



The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

September 2010

Jeremy Hall

Former U.S. Army Soldier

Fighting for ~~God and~~ Country

Sunday, September 19, 2010, 4 pm, Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston, SC

Our speaker for September is former U.S. Army Specialist Jeremy Hall. Jeremy Hall was born in Florida and raised in Richlands, North Carolina. His devoutly religious and patriotic family read the bible together and said the pledge of allegiance after supper. In April 2004, at the age of 19, Hall joined the Army. He graduated basic training with honors and a sense of accomplishment. He was happy to be a part of something and serve the country he loves. When he deployed shortly after training, he believed, as his leaders did, that our involvement in Iraq was nothing short of God's work and America was a Christian nation.

But when he returned to the States, through discussions with a couple of atheist friends, and after extensive study of the Bible and self-searching, Hall eventually came to the very difficult conclusion that religion was not for him. He no longer believed in Christianity or any other supernatural force.

Later that year, Hall volunteered to be a part of a security detail deployed to Iraq. A few days after his unit landed in Kuwait, the Battalion Commander asked us during dinner if there were any atheists in his detail. Hall raised his hand and admitted to his

atheism. That was all that happened, until later. For over a year, Hall was systematically harassed, from being told to sit elsewhere for refusing to pray at Thanksgiving to having his recommendation for promotion rescinded because he refused to pray with the soldiers on his team.

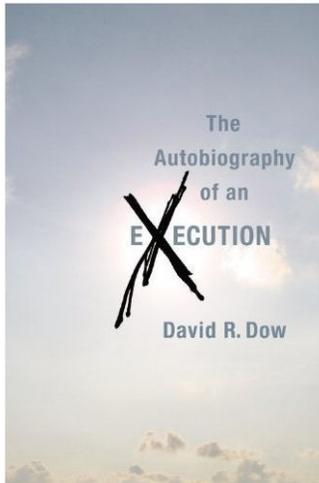


Hall contacted Mikey Weinstein of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and a landmark lawsuit was filed in 2007 against Secretary of Defense Robert Gates because he has allowed the military to engage in "a pattern and practice of constitutionally impermissible promotions of religious beliefs within the Department of Defense and the United States military."

The lawsuit alleges that when Hall received permission by an Army chaplain to organize a meeting of other soldiers who shared his atheist beliefs, his supervisor, Army Major Freddy Welborn, broke up the gathering and threatened to retaliate against the soldier by charging him with violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The complaint also alleges that Welborn vowed to block Hall's reenlistment in the Army if the atheist group continued to meet - a violation of Hall's First Amendment rights. Welborn is also named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

SHL Book Group

by Matt Dean



The SHL Book Group will meet on September 26th to discuss *The Autobiography of an Execution* by David R. Dow.

In an argument against capital punishment, Dow's capable memoir partially gathers its steam from the emotional toll on all parties involved, especially the overworked legal aid lawyers and their desperate clients. The

author, the litigation director of the Texas Defender Service and a professor at the University of Houston Law Center, respects the notion of attorney-client privilege in this handful of real-life legal outcomes, some of them quite tragic, while acknowledging executions are not about the attorneys, but about the victims of murder and sometimes their killers. While trying to maintain a proper balance in his marriage to Katya, a fellow attorney and ballroom dancer, he spells out the maze of legal mumbo-jumbo to get his clients stays or released from confinement in the cases of a hapless Vietnam vet who shot a child, another man who beat his pregnant wife to death and another who killed his wife and children. In the end, Dow's book is a sobering, gripping and candid look into the death penalty.

There are three copies of this book in the Charleston county library system, one copy in the Dorchester county library system, and five copies in the Berkeley county library system. The book is available in hardcover on Amazon for \$16.49, with used copies as low as \$11.98. The Kindle edition costs \$11.99.

Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers

Date: Sunday September 5, 5 pm

Place: Chapin Library
14th Ave. N., Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

Speaker: Dr. Reid Johnson

Topic: Open discussion on differing extremes of religiosity and varying views on Sept. 11.

From the President

We're happy to host Jeremy Hall as speaker at our first meeting of the fall. Jeremy's story has been covered by the *New York Times* and MSNBC, and he gave a well-received speech about his ordeal at the FFRF's Lake Hypatia Advance.

And ... looking ahead, we've got some exciting programs lined up for the fall and spring. Our speakers for October will be Amanda Metskas and August Brunsman, who work with Camp Quest and the Secular Student Alliance. In November, philosopher and novelist Ron Cooper will discuss recent work in evolutionary psychology about our human tendency to attribute agency to natural events. Liberty University alumnus (survivor?) Marc Adams joins us in February to talk about growing up gay among parents, teachers and peers who deemed evangelical Christians like Jerry Falwell "leftwing liberals". And Dale McGowan, editor and co-author of *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers*, will speak at our March meeting and will also conduct a half-day parenting seminar.

