



# THE SEPARATIONIST

SEPTEMBER 2011

## MARGARET DOWNEY: THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2011, 4 PM, GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST.

Margaret Downey was born into a multi-cultural family in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Growing up in a highly prejudiced southern society in the 1950s, Margaret became concerned about persecution from an early age. She has devoted her life to ending any and all discrimination against any and all peoples of the world.

Margaret founded the Freethought Society (FS) and the Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN) in 1993. FS takes a strong stand against prayers in public schools and government sponsored invocations. ADSN is concerned with discrimination against the atheist community.

In December of 1991 Margaret filed a discrimination case against the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) through the Human Relations Commission of Pennsylvania. After nearly eight years she lost her case against BSA. In the U.S. Supreme court case *James Dale v. Boy Scouts of America*, BSA declared itself “private” to avoid the question of open membership thus ending her appeal and many other court cases against BSA’s discriminatory membership policy. ADSN efforts are responsible for convincing movie producer Steven Spielberg to disassociate himself from BSA.

As ADSN’s founder and president, Margaret has represented the interest of the nontheist community at sev-

eral United Nations conferences and spoke at the United Nations Freedom of Religion and Belief meeting in New York City. She attended the 2001 United Nations Freedom of Religion and Belief Conference in Madrid, Spain.



Margaret is a past board member of the American Humanist Association (AHA), The Humanist Institute and the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. She is a current board member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Scouting For All, the Godless Americans Political Action Committee, Advisory Board Member of the Robert Green Ingersoll Museum, and the Atheist Alliance International (AAI). With these connections Margaret can keep her finger on the pulse of the atheist community. She has become a proud atheist

spokesperson and media representative.

Margaret is regularly featured at nontheist and skeptic conferences as a speaker and is well known for her fun-filled presentations and workshops.

“The Story Behind the Story” will highlight Margaret’s journey from being baptized Catholic to becoming an outspoken and proud leader in the nontheist community. Her presentation is a continuation of the essay “My ‘Bye Bull’ Story” which was originally published in *50 Voices of Disbelief: Why We Are Atheists*.

Please note that this meeting will not take place on the third Sunday of the month as usual, but rather on the second Sunday, September 11.

### ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2011, 8:50 AM  
FIRST FEDERAL OF CHARLESTON BANK  
HARBOR VIEW ROAD, JAMES ISLAND**



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 partici-

pates in this program. Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, September 10. 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. If you have any questions, call Roger Prevost at 224-9360.

**INTERFAITH GATHERING FOR PEACE  
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2011, 3 PM  
SOTTILE THEATER  
44 GEORGE STREET, CHARLESTON**

On the tenth anniversary of 9-11, Charlestonians are invited to come to the Sottile Theater for an interfaith gathering for peace. There will be a moment of silence for those who died on 9-11, and for those who continue to suffer the effects of the tragedy. People from each tradition will read from its sacred scripture, or its wisdom teachings, passages pertaining to peace. There will be no sermons or speeches. It will be a unique opportunity for all present to get to know others, and see the good in others. Please note that this is not a worship service or time of prayer.

SHL board member Jason Gregory will give a humanist reading based on the work of Carl Sagan. Other traditions represented will include Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Unitarian Universalism, Paganism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoruba, Baha'i, and Native American.

**THE SEPARATIONIST, SEPTEMBER 2011**

### SEPTEMBER FAMILY OUTING

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2011, 2 PM  
CAW CAW NATURE CENTER  
5200 SAVANNAH HIGHWAY, RAVENEL**

Our September family outing will be a program called Native Americans of the Lowcountry at Caw Caw Nature Center. We will explore the Native American culture of coastal South Carolina at the time of European settlement. The cost is \$5 per person ages 4 and up, free for children 3 and under. For more details, visit our events page (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>).

### BOOK GROUP

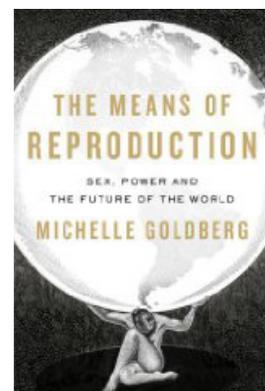
**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2011, 4 PM  
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE  
1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON**

On September 25, 2011, the Book Group will meet to discuss *The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power, and the Future of the World* by Michelle Goldberg.

Deeply reported across four continents, the book explores issues such as abortion, female circumcision, and Asia's missing girls to dramatize the connections between international policymaking and individual lives.

Amazon sells this book in paperback for \$6.40. Barnes & Noble has bargain-priced copies of the hardcover available online for \$2.99. There is one copy of the book in the Berkeley county library system.

We'll meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble, located at 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. Our discussion runs from 4 pm to 5:30 pm and we usually go out to dinner afterward.



### MOVIE CLUB

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2011**

The SHL Movie Club meets once a month, usually on the first Saturday, to view a film and discuss it over dinner. The movie is usually announced by email and on our website a few days in advance. Watch for details on our events page (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>).

