



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

[www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org)

SEPTEMBER 2014

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## September Program

**Ross Blocher:**

### **He Joins Religions So You Don't Have To!**

Ross Blocher, co-host of the podcast *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, has joined religions, undergone alternative medical treatments, and experimented with a variety of scientifically-suspect practices, all so you don't have to.

See photos and hear stories from his adventures, along with some lessons he's learned about making friends with believers while sticking to the facts.

Ross Blocher was raised in an Evangelical Christian home and got as far as college (where he led the resident Bible study group) before he began to question his faith. For the past 8 years, Ross has tested paranormal claims with the Independent Investigations Group, and for over 3 years has been the co-host of the popular investigations podcast *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*



Ross lives in the Los Angeles area and works on animated films. He has a BFA in Animation from Woodbury University. In addition to his investigative podcasts, he has worked as a technical director and a training project manager on several major film releases, including *The Simpsons Movie* and *Frozen*.

**When:** Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Where:** Patio Room, Vista Del Monte (**Park ONLY in spaces marked "VDM".**)

**Time:** Meet at 2:30pm for socializing and light refreshments provided by HSSB. Program begins at 3:00 pm

**Cost:** \$2 members/\$5 non-members

**Dinner:** Vista Del Monte. \$22 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Judy Fontana, [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or 967-7911.

**For More Info:** [Activities@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org](mailto:Activities@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org) or call 769-HSSB

## Activities

### Judy Fontana

Those of you who didn't join us at the China Pavilion following the program on the Supreme Court missed a great meal and great conversation. Don't miss out on joining us following the program on September 20<sup>th</sup>. Dinner will be at Vista Del Monte and the cost is \$22 which includes, tax, tip and wine. You won't find a better bargain in town. The menu for the September dinner is: tossed salad with assorted dressings, garlic bread, BBQ chicken, catch of the day, French fries, rice pilaf, green beans, acorn squash, and assorted desserts and beverages.

Please RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or call 967-7911. Look forward to seeing you there.

Cheers, Judy

## News About Members

**New Member:** Betsy Graham, Santa Barbara.

## President's Column

### Colin Gordon

### Believe it or Not

A sunny Santa Barbara morning and a ring at the door bell. Usually it's a salesman peddling solar energy or air duct cleaning (we don't have any) or other business opportunities, but this time there was a fresh-faced young man with a broad smile and a handful of flyers. He had a younger companion who said nothing, presumably learning how to do it and, after the usual pleasantries, launched into his spiel about Jesus and how we all need to be saved. Listening politely I threw in a few questions and comments, and then leaned forward with an air of confidentiality and said "I've got news for you - there is no god, it's all in your imagination". That did not go down too well.

Not that he got angry or even agitated, it seemed like he just did not understand - as though I had addressed him in Japanese. Unfazed, he continued with his speech. It was time to bring out the big guns, more specifically one big gun - George Carlin. I have the foresight to keep a few copies of an abridged version of his monologue on religion close by, and hand one out to any Christianity salesman that comes to the door. Results vary. In this case he read it with amusement, probably thinking it was just a joke and missing the real message, although it seemed pretty hard to miss. Then he went on to other homes to save more souls.

George is my favorite comedian of all time. His monologue is hilariously funny as well as telling a few home truths about religion, although in rather earthy language. It should be required viewing for all humanists (if you haven't seen it Google "George Carlin on Religion").

After this visit a thought occurred to me. Should we Humanists be spreading the word, our word that is, from door to door? Would it even be possible? Apart from the difficulty of finding a fresh faced young man or woman, we are not trying to save people from perdition where you will suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry for all eternity (Carlin quote) but just from a lifetime of delusion. It doesn't have the same ring to it. But there is a groundswell of people that declare themselves as not affiliated to any religion, the "Nones," and, although few would come out as atheists, these are our future humanists. We should be spreading the word to them. But what exactly is the word? We can't just say that we don't believe in any spiritual being, that has an air of negativity to it. We need a positive message to the effect that we can be good law-abiding civic-minded citizens without clinging to any religious beliefs.

We have a lot to learn from the LGBT community in this respect. Not that long ago they were a marginalized community hiding

their life style for fear of discrimination or sometimes physical attack. Now that has changed, not completely but they are getting there. How did they do it? First they got rid of the word "homosexual," a five syllable word that has bad connotations and does not exactly roll off the tongue, and substituted a short, happy word, "Gay" – a stroke of genius. And their organization was called, not the "Gay Society" but "Gay Pride." I think we have a similar problem; can we make a similar image change?

Our Society is focused on monthly meetings with some excellent speakers, thanks to our Program Committee, some open to the public, and we do a good job in advertising them. However I think we should also move out of the shadows and take our place in the community as a civic-minded group that contributes to the general good. One way is to support local causes with well placed donations. We are registered as a Non-profit Charity and, although not wealthy, we do have some surplus funds. I think this would be a good use for them.

### Victor Stenger

Victor Stenger, physicist and atheist author, died at age 79 on August 27, 2014. He spoke to HSSB in July, 2007, on his book, *God, The Failed Hypothesis*.

