



# The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 5

May, 2017

## Spring Potluck Party And Board Elections

Sunday, May 21, 2017, 5:00 PM, 611 North Shore Dr, Charleston (James Is.)

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### 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.

Our **Spring Potluck Party** will be held at 5PM on May 21st at the lovely James Island home of SHL member Libby Smith.

Bring a dish to share and get to know like-minded people over dinner and conversation. We are not assigning items, simply bring whatever food item you wish: salads, entrees, side dishes, and desserts are all good choices. Items can be homemade or store bought. SHL will supply the paper goods and beverages.

We will not have a formal speaker meeting this month. However, we will have a very short business meeting during the potluck to elect the SHL Board for 2017 - 2018. All dues



-paying members present at the potluck are eligible to vote! If you are not currently a dues-paying member, you can join or renew your membership [here](#). And, if you would like to be considered as a candidate for the board, please write to [shl@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:shl@lowcountryhumanists.org) to let us know!

(Note that children are welcome to attend this party, but that they will need to be supervised, especially outside where there is a waterfront area which may not be safe for little ones.)

Looking forward to seeing you there!

# President's Corner: We Will Miss You Sue

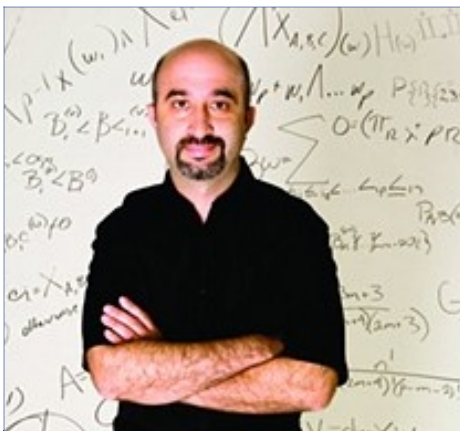
## President's Corner: "We Will Miss You Sue"

by Alex Kasman

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* would not exist without the help and support of *many* people: the brave founders who dared to form an atheist group in the "holy city", the members and donors who pay for all of our activities, every volunteer who host or run the SHL events, etc...

But, within that larger group, a few stand out as super-heroes, those who have done far more than most to contribute to this group's success. Sue Edward is one of them. Here are just a few of the things she has done: she single handedly has produced the *Separationist* (the newsletter of SHL, including this issue), run the monthly Movie Club and Happy Hour, served as our liaison to the Progressive Network, and hosted many SHL board meetings at her house. In fact, a clue to how important she

has been to SHL is how we're trying to find a way to fill the gap she will be leaving in the group when she moves to Kansas City where she has taken an exciting new job. We are not even considering finding *someone* to replace her, because we know that the best we can hope for is to find a team of *people* to take on at least *some* of the things she was doing. She is literally irreplaceable!



**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.

One of the last things she did for us was give us a wonderful opportunity to gather many former SHL board members and friends at a farewell party. On behalf of all of SHL, past present and future, let me say "Sue Edward, no matter where you move to or whether you pay your dues, we will always consider you a member of the SHL family and will be grateful for all you have done."

# 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.

## May 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6 <a href="#">Volunteer Activity</a>
7	8	9	10 <a href="#">Happy Hour</a>	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21 <a href="#">Book Club</a> <a href="#">Potluck</a>	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29 	30	31 <a href="#">Team Trivia</a>			

# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

## SHL Volunteer Activity: Adopt a Highway

Saturday, May 6, 2017, 8:45am—10:00am

Bank parking lot, 1011 Harborview Rd, Charleston  
(James Island)

In 2016 the SHL re-adopted a piece of Harborview Road to keep clean through January 2018. A road widening project has changed the area quite a bit, but litter still happens! Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, May 6.



As always, participants get a sense of accomplishment from making the world a better place, and a chance to talk as we walk. We also have a sign put up by the Dept. of Transportation there that says that the road is kept clean by "Secular Humanists" which helps us let people know that we exist and that we care.

We meet at 8:45 am in the parking lot of the bank at 1011 Harbor View Rd, next to the Harris Teeter, on James Island. We'll bring the supplies. Please join us if you can.

