



# The Separationist

Volume 21, Issue 3

March 2014

## Ashley Miller: Religion versus women, minorities, and LGBT

Sunday, March 16, 2014, 4 PM, Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

### Inside this issue:

<a href="#">Upcoming SHL Events</a>	2
<a href="#">Charity of the Quarter</a>	5
<a href="#">Take Our Survey</a>	5
<a href="#">Herb Silverman</a>	6
<a href="#">Become a Humanist Celebrant</a>	7
<a href="#">Member Perk: Stipends</a>	8
<a href="#">Find Us</a>	10

### About SHL

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists and scientific naturalists. We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

Ashley F. Miller is a writer, activist, and communications scholar from South Carolina, who has worked for LGBT, secular, and women's rights for over a decade. She is one of the leading young women in the secular movement, speaking regularly at schools and conferences across the country about feminism and communications. She has written for dozens of publications, including Salon, Free-thought Blogs, and the academic journal Cross-Currents, and run local communications campaigns for law firms, news websites, and secular organizations. She is a PhD candidate in Mass Communications at the University of South Carolina, where she has focused on women and minorities in

the media. Before returning to school for her PhD, she worked in film and television in Los Angeles. She has a Masters in Film Production from FSU, and a Bachelors degree from Emory University in Film Studies.

She has been invited to speak at The Amazing Meeting, Dragon\*Con, Skepticon, CONvergence, FTBCon, UNC, DePaul, and the University of South Carolina.

Find her blog at [www.freethoughtblogs.com/ashleymiller](http://www.freethoughtblogs.com/ashleymiller).



**When:** Sunday, 3/16/14 at 4pm

**Where:** Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street Cost: Free!

**Refreshments:** If you have not yet brought a pre-meeting refreshment this year, please bring a snack for the pre-meeting refreshments table. Suggested snack foods are veggies & dip, cheese & crackers, fruit, granola bars, cookies, cake squares – anything that one can eat without utensils. The snack item should be for about 8-12 people, which is the average number of servings in a typical container/bag. As always, SHL will supply the paper goods and beverages.

**After the meeting:** Everyone is invited to join our speaker for dinner at a nearby restaurant (restaurant location will be announced at the start of the meeting).

## Sunday Quest

Sunday, March 16, 2014, 4 PM  
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

Sunday Quest, our new humanist youth program, will provide our children an opportunity to learn about humanism and all of its life-affirming ideals. Modeled after the Harvard Humanist Learning Lab and other secular Sunday schools, our goal with Sunday Quest is to create a safe space for children to explore their developing worldviews, think for themselves, connect with

their community, and build a strong ethical foundation. Each class will offer fun, interactive games and activities.

Scheduled during our third-Sunday monthly speaker presentation at Gage Hall, Sunday Quest will be geared toward children ages 5-12 years old. This is a drop-off program, and we welcome parents to attend the speaker presentation. If space allows, children

older than 12 years old may attend as program assistants and children younger than 5 years old may attend with a parent. The program will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half.

Space is limited, so pre-registration is required. Please email [president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org) to register your child(ren) or for more information.

# Upcoming SHL Events

Events sometimes get added after The Separationist is posted. Keep up to date with SHL events by signing up for our [email lists](#) or [meetup](#), or check postings on our [website](#) and [facebook](#) group.

## SHL Movie Club

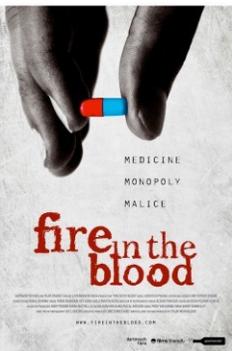
Saturday, March 1 2014, 7:00pm

Park Circle Film Society, 4820 Jenkins Ave, North Charleston

Please join us for a viewing of the film *Fire in the Blood*, winner of the Documentary Feature Award (main prize) at DOXA, the international documentary film festival of Vancouver, 2013. Meet us inside the theater at 6:45pm. Following the movie we will enjoy drinks or a late snack/dessert at a nearby restaurant.



