LEAD US NOT INTO PENN STATION

provocative pieces
by Anne Nicol Gaylor

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for "Jody" and the kids

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Reprinted 2011
Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 750
Madison, Wisconsin 53701
ffrf.org

ISBN: 1-877733-14-8

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Photo by Brent Nicastro

Lead Us Not into Penn Station, a provocative series of essays, offers a graceful and engaging introduction to freethought and the importance of separation of church and state, from the warm perspective of one of the United States' leading freethought advocates.

Anne Nicol Gaylor, a founder of the national Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wis., served as its elected president from 1978–2004. A nontheist and feminist, she has been active in the struggle for separation of state and church and for the right of women to control their own reproductive destiny for more than a quarter-century.

Born in rural Monroe County, Wisconsin, she attended a one-room country school and Tomah High School. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1949. She and her husband, Paul, have four children and two grandchildren.

A businesswoman, she started the first private employment agency in Madison and the first service supplying temporary office help. With her husband, she published an award-winning suburban weekly newspaper in the late '60s.

Since 1972, she has worked as the volunteer administrator of the Women's Medical Fund, which she co-founded. Believed to be the longest continuously-running abortion aid charity, the Women's Medical Fund has helped more than 14,000 women without resources pay for abortions in Wisconsin. Anne wrote of her experiences in referring thousands of women for abortions in her 1975

book, *Abortion is a Blessing* (Psychological Dimensions).

Under Anne's tutelage, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has grown from a "dining-room table" group to a national association representing more than 5,000 freethinkers (atheists and agnostics). The Foundation owns its own office building in downtown Madison, offers scholarships to freethinking students and awards to activists, publishes a newspaper, *Freethought Today*, books and music, and acts upon violations of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The Foundation's many successful legal challenges include overturning Good Friday as a Wisconsin state holiday, winning the first fully-adjudicated challenge of "faith-based" funding, halting parochial aid, removing Ten Commandments monuments from public-owned property and stopping a half-century abuse of official religious instruction in public schools in Dayton, Tenn.

Anne Nicol Gaylor's longtime activism for state/church separation came about because of her conviction that "the degradation of women is a cornerstone of all religions. Until kindness and reason replace religious dogma, the problems in society, for both men and women, can never be solved.

"Freethinkers have arrived at their conclusions after a great deal of thought and reading and observation, and then to have some gullible religionist, who doesn't even know what the bible says, tell us what we should be thinking is really the epitome of arrogance. To be an open atheist, agnostic or freethinker in this country is often to be treated as a 4th-class citizen or a curiosity — some sort of Martian.

"Another assumption freethinkers routinely encounter even today is the idea that because you think freely you must be the agent of some foreign power. My mother's ancestors came to this country on the Mayflower and my father's have been here since the mid-1800s. My philosophy has a great deal more in common with the founding fathers of our government than that of any conventional Christian. Many religionists know nothing of the freethought origins of our country and the secular nature of our Constitution, and they don't want to learn.

"Truly, it has reached the point for nontheists where even the public expression of our intellectual views can put us in physical danger. One basic fact is apparent to me: the reason there are so many religious nuts out there is because religion itself is intrinsically nutty!"

Lead Us Not into Penn Station

The story is told of the young elementary school student who had to recite the Lord's Prayer each day in his New York public school classroom before the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1962 mandated no prayers in the public schools. His surprised parents, who were commuters, discovered their child was reciting most glibly his attempt to make sense of the Lord's Prayer: "And lead us not into Penn Station."

For the most part the perils of Penn Station are behind us now, but the threat of church-state entanglement is not. A Congress and a President write into law that the bible is "the Word of God" and that we have "a national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures"!

Religionists defeat equal rights for women and fight constantly to deprive all women of their right to choose contraception, sterilization and abortion. Bibles under their arms, they rail against civil rights for homosexuals. Federal and state governments hire chaplains in diverse public programs and situations in total violation of the constitutional mandate that "there shall be no religious test for public office." The White House hires a liaison for religious affairs, a government employee handsomely paid by tax dollars to work with church representatives, another totally unconstitutional expenditure of public money. Churches are granted tax exemption, an indirect subsidy, compelling all of us to pay higher taxes that religion may be tax-free — and unaccountable to anyone!

The unaccountability of religion resulted in one of the grimmest and most bizarre crimes of the century — the mass murder perpetrated in Guyana in 1978 by an ordained clergyperson, the Rev. Jim Jones. Despite the horrendous nature of the crime there was absolutely no investigation of the mainline, mainstream church,

the Disciples of Christ, that ordained this clergyman and turned unseeing eyes toward the newspaper exposés that years before the Guyana tragedy had described Jones' unethical practices and phony cancer cures. Because the Reverend regularly sent dollars to church headquarters, he was never defrocked, and the parent church, responsible for his ordination and continued good standing, was never investigated.

The airwaves in our country are open to any religion making any claim — an unscrupulous Oral Roberts "sees" Jesus, and fake "faith healing" is epidemic — where is the truth in advertising principle that others who broadcast must honor?

In direct violation of U.S. Supreme Court decisions, teachers and administrators promote organized prayer in the public schools, usually victimizing kindergartners, or those too small to question "God is good." Christian zealots erect the vengeful, sexist and morally inadequate Ten Commandments on statehouse lawns and place huge crosses, the Christian torture symbol, in public parks. The supernatural is extolled by elaborate nativity pageants staged at state capitols and city halls, and posters on publicly-owned property proclaim "Keep Christ in Christmas."

The U.S. Post Office has given cancellations to religious groups across the country in violation of its own regulations, and other religious cancellations such as PRAY FOR PEACE appear frequently on the mail of those who believe in prayer and those who do not. Churches lobby openly in Congress and the statehouses, and congregations by the hundreds are exhorted from pulpits to attend legislative hearings, to vote in a specific way and to elect a particular candidate. Internal Revenue Service rulings which apply to tax-exempt groups and which forbid political activity are wantonly ignored by churches. Delinquent children, the ill and elderly are cared for in church-owned facilities, but although the church gets the credit, the taxpayer gets the bill. And what a bill!

In short, there is a great deal of state-church entanglement with an immense amount of separating to be done. Thomas Jefferson, who called the god of the bible "cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust," envisioned a wall of separation between government and religion. That wall appears to be in serious need of repair. The First Amendment — "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" — needs protection, perhaps now more than

at any time in our country's history.

This booklet contains provocative freethought pieces. It has been published because the blind faith of evangelistic religionists is leading us into far more hazardous places than Penn Station.

What's Wrong with the Ten Commandments?

Critics of the Christian bible occasionally can score a point or two in discussion with the religious community by noting the many teachings in both the Old and New Testaments that encourage the bible believer to hate and to kill, biblical lessons that history proves Christians have taken most seriously. Nonetheless the bible defendant is apt to offer as an indisputable parting shot, "But don't forget the ten commandments. They are the basic bible teaching. Study the ten commandments."

Do study the ten commandments! They epitomize the childishness, the vindictiveness, the sexism, the inflexibility and the inadequacies of the bible as a book of morals.

Actually, only six of the 10 commandments deal with an individual's moral conduct, which comes as a surprise to most Christians. ("I never realized that!" said my husband, whose background includes a total immersion baptism, both Sunday school and church every week, non-questioning parents and a grandfather who was a Missouri preacher. Happily, the indoctrination never took.)

The first four commandments are all cut from the same piece of sleazy cloth. Essentially, they say:

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

2. Thou shalt not make thee any graven images or bow down to them, and if you do I'll get you and your kids and their descendants.

3. Thou shalt not take the name of the lord in vain.

4. Keep the Sabbath holy.

The exact terminology is found in chapter five of Deuteronomy. It can be a bit confusing. For a while, I was convinced there were 11 commandments, and one had been overlooked all these years. (Two

other versions of the "10 commandments" can be found in the Old Testament. One version, in Exodus, chapter 20, differs slightly from the Deuteronomy version, while a third, in Exodus, chapter 34, is wildly different, containing commandments about sacrifices and offerings and ending with the teaching: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk." This is the only version referred to in scriptures as the "ten commandments.")

In essence, the first four commandments all scream that "the lord thy god" has an uneasy vanity, and like most dictators, must resort to threats, rather than intellectual persuasion, to promote a point of view. If there were an omnipotent god, can you imagine him *or her* being concerned if some poor little insignificant creature puttered around and made a graven image? Do you think that any god, possessing the modicum of good will you could expect to find in any neighbor, would want to punish children even "unto the third and fourth generation" because their fathers would not bow down? How can anyone *not* perceive the pettiness, bluster, bombast and psychotic insecurity behind the first four commandments? We are supposed to respect this!

"Honor thy father and thy mother" is the fifth commandment, and it is, of course, an extension of the authoritarian rationale behind the first four. Honor cannot be automatically bestowed by an honest intellect. Intellectually honest people can honor only those who, in their opinion, warrant their honor. The biologic fact of fatherhood and motherhood does not in and of itself warrant honor. Until very recently parenthood was not a matter of choice. It still is a mandatory, not optional, happening for many of the world's people. Why should any child be commanded to honor, without further basis, parents who became parents by accident — who didn't even plan to have a child? All of us know children who have been abused, beaten or neglected by their parents. What is the basis for honor there? How does the daughter honor a father who sexually molests her? "Honor those who merit your honor" would be a much more appropriate teaching, and if that includes your parents, great! It has been suggested that "Honor your children" would be a useful commandment.

Commandments six through nine — thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, steal or bear false witness — obviously have merit, but even they need extensive revision. To kill in self-defense is regrettable, but

it is certainly morally defensible, eminently sensible conduct. So is the administration of a shot or medication that will end life for the terminally ill patient who wishes to die.

Adultery, the subject of the seventh commandment, again raises the question of an absolute ban. For the most part fidelity in marriage is a sound rule, making for happiness, but some marriages may outlast affection. Some couples may wish to live by different rules. Until relatively recent times Christian marriages were not dissolvable except by death, so the ban of divorce coupled with the ban of adultery obviously created great distress. Adultery, it must be remembered, involves an act between consenting adults. Should it really rate in the Christian's "Big Ten?" How much more relevant and valuable it would be to have, for instance, a commandment that forbids the violent crimes of rape and incest.

"Thou shalt not steal" raises questions regarding the usefulness of a blanket condemnation, and may put squatter's rights ahead of public and private welfare. Should people who are cold or ill steal to ameliorate their situations? Should the child who is hungry steal? Surely this commandment cries for some amending clauses. One is reminded of the comment of Napoleon, who really had religion figured out. Said Napoleon: "How can you have order in a state without religion? For, when one man is dying of hunger near another who is ill of surfeit, he cannot resign himself to this difference unless there is an authority which declares, 'God wills it thus.' Religion is excellent stuff for keeping people quiet."

In general, to bear false witness is construed to mean "don't lie," and that is a valuable moral precept, except again it is stated in absolute terms. Lies have saved lives, they have preserved relationships, and every day they save hurt feelings. The truth is not always a reasonable or kind solution. Interestingly, in biblical times the dictum not to bear false witness against a neighbor was a tribal commandment and meant to apply only to persons within the tribe — it was quite all right to bear false witness against "strangers."

Finally, the tenth commandment, which riles the feminist blood, says: "Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbor's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbor's." In addition to rating a wife with an ox and an ass, the bible loftily overlooks the woman who might desire her neighbor's husband.

Covetousness somehow does not seem like such a crime. If you can't have a comfortable house or a productive farm, what is the great harm in wishing you did? Covetousness may be nonproductive and unpretty, but to make a big, bad deal out of it is ridiculous. Bible apologists sometimes will excuse the triviality of the tenth commandment on the basis that covet, in a more superstitious age, once meant "to cast an evil eye." Someone who coveted "his neighbor's house" was purportedly casting an evil eye on that property with a view toward its destruction. Whether one accepts the apologist's definition of covet or the more popular meaning, the tenth commandment lacks real importance.

Little in Christianity is original. Most of it is borrowed, just as the celebration of Christmas was borrowed from Roman and earlier pagan times. When the "lord" supposedly wrote his commandments on two tablets of stone and delivered them to Moses (Deut. 5:22), he was only aping Bacchus, Zoroaster and Minos. In T.W. Doane's book about the parallels between Christianity and other religions, he says:

"Bacchus was called the 'Lawgiver,' and his laws were written on two tablets of stone. This feature in the Hebrew legend was evidently copied from that related of Bacchus, but the idea of Moses receiving the commandments from the Lord on a mountain was obviously taken from the Persian legend related of Zoroaster. Prof. Max Muller has said: 'What applies to the religion of Moses applied to that of Zoroaster. It is placed before us as a complete system from the first, revealed by Ahuramazda (Ormuzd), proclaimed by Zoroaster.'