## SHL Happy Hour

Wednesday, May 10, 6:00pm

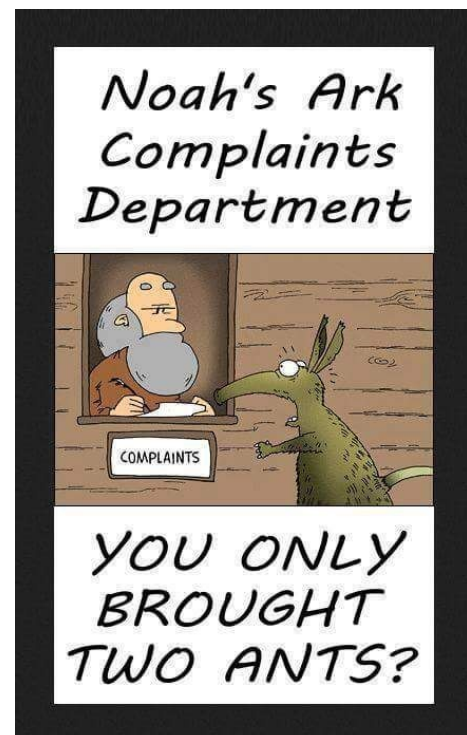
DIG in the Park, 1049 E. Montague Ave, North Charleston (Park Circle)

Happy Hour is always a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and yummy food among old and new friends!



This month we will meet at DIG in the Park. Everyone is welcome—we hope to see you there!

RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).



# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

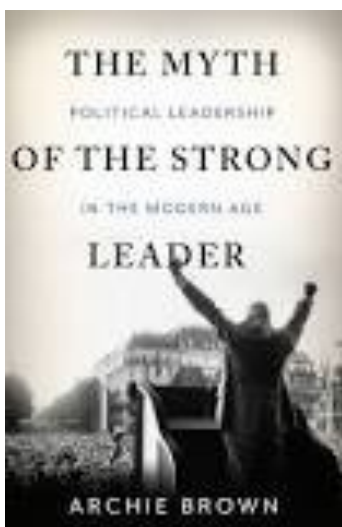
## SHL Book Club

Sunday, May 21, 2017, 4:00pm

611 North Shore Drive, Charleston (James Island)

*Note: this is a special date and location!* This book group meeting will be held immediately before the [SHL Potluck Party](#) and instead of our usual location we will meet at the home where the party is to be held.

In May we are reading *The Myth of the Strong Leader: Political Leadership in the Modern Age* by Archie Brown (2014, 482p). In this magisterial and wide-ranging survey of political leadership over the past hundred years, renowned Oxford professor Archie Brown challenges the widespread belief that strong leaders – meaning those who dominate their colleagues and the policy-making process – are the most successful and admirable.



Bill Gates' Favorite Books of 2016 states that this book is "an important and unusual read ... Brown does a wonderful job of showing how the same qualities that can be seen as so appealing in strong leaders can lead, in mild cases, to bad decisions and in the most extreme cases to death and suffering on a massive scale. After reading this book you come away with a deeper understanding of leadership in general."

It is not a strict rule that you have read the book by the time of the club meeting. We find that those who have not read the material before hand can contribute inter-

esting insights to the topic and then are compelled to do further reading. Always a good thing. We have a list of books we are considering for future book club meetings. At our monthly meetings we then vote on which books from this list are to be read when. And we

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 Potluck

Sunday, May 21, 2017, 4:00pm

611 North Shore Drive, Charleston (James Island)

Join us for our annual Spring potluck and board elections. [See page 1](#) for details.

# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

## Trivia Night

Wednesday, May 31, 2017, 7:00pm

Two Keys Public House, 205 Grandview Dr, Summerville

**Note: this is a new location.** Come out for a night of trivia and socializing! This is a team event and is free. It's also lots of fun! Any winnings will be used to purchase appetizers for the team at a future trivia night.