"Science flies you to the moon. Religion flies you into buildings."

- Victor Stenger

Read more here:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/08/29/victor-stenger-physicist-and-prolific-atheist-author-is-dead-at-79/>

### FFRF Convention October 24-25

The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) is having their annual convention in Los Angeles, October 24-25<sup>th</sup>. This is a really good opportunity to get together with like-minded people from all across the country and exchange ideas, hear new ones, maybe even make some new acquaintances! The convention will be held at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel, 506 South Grand Avenue, and the hotel is offering special convention rates of a standard room with one or two beds for \$169 a night. The hotel room needs to be reserved by September 23, 2014 to get the special rate.

I urge all members of HSSB to attend this convention. I have attended several similar ones in the past and have enjoyed every one of them. If you don't want to drive, consider taking the train: the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner has about 5 runs per day and the Coast Starlight is once a day.

Register for the convention here:

<https://ffrf.org/component/civicrm/?task=civicrm/event/register&reset=1&id=14>

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"I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers and possible beliefs and different degrees of uncertainty about different things, but I am not absolutely sure of anything and there are many things I don't know anything about, such as whether it means anything to ask why we're here. I don't have to know an answer. I don't feel frightened not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without any purpose, which is the way it really is as far as I can tell."

— Richard Feynman

**August Program:  
Speaker Scott Bowman --  
Supreme Court Decisions in Review,  
2013-14: Is there an Emerging  
Consensus on the Court?  
Robert Bernstein**

Many see the US as becoming ever more divided along political and ideological lines. But a June 26 article by Neal Katyal in the New York Times argued that the Supreme Court might be coming to a consensus that could be bringing the country together.

The Court heard 75 cases in the 2013-14 session. Forty four of those were 9-0 consensus decisions and only 11 were divisive 5-4 decisions.

But our speaker Scott Bowman said this apparent unity hides a lot of disunity below the surface. Agreement on results does not tell us about partisan politics or about ideology. The same result can be reached via different modes of reasoning. It is necessary to get down into the details and the rest of the two-hour talk and discussion involved a lot of details.

Most cases do not involve partisan or ideological issues. And many cases are decided on narrow grounds.

“Judicial activism” is a term that conservatives successfully associated with liberal policymaking on the Supreme Court in the 1970’s and 1980’s. During the Reagan and Bush, Sr. era, this same conservative narrative made “liberal” a dirty word. But the truth is that conservative justices also practice judicial activism.

Judicial activism entails an agenda to transform or significantly revise the law in accordance with a philosophy of Constitutional interpretation. The mere exercise of judicial review does not constitute activism.

Ideological conservatives on the Court (and the date appointed) are: Scalia (1986), Kennedy (1988), Thomas (1991), Roberts (2005), and Alito (2006). Liberals are: Ginsburg (1993), Breyer (1994), Sotomayor (2009), and Kagan (2010).

Kennedy is the swing vote to watch. No one can figure him out. He is a bundle of contradictions, though predictable in some areas. He voted Right 3 times and Left 1 time in 5-4 cases.

The Conservative philosophy is “Originalism” and claims to look at the original meaning of texts at the time they were written. They try to move power from the Federal to the State level. They try to limit their own powers, except when they want to exercise them! They try to limit, reduce or roll back rights that are not explicitly spelled out in the Constitution.



*August speaker Dr. Scott Bowman. Photo by Robert Bernstein.*

Scalia says just look at the meaning of words in 1789. This is not true conservatism in Bowman’s view. He calls Scalia a “reactionary.” And a fundamentalist.

In contrast, Liberal philosophy is “Evolutionary Realism” and sees the Constitution as a living, evolving document. They are pragmatic. They are devoted to protection and expansion of fundamental rights. They are rooted in the values of the Progressive era and have a secular view of the origin of rights.

Of the 44 9-0 decisions, only 7 involved Constitutional issues. And only 3 raised broad Constitutional issues. These three are the only ones to look at.

- Abortion Protests (1st Amend.) – *McCullen v. Coakley*;
- Recess Appointments (Article 2) – *N.L.R.B v. Noel Canning*;
- Cell Phone Searches (4th Amend.) – *Riley v. California*.

The abortion case involved a buffer ordinance in Massachusetts that kept protestors 35 feet away from patients entering reproductive care clinics. It was enacted in 2007 following years of harassment and violence, including a 1994 shooting rampage.

Strangely, this was decided 9-0 against the law. Roberts said the ruling was content neutral. Scalia said it was not. By concurring with Roberts, the liberals hoped to limit the damage of the ruling. Otherwise, Scalia would have had the majority opinion. It was really a 5-4 decision masquerading as a 9-0 case.

I asked how it could be that protestors at political events can be forced to protest far from where it could be effective. The answer? The Court classified the abortion protestors as “counselors.” Perhaps a lesson there: When we want to protest economic, military, energy or health care policies we just need to say we are “counseling” our elected officials.

The “recess appointments” case involved the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Noel Canning was a Pepsi distributor that was unlawfully refusing to execute a collective bargaining agreement.