"The disciples of Zoroaster, in their profusion of legends of the master, relate that one day, as he prayed on a high mountain, in the midst of thunders and lightnings ('fire from heaven'), the Lord himself appeared before him, and delivered unto him the 'Book of Law.' While the King of Persia and the people were assembled together, Zoroaster came down from the mountain unharmed, bringing with him the 'Book of the Law,' which had been revealed to him by Ormuzd. They call this book the Zend-Avesta, which signified the Living Word.

"According to the religion of the Cretans, Minos, their lawgiver, ascended a mountain (Mount Dicta) and there received from the Supreme Lord (Zeus) the sacred laws which he brought down with

him.

"Almost all nations of antiquity have legends of their holy men ascending a mountain to ask counsel of the gods, such places being invested with peculiar sanctity, and deemed nearer to the deities than other portions of the earth."

Which brings us to the obvious question: how can anyone respect those who insist that the bible is truth? How can we be expected to put up with the bible's use in public ceremonies, with the demands that we respect it or Christianity? Surely Christians of intelligence and good intentions would want to debunk the bible themselves, to extract from it the modest number of teachings that are kind and to publicly label the rest fables, mythology, legends, superstition and sexism.

Was Jesus a Horse Thief?

The one-room country school I attended when I was a little girl was not at all fussy about what age you were when you started, so I got to start first grade when I was four. Consequently, I learned to read at an early age, I loved to read, and I read everything I could put my hands on.

Since country schools in the 1930s were very poor, there were not all that many books available. Our school library, unlike school libraries today, was not a room, or even an alcove. It was a piece of furniture — an old oak bookcase whose glass doors had been broken out years before. It held only about 90 books for the children in our eight grades, and, of course, it did not take too long for a hungry, growing reader to go through them. Soon, I was reading the adult books at home, including some memorably bad turn-of-the-century novels. Occasionally, in desperation, I even read my father's agricultural journals. But one book available to me that I could never read because it repelled me so was the bible. I tried it, I dipped in here and there. But it did not seem to make much sense, and far from impressing me or comforting me, it frightened and dismayed me.

At the time I decided that the bible, unlike those turn-of-the-century novels, really was supposed to be an adult book, and that I might appreciate it more when I was older. About that time I got a card at the Andrew Carnegie library in town, and my problems of what to read were ended. There I found shelves and shelves of books, and I could choose what pleased me. (Thank you, Andrew Carnegie.)

Except to check an occasional verse or biblical allusion, I did not read the bible again until I was a college student, and certain palatable parts of both the Old and New Testaments were required

reading for a literature course. I decided then that it made more sense than when it had frightened me as a child, but I was still unconvinced of its merit. I thought some of the prose quite stately and some of the poetic images very lovely, but the content and teachings still troubled me. Unlike so many books that drew me back, I definitely did not want to return to the bible. Again, I decided the problem was my own immaturity, that in a few years I might understand what all of the excitement was about. After all, at age 19 you are inclined to accept professorial judgment without question. If they and all those clergypersons thought it great literature and immortal truth, the fault was probably mine.

Busy with children, career, causes, and always with a good supply of delightful books on my night table, I had no occasion to read the bible again until I found myself disagreeing with an acquaintance about the respect due Jesus. There was a ferocious flap in the 1960s brought on by the Beatles' rather innocuous remark that they were now "more popular than Jesus." Widely circulated, the famous quotation caused a huge uproar in this country, with hundreds of boycotts of Beatles music by disc jockeys, passionate denunciations from pulpits, and a rash of bonfires of Beatles records and sheet music, especially in the south. My friend, a churchy type, argued that he did not like to see anyone's religion belittled, adding that whatever one thought of the divinity of Jesus, surely he was a wise and admirable man.

Somehow I didn't remember Jesus that way. And so, it was back to the bible. And this is what I found.

1. *Jesus believed in "demons."* Jesus believed that "demons" caused illness, both mental and physical illness. The New Testament swims in this. Jesus spoke not a word about germs, bacteria, viruses, contagion and the importance of sanitation. He did not know about these things; he believed "demons" to be responsible for sickness.

2. *Jesus unnecessarily killed animals,* i.e. pigs. For the most part a pig is a very gentle and intelligent animal, and clean, given the chance. (Most pigs are penned in small spaces where they have no chance to be clean.) A pig can be a delightful pet, affectionate, and as companionable as a dog. Yet Jesus, who had the power to still the seas and calm the winds, chose to drive "demons" from people into pigs. In one report (Mark 5:13) 2,000 pigs whom the "unclean spirits" had entered "ran violently down a steep place into the sea." One can

only wonder at Jesus' irrationality. With his supernatural powers, why not drive the "demons" directly into the sea, and spare 2,000 pigs?

3. *Jesus told the people he spoke to that the world would end in their lifetime.* Obviously, this was a rather serious error, and must have caused a great deal of unnecessary fear and apprehension.

4. *Jesus believed in and promoted the idea of everlasting punishment,* even for offenses such as calling someone a fool (Matthew 5:22). Most wise and kind persons do not believe in hell; they do not accept the idea of a creator who punishes the objects of his creation.

5. *Jesus had an uneasy vanity.* He frequently became quite vindictive if people did not believe in him. A wise person would understand that there was cause for questioning.

6. *Jesus destroyed a fig tree out of peevishness.* With a disciple, he came upon a fig tree that had no fruit, for the very good reason that it was not the season for figs. Finding no figs, Jesus caused the tree to shrivel and die, thereby assuring no future figs for hungry persons.

7. *Jesus was a horse thief.*

> "And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples,
>
> Saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat; loose him, and bring him hither.
>
> And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him." (Luke 19:29–31)

These verses cannot help but give a thoughtful person pause. Why was it that someone with the magical powers of Jesus would choose to put his disciples at risk to steal a horse for him; here was someone with the supernatural ability to feed a multitude with a bit of bread and fish, yet he could not manage to slip that horse's rope and get it to trot past him. Horses were very valuable in those days, even young horses "not yet rid by man." Stealing horses was a very dangerous pastime. The horse belonged to someone; it was tied.

His unwitting disciples, who could not have been unmindful of Jesus' preaching a day or two earlier that it was wrong to steal (Luke 18:20) did as they were told and survived a challenge.

So, in fact, Jesus was a horse thief. In a sense, he was worse than a horse thief, because he made others do his stealing for him.

Someone once called Jesus "a mediocre preacher who had mistaken ideas about practically everything." The most cursory reading of the New Testament will confirm that evaluation. Far from being omniscient, as would be anyone's expectation for a reputed "god," Jesus actually was superstitious and most ignorant of science. He thought the sun could stand still and that the moon had a light of its own. He was an exorcist, preoccupied with demons. He liked to call people names — "fools," "serpents," "dogs," "hypocrites" and "vipers" are a few of the epithets he used regularly. He encouraged his followers to mutilate their bodies, to drink poison and to handle snakes, and some of them still follow those lethal teachings today. He based his ministry on a sense of guilt and the fear of physical punishment. His style was to mix threats and curses with promises, and he cursed not only individuals but whole cities. Most philosophers who make claims present arguments to support them, but the biblical Jesus backs his claims only by threats of eternal damnation. His "cures," sometimes effected with holy spit and followed by admonishments to "tell no one," must perplex even modern-day Christians. Why would a "god" with the power to cure not want to cure as many persons as possible?

Anyone who really believes in the bible has a serious problem — that person is either very ignorant or very disturbed. Yet George Gallup tells us (October, 1976) that 38 percent of the people in this country say that they believe the bible is "literally true, word for word."

With the upsurge in fundamentalism in this country, a renewed belief in witches, demons and devils, and a president who may very well be one of the 38 percent, we, who think freely, have our work cut out for us.

Let's Dispense with Christian Funerals

Something has got to be done about funerals!

Most of my life I have been quite successful at finding reasons not to go to funerals. But as I grow older I find these events more difficult to avoid. Not only does it seem more people are dying, but my old excuses of youth, pregnancy, baby-sitting, employment or "too poor to travel" just don't hold up any more. I find I simply will offend if I do not put in an appearance. It is not that I am not fond of the friend or relative or their survivors; it is just that funerals are in such abominable taste.

In the first place most of them have a corpse and an open casket, so we of necessity remember the dead, not the living, person. I wonder how many young people's nightmares and older persons' unhappy recollections can be directly attributed to this more-or-less coercive viewing of the dead.

Few, if any, dead persons look natural. Most have become emaciated by illness, and the undertaker's ministrations have merely made them caricatures of themselves. Many are wearing their spectacles, something I find especially pointless. Glasses are such a nuisance in life — couldn't they be dispensed with in death? Yes, I know they are supposed to "make him look more natural." But he isn't natural, he is dead.

The real evil of funerals, however, is the clergyperson's nonsense, the absolute gibberish he spouts for half an hour — an uncomforting, unconvincing string of platitudes and prayers that has nothing to do with the life of the person who has died. So often a funeral service has been so utterly impersonal that I have decided the clergyman went to his files, grabbed a prepared sermon under

"funerals," hastily penciled in a few blanks here and there with the name of his victim, and proceeded to present his atrocity, comfortable in his knowledge that his audience would be too polite to object and that his fee would be forthcoming despite his total lack of homework.

Sometimes the clergyperson is so indifferent that he does not even get the right name. A sweet aunt of mine who died recently at age 80 had been known all of her life by her middle name, but the clergyman, of whose church she was a member, and who publicly professed his friendship of several years duration for this "blessed soul," referred to her throughout his otherwise impersonal remarks by her first name. Bewildered, I wondered as I listened, which one of us, I or he, was at the wrong funeral.

Years ago I attended the funeral of a 96-year-old woman, whom I loved dearly, who had kept house for our family for ten years after my mother's death. Protestant Irish, of independent spirit, she was a feminist, a "maiden lady," and very proud of it. She sincerely regarded most men (not all, but most) as inferior, and her single state was definitely by choice. The unctuous clergyman, who again publicly stated his intimate knowledge of her soul, concluded his asinine sermon with the passage from the bible which extols the good wife! Had I not already been convinced that there was no afterlife, I would have been at that moment, because had there been any possibility, my feisty friend would have risen from the dead and throttled that agent of god!!

It pains me particularly to have to sit through this kind of service when I know that so much of relevance could be said. One woman I know who had lived a particularly long, full life — a scientist who had pioneered in a field traditionally closed to women — an active, interested and interesting person up to the moment of her death, should have had a memorial service that was meaningful. But here again we had another victim of religious prattle.

I think the saddest funeral I ever attended was that of an elderly woman who had taken care of our children when they were young. This industrious woman of Scandinavian derivation had worked for us about four years, coming in week days when I was employed full-time, and she was a sort of half-grandmother and half-slave. I remember I had hired her with trepidation because she was frail and looked a decade or two older than her 70 years. But she was

fabulous. She was always there despite her age and health — she had had some major operations over the years including the removal of most of her stomach. She loved to work — work was her hobby — and we had the cleanest house, including attic and basement, in all of Wisconsin. She was organized and intelligent, and she was kind to children. Our youngest, the only one not in school, adored her. For a year or two he called her "Bisitor," his version of visitor. Every morning he would eagerly meet her at the door, saying, "Hi, Bisitor, what are we going to bake today — cake or cookies?" One of her jobs — she had been widowed at an early age — had been as a baker, and she made fabulous cookies. We still remember with reverence her frosted chocolate turtle cookies. Every Monday morning she came toiling up our hill with an angel cake or something she had baked at her home over the weekend for our children. At Christmastime she brought a dishpan full of homebaked treats.

Even our cat loved her. She took stairs one at a time because of her joints, and one of my poignant memories is watching the cat, who liked to be around her, go up the stairs a few steps and then sit and wait for the old woman to catch up.

Our housekeeper seemed to think it reflected badly on her if I lifted a finger around the house, and I remember her first words many mornings, as I casually cleared the breakfast table, were, "Mrs. Gaylor, you put that down. That's my job. I'll take care of that." Surely no family was ever so pampered.

Asthma and accumulated ills finally forced her retirement, and a few years later she died. My husband and I attended her funeral and waited in vain for some word from the clergyman about her intrepid character, some reference to the years she had supported her three children by holding two jobs — days in a laundry and nights in a bakery. There was a great deal of mumbo-jumbo prayer at her bleak funeral, several references to a soul and everlasting life, but there were *no words about her.*

It is time, surely, to stash away the clergy. Services, with or without a corpse, can honor the person who has lived. Memorials can be planned with readings from favorite poets and writers, with music the person had enjoyed while living, with personal anecdotes told by friends — all of this could be so easily arranged.

I am up to here with the clergy — their laziness and their trivial, dimestore, carbon copy funerals. A memorial service should cel-

ebrate life, not death. It is much too important a ceremony and it has too much potential for substance, beauty and joy to be left to the clergy.