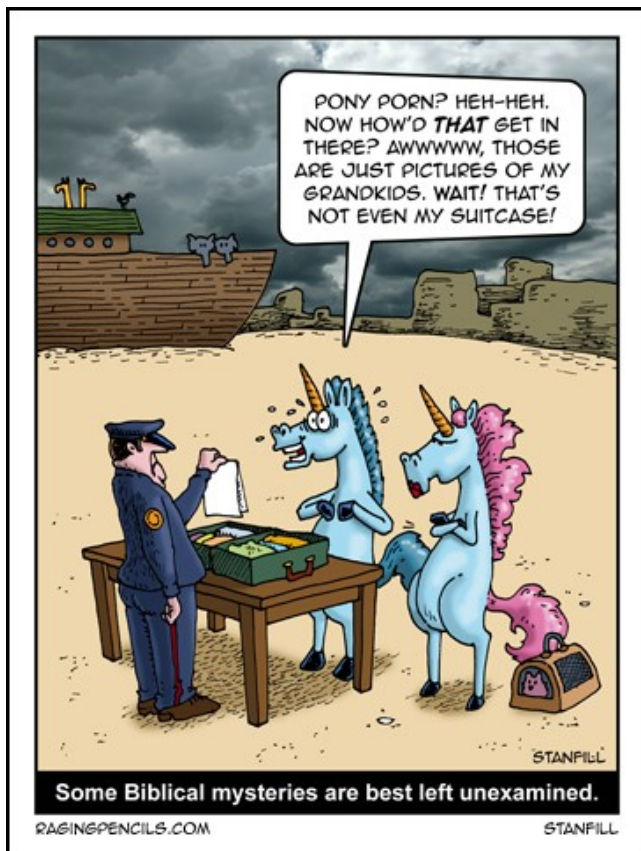
RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).



# Pay it Forward

Do you have usable items that you no longer want or are you in need of an item? If so, join the [Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry Pay It Forward facebook group](#). This is a closed group for SHL members to post things they want to give away and for others to claim them. All items are free. Whether you are spring cleaning, looking for a few items for your apartment or dorm, looking for things you can make into crafts, or just want to free up a little space in your home, this is the place to post/find them.

Why don't I see Movie Club or Girls Night Out events this month? See [page 7!](#)



## Did you know?



You can order SHL's **In Reason We Trust** license plates from the SC DMV! [Click here](#) for info. And did you notice the nifty resemblance to the [AHA Conference](#) logo?

# We Need YOU!

SHL would not be able to provide our members with such a large variety of activities without dedicated volunteers to lead them.

We are currently looking for volunteers to lead the following activities—without volunteers we are in danger of losing these activities. Can this be you?



**Movie Club Coordinator**—the Movie Club Coordinator schedules film viewings at local theaters or in someone’s home, creates an event listing in facebook and meetup and/or sends the info to the newsletter editor, welcomes Movie Club attendees, and facilitates choosing a post-movie restaurant. Time commitment: once per month, less if the position is shared among multiple coordinators.

**Girls Night Out Coordinator**—the Girls Night Out Coordinator selects a bar/restaurant (choosing various locations around the area), reserves a table large enough for the group, creates an event listing in facebook and meetup and/or sends the info to the newsletter editor, and welcomes Girls Night Out attendees. Time commitment: once per month, less if the position is shared among multiple coordinators.

**Have something else in mind?** We are always open to offering new activities for our members—either regularly scheduled or one-time events. Some of these may be game nights, bowling, bocce, bridge walks, billiards, political discussions, river floats, kayaking, biking, teen activities, etc.

If you are interested in one of the above volunteer positions or in organizing another event, contact [president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org). THANK YOU!



## Other Events of Interest

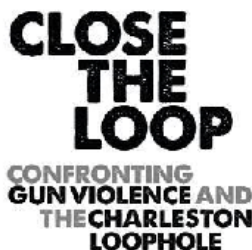
While not official SHL events, the following events may be of interest to SHL members

### "Close the Loop" Speaker Panel

**Saturday, May 6, 2017, 10:00am—noon**

**UU Church, 4 Archdale St, Charleston**

Close The Loop – Confronting  
Gun Violence and The  
Charleston Loophole



Keynote Speaker: SC State  
Senator Marlon Kimpson

The OFA (Organizing For  
Action) SC Fellows of 2017 will  
be hosting a Speaker Panel on Saturday May 6th from  
10 am to 12 pm at Gage Hall (Unitarian Church) in  
Downtown Charleston.