An intricate tale of medicine, monopoly and malice, FIRE IN THE BLOOD tells the story of how Western pharmaceutical companies and governments aggressively blocked access to affordable AIDS drugs for the countries of Africa and the global south in the years after 1996 – causing ten million or more unnecessary deaths. It is also the inspiring story of the improbable group of people who decided to fight back.



Shot on four continents and including contributions from global figures such as President Bill Clinton, Bishop Desmond Tutu and economist Joseph Stiglitz, FIRE IN THE BLOOD is the never-before-told true story of the remarkable coalition which came together to stop 'the corporate Crime of the Century' and save millions of lives.

## Sunday Funday at the Park

Sunday, March 2, 2014, 11:00am

RM Hendricks Park, 4953–4999 block of Virginia Ave, North Charleston

Bring the kids and meet other like-minded families in a fun, casual, and judgment-free environment. Dogs on leashes are welcome, too! Don't have kids? No problem! Come on out! Sundays are fundays for everyone.

R.M. Hendricks Park is located on Virginia Avenue in the 4953–4999 block. Although it's very easy to get to, it doesn't have an exact address and GPS units have had problems with it. It's right off the I526 exit ramp for Virginia Ave. It's also right across the street from the intersection of Lincoln Ave and Virginia Ave. This is a very nice park and has an enclosed playground, shelter with several picnic tables, bathrooms, lots of green space, and plenty of parking.



## SHL Happy Hour

Tuesday, March 11, 2014, 6:00pm

Southend Brewery & Smokehouse, 161 East Bay St, Charleston (downtown)

Join us for a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and food with old and new friends! Everyone is welcome. Don't be shy—come join us!

## Upcoming SHL Events cont.

### SHL Volunteer Activity

Saturday February 15, 2014, 8:30—11:00am

Pet Helpers, 1447 Folly Rd, James Island

SHL is returning to one of our most popular volunteer locations: Pet Helpers!

Pet Helpers is a non-profit pet shelter and low cost spay/neuter clinic on James Island. SHL volunteers will be assisting with the animals' "morning rituals" of cleaning, feeding, walking and more. Volunteers coming to help out will also have an opportunity to play with the animals!

Come and meet us at Pet Helpers. Children are welcome to come and help out as long as they are supervised by an adult. All volunteers should wear long-pants and closed-toed shoes. Pet Helpers also accepts donations of pet toys, Pedigree canned dog food, Friskies or 9 Lives canned cat food, towels and sheets, etc.



### Debate: *Christianity or Atheism: Which makes more sense?*

Thursday, March 20, 7:00, Physician's Auditorium, CofC

Debate: *Christianity or Atheism: Which makes more sense?* Herb Silverman debates Wallace Marshall

Herb Silverman is founder and president emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America and founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. He has written articles for *The Humanist*, *Free Inquiry*, and the *Huffington Post*. He has also been a regular contributor to "On Faith," a forum produced by the *Washington Post*. His latest book is [\*Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt\*](#).



Wallace Marshall is Director of the Charleston chapter of Reasonable Faith, a Christian apologetics organization. He received his M.Div from Princeton Theological Seminary and his PhD. from Boston College, where he studied the historical interaction between science, religion, and philosophy in the West.

# Upcoming SHL Events cont.

## Team Trivia



Thursday, March 20, 8:00pm  
El Maguey, 401 Barony St, Monks  
Corner

Thursday, March 27, 2014, 7:00pm  
Liberty Tap Room, 1028 Johnnie  
Dodds Blvd, Mt Pleasant

Come out for one or both nights of trivia and socializing! This is a team event and is free.

Our team **Happy Humanists** is officially registered, so our points are cumulative and will be going for season totals.

Team Trivia offers trivia nights at various places throughout the Charleston area on different days and times. Team members are welcome to play using the team name at any Team Trivia night. And if you would like to organize an SHL trivia night in your part of town (hello, West Ashley!) let us know. Organizers are responsible for checking in using our team name, welcoming players, and using any winnings from the previous week to purchase appetizers for the team. Please contact [president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org) for more info.



SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program! Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on items purchased at Amazon.com through the links on our Website. So, if you are buying the book club book (or anything else from Amazon), this is a super-easy way to contribute to SHL! Simply use the link at <http://lowcountryhumanists.org/default.php>

## SHL Book Club

Sunday, March 23, 2014, 4:00pm

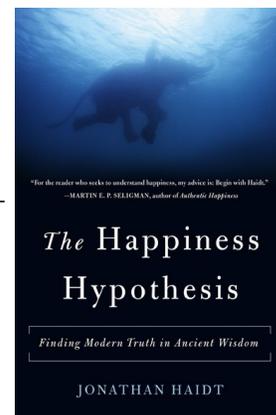
Barnes & Noble, 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd, West Ashley

This month we will review Jonathan Haidt's book [The Happiness Hypothesis](#).

This is a book about ten Great Ideas. Each chapter is an attempt to savor one idea that has been discovered by several of the world's civilizations --to question it in light of what we now know from scientific research, and to extract from it the lessons that still apply to our modern lives. It is a book about how to construct a life of virtue, happiness, fulfillment, and meaning.

"In his widely praised book, award-winning psychologist Jonathan Haidt examines the world's philosophical wisdom through the lens of psychological science, showing how a deeper understanding of enduring maxims—like Do unto others as you would have others do unto you, or What doesn't kill you makes you stronger—can enrich and even transform our lives....." — *Amazon review*

Our March 24th meeting will be, as usual, at the Barnes and Noble book store on Sam Rittenberg Blvd. from 4:00 to 5:30 PM and culminate with our gathering for dinner and socializing afterwards.



## Charity of the Quarter

Our March-April Charity of the Quarter is [We Are Family](#).

We Are Family has been providing support, resources, and leadership development opportunities to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, (LGBTQI) and straight ally youth since 1995.

We Are Family's mission is to provide support and resources that have a lasting and measurable impact for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex (LGBTQI), and straight ally youth ages 11-23 in Charleston,

Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties.

We Are Family's vision is that LGBTQI and straight ally youth



feel empowered to find their places in the world, in their families, and in their communities.

*Four times a year SHL collects donations on behalf of a worthy local charity. You can donate by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to*

SHL  
PO Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417-2256

*Make checks payable to SHL and note COQ in the memo line.*

*Or securely [donate online!](#)*

## Take our Survey!

Do you like organizing or hosting events? Or do you enjoy working behind the scenes? We are looking for people with skills, motivation, vision and experience to help run and guide SHL in the future. If you would like to be more involved in leading SHL, please complete our short [member involvement survey](#).



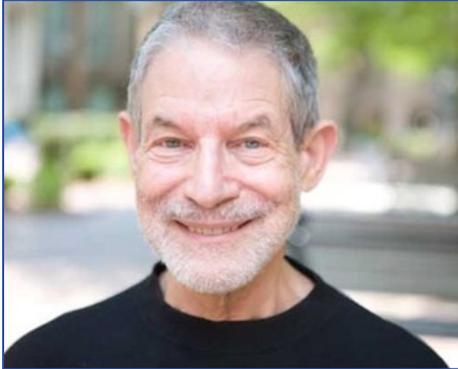
# In Defense of Snake Handlers

Before we get to the snakes, what do we mean by religious freedom? I think it means that individuals can practice, promote, and proselytize for their religion, but that government cannot favor one religion over another, or religion over non-religion. If government exempts an action from law because of a person's religious belief, I think that same exemption should apply to non-religious conscientious belief. Example? The [Supreme Court ruling in favor of an atheist conscientious objector to war](#).

However, claims of religious belief or conscience cannot be used as a valid excuse to undermine society's promotion of the general welfare. For instance, we must pay taxes even for government expenses we morally oppose. For me that would include wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the War on Drugs; for others it might include Obamacare. A pharmacist should be required to dispense prescriptions regardless of religious belief, just as a supermarket cashier is required to check out meat products regardless of vegan belief.