The Religious Battered Woman

At long last, the cause of the battered woman has become "fashionable." There has been a spate of articles, a book or two and a movie, with TV actress Sally Struthers getting convincingly roughed up. Even the male-dominated wire services in the U.S. are recognizing that, yes, there is a problem, and, really, men shouldn't be treating women that way. Battered women finally are getting PR.

But there are still those who, just as they did for rape, blame the woman, who is the victim, for her predicament.

"Why does she stay?" they ask.

Why does she stay? Why does the woman, whose husband uses her as a private punching bag, stick around? The answers are so clear one wonders why the question is ever asked. She stays because she has nowhere else to go. She stays because she is economically and emotionally dependent. She stays because she may have small children or because her children may not want the family broken up. She stays because she is ashamed to tell anyone that her husband beats her. She stays because she fears the unknown; she has learned to cope, after a fashion, with being beaten, but she fears she might not be able to cope with whatever lies beyond her home. What she has, bad as it is, might be better than what would happen to her if she left. She stays because she has been told repeatedly by her husband that she is no good, no one would want her, she could never make it on her own. Her self-esteem is nil. She is isolated. Her husband's behavior has cut her off from friends and family, and she is beaten, in every respect.

"But," says the doubter, "She must really like to be beaten." That myth persists. Surely a grown woman must have something wrong with her to stay in her situation, the skeptic says. She must be a masochist. She must enjoy abuse. Somehow, this woman herself is

to blame.

The myth dies hard. It is a simple truth, but one impossible for many to understand, that nobody likes to be beaten. Men don't like to be beaten, children don't like to be beaten, women don't like to be beaten. That is the fact of the matter. Just as a child may continue to love a parent who beats him or her, so a woman may continue to love her batterer. It is a form of childish dependency. And even if there no longer is affection, only fear, the woman stays because she is trapped. And there is always tomorrow. She can still hope that tomorrow will be better.

According to Mandy Stellman, a Milwaukee attorney and feminist who deals daily with battered women: "A religious woman refuses to believe that her marriage is not forever, and therefore convinces herself that her husband is a loving spouse. She will deny that he ever abused her or beat her; she believes God will punish her if she complains. So she will never tell anyone that her husband has, in fact, battered her or sexually abused her. Finally, she is so traumatized by fear of her husband, and by the humiliation, that she lies to herself and denies the facts of the abuse."

Battered women have traits and circumstances in common, and these make up the "battered woman syndrome." The battered woman is someone who denies the abuse, at first to others, eventually to herself. She is someone who "bruises easily." Every battered woman in the country will tell you that she "bruises easily." Always, she feels guilty. Somehow, she thinks, she must be at fault. She believes she must be doing something wrong, or this wouldn't be happening. Although he will beat her drunk or sober, almost invariably the husband of a battered woman has a drinking problem. Often, the battered woman is someone who "had to get married," and the battery usually started before the marriage. Interestingly, the battered woman is almost always someone who is much smarter than her husband. This fact is all but ignored in the literature on the subject; apparently that frail, male ego must be protected at all costs. Frequently she is someone who was victimized as a child, either by battering or sexual abuse. She is accustomed to being a victim. She enters the relationship with her batterer with an already low self-image.

Often, the battered woman is religious, a three-fold problem. First, most religions teach that marriages, if not actually made in

heaven, should last, and divorce, even if allowed, is a disgrace. Secondly, the religious battered woman has read the bible and knows very well its opinion of women. There are in excess of 200 bible verses that specifically belittle and demean women. Her low opinion of herself is buttressed by her religion. Third, she has been praying when she should have been acting. Surely, she thinks, god will help her if she prays hard enough and long enough. Not only does her god not help her, her clergyman, if she dares confide in him, will probably urge her to "work harder at her marriage." Because she is religious, she has developed no inner strength that is meaningful or useful to her in times of crisis. She has relied on prayer to the extent that she has lost the power to act, to cope, to initiate, to solve problems, to reason.

If anyone helps her, it will be other women, feminists who have established counseling centers, legal services and shelter homes. Shelter homes are a temporary answer at best, and one wonders at a society that tolerates them as a real solution. The abused woman must uproot herself, bundle up her children, live in inadequate, cramped housing when she is the victim! Why doesn't society uproot the male? He is the problem. He is the one guilty of battery. Why isn't he hustled away? It is reminiscent of those curfews for women in some foreign countries because women are being attacked on the streets. Why aren't there curfews for men?

Occasionally, the battered woman, whom no one has helped, and who believes herself powerless to change her situation, will herself resort to force. Since she is almost always much smaller than her assailant, the force will not be physical. She will arm herself with a gun (or a knife), and she will kill the violent man, in her desperation.

More often, she will be killed herself.

Why do men batter? And why has society permitted them to continue to batter? Why, when it is a crime for one man to assault another, is it not a crime for a man to beat his wife? Why is violence, that never would be tolerated by society if it took place in an office or a bar, tolerated in the home? Why does our society's well-known sympathy for the underdog not extend to women?

What are the answers? Clearly, men who batter must be worked with as well as the victims who are battered. Certain men's need to inflict pain must be analyzed; these men must be rehabilitated. There are so many of them, it would be impossible just to lock them

up.

And the battered women? Their immediate needs must be met. They must be helped to remove themselves from their dangerous situations, to start new lives, if possible. They must recognize self-worth; they must know that their husbands' expressed opinion of them is not the opinion of others, the opinion of society.

Finally, we must change the way we look at women, the way we "bring up" girls. Young women must know that they are not inferior human beings, that it is not their duty to please men. This business of romantic love — that there is only one true love, and if you blow that, forget it — must be dispelled. Women must know that it is not necessary to live in fear, that the men who beat them or abuse them can be arrested and imprisoned, that battery is a crime, that women are not possessions.

The religious battered woman must come to see reality — that religion has been part of her problem, and that true mental and emotional health can come about only when she can reject her religious dependency sufficiently to recognize a fact: that the degradation of women is a cornerstone of religion.

Bible-belt Journalism

All of us, no matter what part of the country we hail from, are subjected regularly to "Bible-belt journalism." The local reporters dish it out, and so do the national wire services. I refer specifically to the "miracle" and "narrow escape" story that credits all happy endings with the power of prayer.

One of the midwest's leading daily newspapers is the *Milwaukee Journal.* It thinks it is good, and it has wide readership in Wisconsin. My own opinion of it is that it has always been a somewhat *sterile* newspaper. Except for one excellent, irreverent social and political cartoonist, the paper tries so hard to be objective that it has lost its own personality in the process. But one area where objectivity is regularly by-passed is in its reporting of the efficacy of prayer.

Earlier this year (1977) a woman, who was never apprehended, kidnapped an eight-month-old baby at a shopping center in Greendale, a Milwaukee suburb. The baby was being wheeled in his stroller by his five-year-old brother while his mother shopped, when the kidnapper approached the older boy and asked if he were looking for his mother. Although the boy responded that he was not, the woman wheeled the stroller away. A short time later the child was found unharmed in a grocery cart at another shopping mall. The *Journal's* coverage of this incident was titled: "BLESSED EVENT; KIDNAPPED BABY FOUND IN OUTPOURING OF PRAYER."

The *Journal* reporter pulled out all the religious stops in writing the story. "BABY RECOVERED AMID TIDE OF PRAYER" was the secondary headline, and "The power of prayer came through," was the mother's opening quote. The story went on to describe how the mother, after reporting the kidnapping to police, phoned a friend and "fellow" member of the Schoenstatt movement of the Catholic Church, and asked her to pray that the woman who took the child

would have a "change of heart." This woman phoned others and asked them to pray.

"By the time all the phone calls were completed, we had 200 persons *whose prayers were storming heaven,*" the mother is quoted as saying.

Prayers are still being said, according to the *Journal,* for the woman who took the baby so that she will get "what she really needs — a child of her own." (I must digress here to wonder at the mentality that would pray for an obviously unbalanced woman to reproduce — think of the poor, helpless infant! I also wonder at the acumen of the Milwaukee Police Department which apparently could not find the abductor despite her unusual appearance. According to the *Milwaukee Journal:* "She was described as white, about 28, 5 feet 10 inches and thin, with blond hair worn in a dutch boy cut, buck teeth, a pimply face and a limp.")

One expects Bible-belt reporting in Athens, Georgia, and Springfield, Missouri, but when it is served up in a metropolitan newspaper that prides itself on objectivity, we really must take alarm. We must also take alarm that letters to the editor regarding "Bible-belt journalism" rarely will be published. My letter to the *Milwaukee Journal,* challenging its reporting, met every requirement for publication. It was four short paragraphs, properly typed and double-spaced. It carried my name, my address and my telephone number. In addition, although I do not live in Milwaukee, I am a *Milwaukee Journal* subscriber. Yet my letter was never used.

I had pointed out, of course, that the lost baby was not found by prayer. I said that if Greendale police had chosen to pray rather than put the description of the baby on teletype, had supermarket personnel chosen to pray rather than report a found baby, and had suburban police chosen to pray rather than work on the case, the child would still be lost.

I told the *Journal* that to imply that organized prayer changed the kidnapper's mind was really the most baseless of speculative reporting, and that they were bolstering superstition and futility with such unenlightened coverage. I suggested that such corny journalism belonged in medieval Catholic magazines such as "Immaculata," not in the metropolitan press. I asked them to be responsible enough and objective enough to spare us the schmaltz when they had no facts to support their conclusions. And, of course, the letter was nei-

ther printed nor acknowledged.

The media are very powerful. They are attitude-makers. When media will not criticize religion themselves and will not print anyone who criticizes religion, then how are nontheistic views ever to be heard?

Recently, wire stories flooded Wisconsin papers regarding a near catastrophe where the principals again attributed their success to prayer. A spring forest fire near Black River Falls, Wisconsin, caught two men who were trying to save some lumbering equipment. The two reported that they doused their clothing with water from a spray-can and jumped into a sand depression in a clearing — they had made the depression themselves with a bulldozer. And this is how they escaped although the fire burned around them.

"Did you pray?" questioned the United Press reporter. Oh, yes, they responded, and the resultant story was titled: "Tall praying saves lives." Well, obviously if the men did not have the moxie to do the practical things to sustain their lives, they would have perished. They knew, despite the reporter's leading question, that their actions saved their lives. They know, as everyone knows with the exception of fanatics, that praying did not save them; intellect did. People die every day while praying that they may live, as any clergyman can tell you.

Just this spring everyone in the country who reads a paper, listens to radio or watches television heard about the religionists in Pennsylvania who were seeing Jesus Christ in an altar cloth in a small Episcopal church! ABC actually gave this utter nonsense a long segment of coverage, with the announcer speaking in the lowered, respectful tones usually reserved for papal appearances, or, at least, golf tourneys. ABC never tried for any balance in its segment, interviewing half a dozen persons who "saw Jesus," but not one doubter or dissenter. Of course, with the power of an unaccountable television network behind it, trivial superstition takes on credibility. And letters of complaint are brushed aside.

It really is too much. We must all start screaming about this silly, harmful reporting. We must phone and complain. We must open fire on Bible-belt journalism, on the reporter if there is a byline, on the editor if there is none. Even though our letters are not published, we must still write them. We must let the media know how disgusted we are with those hours of repetitive nonsense religious groups may air

for free. When Billy Graham usurps prime time, we must run for the phone and give the station manager, or whomever we nail, an earful.

Aldous Huxley said that religion can survive only as a "consciously accepted system of make-believe." The problem is that religion is not only surviving, it is smothering us because the "make-believe" is not being challenged. We shrug off the miracle-of-prayer stories when we should all be complaining about them. We must start to demand objectivity and balance. Because the media problem is serious. Can you imagine what our TV fare will be in a few years' time if we don't start to do something now?

Hitler's Religion

The first legislative hearing I ever attended was in the mid-1960s at the Wisconsin capitol, and the subject was the modernization of Wisconsin's birth control law. Wisconsin, the last state in the country to legalize contraceptives for unmarried persons, had a law until 1974 that was hostile to birth control for anyone and denied it to the unmarried, no matter what the circumstances. A fifty-year-old widower, for example, could not legally buy a condom.

Toward the end of the hearing, which had featured calm and reasonable presentations by professional people who supported liberalization of the law and emotional outbursts about morals from clergy and Catholic matrons opposed to change, a frail, elderly man took the podium. He explained that he was an atheist concerned about separation of state and church, and that he regarded the birth control issue as one where the Catholic Church was imposing its doctrine on the state, an observation that resulted in immediate uneasiness among the legislators hearing testimony, especially the Catholic chairperson. The atheist then began a brief summary of the historic problems of state-church entanglement, citing the bloodshed and wars in European history that were religion-related. When he referred to religion's role in World War II and Adolf Hitler's Catholicism, the chairman of the committee became enraged, and in a red-faced frenzy struck his gavel repeatedly until the elderly man tremblingly left the podium.