Panelists:

**\* SC State Senator Marlon Kimpson**

Senator Kimpson will discuss SC House Bill S. 516, a bi-partisan bill which he is co-sponsoring, and how we, as citizens, can offer our support in regard to better common sense gun legislation and gun safety going forward. S. 516 addresses three components aimed at closing "The Charleston Loophole", which allowed for Dylan Roof to purchase the gun he used to commit his terrible act of violence at the Mother Emanuel AME church.

[http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess122\\_2017-2018/bills/516.htm](http://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess122_2017-2018/bills/516.htm)

**\* Jackie Shelley of Moms Demand Action**

**\* Pastor Thomas Dixon of The Coalition – People United to Take Back Our Community**

- \* Merrill Chapman of The Brady Campaign
- \* Richard Haggerty, MD with Arm and Arm
- \* Christian Rainey

We hope you will join us for this special event.

There is some on street parking around the church, but the best place to park is at the Queen Street Garage.

### Hands Across the Sand

**Saturday, May 20, 2017, 11:30am—12:30pm**

**Edwin S. Taylor Fishing Pier, Folly Beach**

No offshore drilling! Yes clean energy! Come join us for the 8th annual Hands Across the Sand event at Folly Beach to oppose offshore drilling in the Atlantic and push for clean energy alternatives. Gather with fellow citizens for a quick but powerful photo opp that will send a strong message to our elected leaders.

We will have a press conference at 11:45 am, at which elected officials and other community leaders will deliver comments. At 12:00, participants will join hands in a line as long as possible, forming both a physical and metaphorical line in the sand, standing up for protecting our coast from offshore drilling. We will invite media to film and will send photos to elected officials to show our opposition to offshore drilling and love for the coast. The event will be over by 12:10 or so and then stay to enjoy our beautiful beach!



## Other Events, cont.

### Hands Across the Sand, cont.

The event will be on the beach, just to the west of the pier (kind of in front of Tides Hotel).



COME EARLY BECAUSE PARKING AND WALKING TO THE BEACH CAN TAKE A WHILE!

BRING SIGNS AND INVITE FRIENDS!

Hands Across the Sand events will also be taking place in North Myrtle Beach, Garden City Beach, and dozens of locations around the country and world! More information here: <http://handsacrossthesand.org/organize.php?state=South+Carolina>

### Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers: Alix Jules

Friday, May 26, 2017, 6:00pm

Waccamaw Branch Library, 41 St. Paul Place, Pawleys Island

The Humanist Pat Down: Defending Race in the Face of Reason

In this talk, writer and activist Alix Jules discusses Race and Racism in America, including racial tones in culture, religion, and their effect on US politics. He reviews some of the current stats and prevailing theories that continue to shape racial dynamics, while examining the concept of privilege in the Era of Trump. The writer also takes a candid, but humorous look at why even Humanists struggle with finding proper footing when discussing these topics. In addition he'll also discuss the backlash against PC culture and why words like "diversity" became a pejorative.

This talk is sponsored and hosted by the **Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers**. We are a chapter of the American Humanist Association and support reason, ethics, and compassion. We normally meet monthly in Myrtle Beach, Due to travel schedules and because this is the Friday of Memorial Day weekend we will be meeting at the Waccamaw Library for this talk. We hope you'll Join us.



## Other Events, cont.

### Humanist Disaster Recovery in Louisiana

Saturday, May 27—Wednesday, June 7, 2017

#### Louisiana

Humanist Disaster Relief will deploy a team to assist in the rebuilding efforts in Louisiana in the aftermath of storms and flooding. The team will work in Louisiana between May 27th, 2017 and June 7th, 2017.



The mission of [Humanist Disaster Recovery Teams](#) (HDR Teams) is to provide recovering communities with trained humanist volunteers. HDR Teams is the first national humanist disaster recovery volunteer program. The 2016 South Carolina Humanist Disaster Recovery Team was the first deployment of the HDR Teams program: they worked in Columbia South Carolina rebuilding homes with our partner, St. Bernard Project, after flooding caused by Hurricane Joaquin in late 2015. The team trained, demolished the interior of a home, performed mold remediation, hung drywall, mudded, sanded, and primed homes in the area. Several SHL members volunteered for the Columbia HDR team.

