



The Separationist



SPRING POTLUCK 2007

Even the non-religious can have traditions! The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry will prove this once again by celebrating another successful year with a Potluck Party on **May 20**. We will meet at **5:00p.m.**, at Roger's house (**see directions on page 2**) for a short business meeting followed by a party featuring good food and good company.

This is a chance to get together for a social exchange with folks you never have time to chat with at the regular meetings. SHL members who seldom or never attend monthly meetings are especially welcome at this friendly gathering.

One important item on the brief business meeting agenda will be elections for SHL board members. Please come prepared to



nominate yourself or someone else who has agreed to be nominated. It would be wonderful to have some new volunteers for this influential and prestigious role.

Don't forget to bring food and/or drink along, too. Some of you may wonder what to contribute. As is our custom established years ago by Herb Silverman: "Atheists will bring only food whose ingredients they can see, agnostics are not sure what they will bring or whether there really is food, skeptics will argue whether we really should have a potluck supper at all, pagans will bring wine, anarchists may bring

whatever they damn well please, and humanists optimistically believe they will help to complement the meal and make it a wonderful experience for all."

SHL Helps Out at Lowcountry Food Bank

On April 27th, a team of volunteers from the SHL helped out at the Lowcountry Food Bank as the first official activity of the SHL Volunteer Network. Jonathan Lamb coordinated the activity by making arrangements with the Food Bank and organizing the team. (Jonathan also took the photos on page 4.)

Essentially, what we did, is take boxes of donated food and process it by throwing out anything unusable and sorting the usable things (after cleaning) into boxes. The food was donated to the Food Bank by area supermarkets and restaurants (much of it either damaged or beyond its expiration date). The sorted boxes are then taken by "client" organizations (food pantries, soup kitchens, churches, etc.) for further distribution to poor individuals and families in the area.

We were pleased to learn that the Food Bank places great emphasis on the nutritional quality of the food they distribute and that they ensure that the client organizations are truly getting the food to those who need it most. It is also good to know that the SHL was able to help them with these noble goals.

The SHL hopes to be involved in a project like this each month in the future. If you would like to volunteer, watch for information in this newsletter, make sure that the SHL has a current e-mail address for you, or write to Jonathan at weatherfeller@gmail.com.

Opinion:

Should the HPV vaccine be mandatory for 6th grade girls?

By Laura Kasman

This spring, Merck's human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine came to market as the first vaccine that could protect women against cervical cancer. I say could, because it will take years to find out if the vaccine actually makes cervical cancer rates go down. For now all we know is that the vaccine protects against infection with the two HPV strains most commonly found in women with pre-cancerous cervical lesions (the virus is hard to identify in fully formed tumors). There are another 10-12 HPV strains now known to cause cervical cancer, but altogether they currently account for only about 10% of cases. However, because of the other carcinogenic HPV strains and the uncertainty about the vaccine's ability to prevent cancer, vaccinated women will still have to get annual Pap tests for the foreseeable future.

The question now is whether the vaccine should be mandatory for 11-12 year old girls, as Merck recommends and numerous state legislatures are now considering or legislating. My opinion is no. And before you decide I must be a right-wing fundamentalist, Focus on Family type to say that, know that as a virologist (PhD. 1992), a humanist, and the mother of an 11 year old daughter, I have spent considerable time thinking over the issue. I even spoke personally with the principal scientist that developed the vaccine, Martin Kast, when he was at MUSC in April. (He has two daughters by the way, 15 and 19, both vaccinated). First let me say that having seen the data, I have no doubt that the vaccine is safe, and that it protects against infection with the HPV strains it is made to protect against. However, let's consider the bigger picture.

Mandatory childhood vaccines, with the exception of tetanus, are mandatory because the diseases they protect against are highly contagious and infected people endanger casual bystanders. Second, many of the childhood diseases are most dangerous to very young infants who haven't been fully vaccinated yet and pregnant women, who it is not safe to vaccinate. In addition, the vaccines do not produce a strong immune response in everyone, and so the best way to protect the unprotected populations is to vaccinate as many people as possible to keep the germ from getting a "foothold" in the population. And finally, the diseases are all ones that affect primarily children, and so it makes sense to vaccinate children, even though they cannot give informed consent.