For some reason, Catholics are not eager to claim Hitler.

Even today, when I refer to Hitler's Catholicism in conversation or a speech, it immediately becomes apparent that I have said something "not quite nice," and I am often challenged. Nontheists, I then explain, know that many modern tyrants, whether petty tyrants such as Richard Nixon, or more successful tyrants such as Hitler, have

regarded themselves as exemplary Christians, an estimate their followers had no trouble accepting. Hitler's religiosity — he was a Catholic until his death — is often glossed over, but it is critical in understanding his motivation.

I have often reflected, wistfully, on how much happier modern history might have been had Hitler been brought up as an atheist, an agnostic, or, at least, a Unitarian. Born and bred a Catholic, he grew up in a religion and in a culture that was anti-semitic, and in persecuting Jews, he repeatedly proclaimed he was doing the "Lord's work."

You will find it in *Mein Kampf:* "Therefore, I am convinced that I am acting as the agent of our Creator. By fighting off the Jews, I am doing the Lord's work."

Hitler said it again at a Nazi Christmas celebration in 1926: "Christ was the greatest early fighter in the battle against the world enemy, the Jews . . . The work that Christ started but could not finish, I — Adolf Hitler — will conclude."

In a Reichstag speech in 1938, Hitler again echoed the religious origins of his crusade. "I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator. By warding off the Jews, I am fighting for the Lord's work."

Hitler regarded himself as a Catholic until he died. "I am now as before a Catholic and will always remain so," he told Gerhard Engel, one of his generals, in 1941.

There was really no reason for Hitler to doubt his good standing as a Catholic. The Catholic press in Germany was eager to curry his favor, and the princes of the Catholic Church never asked for his excommunication. Religions encourage their followers to hold authority in unquestioning respect; this is what makes devout religionists such wonderful dupes for dictators.

When Hitler narrowly escaped assassination in Munich in November, 1939, he gave the credit to providence. "Now I am completely content," he exclaimed. "The fact that I left the Burgerbraukeller earlier than usual is a corroboration of Providence's intention to let me reach my goal." Catholic newspapers throughout the Reich echoed this, declaring that it was a miraculous working of providence that had protected their Fuhrer. One cardinal, Michael Faulhaber, sent a telegram instructing that a *Te Deum* be sung in the cathedral of Munich, "to thank Divine Providence in the name of

the archdiocese for the Fuhrer's fortunate escape." The Pope also sent his special personal congratulations!

Later the Pope was to publicly describe Hitler's opposition to Russia as a "high-minded gallantry in defense of the foundation of Christian culture." Several German bishops openly supported Hitler's invasion of Russia, calling it a "European crusade." One bishop exhorted all Catholics to fight for "a victory that will allow Europe to breathe freely again and will promise all nations a new future."

Biographer John Toland wrote of Hitler's religion: "Still a member in good standing of the Church of Rome despite detestation of its hierarchy, he carried within him its teaching that the Jew was the killer of god. The extermination, therefore, could be done without a twinge of conscience since he was merely acting as the avenging hand of god — so long as it was done impersonally, without cruelty. Himmler was pleased to murder with mercy. He ordered technical experts to devise gas chambers which would eliminate masses of Jews efficiently and 'humanely,' then crowded the victims into boxcars and sent them east to stay in ghettos until the killing centers in Poland were completed."

Jews, of course, were not the only "holy" victims. In Yugoslavia, Hitler installed a Croatian, Ante Pavelic, as his puppet, and Pavelic, a Catholic like Hitler, began extermination of the Serbs, who were Greek Orthodox. One of my relatives by marriage is a Yugoslavian, a Serb, who survived World War II by going "underground" with the advent of Nazism in his country. Out of his immediate family of 17 (this includes his parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and first cousins), only three survived. His mother and sister just disappeared, his mother shortly after being given the opportunity to convert to Catholicism, an offer she refused. The Vatican was not unaware of the massacres conducted in Yugoslavia in the name of Catholicism, but Pope Pius remained diplomatically quiet. In fact, one of his actions was to receive Ante Pavelic in private audience, thereby giving his blessing to this regime.

War's causes, of course, are complex, but it would be difficult to overestimate the disastrous role religion played in World War II. Distrust, fear and hatred of Jews was a lesson Hitler learned early in life. It was taught by his church and reinforced by his culture. It became his obsession, his version of "the Lord's work." That Hitler, that

supreme villain of the 20th century, could see himself, and be seen by others, as "providentially" guided, protected and inspired should certainly serve as an ominous clue to the dangers of religious belief. Just as the Vatican umbrella could be maneuvered to shield the massacres of Serbs by Catholics in Yugoslavia, so can religion validate any behavior, any atrocity, any war.

Who Was Joseph Coveney?

"He died as he had lived a disbeliever
in the Bible God and the Christian religion."

Next time you're "tooling along" through northern Indiana on your way to or from Chicago, plan to take a pleasant detour across the Michigan border to Buchanan and pay your respects to Joseph Coveney (pronounced "cove-ney"), an irrepressible freethinker of the 19th century.

Unlike so many freethinkers, whose ashes are scattered anonymously to the winds, Coveney's bones are traditionally interred. But there tradition ends, for he is buried near his Monument to Freethought, a monument whose uniqueness still attracts an occasional tourist to the Oak Ridge Cemetery in Buchanan, although it was erected more than a century ago.

Its inscriptions may startle and perplex the religionists who happen on it, but they bring smiles of delight to those who share Coveney's views.

"THE MORE PRIESTS
THE MORE POVERTY

THE MORE SAINTS
THE MORE HYPOCRITES

THE MORE RELIGION
THE MORE LYING"

the monument proclaims. And, *"He died as he had lived a disbeliever in the Bible God and the Christian religion."*

Erected of granite and marble, the monument stands about 15 feet high and reportedly cost $3,000, at a time when $1,000 bought

a five-room house and $12 a man's suit of clothes. Although it was rumored when it was erected that the monument had to be inscribed in England, since there was no one blasphemous enough to take on the task in the United States, actually it was done in nearby Niles, Michigan.

And who was Joseph Coveney? He was born in the County of Cork, Ireland, on January 29, 1805, the son of an English mother and an English-Irish father. He attended parish schools until he was 13 and then learned the weaver's trade. When he was 20 he came alone to the United States, arriving in New York on May 26, 1825. There he learned carpentry, a trade at which he worked for several years, first in New York, later in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, and then in Indiana.

In the autumn of 1837, when he was 32 years old, Coveney married Louisa Martindale Roe, the oldest daughter of a prominent pioneer of Portage Prairie, Indiana, near the Michigan border. Some accounts describe her father as a pastor, others as an illustrious citizen. The various accounts agree that Coveney met Ms. Roe when he built a house for her father.

During the early years of his marriage Coveney continued his carpentry trade while farming 40 acres of land near Buchanan, Michigan, purchased through the government land office for $1.25 per acre. The Coveneys had 13 children (poor Louisa), and in 1854 Coveney built a "fine fourteen-room home." By this time he had acquired 600 acres of land and was one of the richest men in the area. He grew fruit and wheat and his orchards and wheat fields were locally famous for their large yields. Later he travelled to California where he "did not strike gold but did earn a great deal of money by use of carpentry skills." He made at least two trips abroad to his native Ireland and to England.

He died at 92, well-thought of by his neighbors who, for the most part, spoke of his generosity and kindness and took his Monument to Freethought in stride.

The Monument to Freethought was erected in September of 1874, almost a quarter century before Coveney's death. Besides being a vehicle for expressing Coveney's philosophy, it served as a family monument with the dates of the births and deaths of two daughters who died in childhood inscribed on one side of it. The monument is surrounded by a dozen small headstones, including



Joseph Coveney

those of Coveney and his wife.

Coveney's headstone carries his famous initials: J.C.

The monument has numerous inscriptions on its four sides and these include FREE THOUGHT, FREE RELIGION, FREE SPEECH and FREE PRESS, with additional homilies engraved under each heading. An ardent admirer of Robert Ingersoll and Thomas Paine, Coveney included Paine's words: "The world is my country. To do good my religion." Also an apt warning to posterity is recorded: "A word to the wise. God in the constitution is the end of liberty. Beware how you unite Church and State."

Other inscriptions are quite diverse (and hard to read, due to weathering and vandalism): "The Christian religion begins with a dream and ends with a murder." "All Christian denominations preach damnation to the others." "Remember Mary Dyer hanging on the big elm on the Boston Commons a victim to Christian superstition." Mary Dyer was a Quaker publicly hanged on Boston Commons on June 1, 1660, for the double "crime" of preaching the Quaker creed on the Commons and of failing to leave Boston when



Coveney's Monument to Freethought

ordered to do so.

One inscription on the north side of the monument, the FREE RELIGION side, remains very clear: "Nature is the true god, Science the true religion."

Coveney's Monument to Freethought has withstood a certain amount of assault and battery. While little contemporary criticism appeared in local papers, probably due to the prestige of Coveney and the relative popularity of freethought at that time, a Chicago paper, the *Daily Times*, denounced Coveney, and the Niles paper engaged in occasional editorial sniping. Vandalism followed. Reportedly, some "small ornamental devils perched on the four corners" were destroyed along with the spire on top. And the monument was bathed in tobacco juice. Wrote Coveney, according to an early history book of the area: "I was reared in a Catholic country but it remained for a Protestant Christian to try to refuse me the right to maintain this monument in a public cemetery. I had inscribed thereon some of my sentiments on the religious fallacies of the day. These inscriptions, not coinciding with the views of the orthodox element, a minister's son, urged on by Christian hate, marred and defaced the monument in a barbarous manner. His act received the commendation of some of the strictly orthodox, though it is but fair to say that all of the most prominent citizens of Buchanan condemned the act and used every effort to prevent its repetition."

Testaments abound to the genial temperament, the character and generosity of Coveney. Wrote contemporary local historian Franklin Ellis in 1880, "He is esteemed as a shrewd businessman, a good practical farmer, an intelligent citizen and is respected by his neighbors."

Another noted that he did seem to possess "a mischievous drift toward plaguing the pious." The irrepressible Coveney kept a team of horses named Jesus and Christ, and at one time, the *Niles Daily Star* reported, "had three horses, two black and one white, which he named after the deity."

Robert G. Ingersoll

Freethought flowered in the United States in the latter half of the 19th century, and its best known advocate was Robert Green Ingersoll, a lawyer and Civil War officer, who travelled the continent for 30 years, speaking to capacity audiences. Although his repertoire included lectures on Shakespeare, Voltaire and Burns, the largest crowds turned out to hear him denounce the bible and religion.

He was immensely popular, and his speaking fees ranged as high as $7,000 in an era of low wages and no income tax. He once attracted 50,000 people to a lecture in Chicago — 40,000 too many for the Exposition Center.

Ingersoll was the son of an impoverished itinerant pastor, and the church of his childhood was bleak indeed. Sunday was an ordeal beginning on Saturday night. "When the sun fell below the horizon," Ingersoll said in later years, "there was a darkness fell upon the house ten thousand times deeper than that of night. Nobody said a pleasant word; nobody laughed; nobody smiled; the child who looked the sickest was regarded as the most pious. That night you could not even crack hickory nuts."

There were no stoves in the churches of his childhood. "It was thought to be a kind of sin," he said, "to be comfortable while you were thanking God." He recalled: "We sat in a row with our feet coming in about six inches of the floor. The minister asked us if we knew that we all deserved to go to hell, and we all answered 'yes.' Then we were asked if we would be willing to go to hell if it was God's will, and every little liar shouted 'Yes!' "

Ingersoll was not interested in genealogy. He wrote, "I know little about my ancestors — not much more than they do about me." But his wife's family was known and renowned for their unorthodox religious views. Eva Parker Ingersoll was a rationalist and a strong



Robert G. Ingersoll

influence on her husband's freethought evolvement. Her own parents were fans of Voltaire and Paine and her grandmother, Sarah Buckman Parker, who is described as "a woman of vigorous intellect," was an atheist.

Eva Parker Ingersoll was also an excellent cook, and when Ingersoll travelled from Peoria to small communities to argue cases in the early years of their marriage, he missed the comforts of home. He complained of the poor food and dreary lodgings in his letters, once noting, "Life is too short to be wasted in this way. A good dinner lost is gone forever!"

Although Ingersoll's lectures were long, two or more hours, and flowery, in the fashion of the day, his letters contain some one-liners and trenchant comment.

"All religions are inconsistent with mental freedom."

"Shakespeare is my bible, Burns my hymn-book."

"I do not borrow ideas. I have a factory of my own."

"I do not believe in putting out the sun to keep weeds from growing."

"There is a great difference between fear and prudence."

About his portly self, swimming: "A stack of hay struggling with the waves."

Re heaven: "One world at a time."