Some SHL members are working with the Unitarian Church in Charleston to put together a Sunday service highlighting the secular aspect of the congregation. Though planning is in the very early stages, it's safe to say that the service will explore the convergence of humanism and Unitarianism, possibly using the UUA's "seven principles" as a jumping-off point. If you're interested in participating in this service, please contact me at president@lowcountryhumanists.org.

Matt

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

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Volunteer Corner

by Nancy Worley



SHL members are once again asked to donate school supplies to the Teachers' Supply Closet, which provides free school supplies to teachers in the tri-county area schools in which 90% of the students live at or below the poverty level. A large box marked Teachers' Supply Closet will be placed at the entrance to Gage Hall for our September 19 meeting. Composition books, crayons, washable markers, pencils and scissors are always needed. In addition, there is an Arts and Crafts room where yarn, fabric scraps, felt and beads are appreciated. The Treasure Chest Room contains incentives for students. Stuffed animals, slightly used toys, games, stickers, dolls and toy cars are needed for this room. SHL is tentatively scheduled to assist with inventory at the Teachers' Closet in November. Date, time and directions will be announced later.

On September 27, we will be volunteering at the Charleston Animal Society on Remount Road in North Charleston. If you are interested in volunteering for this event, please call me at 763-4044 or e-mail me at worley@bellsouth.net.

Adopt-a-Highway

by Roger Prevost



The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are active in the South Carolina Adopt-a-Highway program. We pick up litter from a two mile stretch of Harbor View Road on James Island four times a year. Our official SC Department of Transportation sign is on the corner of Harbor View and Fort Johnson Roads and lets the community know

that SHL participates in this program.

Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, September 11. We will meet at 8:50 am in the parking lot of the First Federal of Charleston Bank on Harbor View Rd, James Island. It's right next to the Piggly Wiggly. The pick up usually last about an hour and a half. Please join us if you can. Call Roger Prevost at 224-9360 if you have any questions.

Family Corner: It's a Swamp Thing

by Amy Monsky



Our family activity for September is an educational program about swamps at Old Santee Canal Park. In this class, we will dive (figuratively speaking) headfirst into Biggin Swamp to discover another world teeming with life below the surface of its waters. From the plants to insects to plankton, we will learn the valuable roles in this fragile ecosystem.

Join us for this myth-busting look at our swamp. The program will begin at 11 am sharp on Saturday, Sep. 25, in the interpretive center and will last about an hour. Cost is \$2 per person and includes admission to the park. After the program, we will have a byo picnic lunch and/or you can explore the park. Please RSVP by Friday, Sep. 24 by emailing me at:

SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com

You can find directions and other information about Old Santee Canal Park on their website:

www.oldsanteecanalpark.org

SHL Charity of the Quarter

by Jonathan Lamb



We have raised nearly two-thousand dollars for three great local charitable organizations in 2010! We always receive a thank-you letter from the groups we support, so we are clearly demonstrating to the community

that secular humanists are caring, philanthropic people. The Sustainability Institute of Charleston is our charity for September and October. This organization is based in North Charleston and focuses on helping people weatherize their homes and improve energy efficiency through cost-effective improvements. They often focus on helping low-income households reduce utility bills via free home energy audits and targeted home upgrades. Learn more about this great organization at www.sustainabilityinstitutesc.org. Please contribute by bringing a check to the meeting (made out to "SHL" with "Sep-Oct charity" on the memo line) or donate via credit/debit card on our website.

Attend Christian Concert or Else

by Alan Kurtz

If you're in the Army, what's the quickest way to get confined to barracks? Refuse to attend a Christian concert. It happened on May 13, 2010, at Fort Eustis in Newport News, Virginia, home to the U.S. Army Transportation Corps. The event was the Commanding General's Spiritual Fitness Concert.

Maj. Gen. Chambers is a self-professed born-again Christian. "That had a big influence on changing my lifestyle," he says of his rebirth at age 16. His concert series, featuring Christian performers, is aimed at awakening soldiers' spiritual awareness. "Chambers acknowledges without trepidation," writes T. Anthony Bell, a military retiree who works without trepidation for Army Public Affairs, "that there are some soldiers who lack the moral upbringing or ethical consciousness to fulfill their promise as soldiers." This has led to the program of musical behavior modification. "Our soldiers today come from many different backgrounds," the general explains. "Some of those backgrounds did not include any kind of ethical, moral, or civics-type training as children. Our intent is to expose that to them while they're here, and if it changes just a few behaviors then we've been successful."

The May concert at Ft. Eustis was headlined by BarlowGirl, an evangelical Christian rock group. The band, composed of sisters Alyssa, Becca, and Lauren Barlow, was on its "Love & War Tour" promoting their latest album. The Department of Defense shelled out \$23,000 to BarlowGirl's representative, Greg Oliver Agency, for two shows, one at Ft. Eustis and another at nearby Ft. Lee, where Maj. Gen. Chambers was then in command. (He now serves as director for logistics, J-4, U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.)