(continued on page 5)

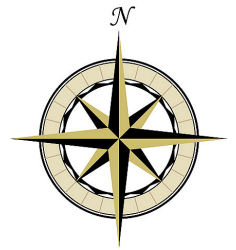
Directions to the Potluck Party

● The address is 313 West Hudson Avenue on Folly Beach.

● To get there, take Folly Road through James Island.

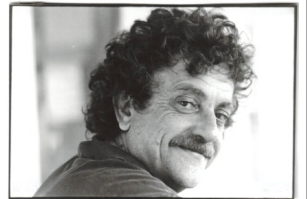
● When you go over the last bridge and are on Folly Island, take the third right turn onto West Hudson Avenue.

● Roger's house is three blocks down on the left side and his phone number is 588-9367.



Kurt Vonnegut

In April, American author Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) died from complications following an accidental fall. Vonnegut frequently referred to his lack of religion, his skepticism and (at least *sometimes*) his self identification as a secular humanist. In a "self-interview" he once asked himself about the influence studying anthropology had on him, and he answered:



"It confirmed my atheism, which was the faith of my fathers anyway. Religions were exhibited and studied as the Rube Goldberg inventions I'd always thought they were."

Contact Information for the SHL:

Phone: 843-556-4490

E-Mail: shl@lowcountry.humanists.net

Web: lowcountry.humanists.net

**Mail: P.O. Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417**

Letters to Editors from SHL Members

The following letter was sent to Time Magazine in response to their article "Teaching the Bible". It was not selected for publication in the magazine.

Like David van Biema ("The Case for Teaching the Bible", Time, 4/2/2007) and Stephen Prothero, I find the 1995 Colorado kidnap-rape-murder case -- in which jurors referred to the Bible in determining a punishment -- an interesting example. They present it as an instance of Biblical illiteracy, but I see it as illiteracy of a different kind.

In the article, van Biema suggests that a Biblically literate juror could (and should) have brought up Jesus' repudiation of old testament law in arguing against the application of the concept of "eye for an eye" in this case. Let us forget small complaints about this idea, such as that it seems to ignore the possibility that the jury contained Jewish Biblical experts who nonetheless would be unmoved by such arguments. These little details distract from the real point.

The point is that a discussion of what the Bible says about crime and punishment has no place in the jury room, regardless of the level of Biblical literacy of the jurors. The job of the jury is to apply the laws of this nation, not the laws of their religions.

Only when Americans (including jurors, Time Magazine columnists and university professors) demonstrate an ability to respect the separation of church and state built into our Constitution will I be willing to support Biblical literacy programs in public schools. Until then, with the level of Constitutional illiteracy in this country, I would no more support such a program than I would support classes about nutrition and diet if they were to be taught by teachers with eating disorders using textbooks written by the fast food industry.

-Alex Kasman

The following letter appeared in the Post and Courier, 4/5/07

A March 27 Post and Courier article described invocation guidelines recently passed by the Charleston County School Board. The guidelines allow for a reference to one divine being but no reference to a specific deity.

Such guidelines have something for both religious and non-religious to dislike. It is not the business of the school board, which represents a diverse community of all faiths and none, to invoke any deity, specific or not.

Board Vice Chairman Hillery Douglas said he was satisfied with the guidelines because they showed that "the board was religious and believed in a supreme being." Excuse me? I thought people were religious, not boards. The U.S. Constitution says there may be no religious test for public office. Individuals, including board members outside of official board functions, have the right to worship as they please or not worship at all.

Board member Arthur Ravenel Jr. said he was happy with the guidelines because members "were invoking the same deity that every religion worships." Perhaps Mr. Ravenel should spend time in one of the schools he represents and take a course in world religions. He would learn that not all religions worship the same deity. Some worship different deities, some worship many deities, and some worship no deity at all. For example, I am a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, a nontheistic religion that worships no deities.

Instead of publicly worshipping a non-specific deity as a board, the members who wish to seek guidance for conducting business from a deity of their choice should do so in private.

Perhaps if school board members didn't devote so much public time and energy on how to pray at public meetings and to avoid lawsuits for so doing, they would spend more time on the difficult task of improving the quality of education for our children in public schools.