The biblical concept of people: "Eternal kindling wood."

To a friend: "You can have confidence in my prescription. I am not a doctor — never killed people for a living."

Of William Jennings Bryan: "He talks, but he does not think."

Some of Ingersoll's "yarns" were about the ministry, and he liked to tell the story of an old deacon who wanted to get rid of a not-too-popular preacher. When the deacon suggested that the preacher quit the ministry in favor of a more lucrative career (this was in pre-Falwellian times, folks) the preacher replied that he could not conscientiously leave the ministry as he had had the 'call.' Replied the deacon, "That may be so, but when God called you to preach, he forgot to call anybody to hear you."

As Ingersoll became famous there were lots of conversion attempts on the part of Christians. One woman sent him scriptural quotations from a newspaper but neglected to cut off an advertisement at the bottom of the page which read, "Drink Bill's Brand of Rock and Rye, warranted pure, only 50¢ a pint." An amused Ingersoll wrote the woman and rebuked her for leading him to drink.

Rumors about the Ingersolls abounded, and one rumor had it that Ingersoll's son was a drunkard and that more than once in the presence of guests he had to be carried away from the table. To which Ingersoll replied, "It is not true that intoxicating beverages are served at my table. It is not true that my son ever was drunk. It is not true that he had to be carried away from the table. Besides, I have no son."

Ingersoll was a devoted husband and father, and his letters to his family are filled with love. When his daughter Eva married, she cut short her wedding trip because she was so homesick, and the family had an agreement that they would spend six months of the year liv-



Ingersoll with grandchildren Eva and Robert in 1898, a year before his death

ing at Eva's mansion on the Hudson River and six months at the Ingersoll home in New York. Under the Ingersolls' hospitable roof lived an extended family. Besides their daughters, Eva and Maud, were Ingersoll's mother-in-law, and his wife's sister and her husband, the Clint Farrells, and their child.

The Ingersoll "At Homes" were famous, both in Washington, D.C, and in New York. Good food, good music and good company abounded, and the famous flocked to his door. He was the personal friend of three presidents. (Can you imagine someone whose fame was based on attacking religion and the bible getting a foot in the door of the White House of our day?)

Ingersoll's family was most concerned about his physical welfare, especially his weight, which was about 220 pounds. One day in

April of 1883 a friend, Col. E.J. Sherman, a state representative from Massachusetts, visited the Ingersoll home and earnestly recommended that Ingersoll take a long walk every day. Ingersoll later wrote to Sherman:

"After you went away, the family commenced. No man ever received an equal amount of advice in an equal time.

'You must walk, Colonel Sherman says that you are liable to fall dead for want of exercise. Do you hear? You must WALK!'

'Yes,' said Grandmother. 'The apoplexy is lurking in your blood.'

'You are liable to be paralyzed,' said my wife.

'Or die in your sleep,' said Mrs. Farrell.

'Or after you wake up,' chimed in the baby.

'You must walk,' said Eva.

'You ought to run,' added Maud.

'And never sit down again as long as you live,' shouted Clint."

The freethought journal of the time, *The Truth Seeker,* printed a story of Colonel Ingersoll and the hurricane at Virginia Beach. "A story has been told to indicate Colonel Ingersoll's lack of fear. The scene is laid at Virginia Beach, Virginia, when a storm came up. The hotel where Ingersoll was staying was rocking in the hurricane, and the other guests had gathered in the lobby, after midnight. Some were praying audibly. While the terror of the guests was at its greatest, Ingersoll came down. 'Are you going to pray?' asked a frightened woman. 'No,' replied the Agnostic, 'I came down to see if breakfast was ready.' "

Ingersoll was diligent about answering correspondence, even from the devout, and his daughters made copies of many of his answers. To a committee of males at the blown-away Baptist Church in De Leon, Texas, Ingersoll wrote the following:

"Gentlemen:

I hardly know why you saw fit to send 'An Appeal' to me, to help rebuild the Baptist Church of De Leon. It seems, from your appeal, that you had a church — that it had been dedicated to 'the Lord God of Israel,' as you call

him, but that afterwards this same Lord God of Israel 'tossed your church to the ground,' leaving you without any place of worship.

I feel like acquiescing in what the Lord has done. He knows, better than I, whether he wants a Baptist Church; and, in my judgment he has given what might at least be called 'an intimation,' that a Baptist Church, in that particular locality, was not pleasing in his sight. Why should the 'Lord God of Israel' destroy his own property? He is said to hold the winds 'in his fists.' Why did he open his hand at De Leon? Is it possible that the 'Lord God of Israel' destroys that which he wishes to see rebuilt? Maybe he is simply trying your faith. If so, you should not apply to others. You should furnish the evidence yourselves.

My position is this: If the 'Lord God of Israel' wants a Baptist Church at De Leon, let him change the wind, and blow the old one back.

Yours truly,



R.G. Ingersoll"

Should We Grieve for Gary Gilmore?

It is hardly surprising that the state that broke the 10-year moratorium on state-killings in our country was Utah, where some of the nastiest church-state entanglement goes on at every level of government. The bloodthirsty Christians are back at it, and we can expect to see more state murders via the electric chair, gas, hanging, or rifle squad. In Texas, the good Christians can hardly wait; they are even planning to televise the proceedings.

Capital punishment, that is, murder by the state, cannot be defended. If your laws say that murder is a crime, and the laws of all countries do, and if premeditated murder is regarded as the most heinous crime, as it universally is, then what happens to logic when state-killings take place? What could be more premeditated than tying a man to a chair, putting a hood over his head, and having four skilled, hired marksmen shoot him? What must the civilized world think of us?

About 70 countries in the world now shun capital punishment. England, which once listed 300 crimes for which persons could be sent to the gallows, and where there are records of children being hanged for stealing food, abolished the death penalty in the 1960s. And we were on the verge. But the United States is in a religious pendulum swing, the fundamentalist religions are coming on strong, and blood-vengeance is again in vogue. The less religious Warren court has been replaced by the more religious Berger court, and the change does not bode well for the advancement of humanity.

My state, Wisconsin, was one of the first in the nation to ban state-killings. A legislator and newspaper editor, Latham Sholes, of Kenosha, introduced a bill in 1853 to outlaw capital punishment

that won by a comfortable margin. Only three or four persons had been put to death by the territory or state of Wisconsin prior to 1853. Yet Wisconsin is a relatively safe, secure state. Our law officers statistically stand less chance of being slain than those in states with long histories of capital punishment. Wisconsin residents are in less danger of being murdered than, for instance, Texas residents. Violence does beget violence, and state killings set an example of violence.

Gary Gilmore is not the easiest victim to grieve for. He killed two persons without cause, but, nonetheless, society could easily have been protected from him through his confinement. He may have chosen to commit suicide, but at least, he would not have been murdered by the state. One of the most ludicrous aspects of the whole sorry spectacle of the Gilmore case was the meticulous effort to prevent Gilmore from dying as a suicide. The state used heroic measures to save him so *they* could kill him! That is blood-vengeance straight out of the bible.

Do not underestimate the role of religion in all this. At every state legislative hearing on capital punishment, the religious proponents of state-killings are there, quoting scripture. When 38 percent of the citizens of our country believe that the bible is literally true, word for word (and Gallup says they do), then we should hardly be surprised at the popularity of capital punishment.

One wonders that the consciences of the religionists are not at least nudged by the unfairness of the selection of those who sit on Death Row. Are they not disturbed that in our country, where about 11 percent of the population is black, that blacks constitute over half of the population of those murdered by the state? Are they not concerned that victims of capital punishment almost always are poor? Is their smug religiosity so blinding that they cannot acknowledge that race and poverty dictate who shall live and who the state shall put to death? The rich can get good legal advice; the poor can get an overworked public defender who frequently is inadequately trained.

Law professor Charles T. Black once speculated on what he would expect in legal defense if he had killed someone in self-defense.

"If I were charged with murder," he wrote, "and if my defense, which I myself knew to be true, were that the deceased had threat-

ened to kill me with a knife, I would want a thorough professional investigation conducted into the habits of the deceased with respect to carrying and threatening to use knives. I would want my own people looking into the question of whether a knife had been found in the vicinity, and into whatever traces might exist — such as, say, the story of a hardware store clerk — that connected that knife with the deceased. I would want to find out as much as I could about his prior record of arrests for violent crimes, of psychiatric confinement, and so on. I would want to have located and interviewed all possible witnesses to his demeanor and words just prior to our private meeting. *Above all, I would want a lawyer — not an overworked 'public defender,' not an 'assigned counsel,' but the best criminal lawyer in town,* to advise me and to work with the detective agency employed by me, toward providing everything we needed for the best possible defense case. Are not these the very minimum requirements of prudence?"

Prudence, Professor Black goes on to say, costs money — lots of money.

"I think I could just barely raise enough money for something like a fairly adequate defense — though this would utterly ruin me, because adequate investigation and good legal counsel come very, very high. But it is all completely out of the reach of the poor. The poor man, unless some public interest organization happens to see an important issue in his case, can no more afford a really adequate defense than he could afford a year's cruise around the world on a luxury liner."

Capital punishment is a primitive idea, rooted in revenge. It does not deter crime. Appallingly, innocent persons wrongly convicted of murder, have been hanged or electrocuted or shot by the state, their innocence discovered or established after their execution, or even known at the time. The most famous man to be put to death by the state of Utah, excepting Gary Gilmore, was Joe Hill, the legendary organizer for the Wobblies, whose arrest took place during an especially bitter labor strike, and who was taken in on a trumped-up charge of murder. Following his trial, a charade, he was executed, and left behind the wish that his body be cremated and his ashes spread throughout the country, save for Utah. "I wouldn't be caught dead in Utah," Joe Hill explained.

Yet despite the role of race, poverty and caprice, defenders of state-killings accuse opponents of sentimentality.

"Sentimentality," writes Sidney Hook, a philosophy professor whose writings frequently appear in collections on capital punishment, "is found in Clarence Darrow's speeches and writings on this subject. Darrow was an attractive and likeable human being but a very confused thinker. He argued against capital punishment on the ground that the murderer was always a victim of heredity and environment, and therefore it was unjust to execute him."

Hook adds, "Nor am I impressed with the argument against capital punishment on the ground of its inhumanity." Naturally.

J. Edgar Hoover regularly wrote strong statements in favor of the death penalty, which are liberally sprinkled with references to the bible.

"There are many passages in the Old Testament which refer to capital punishment being necessary to enforce the laws of society. Since the Old Testament was written to individuals and to a nonpolitical body known as the Church, there is a difference in emphasis and approach. Certainly, however, the moral laws of the Old Testament remain with us today. Misguided do-gooders frequently quote the Sixth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' to prove that capital punishment is wrong. This Commandment in the twentieth chapter, verse 13, of Exodus has also been interpreted to mean: 'Thou shalt do no murder.' Then the twenty-first chapter, verse 12 says, 'He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.' We can no more change the application to our society of this basic moral law in the Old Testament than we can change the meaning of Leviticus 19:18: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' which Jesus quoted in the New Testament. To love thy neighbor is to protect him; capital punishment acts as at least one wall to afford God's children protection."

So, the director of the FBI in this country, with its principle of separation of church and state, relied on the bible for his interpretation of the justice of capital punishment in his official writings.

Christians will make sure that the blood flows.

And what of Gary Gilmore, whose bizarre, macabre, off-again, on-again execution captured news headlines and demanded our attention for months? If he wanted to die, he should have been allowed to die by his own hand, but the state should never have been allowed to kill him. The legal precedent set by Gilmore's murder by the state applies to others who, unlike Gilmore, do not wish to die.

The capriciousness of application of the death penalty is apparent in other recent murders in Provo, Utah, the city where Gilmore shot his two victims. A local farmer allegedly killed his mentally defective child by stomping it to death, and a young Mormon, who impregnated a girl and was then compelled by his family to marry her, stabbed her 18 times, then cut her open and stabbed the fetus an additional eight times. These murders were far more vicious than the Gilmore murders, yet neither defendant is on Utah's Death Row. The death penalty has always been capriciously applied.

Will we ever be free from the horror of capital punishment? Not until we are free from religion. It is apparently impossible for most bible-fed children to grow up and ever understand that punishment is not good in and of itself. Bible-toters never ask "Why?" They don't need to. The answers, for them, are all there, in that dark and bloody book.

Gary Gilmore, who was shot by a firing squad in 1977, was the first person put to death for murder in the United States since 1967, ending an unofficial moratorium on state executions.

"Tell Jake to Sleep on the Roof"

A slight, red-haired young woman, Margaret Sanger cared for patients in the swarming tenements of the lower east side of New York City in the summer of 1912. In her area of work one block alone held 3,000 persons, 450 of them babies.

