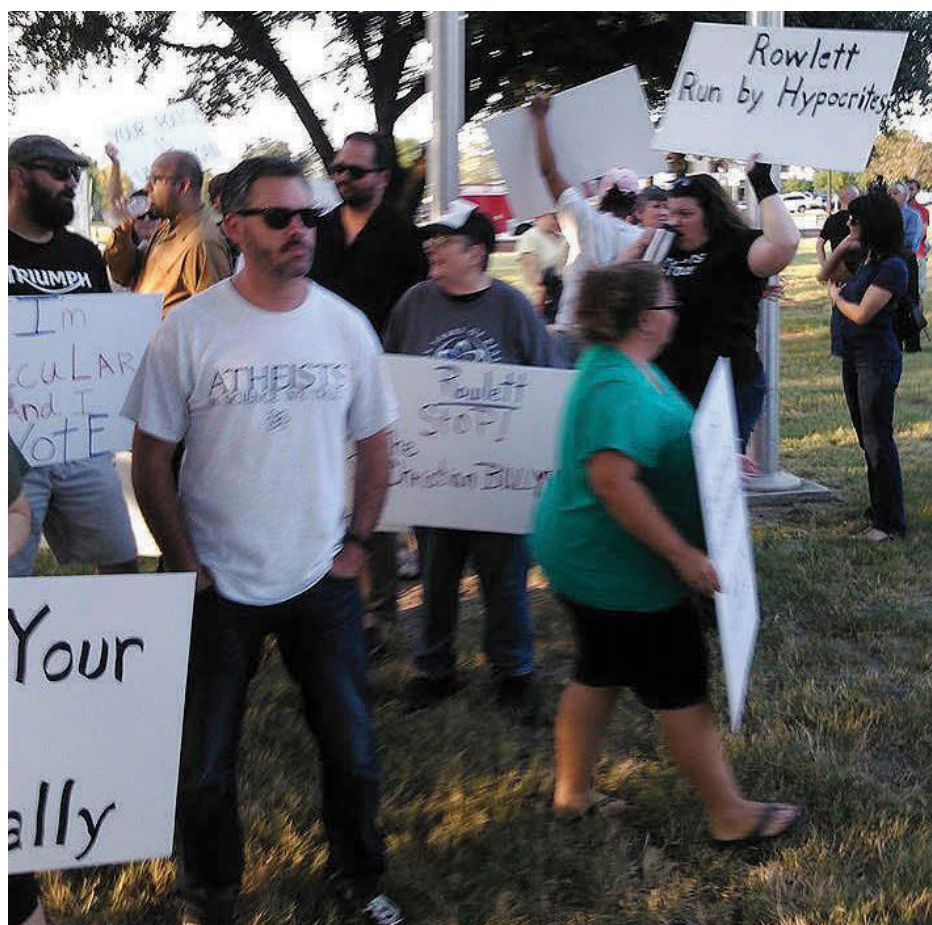
Hate mail: I am a small business owner and if you dumb fuckers threatened me with some lawsuit because I offer discounts to my customers I would carry it all the way to the courthouse and follow it to the end. I think you're a bunch of fucking nerds who probably were not raised in a two parent home. — *Scott Arnold, landscape architect, Winston-Salem, N.C.*

shame on you: in case you haven't noticed since God has been taken out of school schools are getting shot up by freaks with machine guns kids are getting bullied more now than ever before and killing themselves. you guys are sick people who probably believe we evolved from apes. don't have anything else to worry about seriously. — *melissa reed, rowlett, texas*

Dear Dan & Annie: When you look in the mirror each morning, try and ponder the amazing complex, perfectly organized biological system you see in front of you. If an explosion occurs in a print shop, does it produce a dictionary? How could it be that we are accidents? I will pray for you both, for I consider you my brother and sister and will hold out hope for your return to faith, even if it be only the faith of a mustard seed, which grows into a giant and vibrant shining bush by your good works. — *Laun Tischner, Stockton, Utah*

Freedom of Religion: Just let you know you Nazi Bastards! I will be handing out Bibles this coming weekend football game at Jacksonville University! News Flash! This is a Christian Country! Please feel free to call me if you have any questions! — *Hal Brickel*

So you're going to Hell: Great. But in the meantime lay off anything in Texas as I may come up there and give you a big old Texas hug and French kiss. After eating some hot peppers of course. Don't want to catch that Atheist virus. I mean really Wisconsin where there are a bunch of drunks and cheese eaters who have bowel problems. We play toss the cowpatty with people like you. You need to write ISIS and tell them you have some recruits for them called FFRF or Fart Fart Rectum Fart. Have a lovely day Satan Spawn. — *Rick Pike*



More FFRF Letters of Complaint

Continued from page 17

Contact: Middletown High School, Ohio.

