

SECULAR
HUMANISTS



OF THE
LOWCOUNTRY

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.

The Separationist is 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 SHL president (president@lowcountryhumanists.org) with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 9

December 2017

Annual Holiday Potluck and Book Auction

December 17, 4:00 PM
2 Lamboll Street
Charleston, 29401

Children Welcome!

It's that time again! Please bring your favorite dish to share and join us to meet and mingle with other SHL members. Also, please bring humanist-related books and other media to put up for bid and raise funds for SHL activities.

Children are welcome, and there will be a cookie decorating

station to entertain them. Hope to see everyone there!



Save the Date!
SHL's next regular monthly meeting will be 4:00 PM,
January 21, 2018
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

President's Corner: Secular Comforts

Twice a year, I make a presentation to a religious studies class at the College of Charleston. My "Meet an Atheist" talk covers some history of secularism, some of my own life story, and attempts to convey our worldview in a way that is informative but not threatening. The best part is at the end when the students can ask me questions.

One of the questions I was asked recently was "Where do you find comfort?" That question caught me off guard. I don't remember exactly what I said, but I suspect my answer was unsatisfactory. Now that I have had time to think about it a bit, I would like to try to formulate a better answer and test it out on you here in this column.

Just like anyone, regardless of religion, I find comfort in the people that I love and in the beauty found in both art or nature.

But, the question itself implies that it I am missing some source of comfort that is available only to "believers."

For instance, religious people may find comfort in the thought that everything that happens is part of some huge *plan*. I do not believe that, but I am proud to be part of something bigger than myself: the human race itself. When I call myself a humanist, it is because I identify with all of humanity. I am proud to be part of this team working together to do

more than just survive. I'd like to think that I'm making my own little contributions to our efforts to understand how the universe works, to invent new things and create artwork.

Life really looks quite unfair. Some people who are seemingly



very deserving suffer terribly and everything seems to work out great for some people who do not seem as deserving. A religious person may find comfort in thinking that these apparent injustices are made right by an all-powerful being in the eternal afterlife. But, I think life is actually exactly as unfair as it seems. Still, I find comfort in my ability to do something, even if it is only a little something, to make it *more* fair. Through my charitable donations and volunteering, by how I treat the people around me, and by how I *vote*, I like to believe that I am going to leave the world a little more like that ideal we all wish it was,

Religious people will tell me that the *purpose* in their life comes

from their faith, and that my secular life must therefore be (or seem) purposeless. But, it certainly does not feel that way. There is enough joy and love in life to make it worth living.

I do not believe there is any actual *magic* in the universe, but there is enough mystery and grandeur in the natural world to inspire awe. And, I do not believe that our souls "live" forever, but that makes the short lifetimes that we are lucky enough to have even more precious.

And finally, although I'm sure it *would* be pleasant to believe that I am personally loved by the creator of the universe, pleasure is not actually a criterion that determines what I believe. In fact, I would rather know the truth than believe a pleasing falsehood. So, ironically, my confidence that I am following the evidence and logic rather than pursuing "comfort" is itself a source of comfort.

Well, dear Separationist reader, what do you think of my answer? Feedback would be appreciated, because I may be asked the same question again the next time I speak to a comparative religion class at CofC.

Alex Kasman is a math professor at the College of Charleston. He has been on the board of SHL for 15+ years. During that time he has served various roles including volunteer coordinator, newsletter editor, Webmaster and is currently serving as SHL President.

Upcoming SHL Events

Volunteer Activity: Potluck in the Park



Sunday, December 3

Set up 12:45 p.m.

Start serving 1:00 p.m.

68 Columbus St.

Charleston, SC

The event is held next to the fountain in the park with the white columns. It's a small park near Trident Tech with plenty of free parking. Kids and teens welcome!

In December we will be sponsoring the weekly community potluck for the needy in Mall Park downtown Charleston, organized by Kathi Regalbuto. We've done this several times before, and each time we feed anywhere from 30 to 60 people. We have

received compliments on the quality of our cuisine!

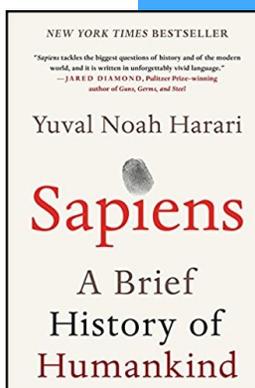
SHL members bring the food and help serve. Kathi provides tables, chaffing dishes, paper plates and utensils. Please RSVP on Meetup (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/) or email volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org to volunteer and let us know what you would like to contribute. You can bring a casserole or similar dish to be eaten immediately or bring a bag of grab-n-go items like fruit and hardboiled eggs for folks to enjoy later.

SHL Book Club

In January we will discuss ***Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*** by Yuval Noah Harari (2015). Hardcover 464 pages \$27.90, paperback \$8.80, Audible \$12.99 15 hours, Hoopla (free with library card).

Says book club coordinator Yvonne Michel, "Although this book is not brief by any means, it is impressive with its presentation of complex science and history in a fully compelling narrative and a depth of understanding that is rarely related with such clarity and comprehension. It also has some challenging stories to tell us all."

According to an Amazon review, "Tackling evolutionary concepts from a historian's perspective, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, describes human development through a framework of three



Note: The Book Club is on vacation for December but will reconvene on January 28, 4:00, at Barnes & Noble/West Ashley.

not-necessarily-orthodox "Revolutions": the Cognitive, the Agricultural, and the Scientific. His ideas are interesting and often amusing: *Why have humans managed to build astonishingly large populations when other primate groups top out at 150 individuals?* Because our talent for gossip allows us to build networks in societies too large for personal relationships between everyone, and our universally accepted "imagined realities"—such as money, religion, and Limited Liability Corporations—keep us in line."