Most of her cases were confinements for pregnancy, and she dealt daily with women who had five, six and seven children already crowded into tiny apartments, where a new baby pulled the family ever deeper into the hopeless morass of poverty.

Repeatedly she was seeing the degradation of motherhood, of sex servitude. She was nursing women, frail and wasted, fearful of another pregnancy, yet unable to prevent it.

Back-street abortionists flourished in the area and going home at night Margaret Sanger often passed long lines of women waiting in front of the abortion "offices." Several times she counted over 100 women waiting.

One day she was called to a dingy tenement on Grand Street to attend a Mrs. Sadie Sachs, a victim of bungled abortion. Her husband, Jake, a truck driver, had come home to find his wife unconscious on the floor, their three children crying helplessly. A doctor confirmed that septicemia had set in, and he and Margaret Sanger struggled for two weeks to save Mrs. Sachs' life.

Present when the doctor came for his final examination of Mrs. Sachs and to pronounce her out of danger, Margaret Sanger heard her patient ask him, "What can I do to prevent another baby?" Said the doctor, "Young woman, there's only one way. Tell Jake to sleep on the roof!"

Later that year Margaret Sanger was summoned again to the Sachs tenement, only this time she and the doctor were too late. Mrs. Sachs, pregnant again, had attempted self-abortion and died.



Margaret Sanger

That night Margaret Sanger reached a turning point in her life and put aside her nurse's uniform forever.

"I was now finished with superficial cures," she wrote, "with doctors and nurses and social workers who were brought face to face with this overwhelming truth of women's needs and yet turned to pass on the other side. They must be made to see the facts. I resolved that women should have a knowledge of contraception. They have every right to know about their own bodies. I would strike out; I would scream from the housetops. I would tell the world what was going on in the lives of these poor women. I would be heard. No matter what it should cost, I would be heard."

The cost was great, but she was heard. Abused, persecuted, shunned by former friends, in exile, jailed nine times, Margaret Sanger finally saw birth control (she coined the phrase) legally, socially, and medically accepted. Her pamphlet, "Family Limitations," which sent her into exile in Europe because it spelled

out specific birth control techniques, eventually was printed in 13 languages. Her newspaper, "The Woman Rebel," was the harbinger of a new and wholesome concept of sex for women, free from prudery and restraint, presaging the emancipation of women from sexual servitude and mandatory motherhood.

There were many low points — her lonely flight to England to avoid arrest, the death of her much-beloved, only daughter Peggy, the raids on her birth control clinic, the hunger strike and near-death of her sister, Ethel, who was imprisoned for disseminating birth control information, her own arrests and a 30-day incarceration in Queens County Penitentiary.

Her crusade for birth control was a focal point for official Catholic harassment. As late as 1921, when she organized the First American Conference on Birth Control held in New York, its final rally was obstructed, with the Town Hall closed by order of Archbishop Patrick J. Hayes.

Wrote Margaret Sanger:

> "It was one thing to have halls closed by a mistaken or misguided, ignorant police captain, but a very different thing to have a high dignitary of the Roman Catholic Church order me to stop talking. I knew the law of the city; I knew the rights of citizens guaranteed under the Constitution. I had been taught by my teachers in American history that the church and state were separate and apart; that we as citizens were guaranteed from interference by powerful church influence. At the thought of this official impertinence, this bullying, this arrogant dictatorship, this insolence of a Roman Catholic Archbishop, my resistance, my resolution became set. I would not close that meeting unless I was forced by arrest to do so. I knew our rights were being violated . . . Unless I stood my ground and got arrested, I could not take the case into the courts."

Naturally, Margaret Sanger stood her ground. Confusion followed as she was silenced by two policemen and other women took the podium and attempted to speak. There were cheers and bravos for the women, boos, hisses and catcalls for the policemen who silenced them. Finally, Margaret Sanger and Mary Winsor, a daunt-

less suffragist, were arrested. With policemen holding their arms, they were led from the building and marched through the streets to the stationhouse, followed by a large crowd. Reserves had been called out to deal with the "mob."

The case was dismissed the next morning, but Archbishop Hayes inadvertently had assured the birth control movement the best publicity possible. His aide, a Monsignor Dineen, helped the cause still further with a statement to the *New York Times* (Nov. 15, 1921).

> "The Archbishop is delighted and pleased at the action of the police, as am I, because it was no meeting to be held publicly and without restrictions. I need not tell you what the attitude of the Catholic Church is toward so-called birth control. What particularly aroused me, when I entered the hall, was the presence there of four children. I think any one will admit that a meeting of that character is no place for growing children. Decent and clean-minded people would not discuss a subject such as birth control in public before children, or at all. The police had been informed in advance of the meeting. They were told that this subject — this plan which attacks the very foundations of human society — was again being dragged before the public in a public hall. The presence of these four children at least was a reason for police action."

The four children, as it turned out, happened to be four mature Barnard College students with bobbed hair. Short hair was very daring for young women in 1921, and to the elderly Catholic clerics, short hair could only be found on youngsters.

The action of Archbishop Hayes brought a firestorm of protest with critical editorials in all the east coast's leading daily papers. People who had never heard of birth control heard of it after the Catholic blunder. The idea was dramatized, advertised, and given column after column of favorable publicity.

Margaret Sanger travelled far with her message — Japan, China, India — and made dozens of trips across the Atlantic. She lived to see birth control clinics around the world.

Eventually, the honors poured in, among them a beautiful tribute from her close friend, British author H.G. Wells. How appropri-

ate if there were a statue of Margaret Sanger in our nation's capital with his words inscribed:

> "Alexander the Great changed a few boundaries and killed a few men. Both he and Napoleon were forced into fame by circumstances outside of themselves and by currents of the time. But Margaret Sanger made currents and circumstances. When the history of our civilization is written, it will be a biological history and Margaret Sanger will be its heroine."

Shrill! Abrasive! Acerbic! Inflammatory!

It is axiomatic that a feminist who speaks out publicly on controversial issues automatically is described with one or more of these adjectives: she is shrill, strident, abrasive, acerbic, inflammatory, vitriolic, radical, volatile, emotional, hysterical and militant.

A man who promotes unpopular causes, of course, may be thought of as somewhat misguided, but the adjectives trotted out to describe him are complimentary — he is aggressive, he is straightforward, he is direct, he even "tells it like it is."

This double standard is not only annoying to women attempting to bring about social change, it has affected adversely the entire women's movement. When activist women are repeatedly put down, ridiculed or trashed, other feminists are discouraged from activism.

As a proponent of the related causes of freethought and women's rights, especially the right to choose abortion, I have been described repeatedly in the press as "shrill." Never mind that my voice is so small that I am forever being told to "speak up." Because I am a feminist and my commitments are not popular ones, I am "strident."

My personal stage debut came about when I was newly five years old. I had started first grade at age four (country schools weren't fussy about such things back in the '30s) and because I memorized easily I was given an impressively long "piece" to speak in the annual holiday program. I knew it backwards and forwards, but when my older classmates pulled the curtains open and I saw all those strange faces staring at me, I couldn't say a word.

After an agonizing minute or two the curtain-pullers mercifully obscured me from public view. A shadow of that terror I felt is still

with me, and it is a fact that I am not happy to be in front of an audience — stage, screen or radio. Therefore I give short speeches, brief responses, and pretty much speak when I am spoken to. The only reason I'm in public view at all is because my causes have been most unpopular, and the things that needed to be said no one else was saying.

Yet, predictably, because I am a woman, and the causes that I promote are perceived by some as threatening, I am labelled "abrasive" and "inflammatory."

"Ladies" sometimes join sexist males in putting down feminists.

Edith Rein is a name most of you won't recognize. If you live in Wisconsin, you should — she was a very early and effective abortion rights activist from Milwaukee, referring many desperate women for abortions in the 1960s when it was not only an unpopular thing to do, but a dangerous thing to do.

I had heard about Edie and asked a mutual acquaintance, the lady-like conservative wife of an ultraconservative physician, what she was like. The response was, "Oh, she's wild!"

When I finally met Edie I was braced for a fire-breathing dragon. What I found was the gentlest, most mild-mannered, thoughtful person you could hope to know. Edie was a woman whose cause was not socially acceptable — therefore she was "wild."

In my work for freethought and feminism I have been interviewed by many press people. Invariably I hear, "But you're so quiet. You're so soft-spoken."

Or, tactfully, "I was expecting someone much different."

And, in the memorable case of a wire service reporter, "My boss (male) told me to 'go out and interview that nut.' "

My introduction to the double standard for outspoken men versus outspoken women came about during one of the first talk shows I did in Madison in 1970 on the abortion issue.

My host was a radio personality who has long since gone on to grace TV in another city. It was obvious from the first that he was unhappy with my pro-abortion, anti-religion philosophy and responses which, at that point, were tentatively if not timidly expressed. Midway through the program I got my talk-show-sexism initiation as he demanded out of the blue: "Why are you being so abrasive?"

Incidentally, his very presence on TV today is illustrative of the



The author (center) on the Phil Donahue show

double standard. He is one of the most physically unattractive men I have ever met; a woman with looks in that league would not be allowed in front of a TV camera at all, much less be paid to be there.

The culmination in sexist treatment for me by a media male was my contact with Phil Donahue, of talk show notoriety, who may be trying to be a feminist but surely has a long way to go. I was not a particular Donahue fan, but I respected his showmanship and his willingness to air controversial topics. I appreciated, too, the program's spontaneity — there is almost none of that left on television, which has programmed itself down to the second.

I had not asked to be a guest on the Donahue show. They had heard about me somewhere, and my invitation originated with them. I had been asked to send some information about myself, which I did — a one-page bio sheet with my book, *Abortion Is a Blessing,* prominently mentioned. When I got to the studio I told Donahue's assistant, to whom I had sent my bio data, that I had brought my book.

"Oh," she said. "I didn't know you had a book. Let's have it."

There followed what can only be described as a pregnant pause.

"Oh," she said again. "I don't think Phil will want to show this."

Indeed Phil didn't. He came trotting in, obviously disturbed, and said he could never show my book — it was "tasteless" and would "create a shock wave across America." Nervous about the program, I felt my confidence ebbing as Phil elaborated on his anti-my-book views. It was very apparent to me and my husband, Paul, that he was unhappy with his guest. I was then informed the first few minutes of the show were terribly important — that was when people decided whether to stay tuned, and that I (a nonactress, who had just been rather pointedly criticized) must exhibit "enthusiasm."

Phil then turned to my husband and asked, "How would you like to be on the show?" Nonplussed (it was his very first TV invitation), my husband referred the question to me.

"I am a feminist," I told Phil. "I would like to speak for myself." And that was the end of any possible "rapport." Phil looked grim, his face closed down, and we went on to the set. The cameras turned, and good old Phil left me sitting there on stage and spent most of that long hour in the audience.

The topic was religion and women's rights. I was able to make a few statements, expressing my opinion that the bible was a rather sexist book. At one point, Phil, tearing himself away from the born-agains, bore down on me asking out of the blue (you guessed it): "Why are you so vitriolic?"

During a commercial, when the program was almost over, I watched as a self-satisfied Phil came arrogantly down the aisle toward me and I thought, "You sexist! I am your invited guest and by every measure of courtesy you should be putting me at ease and giving me a chance to talk. But because my book offended your Catholic bias and because I do not meet your male standards of smiling effusiveness, you have tried to humiliate me."

This, I decided, was a game that two could play.

I had interrupted no one throughout the show, but the woman who phoned in next got short shrift. She was taking exception to my earlier statement that religion had too much power in the media.

"Let me tell you about the power of religion," I said (or words to that effect — I never saw the program). "I am probably the first person ever to appear on the Donahue show whose book could not be shown because of religious prejudice. Because I dared to write a

pro-abortion book with a positive title about abortion, my book may not be shown."

Phil turned several satisfying shades of red, and the argument was on.

"I have referred thousands of women for abortions," I finally got to say. "They have been as young as twelve and as old as 52. Many of them have had nine and ten children. Many have been ill. I know that abortion is a blessing. It is a blessing for women and a blessing for society."

From all reports, including his own, Phil got all kinds of personal flak from that program — viewers had a glimpse of the real Phil Donahue and I, inflammatory person that I am, got more than 1,000 letters, 3 out of 4 of them pro-me.

To those women who list the media as a major impediment to women's equality, I say, "You're absolutely right." There is a feminist reporter here and there who will be helpful, but the opinion shapers in this country are male for the most part and far more interested in football than in human rights.

The ERA would have whizzed through years ago had the media cared to document its seriousness. Instead, they chose to make a media star out of Phyllis Schlafly.

Had modern television and radio been around at the time of another social revolution, when the abolitionists were educating about freedom for black people, the chains of slavery would still be clanking. The merits of the issue of freedom would have been ignored as the networks interviewed the clergy about the sanctity of slavery and Simon Legree graced *Face The Nation* and *Meet The Press.*

Until feminists become the publishers, the editors, the station owners, the program directors and the hosts, we will have that insidious double standard and women's rights will continue to be in jeopardy.