### CHARITY OF THE QUARTER CHARLESTON WALK FOR AUTISM



Charleston Walk for Autism is our charity of the quarter. This Charleston-based organization raises funds to help Lowcountry individuals affected by autism primarily by funding scholarships that help pay for behavioral and relational therapies, which are often cost-prohibitive for families. They also hold the annual Walk for Autism every April in downtown Charleston. Learn more about this great organization at [www.walkforautism-charleston.com](http://www.walkforautism-charleston.com). Please contribute by bringing a check to the meeting or donate via credit/debit card on our website.

### VOLUNTEERS BEYOND BELIEF COMPASSIONATE HUMANISM AT WORK

At our March 2011 meeting, Dale McGowan spoke about the need and benefit of focusing, encouraging and demonstrating humanist generosity and compassion. Dale's Foundation Beyond Belief pools donations from humanists around the country to contribute to several small to medium-sized charities. His inspiration for this came from SHL's Charity of the Quarter which he read about in our newsletter.



**VOLUNTEERS  
BEYOND BELIEF**

Now SHL can be an integral part of another of Dale's efforts—Volunteers Beyond Belief, a network of local freethought organizations putting compassionate humanism into action through community volunteering.

The Volunteers Beyond Belief program launched in July 2011 with teams in eight U.S. cities—including SHL in Charleston—and plans to expand to 16 local teams in early 2012.

The national organization assists local teams in finding volunteer opportunities and in committing to a regular schedule of volunteer events, making hands-on volunteering a major part of their groups' activity and identity.

### CAMP QUEST SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY WEEKEND RETREAT

Camp Quest South

Carolina's inaugural event is an overnight Family Weekend Retreat, October 1st and 2nd, 2011, at Camp Long in Aiken, South Carolina. The retreat



will be a mini-Camp Quest—all the fun and excitement of a week-long camp will be condensed into a school-year friendly, easy-on-your-wallet, super-duper-fun weekend! Both parents and kids will get a sampler of what campers can expect at a week-long camp. Plus, the camp experience will not only be a fun way to spend the weekend with one's own family, it will also lead to a strengthened sense of community with our fellow humanist families.

Camp Quest is known for the 3 F's – Fun, Friends, and Freethought. At the family camp, we add a 4th F, and that is, of course, Family! The entire family, from the youngest baby to the oldest grandma and grandpa, is welcome! We will have age-appropriate programs and activities for all ages. This makes the family camp particularly attractive to families with children who are not quite camper-aged (especially envious younger siblings!) or who may be camper-aged but not quite ready for a whole week away from home. Of course, the weekend camp will be lots of fun for camper-aged kids as well.

The event is already at capacity. Thirty families have signed up, for a total of more than 90 participants. And those 30 families are coming not just from the expected states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, but from Florida and Texas as well.

SHL board member Amy Monsky and her son Jake were interviewed for a *Washington Post* article about Camp Quest, and the piece was recently picked up by the *Post and Courier*. You can read the article online at <http://bit.ly/camp-quest-article>.

## A REPORT FROM THE AMERICAN ATHEISTS NATIONAL CONVENTION LARRY CARTER CENTER

The American Atheists April National Convention celebrated over 800 Atheists from most states and more than a dozen countries. In five decades, the convention has never attracted more than 600 attendees.

Our headline event was an Atheist heroic premier of *The Ledge* produced by Matthew Chapman, great grandson of Charles Darwin. An Atheist employer keeps police and audiences at the precipice of drama. Love and escape by a woman abused by a Christian highlights a subplot with a detective's family...coming soon to a theater near you.

Jeff Sharlet revealed his follow up book about The Family political cult. Iowa's Grassley, South Carolina's Sanford, and Nevada's Ensign are amongst dozens of top national offenders of our Constitutional prohibition of religious and corrupt crimes against our secular nation.

Jamilla Bey of National Public Radio keeps shattering the skin color barriers with other minorities fighting the false assumption that Atheism is only for white males. Additionally, she called on Atheists to visit African American churches to find those closeted Atheists missing from our ranks and to see some healthy fun things done in those communities.

Comedian Paul Provenza read/performed excerpts from his book *Satiristas* which is the wit, laughing out loud wisdom, and often Atheistic look at the people in our world as told by great living and dead comics. It is

full of Atheistic laughs and poking fun at religious, smug audiences.

Most scientific was Iowa State distinguished professor Avalos, author of *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*, proof from scriptures that religions and alleged deities are not primarily sources of peace, love, or science. Dr. Avalos cited the ancient sources of intelligent design - wrong then and wrong for the past two decades

as warmed over illegal creationism for schools and textbooks - old as the fictions of Christian founders 19 centuries ago.

More laughs were nonstop from impersonator Troy Conrad, both as Jesus on many planets and as George Walker Bush confessing his crimes and many ineptitudes. Later I had the pleasure to be his George's secret service beer taster as we did the pub crawl across the river.