Violation: Despite assurances from the school district attorney in April 2014 that a football coach who prayed with his students was "expressly informed . . . that his actions had crossed the line and were impermissible," multiple people informed FFRF that the coach continued to lead his team in prayer before and after each game, and in fact kicked a player off the team for refusing to pray.

Contact: All 17 Nevada school districts.

Violation: Nevada law requires school boards to appoint a Sex Education Advisory Committee, which is to include representatives from certain occupations, one of which is "religion."

Contact: Wimberley High School, Texas.

Violation: The athletic director and head football coach leads his team in prayer at the end of every game, and coaches engage in smaller prayer circles with players before games.

Contact: City of Nampa, Idaho.

Violation: The mayor hosts an annual "Mayor's Community Prayer Breakfast."

Contact: Huffman ISD, Texas; Washington Local Schools, Columbus, Ohio; Western Wayne Schools, Pershing, Ind.

Violation: These school districts all had staff members planning, coordinating and participating at an annual

Christian prayer event called "See You at the Pole." Huffman ISD had staff involvement at all of its schools, including at Ben Bowen Early Childhood Center, where staff invited a pastor to lead children in prayer.

Contact: Gladewater High School, Texas.

Violation: Youth ministers came to the school to counsel students after the death of a classmate, and the school included prayer at an assembly about the student.

Contact: Long Beach School District, Miss; Davidson County Schools, Lexington, N.C.

Violation: High schools in both districts start home football games with a prayer over the loudspeaker. At Long Beach High School, the band regularly recites the Lord's Prayer before half-time performances.

Contact: Botetourt County Parks and Recreation, Va.

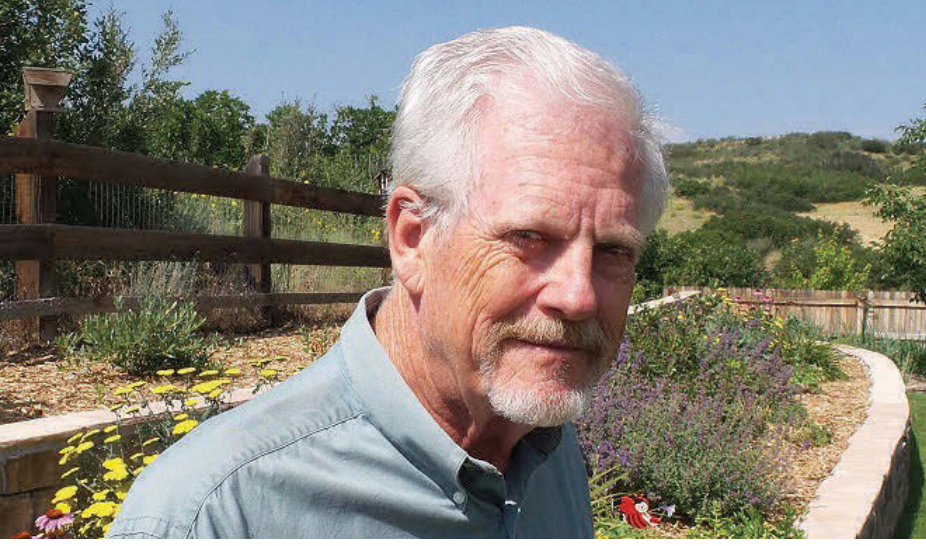
Violation: The department is hosting a trip to see Pastor Joel Osteen in November at a Christian event that is to include "praise and worship music," "special testimony" and "prayer time together and an inspiring message from Joel Osteen."

Contact: Boone County Schools, Florence, Ky.

Violation: A religious club at Conner Middle School is led by two faculty sponsors and a youth minister, who facilitates and leads the group in prayer.

—*Maddy Ziegler*

Meet a Colorado Member



Mike Hogan

Name: Mike Hogan.

Where I live: Castle Rock, Colo. Colorado has shown a near uncontrolled growth over the last several decades. Castle Rock, once a sleepy rural community, is becoming a reluctant suburb of Denver.