Why Abortion?

The once forbidden subject of abortion has been debated furiously for well over a decade. Despite this airing of the topic and the historic decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 that abortion is a woman's private constitutional right, abortion remains an emotionally volatile issue, inspiring regular letters-to-the-editor, syndicate columns, TV fetus commercials and billboards, church pronouncements, political party platform debates, picketing of clinics and violence against them, legislative calls to arms, court challenges and some of the most intensive lobbying in the history of Congress.

Since the subject of abortion remains viable, durable and still controversial, it seems useful to present some positive words about it. The selection that follows is excerpted from my book, *Abortion is a Blessing* (1975). It was my testimony given at the abortion hearing of the Judiciary Committee, Wisconsin Assembly, May 25, 1971, pre-*Roe v. Wade.*

The Victims

What happens when an abortion clinic closes? When Dane County District Attorney Gerald Nichol ruthlessly closed Madison's Midwest Medical Center on April 19, 1971, he set into motion a chain of tragic events whose total effect may never be known. Lawmakers, so prone to investigate everything, could be investigating these tragedies, but they are not. At least they can listen; they can listen to what happened to one Wisconsin girl.

This girl had an appointment at the Midwest Medical Center the week it was closed. She and her boyfriend had read about the clinic in their local papers, and although they had only a little money they were able to arrange an appointment for a partial fee. When the

clinic was raided, they were all but paralyzed, because they had no knowledge of where else to turn. At first they procrastinated, then the boy made several calls to hospitals and doctors, but they were all abrupt with him. Those who talked to him at all talked about the high cost of a hospital abortion, the need for parental consent, the legal uncertainties. They suggested no other alternatives of places to go and the young couple's despair deepened.

The boy and girl had come to each other from backgrounds of parental rejection; the girl had run away from her home. They had both been hurt, they had been unhappy in their home life. In each other they seemed to find some measure of security and acceptance, of uncritical love, something they had never had.

Although the boy had no thought of abandoning the girl, she became terribly depressed. She could only think that each day she was getting farther and farther along into this unwanted pregnancy, and what a terrible burden she was becoming to the boy. He was the only one she had to cling to and she was afraid. So one night, without the boy's knowledge, she took a last desperate way out of her problem. She took a wire coat hanger and jabbed it into her uterus. Toward morning, when the pain became too much to bear, she told the boy what she had done and he went to get help for her.

Now because he was very young and frightened, he did not call the logical people to call in an emergency — a doctor or a hospital. You will remember they had rejected him before. He did not call the police because he actually feared he and his girl would be arrested. He phoned collect to a clergyman in a town a hundred miles away, who was the only person he felt he could trust, and this man put him in touch with a counselor in his own city.

The counselor came out and convinced the boy that his fears of legal retribution were overblown, and that the girl was in very serious condition. She helped him take her to a hospital.

But they were too late. The girl had punctured her uterus with the hanger, she had bled excessively, and she died in the hospital a few hours later.

Last night I talked to the counselor who was with the girl when she died, and she asked me to convey a message to you. Tell the legislators, she said, that it is a terrible thing to watch a young girl die, and to know that her death was unnecessary, a total waste. Tell them how terrible it is that anyone should have to lose her life because of

fear, because everyone who could help her was too intimidated by our unjust law to give her the help she needed. Let them know about this girl's family, who last saw her warm and alive and now will see her always as something dead, to be carried out and disposed of. Tell them about this boy who had to be physically restrained from destroying himself when he realized his girl was dying. Don't let them sit there and debate abortion, without knowing the tragedies that occur when abortion is not available. Let them know about this girl — one girl's death is one too many . . .

When the Midwest Medical Center was closed in April, 324 women had appointments there. Where did they all go? What could they do?

Many of them who could afford to go to New York City went to clinics and hospitals there. A handful were accepted in Wisconsin hospitals.

Five or six of them, without much money, wound up in an old house in Milwaukee where, they reported, a drunken pervert made sexual advances toward them before giving them botched abortions. At least two of these women were hospitalized in serious condition.

And what of the others? Consider one case, a Madison woman of twenty-three. The woman is not married, she never has been married. She already has three children, five, three, and one. She is enrolled in a program to help her to complete her schooling and learn a trade, so that she may become employable. This woman could barely afford Madison's clinic, even at an adjusted rate of $58. She could never afford to go to New York City. Now past the time when abortion is simple, safe, and relatively inexpensive, she will be quitting her training. She will have a fourth unwanted child that will have to be supported to maturity by others. And her last hope to be anything but a breeding machine may be gone forever.

And what about the Rock County woman, the married mother of eight children, who cries throughout conversations because she is so desperate about another unwanted pregnancy? She could afford the $50 the clinic had arranged to charge her — there is no one else in the country she could go to with her $50.

And what about the young Milwaukee woman, married, with three children, five, four, and three? Her husband is unemployed. She works — for $1.26 an hour in a burger joint. She is pregnant — she cannot afford to be pregnant — her family needs her income.

She is too late now for an outpatient abortion — what is she to do? What is her family to do? What is our society going to do when it cannot take care of the unwanted children already born?

Wisconsin women are going to have abortions. If they have enough money they are going to travel to states where it is available. If they do not, they are going to seek out the incompetent, unsafe abortions, or attempt to abort themselves.

This legislature cannot stop the tide of abortion reform or the acceptance by women of abortion. You can only succeed in making it dangerous or inconvenient or expensive for them. In the cases where you are able to make it impossible to get, you will be adding the burden, both social and financial, of unwanted children to our state.

Women are going to be free. They are going to determine their reproductive lives as they wish; this is the essence of dignity and personal freedom. No one can know better than a woman herself whether it is best for her to bear a child. In a world that cannot possibly take care of the children it already has, what folly to force unwilling women to bear unwanted children.

Abortion is going to be legalized in Wisconsin. It is not a question of *if*, it is a question of *when*. Humane men and women will work to legalize it now, so that women's suffering and death may be avoided.

Slavery: "A Trust from God"

Abolitionist Theodore Parker once remarked that if the whole American Church had "dropped through the continent and disappeared altogether, the anti-slavery cause would have been further on."

When William Lloyd Garrison delivered his first anti-slavery lecture in Boston, church halls were closed to him, and he was obliged to accept the use of the small and unprestigious Julian Hall from Abner Kneeland, a noted "infidel," who once had been prosecuted and imprisoned for blasphemy.

Mid-1800s estimates reported 80,000 slaves owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists and 250,000 by Methodists. Anglicans probably owned most of the rest of the nearly 4 million blacks held in serfdom in the United States at the outbreak of the Civil War.*

That bloody Civil War was fought, in part, because of the bible and the church. Although there were denominations that spoke out against slavery, with the exception of the Unitarians and the Quakers they were Johnny-come-latelies; freethinkers again led the fight against this fundamental wrong.

Clergy could turn to their God and their bible for justification of slaveholding, and they did.

This is Benjamin Morgan speaking, clergyperson of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, whose sermon, given near the outbreak of the war, survives.

"(Our) duty is plain of conserving and transmitting the system of slavery, with the freest scope for its natural development and

* Speaking of that war, a charming anecdote is told by Foundation member David Cobb's wife, Jeanne. When she was a little girl in Mississippi she heard so many stories of silver being buried to hide it from the Yankee marauders that she was of school-age before she realized that the War between the States was the Civil War, not the *Silver War.*

extension. Let us, my brethren, look our duty in the face. With this institution assigned to our keeping, what reply shall we make to those who say that its days are numbered? My own conviction is, that we should at once lift ourselves, intelligently, and proclaim to all the world that we hold this trust from God."

Anti-slavery societies had existed in the United States for a quarter of a century before the Civil War, and it is apparent from Rev. Palmer's remarks that he had felt the sting of their rebuke. Nevertheless, the rationalization went on.

"The argument which enforces the solemnity of this providential trust," he said, "is simple and condensed. It is bound upon us, then, by the principle of self-preservation, that 'first law' which is continually asserting its supremacy over others.

"Need I pause to show how this system of servitude underlies and supports our material interests? That our wealth consists in our lands, and in the serfs who till them? That from the nature of our products they can only be cultivated by labor which must be controlled in order to be certain? That any other than a tropical race must faint and wither beneath a tropical sun?

"Need I pause to show how this system is interwoven with our entire social fabric? That these slaves form parts of our households, even as our children; and that, too, through a relationship recognized and sanctioned in the scriptures of God. . . ."

Rev. Palmer had harsh words for abolitionists.

"The worst foes of the black race are those who have intermeddled on their behalf," he said.

The condescension reserved today for women seeking equality was turned on full-force by clergy in their justification of the slavery system.

"We know better than others that every attribute of their (the blacks) character fits them for dependence and servitude. By nature, the most affectionate and loyal of all races beneath the sun, they are also the most helpless; and no calamity can befall them greater than the loss of that protection they enjoy under this patriarchal system. . . . Freedom would be their doom; and equally from both they call upon us, their providential guardians, to be protected.

"I know this argument will be scoffed abroad as the hypocritical cover thrown over our own cupidity and selfishness; but every Southern master knows its truth and feels its power. My servant,

whether born in my house or bought within my memory, stands to me in the relation of a child. Though providentially owing me service, which, providentially I am bound to exact, he is, nevertheless my brother and my friend; and I am to him a guardian and a father.

"He leans upon me for protection, for counsel and for blessing; and so long as the relation continues, no power, but the power of almighty God, shall come between him and me."

Rev. Palmer knew exactly who was on his side and who the enemy of slavery really was.

"In this great struggle," he said, "we defend the cause of God and religion. The Abolitionist spirit is undeniably atheistic. The demon which erected its throne upon the guillotine in the days of Robespierre and Marat, which abolished the Sabbath, and worshipped reason in the person of a harlot, yet survives to work other horrors, of which those of the French revolution are but the type.

"Among a people so generally religious as the American, a disguise must be worn; but it is the same old threadbare disguise of the advocacy of human rights. . . .

"This spirit of atheism, which knows no God who tolerates evil, no Bible which sanctions law, and no conscience that can be found by oaths and covenants, has selected us for its victims, and slavery for its issue.

"It is time to reproduce the obsolete idea that Providence must govern man, and not that man should control Providence. In the imperfect state of human society, it pleases God to allow evils which check others that are greater.

"To the South the highest position is assigned, of defending, before all nations, the cause of all religion and of all truth."

The Rev. James Henley Thornwell, speaking in Charleston, South Carolina, on "The Rights and Duties of Masters," echoed the cry that atheists were at fault.

"The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders — they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, jacobins, on the one side, and the friend of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battle ground — Christianity and Atheism the combatants; and the progress of humanity at stake."

It is "impossible to deny that slavery is sanctioned by Christ and his Apostles," the Rev. Thornwell reiterates.

The Apostle Paul, he goes on to say, "considered slavery as a social and political economy, in which relations subsisted betwixt moral, intelligent, responsible beings, involving reciprocal rights and reciprocal obligations. There was a right to command on the one hand — an obligation to obey on the other."

Obviously, Parker and Thornwell knew their bible.

Rules for slavery appear in the Mosaic Law. Among the more familiar passages is this excerpt from Exodus 21.

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out by himself.

And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free:

Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.

The chapter goes on to allow a father to sell his daughter; another verse refers to the slave as his owner's "money."

According to Genesis 9, God first ordained slavery because of the behavior of Noah's son Ham, who committed the apparently unpardonable sin of observing his drunken father's nakedness. God punishes Ham, with typical biblical justice, by condemning Ham's son Canaan to be "a servant of servants."

The New Testament doesn't help matters any; Jesus left the laws of slavery exactly as he found them.

In I Timothy, Paul tells slaves to honor their owners.

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." (I Tim 6:1)

In Ephesians (6:5) servants are to be obedient "with fear and trembling."

Titus (2:9) says that they must obey and please their owners "in all things."

Again in 1 Peter (2:18), "Servants, be subject to your masters

with all fear."

Paul sends the slave Onesimus back to a servitude from which he had fled. (See Epistle of Paul to Philemon)

As for Jesus, his terrible parables (as author Ruth Green called them) are filled with references to slaves and masters, none of which denigrates slavery in any way.

The Civil War is more than a century behind us, but it does behoove freethinkers to be aware of just whose book upheld slavery, in the same way it still upholds and fosters so many evils.

Blacks as well as women and homosexuals, who say they "love" the bible, truly revere the chains that bind them.

Free From Religion

In that remote and quiet time that was America Before Television, it was possible to grow up almost oblivious of religion. I know — I did.