You are welcome to RSVP on SHL's Meetup page (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/) or Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/90436456767/>).

December 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3: <i>Pothuck in the Park</i> 12:45 PM Columbus St	4	5	6	7	8	9
10  Intl Human Rights Day	11	12	13  Hanukkah begins	14	15	16 
17: <i>Holiday Potluck</i> 4:00 PM Lamboll St	18 	19 	20	21  Winter Solstice	22	23  Festivus & HumanLight
24/31	25  Christmas	26  Kwanzaa begins	27	28	29	30  Happy Festivus!

SHL in the News: Members Confront Racism

In a November 4 article in the *Post and Courier*, the newspaper requested that people explain how their “faith” fights racism (“Guiding light: Readers share how faith can foster racial reconciliation”). As it turns out, several humanists responded. SHL members Herb Silverman, Sharon Robles, Bonnie Cleaveland, and Alex Kasman contributed the following comments.

Herb Silverman, Charleston: “Each one a minority”

As a secular humanist, I have faith in reason. What divides us in this diverse community is not so

much our religious differences, but the degree of commitment we have to equal freedom of conscience for all people. Each of us is a minority in some way. It might be race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other aspect in which we may be regarded as different. We must defend the rights of all our citizens and residents and treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity. Our deeds are more important than our creeds.

Sharon Robles, Mount Pleasant: “Common humanity”

I consider myself a humanist,

with a strong affection for the Unitarian/Universalist principles. Humanism is an approach to life based on reason and our common humanity. When we respect our common humanity, there is no room for prejudice against a segment of the human race. I was married in a Unitarian Church, and we raised our children to be part of the Unitarian Universalist church. Unitarian/Universalists follow seven core principles, all of which acknowledge “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” I have on many occasions protested and marched in order to support a more just and equitable

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Charity of the Quarter: Hurricane Recovery

The SHL Charity of the Quarter for October through December 2017 is the Hurricane Recovery fund coordinated by Foundation Beyond Belief. FBB has raised over \$25,000 for the victims of Hurricane Maria, a Category 4 storm that struck Puerto Rico on September 20.

FBB has announced that the primary on-the-ground beneficiary of their fundraising work will be Proyecto Matria, a “local organization working to help the women of Puerto Rico become self-sufficient in order to overcome situations of violence and gender discrimination.” Proyecto Matria was founded in 2004 with the goal of providing women with such vital services as affordable housing (an especially dire need in the wake of the destructive power of the storm) as well as education, psychological support, and job assistance.



FOUNDATION BEYOND BELIEF

FBB is a humanist charity that has promoted secular volunteering and responsible charitable giving since 2010. FBB provides an avenue for humanists to give to highly qualified and vetted charities in a number of cause areas. FBB has already channeled millions of grant dollars toward programs that alleviate poverty, promote education, work for social justice, and benefit the natural world.

In January 2016, FBB deployed their first Humanist Disaster Recovery team to Columbia, SC. Volunteers helped victims from the “Thousand Year Flood” of the previous October to rebuild their homes and lives. Now we in South Carolina can turn to FBB to help

society, based on these core beliefs.

Bonnie Cleaveland, West Ashley: “Hatred is devastating”

Secular humanists know that the problems we face must be solved by human action, so part of the humanist's credo is to work for human rights and racial justice. We don't need faith to know to treat people of all races with equal respect. Science reveals that

oppressed racial groups suffer generational effects of that oppression. Hostility makes individuals more likely to suffer and die from heart disease. Hatred is thus devastating to individuals and societies, both discriminated and discriminator.

Alex Kasman, Mount Pleasant: “World unity”

My “faith,” if that is the right word, is secular humanism. The word “humanism” in it refers to

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

SHL

P.O. Box 32256

Charleston SC 29417-2256

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

Or securely **donate online** on our website (go to lowcountry-humanists.org and select “Join/Donate > Donate to our Charity of the Quarter” from the top menu.)

others recover from a similar disaster.

our belief in the unity of the human race and the fact that we want to make the world a better place for everyone. We also accept the lessons of science, even when they are not pleasant. There is a great deal of evidence showing that we all have implicit biases, which can be a source of racism. However, we can learn to recognize when unconscious biases are causing us to think irrationally and avoid the damage they could cause.

SHL Board for 2017-2018

Alex Kasman, President

Bonnie Cleaveland, Vice President/
Secretary

Garrett Gehlhausen, Treasurer

Tom Amon

Steffi Green

Vera Hannaford

Ed Stephens

∞ ∞ ∞

Newsletter editor:

Sharon Strong

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SHL is a non-prophet organization!

Find us online! We're (nearly) omnipresent!



Web (check out SHL's one-stop-shop)



Meetup (find future events and RSVP)



Email Lists (manage your notifications)



YouTube (watch video debates etc.)



Zazzle (buy SHL T-shirts & more)



Yahoo Families Group (parenting info)



Facebook Page (public postings)



Facebook Group (closed group for conversations about atheism/humanism)



Facebook Lounge (closed group for wide-ranging discussions)



Facebook Families Group
(closed group for parenting support)



Facebook Pay-It-Forward Group
(exchange free stuff & info on good causes)