Where and when I was born: Born in rural Nebraska, just before the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941; the first grandson of an Irish immigrant and first son of a sharecropping farmer.

Family: Two daughters and four grandkids; my partner of 12 years, Sue, and her daughter, son and three grandkids. If this was Christianity Today, I

would say, "We have been blessed!"

Occupation: Over the years, I have been an employed pharmacist, pharmacy owner, liquor store owner, real estate broker and property manager. I call myself retired, but still manage and maintain our residential rental properties, so it sometimes seems the exact opposite!

Military service: During the Vietnam "conflict," the federal government had an insatiable appetite for new foot soldiers. The military draft was an accepted part of every young man's future plans. (George W. Bush and others with connections had more options.) When I got my notice to re-

port to Minden, Neb., I enlisted instead from Denver. I got some satisfaction knowing that the Kearney County, Neb., draft board was one warm body short that month. I served three forgettable years.

How I got where I am today: That is difficult to explain without trying to explain where I started. My education began in a one-room country school. The windows on one side opened to a wheat field, on the other side to a pasture. The bull provided as much education as did the teacher.

Catholicism permeated every bit of my life. A mean S.O.B. god controlled everything, and devils lurked in every dark room. I swallowed all of it. We prayed to Jesus to keep the tornadoes and hail away, to make it rain during the growing season and stop raining at harvest time. When my prayers didn't work, I didn't doubt the existence of Jesus but was convinced he couldn't care less about me.

As one gradually discards one card at a time, the whole house of cards suddenly collapses. The progression goes from knowing that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, to knowing he was just another mythical god, to discarding completely the very basis of Christianity. I don't need a christ, a redeemer, a savior or a messiah. I wasn't born evil and sinful or a lazy no-good.

As Al Franken's character Stuart Smalley said on "Saturday Night Live," "Because I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like

me." I have my failings, but I can work on them myself, by myself. I have no need whatsoever for a Jesus the Christ to save me!

Things I like: My passion is "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," just the opposite of religion and the authoritarianism of Christianity.

Things I smite: The anti-intellectualism, anti-elitism, anti-education and anti-libertinism in this country.

Some of my heroes are: When running for president, Thomas Jefferson was accused of being an atheist. He wrote, "Say nothing of my religion. It is known to God and me alone. Its evidence before the world is to be sought in my life if it has been honest and dutiful to society the religion which has regulated it cannot be a bad one." Were that only true today!

Another of my heroes, Mark Twain, wrote, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

Before I die: Number one on my to-do list is finishing my book, tentatively titled *Round 10: The Amendments vs. the Commandments*. I want my children and grandchildren to have a shortcut to the knowledge it has taken me a lifetime to discover. It covers how to identify reality, how to identify a god in the imagination and the risks of religious people

Meet a Longtime Member

Name: Frank Prah.

Where and when I was born: 1933 in Richland Center, Wis., the same small town where Frank Lloyd Wright was born. My father owned a photographic store in Madison. He died when I was 18 months old in the throes of the Great Depression. My mother soon lost everything and could no longer hold the family together. Rather than adopt us out, she opted to have relatives and friends keep the five of us until things got better.

Where I live: St. Petersburg, Fla., since 2000.

Education: After attending some of the best and worst schools, I graduated from Madison East High School in 1952. After the military, I tried college but discovered I did not have the math background for engineering and dropped out. I went back to work as an electronic tech, mostly in the marine field. I traveled much of the world in this capacity, servicing radio, radar and other shipboard electronics, mostly associated with oil drilling operations worldwide.

Occupation: Electronics technician, retired.

Military service: Four years in the U.S. Navy in the Korean War era.

How I got where I am today: I never had the opportunity to bond to a family or to any one person in my early childhood. I was left, pretty much, to figure out the world by myself. I was never indoctrinated into a religion before school. My mother thought it was time and started me in a Catholic school. The Catholic Church has a saying, "Give me your children until they are 7 and I'll have them for life." (My mother got it backward.)

Being a persistent "why" child in a school stressing obedience and rote learning, I did very poorly in reli-

gion. In my second year, I developed a chronic ear infection (before the days of antibiotics), and my mother thought I was going deaf. She enrolled me in a public school that had a special program for the hearing impaired, where I quickly went to the top of the class.

The nearby University of Wisconsin-Madison campus became my playground. Instead of baseball and other children's games, the campus museums and labs became my playground. What a great learning place for young children with inquiring minds!