-Herb Silverman

"Why We Fight"



**Special Humanist Movie Club
3PM on May 5th at Gage Hall**

The SHL's Movie Club usually meets at a movie theater on the first Saturday of each month, but in May they will be returning to Gage Hall (4 Archdale Street, next to the Unitarian Church) where we generally have our monthly meetings for a special event.

Eugene Jarecki's documentary "Why We Fight" (2005) will be shown in an event that will be advertised and is open to the public. The movie will be followed by discussion and a trip to a nearby restaurant for anyone who is interested.

SHL Trash Pickup

May 12, 2007

Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. On Saturday May 12th, SHL volunteers will meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. In exchange for our participation, the SHL gets a roadside sign that enhances our group's image through community involvement. It's also good exercise! If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.



News Briefs

Court Ruling on Child Proselytization

Michaela Bloodgood attempted to distribute a flyer at her public elementary school in Syracuse, New York reading:

"Hi! My name is Michaela and I would like to tell you about my life and how Jesus Christ gave me a new one."

The school, however, denied her permission to do so. Based on this, and with the help of the Florida based "Liberty Counsel", Bloodgood filed a lawsuit filed in 2004. Now, a Federal Court has ruled that the school violated her freedom of expression by doing so. Significant factors in the decision included that other students had distributed material unrelated to school activities, including advertisements for a YMCA camp and a Syracuse Children's Theater production.

Newsweek Poll

Results of a new poll on religious beliefs and tolerance was announced by Newsweek Magazine. We wish they gave some information about how the poll was conducted so that we could better interpret its significance, but in any case the following characteristics of those surveyed may be of interest to Separationist readers:

- 91% of surveyed adults said they believe in God and almost as many (87%) said they identify with a specific religion.
- 48% reject the scientific theory of evolution; 34% of surveyed college graduates said they accept the Biblical account of creation as fact.
- 73% of Evangelical Protestants said they believe that God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years; 39% of non-Evangelical Protestants and 41% of Catholics agreed with that view.
- 10% identified themselves as having "no religion," and only 6% said they don't believe in a God at all. Just 3% self-identified as atheist.
- Newsweek claims that the poll suggests a growing tolerance of atheism since 47% surveyed said "the country is more accepting of atheists today than it used to be." But, perhaps this result does not actually show increasing tolerance, but a greater number of intolerant people who (incorrectly) believe that in some Golden Age, American was a "Christian Nation" which is now corrupted by secularism.
- 62% of registered voters surveyed said they would not vote for a candidate who is an atheist.

Ghosts and Skeptics

An April 4th article in the Post and Courier reported an interesting event which took place at the supposedly haunted "Old City Jail" in downtown Charleston. Two teams of paranormal investigators and the Atheist-Humanist Alliance chapter of the College of Charleston met there for a day of investigation and discussion. Interestingly, the groups had more in common than one might initially have expected. Although none of the AHA members believed in ghosts, one of the paranormal investigators did claim to be an atheist.

Moreover, as the article explains, "Both groups know what it's like to have people look down on them for what they believe, or don't believe." In the end, the groups did not reach any agreement, but everyone was polite...as was the P&C article.

Prayer/IVP Paper Sinks Lower but Not Retracted

A 2001 paper claiming to have proved that intercessory prayer increases the success of *in vitro* fertilization was published in the Journal of Reproductive Medicine (JRM) and received a great deal of attention from the press. As reported previously in this newsletter, the paper unfortunately appears to be a case of complete fraud. In a March 2007 article in Ob-Gyn News, Dr. Bruce Flamm explains how the latest news that one of the authors has plagiarized a research paper should affect public opinion of the paper and the journal:

"The man who designed and supposedly conducted the prayer study resides in federal prison, and the man originally listed as lead author admits he knows nothing about the alleged research. The only remaining author has now been charged with plagiarism...As the situation now stands, there is not a single credible author remaining to support the mysterious 2001 study, yet it remains unretracted in the peer-reviewed evidence-based scientific medical literature. How can anyone decide what articles can be relied upon for correct information if articles known to be highly flawed or fraudulent are not retracted?"