An unconscionable [bill passed by the Arizona Legislature](#) would allow widespread discrimination against the LGBT community in the name of religious liberty. If the governor signs it into law, business owners can refuse to serve gay customers by claiming that it would violate their religious principles. A similar measure was recently defeated in Kansas, but such bills are being considered in other states.

Obamacare, which requires employers to provide coverage for contraceptives, exempts some religious employers. Their employees could still get free access



**Herb Silverman** is founder and President Emeritus of the [Secular Coalition for America](#), author of [Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt](#), and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

to contraception through a third-party insurance provider, but some employers still object because they simply don't want their workers to get contraceptives. Message to employers: Religious liberty gives you the right to argue against contraceptives, but not the right to take away the freedom of individuals to make their own health care decisions.

People are always free to pray the cancer or the burst appendix away. They can also use tarot cards, psychics, or exorcists. In fact, an easily affordable health care plan is offered in [Mark 16:17-18](#): "These signs will follow believers: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands

on the sick, and they will recover." (A cautionary note: All potentially life-threatening freedoms apply to adults only, not to minors.)

In reality, snakes have been more effective in reducing overpopulation than in healing the sick. See [Darwin Awards](#). Kentucky Pastor Jamie Coots, who was also a reality TV star on [Snake Salvation](#), recently died after refusing treatment for a bite he received while handling snakes during a service. To paraphrase [Matt 26:52](#): He who lives by the snake, dies by the snake.

Nonetheless, I side with the religious freedom of snake handlers who practice their religion without imposing it on those of us who live in the real world and decline to play with poisonous snakes.

What I admire (sort of) about Coots is that he was no hypocrite. He died for his beliefs, which would be considered a martyr's death in some circles. Contrast that with televangelists who ask poor people for love offerings, financial or otherwise. A few years ago TV preacher Robert Tilton exemplified the breed when he told people to send money along with their prayer requests, for which he promised special prayers. Unfortunately for him, ABC news [dug up the dumpster-diver evidence](#) of the requests being discarded unread after the money had been removed (not that it would have made any difference had the prayer requests been read).

Unbelievable faith beliefs are required by many religions, which brings to mind Mark Twain's definition of faith: "[Faith is believing what you know ain't so.](#)" Does having faith that poisonous snakes won't kill you make any less sense than having faith that you are literally eating the body and drinking the blood of a Jew who has been dead for 2,000 years?

Suicide was once a crime, but now is mostly legal. I would try to dissuade a potential suicide victim, but sometimes people have rational arguments for end-of-life choices. So I support a person's right to physician-assisted suicide, though some religions try to prevent everyone from exercising this option. To that I offer a valuable cliché: If you don't want to have a physician-assisted suicide (or contra-

ception, abortion, blood transfusion, exorcism, prayers, snakes, whatever), then don't have one.

A live and let live attitude on most matters of religion could lead to a more peaceful world, but sometimes it would also mean a live and let die attitude--including by snakes or suicide.

This piece was originally posted February 24, 2014 on [huffingtonpost.com](http://huffingtonpost.com)

## Become a Humanist Celebrant

A Humanist Celebrant plays a role similar to that of a traditional clergyman with one difference: humanist ceremonies express our positive, nontheistic philosophy of humanism instead of traditional faith. Humanist Celebrants conduct humanist, non-religious, and interreligious weddings, commitment/same-sex unions, memorials, baby namings, and other life cycle ceremonies. Humanist Celebrants

are legally recognized in all states and worldwide, being accorded the same rights and privileges granted by law to traditional clergy. The Humanist Society offers different endorsement options for those considering a one-time experience, those wishing to be regular celebrants as well as leader celebrants, lay leaders, and chaplains. [See the endorsement guidelines](#) to learn more.

**As representatives of AHA, Celebrants, Humanist Ministers and Chaplains are in a unique position to work with their communities in promoting humanism.**

## Happy Anniversary SHL!

2014 marks the SHL's 20th anniversary! Watch for upcoming special events!