Person in history I admire: Neil deGrasse Tyson is the greatest science communicator of my time.

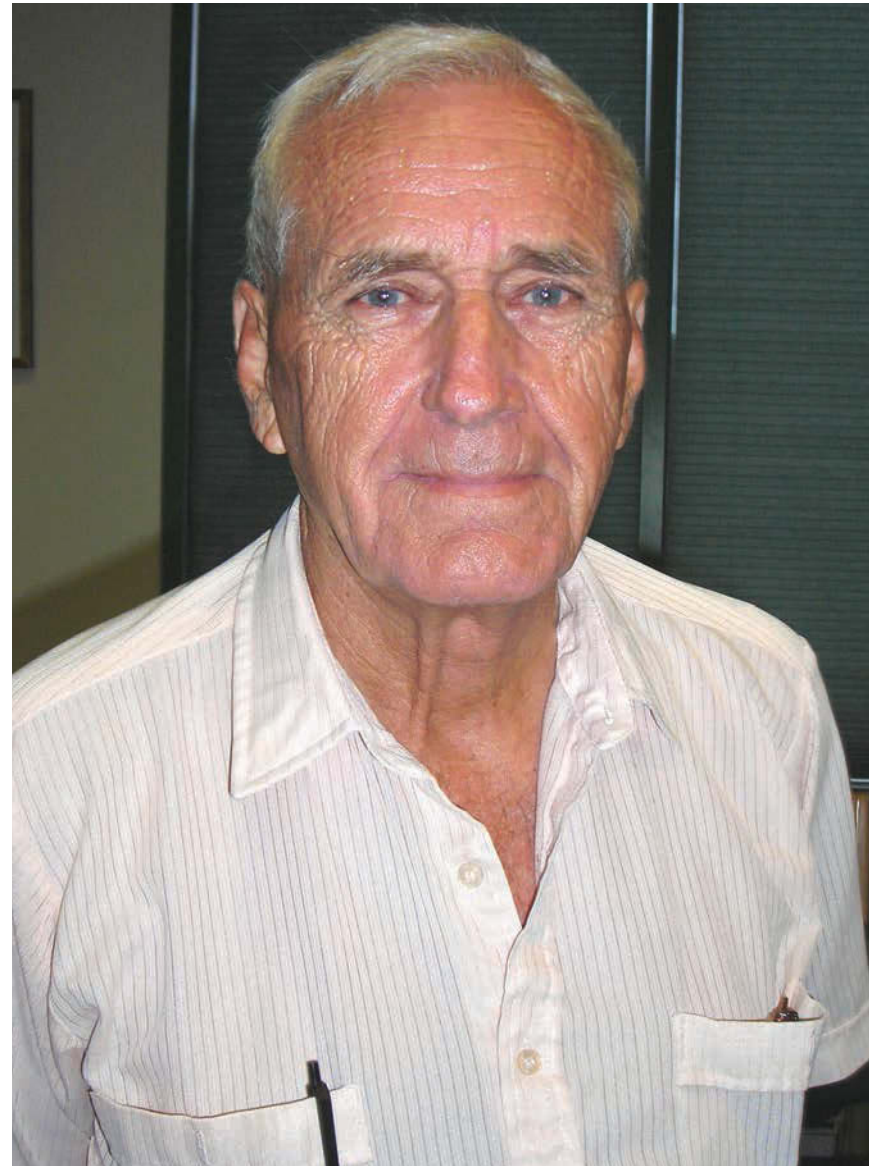
A quotation I like: "Censorship is most effective when self-imposed." It's my email tagline. I have pages of freethought quotes on file.

These are a few of my favorite things: Active, healthy living. I quit smoking in 1978 and haven't been sick since! I'm much healthier than most of my peers.

These are not: That some people have the misfortune to be isolated or forced to go to inferior schools, as I was, really alarms me — not only rural schools but bad inner-city schools. It mostly boils down to money priority.

My doubts about religion started: Maybe the greatest thing my mother did for my learning was to buy a World Book encyclopedia, which I read from almost every day. By fifth grade, I had learned that the real world was far more believable and meaningful than bible stories.