[Click here to apply or to learn more.](#)

### A fond farewell

I moved to the Charleston area in August, 2003 knowing no one other than the coworkers I met at my new job. Relocating to the Bible Belt, I knew I had to seek out other like-minded folks. My first Google searches were for local Atheist, Green Party, and peace groups and was thrilled to find SHL. I attended my first meeting in January, 2004 and I knew I had found a home.

In May of 2007 I was asked if I would be interested in serving on the board. In the following years I coordinated the monthly Happy Hour and Movie Club, took over the newsletter in 2014, and became Vice President in 2016. I have also been a part of many other groups and causes but I knew that if I had to give any of them up, SHL was always the one I would give up last.

As I prepare for my upcoming move to the Kansas City area I once again did a Google search for Atheist groups. While I found several, they do not appear to be as organized or as active as SHL. What we have here in Charleston is special. I am proud to have been a part of it and will cherish all of the friendships and memories I made over the years. Thank you to everyone who makes SHL what it is. I will miss you all.

I will remain active in the SHL Facebook groups and am reachable by email—see you online!

Sue Edward  
[bflosue2337@gmail.com](mailto:bflosue2337@gmail.com)

## SHL Membership

Are you a dues-paying member of SHL? While our meetings and events are open to everyone, membership dues are used to bring in national speakers at our monthly meetings, pay the Gage Hall rental fee, provide snacks at the monthly meeting, provide materials given away at outreach events such as the Flowertown Festival, and more. In addition, only dues-paying members are eligible to apply for stipends for attending secular conferences or summer camp. Most importantly, members vote for the SHL board members at the annual May potluck.

Annual memberships are:

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

Dues are tax-deductible, as we are a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. (As we like to joke, we are also a "non-prophet" organization!)

There are 3 easy ways you can join/renew:

- You can pay by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting.
- You can mail a check to:

SHL  
PO Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417-2256

Make checks payable to SHL and note "Membership" and level in the memo line. Please include your name, address, phone number, and email address.

- Or securely [pay online](#) and select your membership level in the dropdown box.

## Member Stipends

SHL offers five stipends annually to dues-paying 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 Freedom From Religion Foundation convention, Atheist Alliance 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.

For out-of-town conventions and camps, stipends cover up to \$200 of registration, travel, and lodging costs. Food and

drink expenses are not eligible for stipends. **Special for 2017:** SHL is offering 20 additional \$50 stipends to be used for either the American Humanist Association conference or the American Atheist convention being held in Charleston.

A stipend request must be pre-approved before attending your event. To see whether your event qualifies or 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).

Stipend recipients must write a short essay about their event experience and submit it along with 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.

# Conferences

The Holy City will be the host of TWO major secular conferences/conventions in 2017!



## [American Humanist Association](#)

### [Annual Conference: June 8–11, 2017](#)

The American Humanist Association's 76th Annual Conference will take place June 8–11, 2017 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Airport in Charleston, South Carolina! Over 500 humanists, atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers are expected to attend our annual four-day event of informative lectures, activist training, and networking opportunities. See this year's [Conference Schedule](#) and learn more about our distinguished [Humanist Awardees](#) and expert [Plenary Speakers](#) leading lectures on humanist philosophy, politics, social justice, climate change, and more. Awardees for 2017 are

**Adam Savage**, Humanist of the Year

**Susie Bright**, Feminist Humanist Award

**Martin Castro**, Religious Liberty Award

**Staceyann Chin**, LGBTQ Humanist Award

**Annabelle Gurwitch**, Keynote Speaker

**Herb Silverman**, Lifetime Achievement Award

Additional events include the [Post-Conference Cruise of Charleston Harbor](#), [Camp Quest Kids Program](#), and [Celebrant Training by The Humanist Institute](#).

[Register](#) by May 8! And if you're not already an AHA member, you'll receive a FREE one-year membership to the AHA when you register with the full registration package!

*SHL is the official host of the 2017 AHA conference!*



## [American Atheists](#)

### [Solar Eclipse Convention: August 19–21, 2017](#)

We will present a conference focused on science, space, technology, and (of course) atheism featuring prominent academics, scientists, and community leaders during the weekend and, on Monday, will host an eclipse watch-party (narrated by a surprise special guest!) in Charleston.