SHL Volunteers help out at Lowcountry Food Bank (see story on front page)

(Opinion - Continued from Page 2)

The situation with the HPV vaccine could not be more different. The disease is only transmitted by sexual contact and cannot be spread to casual bystanders. The vaccine so far is 100% effective in producing an immune response (50,000 women and counting), so there is no increased protection for the group by vaccinating all girls, especially when the male half of the population will not be vaccinated at all. And third, cervical cancer, the disease the vaccine is being marketed to protect against, is exclusively a disease of sexually active adults. If implemented in pre-teens, it would be the first time that children are vaccinated against a disease that only affects adults.

There are many safe and proven medical interventions for adults that would save many more lives than the HPV vaccine, that we nevertheless do not make mandatory. For example, smoking cessation treatment, daily exercise, annual exams for prostate cancer and cervical cancer, and the annual flu shot. In fact, with the exception of forced quarantine for persons with certain infectious diseases (and even this is controversial), there are no mandatory medical interventions for adults in the United States. Time will tell if the HPV vaccine is the scientific breakthrough that is expected. I would support government efforts to make it affordable for every woman who wants it. But as a humanist and a scientist, I support personal autonomy with respect to medical care, and this is a case where it is perfectly safe for society if every woman gets to make her own informed choice about whether or not to be vaccinated.

Ellie Garvin is Gone

by Sharon Fratepietro

It was sad to hear that Ellie Garvin died on April 10. She and her partner of 30 years, Sue Metzger, have been members of the SHL for more years than I can recall, though Ellie did not attend recent meetings due to poor health.

Ellie and Sue, who still participates from time to time, both had distinguished careers at MUSC. Ellie was a nurse, first in public health and then as an educator. At MUSC she was first a professor, then Assistant Dean of the College of Nursing, and finally the Director of Continuing Education for the Dept. of Nursing.

Although I did not know Ellie well, I remember her as a quintessentially nice woman, with keen interest in justice and separation of church and state. Often, when I had a letter published in the Post and Courier, I got a note from her thanking me for writing it. I am sorry I won't be seeing her pleasant, intelligent face at any more SHL meetings.

July Potluck

**Home of Frank and Frances Hay
July 15, 5:00 p.m.**

The Separationist and SHL monthly meetings at Gage Hall will be taking a break until September, but other SHL activities will continue throughout the summer. The Movie Club and the SHL Volunteer Network will continue to meet monthly. The SHL online discussion board and website are always open. And Frances and Frank Hay have graciously offered to host a mid-summer potluck at their beautiful home in West Ashley. It will be on Sunday, July 15 at 5:00 p.m. Just bring a beverage or a dish to pass to 30 Town Creek Drive, Wespanee Subdivision, and join other humanists for an evening of food and fellowship.

Driving Directions:

- From I-26, take Exit 216A.
- Keep to the left at the fork just before the 3rd stoplight, Hwy. 171.
- Turn left onto Fort Royal Ave. at the 7th stoplight from I 26. There is a BP station on the right. Take the 2nd left off Fort Royal Ave., Town Creek Drive.
- #30 is a single story wood house on the right, near the cul-de-sac.
- From Charleston, take Hwy. 61 and bear right onto Hwy 171 at the fork near Eckerd's. There will be a stoplight and a BP station on the left shortly after you get onto Hwy. 171.
- Turn right at the light onto Fort Royal Ave.
- Take the second left, Town Creek Drive.
- #30 is a single story wood house on the right near the cul-de-sac

Best wishes for a secular summer!

The Separationist

**Newsletter of the
Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry**

Editors:

**Laura and Alex
Kasman**

**Secular Humanists
of the Lowcountry
P.O. Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417**

SHL Calendar

Film: "Road to Guantanamo"

May 4, 2007 / 7PM at Gage Hall

Free showing sponsored by UUC and Charleston Peace.

SHL Movie Club: "Why We Fight"

May 5, 2007 / 3PM at Gage Hall

Contact Jonathan Lamb at weatherfeller@gmail.com to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner.

Trash Pickup

8:50 AM May 12, 2007

Meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. Contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.

SHL Potluck Party

May 20, 2007 / 5:00 PM

(see directions on page 2)

SHL Movie Club

June 2, 2007

Contact Sue Edward bflosue@earthlink.net to join SHL members at a movie and discussion over dinner.

Potluck Party at Hay House

July 15

(See Page 5 for Details)

Join the SHL:

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of free-thinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance, 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 this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Web-page at:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net>

Contribute

Please contact the editors 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 appreciated. Write to us at newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.