Ways I promote freethought: Despite all my travel experiences, I did not learn of the freethought movement or atheism until the mid-1970s when I heard Madalyn Murray O'Hair on a Houston radio station. I was truly amazed at how so much



Frank Prah

freethought literature had been hidden so thoroughly. I had never heard of most of the great American free-thinkers. I decided to do something about that and went back to school to earn my journalism degree in 1986 at the University of Houston. I became active in the new American Atheists chapter, soon followed by FFRF in 1978 and the Humanists of Houston.

For many years my activity was mostly publishing chapter and national

newsletters for the American Humanist Association. I also had many letters published in the two Houston newspapers and a few smaller papers throughout the state. This was mostly before the Internet and partly even before personal computers. The early newsletters were done on a typewriter.

In 1997, I started annual Texas statewide freethought conferences. FFRF's Dan Barker was a speaker at my last one in 1999. I am still active in Atheists



Photos: Andrew Seidel

New bricks and mortar plus ‘face lift’ for existing building

FFRF’s historic expansion nears finish

The list of kind donors below reports donations for FFRF’s Building Expansion Fund received from September 8th through October 5th, 2014. (It’s not cumulative except for the total.) Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues. No donor is identified by name unless expressly indicating permission. These donors go toward FFRF’s 5-story addition — including exposed lower level and 4th floor auditorium, plus 3rd floor 900-square foot library and cupola atop its existing 1855 building in downtown, Madison, Wis.

The (important) editorial wing in the revamped existing building still lacks a name!

Paving stones of beautiful bluestone can still be purchased for \$1,000 (6 x 12”) or \$2,000 (12 x 12”). They will be placed in the Rose Zerwick Garden & Courtyard in the spring. There’s room for name(s) or slogans.

Handmade personalized ceramic tiles will fill the new entryway. They will contain your name or a name in “memory of” for \$2,500. The vestibule tiles will be surrounded by a pansy tile border (“pansies — that’s for thoughts” as Shakespeare noted, symbolizing freethought).

All donations small or large are gratefully accepted and are tax deductible. See more information:

ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page

New Donors

- Estate of Charles Sommers, Wisconsin, \$65,812.73
- Michael Machula, Indiana, \$1,000
- Robert Eberle, M.D., & Wanda Eberle, Virginia, \$1,000
- Bruce and Vickie Tassan, Virginia, \$100
- Anonymous, Minnesota, \$100
- Anonymous, Nevada, \$50
- Anton Krilloff, New York, \$50
- Stefanie Moritz & Vince Jenkins, Wisconsin, \$50
- Sidney Hakim, Texas, \$50
- Anonymous, Georgia, \$50
- Anonymous, New York, \$25

Richard Fletcher, Texas, \$25
Anonymous, Virginia, \$10

Subtotal: \$68,322.73

New cumulative total: \$1,972,562.46

Goal: \$2 million

If you gave a gift designated for the building fund that does not appear to be reflected in this list or in prior issues, please contact FFRF so that we can check our records and publish your gift. Contact Katie Daniel at (608)256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email katie@ffrf.org.

IN REASON WE TRUST



Richard Dawkins
Evolutionary Biologist, Author
The Selfish Gene, The God Delusion
Honorary FFRF Director

“There’s real poetry in the real world. Science is the poetry of reality.”

Join the nation’s largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) working to keep religion out of government. For a free sample of FFRF’s newspaper, *Freethought Today*, phone **1-800-335-4021**

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational charity

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
FFRF.ORG/reason-must-prevail

Above, FFRF’s September ad in *Scientific American*, featuring freethinking scientists and rationalists kindly promoting FFRF. Welcome to our new members who found FFRF through these ads.

FFRF welcomes 9 ‘Lifers’ from 6 states

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to officially welcome its nine newest Lifetime Members. They are:

Dave Bawtinheimer, Dr. Deborah Bienen, Steven Brady, Francis Crawford, Ray Finch, Robert Hanner, Robert Warren Jones, Matthew Joseph Savelkoul and Dr. John Drew Smith.

States represented are Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Min-

nesota and Texas.

Lifetime Memberships are offered individually at \$1,000 each, are deductible to the fullest extent of the law, ensure never another renewal to the kind donor and go into a reserve fund for FFRF’s future.

Warm thanks for investing in FFRF to John, Matthew, Robert and Robert, Ray, Francis, Steven, Deborah and Dave!

Last call to FFRF convention!

Millennium Biltmore Hotel
Los Angeles, Calif.
Weekend of Oct. 24-26, 2014
More information:
ffrf.org/outreach/convention