Charleston is the last major city in the path of the eclipse's path. This is the first total solar eclipse to cross the continental United States since the 1970s!

[Tickets are now on sale! Register today!](#)

# Charity of the Quarter

## Turning Leaf Project



**Turning Leaf Project** is a rehabilitation and reentry nonprofit organization serving adult men who are assessed at a medium to high risk of re-incarceration. We are both an education and employment program. Our first focus is on helping our students increase their thinking, decision and problem-solving skills. Our second priority is job placement. We choose to work with men who have repeat criminal convictions; men who have not changed their behavior as a response to incarceration and who need assistance to change their life direction.

Turning Leaf is different from other reentry efforts in South Carolina, and across the country, for various reasons. We are based on what evidence shows us works to reduce re-offending. We only work with individuals who are at a medium to high risk of re-arrest. We focus on helping our students change their thinking, attitudes, belief and peers – the risk factors most closely associated with criminal behavior. We spend very little time and resources helping our students with food, transportation, clothing and housing. These needs are not shown to be drivers of continual criminal behavior. We offer a reentry program

for men returning from prison and jail and an alternative sentencing program for federal detainees. Our center based program is comprehensive. The men participate in 15 hours of rehabilitation classes at the Turning Leaf center each week. Making progress in classes earns them a job placement with the City of Charleston, North Charleston or Charleston County. The men are paid an educational stipend of up to \$150 a week for their time in classes prior to being placed in transitional work.

The issue of reentry is especially relevant for South Carolina and the Charleston area. Charleston County manages the largest jail in the state (daily population of 1,200). More than 31,000 inmates processed through the Charleston County Detention Center in 2011. Approximately 600 individuals return to Charleston County from state prisons alone every year. The growth in South Carolina's prison population mirrors the national trend. Research and data shows that the increase in national prison population was driven not by an increase in crime, but by state decisions to put more low-risk, non-violent offenders behind bars, to increase prison terms for violent

and non-violent offenders, and to neglect community corrections and reentry programs. As a result, a significant number of parole and probation violators return to prison. South Carolina's state incarcerated population has nearly tripled in the last 25 years, now over 22,000 state inmates, a number that does not include those in SC jails or federal prisons. This growth has come at a significant financial cost to taxpayers. Since 1983, state spending on prisons increased by more than 500 percent to \$394 million. Few organizations exist in Charleston to help the formerly incarcerated population. Those that do operate in silos, providing fragmented and uncoordinated services in separate locations. Most importantly, local rehabilitation efforts typically don't focus on the risk factors that research shows us most correlate to reoffending.

Most recent national data reports that 67% of everyone leaving prison will return in three years. Although we are a new organization with limited data, our initial results are promising. Our three year goal is a re-incarceration rate of less than 30% for program graduates.

*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  
PO Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417-2256*

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

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

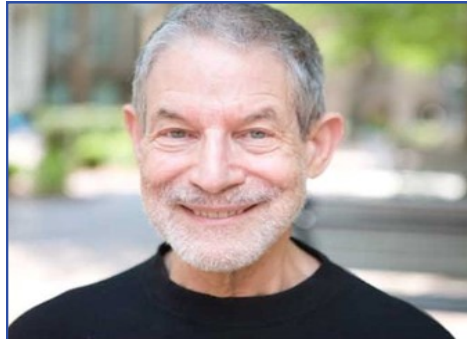
# Herb Silverman

## Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land

**Herb Silverman** was born on June 14, 1942 — Flag Day, which perhaps accounts for his patriotism. He came of age in the turbulent 1960s, attending first Temple University in Philadelphia, then Syracuse University in the middle of New York State, earning degrees in mathematics. In 1976, he moved to the Lowcountry to teach at the College of Charleston. Silverman published more than 100 research papers in math journals, as well as a couple of books on complex variables. He retired as Distinguished Professor Emeritus in 2009 and turned more of his attention to writing books and essays, not about math or academia but about atheism and America's culture wars. Looking back over his career, he does not relinquish his optimism. "It was nearly all good, and when it wasn't good it was interesting," he said.