Four military Atheist leaders discussed our less than secular Pentagon policies which underscored again that American Atheists of generation after generation guarded and fought "in foxholes".

Go to [www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org) for many photos, recaps, and actual videos of this best ever gathering of bible literate, highly schooled American Atheists, American Humanists, American Ethical Culturalists, and Freethinkers. Next year, in Washington DC, we will meet while Congress is in session, not during Ishtar recess as in years past. I encourage everyone to attend.



### NATIONAL EVENTS IN 2012

The Reason Rally will be held March 24, 2012, in Washington, DC. The rally will be filled with music, comedy, and addresses by leaders of the secular movement. The Annual Convention of American Atheists is scheduled for March 25th and 26th, 2012, in Bethesda,

Maryland. Richard Dawkins will be the keynote speaker. Rock Beyond Belief comes to Fort Bragg on March 31st, 2012. With the backing of major secular and military foundations, this grass-roots outfit will be putting on a free festival consisting of secular speakers and musicians.

## SCIENCE IS NOT DEMOCRATIC HERB SILVERMAN

Republican candidate Rick Perry is being compared to George W. Bush, our most recent president from Texas. Here is one place the comparison breaks down. Perry is not campaigning to be the “Education President,” as Bush did. Whatever its merits, Bush was president when the “No Child Left Behind” act became law. Based on Perry’s recent comments, it looks like he is more interested in leaving every child behind.

When a little boy in New Hampshire was prompted by his mother to ask Perry about evolution, Perry replied that it’s just a “theory” with “gaps,” and added, “In Texas, we teach both creationism and evolution. I figure you’re smart enough to figure out which one is right.” Perry, who likes to tell us the importance of following the Constitution, should know that it’s constitutional to teach creationism in a mythology class but not in a science class.

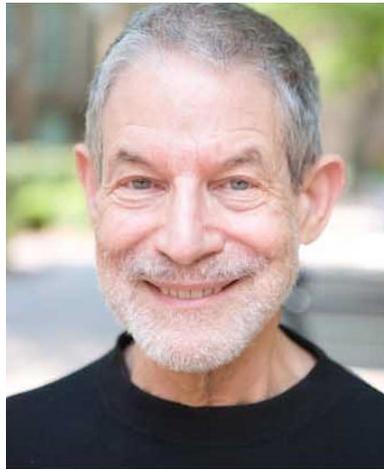
Apparently, Perry’s theory of science teaching is to tell children they are smart enough to figure out what is right and what is made up. Here are other scientific questions to ask small children: When you walk around, does the earth look flat or round? When you look at the sun in the morning and evening, does it look like the sun is moving around the earth or that the earth is moving around the sun at approximately 67,000 mph? Never mind the scientific consensus, you’re smart enough to just know.

Governor Perry is correct in saying that evolution is controversial. But the “controversy” is religious and political, not scientific. Perry and other anti-evolutionists should be asked questions like:

- (1) How do scientists describe the theory of evolution by natural selection?
- (2) How do scientists distinguish a hypothesis from a theory?
- (3) As a scientific theory, how is creationism falsifiable?

An educated person should understand the rudiments

of the scientific method. Creationism should no more be taught as an alternative to the theory of evolution by natural selection than should the “stork theory” be taught as an alternative to reproduction. Creationism is an alternative to Zeus or Krishna, not to Darwin.



Only 38 percent of Americans say they believe in evolution, and far too many politicians are either among the other 62 percent or pander to them. This, to me, is evidence that democracy works best when we have an informed electorate. I agree with Winston Churchill: “Democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.” However, science is not and should not become democratic. If 100 million people believe a wrong thing, it is still a wrong thing.

I’m even uncomfortable with the way the poll question was phrased. Evolution is not a belief; it is confirmed through scientific investigation. We don’t take polls asking people if they “believe” in gravity, though the theory of evolution is better understood by scientists than is the theory of gravity.

Some religions may feel threatened by evolution not only because it flatly contradicts a biblical worldview, but also because we now understand that the first creatures who can be called human inherited their DNA from creatures who could not be called human. The first mammals got their DNA from their reptilian ancestors. And so it goes back to the first single-celled organism. I leave it for religious people to decide where a “soul” enters this picture (and whether they want to believe in DNA).

Adults are free to make decisions for themselves, but I’m disturbed by what is happening in our educational system today. Given how the influential Religious Right opposes the teaching of evolution, or any scientific and social view that conflicts with a literal interpretation of the Bible, we are becoming one nation undereducated.

See all of Herb’s On Faith posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith>

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## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

*Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.*

*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. Contact the editor at [newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org).*

# THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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## OUR OFFICERS

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Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Jonathan Lamb

Secretary: Laura Kasman

## JOIN SHL

*SHL is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. 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 South Carolina Progressive Network. Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$35 (individual) or \$50 (couple or family). Additional donations are always welcome. To join, visit our website at <http://bit.ly/joinshl>, and for more information about our activities, visit <http://bit.ly/shlevents>*