According to the Associated Press, a staff sergeant at Ft. Eustis directed 200 soldiers to march to the concert. Eighty refused, about 20 of them (including several Muslims) based on their religious beliefs. As a result, says the AP, they were "banished to their barracks and told to clean them up."

As Pvt. Anthony Smith remarked, "Instead of being released to our personal time, we were

locked down. It seemed very much like a punishment." He and his fellow non-Christian soldiers (all enlisted men) were also forbidden to use their cell phones or personal computers.

The AP quotes spokesman Col. Thomas Collins as saying, "If something like that were to have happened, it would be contrary to Army policy." The Pentagon is said to be investigating the incident.

Aside from the command favoritism shown by penalizing soldiers who decline to be evangelized, this case raises the question of why the Army is hiring civilian bands in the first place. After all, they already have dozens of fulltime military bands waiting in the wings and staffed to the rafters.

According to the Army's latest field manual, newly published in July 2010, the United States Army Band — garrisoned at Virginia's Ft. Myer, a two-hour drive from Ft. Eustis — is authorized a total of 252 field grade officers, company grade officers, warrant officer, command sergeant major, and enlisted soldiers.

Moreover, according to *The Washington Post*, there are upwards of 30 other Regular Army bands in this country and abroad, 18 Army Reserve bands, and 53 Army National Guard bands. Each unit also has within it "music performance teams" that can be "employed separately from the band headquarters in support of specific musical missions."

The taxpayer cost of all this is substantial. Becoming a member of one of the Army's four largest bands brings with it a ranking of staff sergeant and an annual salary of \$51,000 for unmarried and \$58,000 for married soldiers. Throughout their enlistment period, members are assured a stabilized assignment and enjoy full military benefits, including medical and dental care, group life insurance, 30 days of annual paid leave, post exchange and commissary privileges, and educational subsidies. And of course the price tag for Army bands is merely one component of the overall cost, since the Navy, Marines, and Air Force also have their own bloated bundles of bands. (The Navy even floats a country bluegrass group.)

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So, with all this musical talent readily available, why pay BarlowGirl \$23,000 for two shows?

Perhaps, you may suggest, because military bands are incapable of executing Maj. Gen. Chambers' program of musical behavior modification. "Our soldiers come from many different backgrounds," he said. "Some of those backgrounds did not include any kind of ethical, moral or civics-type training as children. Our intent is to expose that to them while they're here, and if it changes just a few behaviors then we've been successful."

Yet according to the Army field manual, "United States Army bands provide music throughout the entire spectrum of operations to instill in our forces the will to fight and win. Bands provide music for morale support to sustain warriors and inspire leaders. Music performances specifically designed

to reach U.S. service members deliver messages of pride, inspiration, team spirit, cohesiveness, and common goodwill. Army bands have a direct impact on mission success in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and opinions."

That sounds a lot like what Maj. Gen. Chambers had in mind. So the question remains, with all this musical talent at the Army's beck and call, why pay BarlowGirl \$23,000 to evangelize our troops when a service band could have musically indoctrinated them just as well? Best of all, since it's strictly secular, the Army band probably wouldn't have caused 80 soldiers to be confined to their barracks. (Although, considering the fare at most military band concerts, all 200 of those troops might have gone AWOL to avoid the aural equivalent of a night in Abu Ghraib.)

Alan Kurtz writes for Blogcritics.org.

Lost and Found

by Kaniksu Darwin

I do not know why Jesus Christ died.
I do not know why people believe in God.
I do not know why the myth still persists.
I do not know why superstition prevails over reason.
I don't know why.

I don't know why.
I don't know why.
But I have a feeling that it has something to do with superstition, ignorance and peer pressure.
I am glad that I do not submit, and that I am an ATHEIST.

Nate Phelps to Speak at AFFA Meeting in Charleston

The Alliance for Full Acceptance will be hosting Nate Phelps, the son of the founder of the Westboro Baptist Church, Fred Phelps. Readers of *The Separationist* may recall that members of the Westboro Baptist came to Charleston in April to put their hate on display at Charleston Air Force Base and other locations around town.

Nate, however, is a voice for equality and reason through his work as executive director of the Alberta chapter of the Center for Inquiry. The Center promotes "skeptical, secular, rational and



humanistic inquiry" and Nate hopes to expand the mission to include battling homophobia.

At the September 9 AFFA meeting, which begins at 5:45 pm at the Charleston Marriott on Lockwood Boulevard, Nate will speak about growing up in the Westboro Baptist Church, Fred Phelps' rage against the LGBT community as well as anyone who doesn't share his opinions, and his journey to wholeness in the midst of physical, emotional and religious abuse.

SHL members are invited to attend this free event.

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Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

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Join the SHL

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance International, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive an electronic copy of this newsletter. For more information on SHL membership and activities, consult our website at:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>

Contribute to The Separationist

Please contact the editor with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters to the editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome. You can contact the editor at:

newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org

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