As a country child in Wisconsin in the 1930s, I found religion a vague institution that really didn't touch me. Most of our neighbors were part of that majority in this country: the unchurched. Few relatives or friends were religious; prayers before meals were an oddity. If there were evangelists on the radio, I never heard them. Certainly they did not have the ubiquitous obtrusiveness of today, when we are unable to check out what's on television without encountering some unscrupulous mercenary asking for cash "for the Lord."

My freethinking father never went to church or suggested that his children should. I never heard him use the word god in a serious, pious, or profane way. He ignored religion except for gentle jokes over some occasional religious excess that got reported in the daily newspaper.

There were two Jesus pictures among those hanging in our house; they had been donated by a housekeeper along with a bible after my mother's death. A favorite family joke involved one of the pictures and the neighborhood tad who insisted it was a portrait of my father!

When I began school, in the 1930s, schools were very poor, and there were not many books available. Our "library" was not a room, or even an alcove. It was an old oak bookcase whose glass doors had been broken years before. It held only a few dozen books for the children in our eight grades, and a hungry, growing reader like myself went through them in no time. Soon, I was reading the adult books at home, including some memorably bad turn-of-the-century novels. Occasionally, in desperation, I even tried my father's agricultural

journals. One book available to me, which I attempted to study with a high degree of earnestness, was that bible. But, far from impressing or comforting me, these forays into its bloody depths frightened and dismayed me. In time I came to share the view prevailing in my world that it was a book of myths and legends, not to be taken seriously. But it was a special childhood cross to bear to be so eager for something to read while there sat that bible — forbiddingly, uniquely unreadable.

Appropriately enough, there was little attention to religion in school. Catholics had brought suit in the Wisconsin State Supreme Court in 1890 because a public school had instituted devotional bible-reading, and the bible chosen was the King James version, not the Douay. This suit brought a ringing opinion by the court that devotions and devotional bible-reading violated the separation of church and state. In its no-nonsense opinion the court concluded: "There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. . . . Those who made our Constitution saw this, and used the most apt and comprehensive language in it to prevent such a catastrophe" (*Weiss v. District Board,* 1890).

So we never prayed in school; neither did Ronald Reagan, at least not organized prayers. To be sure, a common distortion employed by prayer-people is to suggest that in past decades little children dutifully prayed in the public schools every day. Blithely, they then blame all sorts of social ills on the cessation of school prayer, when in many states such prayer was nonexistent.

Looking back, I regard it as a wonderful plus that I could grow up relatively free from religion: I had little to unlearn. All around me I began to see how religion hampered intellect and freedom, how it devastated lives. I thought of the wasted hours of those who tried to rationalize the hocus-pocus into reality. It was as though they were attempting to prove the existence of Jack and the Beanstalk or Wisconsin's own Paul Bunyan.

Morality, I realized, is learned not through dogma but by example, thought, and observation; and it is practiced not with blind obedience but by good will. It was very dangerous, I could see, to extract your morality from religion — especially from the bible, with its obscene, cruel, and often conflicting teachings. I came to believe that

a good yardstick for moral behavior was its measure of kindness. When you are contemplating an action, you ask: Is it kind? And is it reasonable? And it seemed to me that the kindest people I knew were not religious.

In reading history it became clear to me that freethinkers were the moral leaders — the first to speak out for prison reform, for humane treatment of the mentally ill, for the abolition of slavery, for removal of the death penalty, for women's right to vote, and for the right to choose contraception, sterilization, and abortion.

I probably would have continued in my family's pattern of just ignoring religion had it not been for my work for birth control. Wisconsin was the last state in the union to legalize contraception. As late as 1974 it was illegal in Wisconsin for any unmarried person to purchase contraceptives, and our laws were hostile to birth control even for someone properly married. Trying to change that law turned me into an activist for freethought, because I learned who the enemy really was.

That enemy was religion. That enemy was those long lines of priests, nuns, and fundamentalists who came to the state capitol to testify against contraception and abortion, even as Wisconsin women were having babies every year until they died from it, even as the world began to shudder from overpopulation. In working for women's rights I fought in a battle that would never end, because the root cause of the denial of those rights was religion and its control over government. Unless religion is kept in its place, all personal rights will be in jeopardy. This is the battle that needs to be fought.

To be free from religion is an advantage for individuals; it is a necessity for government.

Originally published in Free Inquiry, Summer 1987.

"I'd Rather Play Outside"

I grew up in a freethought home, so it was very easy for me not to indoctrinate our children in anything approaching a religion. My own family's attitude toward religion was "laissez-faire," and it was natural for me to carry on. Religion was something other people did.

I think a large number of people attend church for purely social reasons, and if families find their society elsewhere the *raison d'etre* for church-going just doesn't exist.

When our children were little, a neighbor who was into Christianity once asked to take our oldest child to Sunday School. It was a Congregationalist church, not a nightmare-inducing sect, so I readily agreed.

When they returned I asked the neighbor how Andy had liked it. A bit ruefully, with a smile, the student replied, "He said he'd rather play outside."

My husband's family was religious, and when they visited in Madison or when our children visited them, we were very careful to allow the children, without comment, to accompany their grandparents to church. And a couple of times I dropped the children off at a church service or function. But their reaction was somewhat like our own: other things seemed more useful and interesting.

Until recently public schools in Wisconsin, for the most part, were neutral in matters of religion, so freethinking children did not have the problems in school that so many report today.

Wisconsin had a State Supreme Court decision in 1890 against bible-reading in the public schools in a suit brought by Catholic parents in Edgerton, and the legal precedent this decision set served several generations of Wisconsin students very well.

When religion is introduced in the classroom, students who are "different" from the majority are singled out for criticism or



Freethought children circa 1961. Andy, who still likes to play outside, is on the left. The curly-haired boy in front is Jamie, and twins Ian Stuart and Annie Laurie Gaylor complete the foursome.

ostracism. They are made to feel like "outsiders" in their own school.

Whether a family is freethought or of a religious bent, it serves all of us well to protect Thomas Jefferson's wall of separation between church and state. Introducing religion into the public schools tears down that wall; it builds walls between children.

To keep church and state forever separate is a goal worth fighting for; it was crucial to the founding and perpetuation of our government. Maintaining that wall is essential for the happiness and well-being of public school children who may hold minority views.

Bittersweet Memories

All of those exhortations, sermons and slogans urging that we put "Christ back in Christmas" are particularly irritating to those of us non-religionists who would like to go even further back and put the *pagan* back in Christmas.

The festival known as Christmas is ancient — far, far older than Christianity. It is a relic of sun-worship, a celebration that the days were once again beginning to grow longer, that the life-giving sun was not gradually going out. The festival was usurped by Christianity (one can see why), but it does not belong to Christians. It belongs to us pagans, and we are willing to share, but we do claim the credit.

The joy of being a non-Christian at Christmastime is that you can take from this modern day holiday what you will — the greetings of the season, letters to and from long-ago friends, the music (while forgetting the words), decorations (sans angels and creches, of course), good foods, flowers, and all kinds of presents. For Christmas is a festival.

And festivals are very important to children. It is blissful to have special days to anticipate and to reminisce about, and far from Christmas being "just another day" to the non-religionist's child, it is a very special time, too.

An absolutely stupendous event, when I was little, was the holiday program in our one-room country school. We spoke "pieces" and performed little comedy skits — I'm sure they turned out to be comedy, whether serious in intent or not. The same wide planks were stored in the school woodshed and used each year for the stage, and a couple of them had been splintered over the years with gaps a small foot could easily go through. So, in addition to remembering our lines, we had to remember just where, under the rag-carpeted



The author as a child

stage, lay those booby traps. There was always at least one nervous performer who forgot, tripped, and set the rest of us off in very unprofessional giggles.

Our programs were not religious, aside from the words of some of the carols. We relied heavily on Santa Claus skits and our main prop was a cardboard fireplace with simulated flame — there was never a creche. At the end of the program when Santa Claus came in, he did not bring religion — he brought gifts!

Holidays do seem to stir up memories, and a few years ago I wrote down some long forgotten events of my childhood.

Perhaps it is because this is the season for nostalgia. Or maybe I have reached the age where childhood memories start coming back full force. Or possibly it is just that the kids' conversation was about

people who had birthdays on the same day. "Hey, Whitey Ford's birthday and mine are the same — he was 25–4 one season." And, "Did you know that Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born on the very same day?"

In any event, quite suddenly, I remembered Dottie, with whom I shared a birthday, and whom I hadn't thought about for years and years.

Back in the 1930s any departure from the normal routine was a memorable event in our one-room country school, but there was high excitement the morning a man in "city clothes" brought a new girl to enroll in school. He brought her in mid-morning after classes were already underway, and I remember someone whispering with a giggle, "She's late her first day!" For some reason at our school being late was far worse than not being there at all.

From my seat on the aisle I covertly studied the newcomer. She looked frail, and a little lonesome and scared, like she wanted to cry. She was delicately pretty with ash blonde hair and green eyes. Her clothing looked skimpy and much too lightweight for our sharp, early winter weather. The teacher and her father were discussing grade placement and I heard him say "should be in fourth grade, but she's been in a lot of different schools."

I puzzled over her father. He seemed young to have a school-aged daughter, and it was curious to see a man on a weekday not dressed in overalls and jacket. He didn't look like a farmer. Where did they live and why had no one known there would be a new family? I remember his face, dark and tense, as he said goodbye to his daughter, and then the teacher brought her to an empty seat across from mine.

At noon recess, over our sandwiches, we learned that Dottie had been born in California and had lived in Arizona and "lots of other places," that this was the first time she had ever been in Wisconsin.

We were quite awed. Some of us had been as far away as Milwaukee, and one boy had been born in Chicago, but here was a girl who had lived in the state of the movie stars. Her mother had been in a hospital for years somewhere in California and she was going to stay with "shirt-tail relatives" who lived on the tenant farm adjoining ours. I was delighted. A new, interesting friend — someone to walk with on that cold mile to and from school.

Our friendship was instantaneous. On our first walk home after

school we talked about our favorite books and our favorite movie stars (Shirley Temple, of course, with a kind word for Jane Withers). Then, out of the blue, Dottie asked, "When's your birthday?" "It's November 25," I answered, adding, "I was born on Thanksgiving Day." She hesitated a moment. "That's my birthday, too," she said. Our friendship was sealed.

The relatives Dottie was staying with were a young couple who had lived on the rental farm next to ours for several months. I did not know them very well; they seemed rather uninteresting. They had lost a baby, a stillbirth, and I thought perhaps that was why they had agreed to take Dottie, because they wanted a child around.

At first they were nice to Dottie, but often, when I met her at the foot of our driveway in the morning for our walk to school, I could see she had been crying. She spent more and more time at our house, coming in after school.

The stories were starting to circulate about Dottie, that her father had left her with these relatives, promising to send money for her care, but no money was sent, and they did not know where he was. Someone said her mother was not in a hospital at all, but had been in prison for years. One boy told me his mother thought that Dottie was probably illegitimate (a new word to both of us), and he said, "She doesn't even know when her birthday is. That's why she said it was the same day as yours."

I shielded Dottie from these stories and never mentioned them to her. Increasingly, we spent our play time together, excluding others. We had a common bond — our missing mothers. My mother was dead — she had died when I was a baby — and Dottie had not seen her mother for years.

Our birthdays came and Dottie joined me for a birthday supper. Her only present was my small gift from the dime store. After supper our housekeeper gave her a half-dollar, an impressive gift to a child in the 1930s. Happily Dottie told us she was going to buy some stationery and send it to her mother so her mother could write to her.

At our school the event of the year was the Christmas program held at night, and we started memorizing "pieces" and practicing our songs soon after Thanksgiving. Everyone had something new to wear for the program; it was tradition. My father had ordered a new, red dress for me from the Sears Roebuck catalog, but I worried

about Dottie, whose limited wardrobe had nothing she had not worn before.

And then, an aunt of mine sent me a dress she had sewn, a pretty blue silk print with long, elaborate sleeves. Providentially, she was out of touch with how much I had grown, and the dress was just too short and tight. But it fit frail Dottie to perfection. The Christmas program night was memorable, and we were both blissful in our finery.

Then, one January morning Dottie did not meet me at the foot of our driveway. I waited, jumping up and down in the cold, and finally walked to the neighbor's farm and knocked at their kitchen door. The young couple told me, not unkindly, that Dottie's father had come unexpectedly the night before to take her away. They were not sure where she was going. There had been no time to say goodbye.

Sadly I walked alone to school, fighting back the tears. The school year stretched ahead, bleak and dreary, without my friend. I watched the mailbox for months, but I did not hear from Dottie. In the spring the young couple moved away to Minnesota, and even that tenuous link was gone.

For a few years I thought about Dottie on my birthday, and then, unintentionally, I put my memory away. I would never know what happened to the little girl who shared my birthday so long ago.

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Madison, Wisconsin 53701
ffrf.org

ISBN: 1-877733-14-8