**Q:** You are a well-known advocate of the First Amendment and a vocal atheist. What prompted you to "go public" with your arguments?

**A:** My political activism was triggered by the Vietnam War and civil rights movement, not by atheism. As a math professor at liberal Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, I assumed that



**Herb Silverman** is founder and President 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.

atheism was the default of my academic colleagues. Despite many marches and protests (including a brief incarceration), I failed to end the war.

However, I did make one civil rights contribution. After my Ph.D. student, Evelyn, passed her qualifying exams, I took her to a local bar to celebrate. The bartender told me that the bar was for men only, and Evelyn would have to leave. The following day, I returned with another woman, a black colleague. The bartender was more uncomfortable being viewed a racist than a sexist, so he let us stay. The next day I brought Evelyn back, and they served us. And from then on, that bar admitted women.

**Q:** In 1990, you ran for governor as a way to challenge a

provision in the state's constitution that forbid nonbelievers from holding public office. Then you tried to become a notary public for the same reason. In 1997, the S.C. Supreme Court ruled in your favor that requiring an oath to God was unconstitutional. Were you satisfied with the decision?

**A:** I'm certainly satisfied with the unanimous decision of the S.C. Supreme Court that the state constitution was in violation of Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits religious tests for public office. The state wasted close to \$100,000 over seven years trying to prevent me from becoming a notary public. Atheists can now legally hold public office in South Carolina, but the unfinished business is to actually elect open atheists.

We know through the Secular Coalition for America (of which I'm president) that there are many closeted atheists in Congress, and we are trying to encourage them to come out. Our goal is to change stereotypes and increase the visibility of and respect for atheists. I hope we reach a point in this secular country where candidates are judged by the content of their character and their political positions, not by their professed religious beliefs.

## Herb Silverman cont.

**Q:** You taught mathematics at the College of Charleston for many years. Do you think empiricism and religious faith are incompatible, or is there perhaps a way to reconcile the two?

**A:** I value empirical evidence to learn about the natural world. I've seen students pray before my math tests, but studying is more effective. Before making a decision, I like to have as much knowledge as possible. However, I sometimes take a "leap of faith," as when I fell in love and married Sharon, a good choice and happy outcome.

I view religious faith as mostly evidence-free, though such faith can make people happy. I've had interesting discussions and debates with people who try to explain why their religious faith is reasonable, but I've not yet heard a convincing argument. On the other hand, there is not much to discuss if someone tells me he is "saved" because Jesus came into his heart. I prefer focusing on this life, rather than a faith belief in an imagined afterlife.

**Q:** You have written at length about your adventures and misadventures in your memoir "Candidate Without a Prayer," and in numerous columns for the Huffington Post and other publications, now collected in a new book called "An Atheist Stranger in a

Strange Religious Land." What kind of reactions have you received from readers?

**A:** Many are surprised that atheists can have a sense of humor. Also, early on, I heard from people who thought they were the only atheists in South Carolina. I took names and a number of them helped start the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, now a thriving organization. ... Attitudes change when friends, neighbors, or even family members discover that you are an atheist and a nice person who does good without god belief.

I wasn't out to my own family until 1990, when I got a call from a distressed woman in Philadelphia — my mother! The Associated Press picked up a story about me, and I had to admit that The Philadelphia Inquirer was not the best way to learn that her only child was a gubernatorial candidate — and an atheist. I knew my mother would be upset because she always wanted me to appear "respectable."

**Q:** What is the status today of atheism and its treatment by nonatheists?

**A:** Among religious demographics counted today, there's a category called "nones," meaning people who are religiously unaffiliated, and it's one of the fastest-growing segments. They are not all atheists or agnostics,

but a significant percentage are — especially among young adults. As our culture becomes more diverse, there is more openness toward other points of view, and we are slowly gaining a place at the advocacy table along with religious groups.

The Internet has probably been the single most important factor in empowering young people with inquiring minds to learn about the many choices for religious belief or nonbelief. ... There is room for all beliefs and none in this wonderful country. Regardless of theological beliefs, I hope we can work together on social justice issues and make America even greater, while placing more value on deeds than on creeds.

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