## Member Perk: Stipends

SHL offers five stipends annually to members to help offset costs associated with attending an atheist/freethought conference or convention, or to attend a freethought summer camp. Some examples of eligible events are the American Atheists convention, Freedom From Religion Foundation convention, American Humanists convention, Camp Quest, and Camp Inquiry, among others.



Stipends are available to dues-paying members. A member may not receive a stipend two consecutive years, however different members of a family membership are eligible even if another family

member received a stipend the previous year.

Stipends cover up to \$200 of registration, travel, and lodging costs. Food and drink expenses are not eligible for stipends.

Stipend recipients must write a short essay about their event experience and submit it along with their receipts to [treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org) within 30 days of the completion of the event. The essay will be published in an issue of *The Separationist*. Parents may assist young children who attended camp with their essays but the essay should reflect the child's own words as much as possible.

A stipend request must be pre-approved before attending your event. To see whether your event qualifies and to inquire about stipend availability and to apply, or if you have questions about the stipend program, contact [treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org).

Membership is open to all who support the purposes for which this organization is founded. The available membership levels and corresponding dues are:

- Individual: \$35.00
- Family: \$50.00
- Individual/Family - Sustaining: \$100.00
- Individual/Family - Benefactor: \$150.00
- Individual/Family - Lifetime: \$500.00

SHL is a 501(c)3 non-profit (non-prophet) organization and dues are tax-deductible. You can join/renew by cash, credit card or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to SHL, PO Box 32256, Charleston SC 29417-2256 (make checks payable to SHL and note Membership Dues in the memo line). Or securely [pay online](#) and select your membership level in the dropdown box.

## Member Essay

### Camp Quest

By: Mabel Reed, age 10

Camp Quest was fun. I had fun on the zip line and doing science. The zip line was fun because I got to see the lake and a lot of trees, too. Climbing up the tree was really hard but my counselors helped me. I thought I was-

n't brave enough to do the zip line but I DID IT!

In science we got to squish strawberries and get out their DNA, too. I don't know what DNA means but I liked it. And hiking was great, too. I got to see a lot of stuff, too. I also liked roasting marshmallows at the campfire.

I loved sleeping on the bunk beds. One time, we won Charlie the Unicorn because we kept our cabin the cleanest.

Camp Quest is so much fun! Don't be afraid of going to camp!

## Member Essay

### Camp Quest

**By: Lucy Reed, age 13**

This was my first year at Camp Quest and it was fantastic. I had so much fun and I learned a lot. There were several activities that I enjoyed such as: performing skits, dissecting a sheep's brain, zip lining, rock climbing, playing violin in the talent show, Socrates Cafe, and going to the Cray Cray Carnival.

I liked the sheep brain dissection because we got to look at the parts of the brain the parts that interested me were the cerebrum, cerebellum, and spinal cord. The brain was white and very small it was about the size of a baseball.

I enjoyed performances, too. During the talent show I played my violin. We also got to performing skits. This was great because I was able to try out my acting skills for the first time and it brought out my funny side. The types of skits we did were hilarious and had everyone around the camp fire laughing.

The last activity, I enjoyed was the CrayCray Carnival because we got to act and look all silly. My costume wasn't very silly but it was nerdy though. At the Cray Cray Carnival I liked to do the karaoke because I loved to sing but I sang terribly though, but overall I did alright and nobody laughed at me.

The best thing about camp was the fact that we were able to be ourselves without any words bringing us down. Being gay and atheist, I'm sometimes put down by that in my community but here at camp I feel safe. It was great to not be the only atheist kid there.

The reason why I'd like to come back for camp is because I can be who I am with no judgement [sic], also because I learned that evolution is more than just going from gorilla to man.

I recommend this camp for anyone who loves the outdoors and is very outgoing.

## Our Officers

President: Amy Monsky  
Vice President: Herb Silverman  
Treasurer: Jason Gregory  
Secretary: Laura Kasman  
Newsletter Editor: Sue Edward

## Contact us!

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president@lowcountryhumanists.org

*SHL is a non-prophet  
organization!*

# SECULAR HUMANISTS



## OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

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## The Separationist

**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.*