But the NLRB was crippled by the Republicans in the Senate refusing to approve Obama’s appointees. The Constitution requires the consent of the Senate. But it also gives the President the right to fill vacancies during Congressional recesses. The House and the

Senate need to agree to adjourn. These days they can’t agree on anything.

Each house can adjourn for 3 days without the consent of the other. The Court ruled that the President could not make appointments during such recesses. Why was this a 9-0 case? Totally different reasoning on each side. Breyer appealed to historical practice; Scalia to literal wording.

What about 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment search and seizure with the cell phone case? This goes back to Revolutionary times when the British used writs to go into peoples’ homes. They seized a printing press used to print incendiary publications. The 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment was to prevent this.

But there are a lot of exceptions. More than the rule. The police have a right to search you and the area around you, for their safety and to be sure you don’t destroy evidence. Further searches require a warrant.

*Riley v. California* involved a cell phone search in a gang case. The police found gang associations there that led to contraband and weapons charges. This is the one case where the entire Court agreed the police need a warrant to do such a search. And they all agreed on the same reasoning! They are imagining themselves and their own cell phones and what might be there. Destruction of evidence is not likely as the phone can be confiscated pending a warrant.

Bowman argued that this was really the only 9-0 consensus case!

He went on to look at the 5-4 cases and focused on these four:

- Campaign Finance (1st Amendment, Speech) – *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission*
- Death Penalty for Mentally Disabled (8th Amendment) – *Hall v. Florida*

- Prayers at Public Meetings (1st Amendment, Establishment) – *Town of Greece v. Galloway*
- Contraceptive Coverage (1st Amendment, Religious Liberty) – *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*

Each of these cases was decided on very divisive ideological lines with Kennedy siding with the Conservative ideologues on all but the death penalty case.

Bowman's conclusion was clear: There is little consensus on the Court on Constitutional matters of importance, with the one exception of the cell phone search case. The future of the Court obviously depends on who is president and the ideological bent of who is appointed to the Court.

### How Modern Neuro-science Explains Supreme Court Decisions

Wayne Beckman

At our recent meeting, Dr. Scott Bowman explained several recent Supreme Court decisions. As you probably noticed, some of the results were surprising. It seemed that for several decisions, the result was not consistent with the philosophy of the judges. He described the “conservative” judges as believing in originalism, which is to interpret the constitution as the writers intended it 200 years ago. They avoid expanding any rights for any minorities. So how can you explain the Citizens United and Hobby Lobby decisions which clearly expand rights to corporations. Private corporations as they exist today did not exist before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Constitution has nothing to say about corporations, but the originalist judges still expand the rights of corporations, which seems quite inconsistent with their typical justification for their decisions. This is where studies of how your brain works to make decisions can provide an explanation. From

numerous ingenious experiments there is very good evidence that rather than rationally making decisions based on analytically examining all of the data, your brain instead makes most decisions based on much more emotional basis and then rationalizes that decision using all of the data your brain has available. You have no awareness of this process. This is related to another feature of your brain which is that the part of your brain that talks does not have access to much of what is going on in your brain. Therefore, the judges' emotional response to support corporations override the intellectual rationalization they typically use to justify their decisions. For those interested in the how your brain actually make decisions I recommend two books: *Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist* by Christof Koch (no relation to either Christ or the famous Koch brothers) and *Who's in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain* by Michael Gazzaniga.



“At the constitutional level where we work, 90 percent of any decision is emotional. The rational part of us supplies the reasons for supporting our predilections.”

- William O. Douglas

## Town of Greece's New Prayer Policy May Exclude the Nonreligious

In the wake of the Supreme Court ruling in its favor, the town of Greece, New York issued a new policy that will bar atheists from delivering opening invocations at city functions, the Center for Inquiry (CFI) reports. According to the new policy, “[t]he invocation shall be voluntarily delivered by an appointed representative of an Assemblies List for the Town of Greece.” That list will be compiled by the clerk of the town board, and will consist of “assemblies with an established presence in the Town of Greece that regularly meet for the primary purpose of sharing a religious perspective.”

This policy dictates that no group lacking a “religious perspective” will be allowed onto the “Assemblies List,” which means that speakers who lack such perspectives will not be eligible to deliver opening invocations. The “Assemblies List” will consist of “all ‘churches,’ ‘synagogues,’ ‘congregations,’ ‘temples,’ ‘mosques’ or other religious assemblies in the Town of Greece” — meaning that the policy specifically excludes anyone who does not participate in a “religious assembly” from delivering an opening invocation.

The Town Board justified its decision by noting that “our country’s Founders recognized that we possess certain rights that cannot be awarded, surrendered, nor corrupted by human power, and the Founders explicitly attributed the origins of these, our inalienable rights, to a Creator.” The policy does not “show a purposeful preference of one religious view over another,” because it does not permit “the faith of the person delivering the invocation to be considered when extending an invitation[.]”

However, it does require that the person invited have a faith, which as the Center For Inquiry’s CEO Ronald A. Lindsay noted, “in effect, bar[s] the nonreligious from delivering

invocations.” Lindsay also noted that in the town’s decision violated the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling, in which Justice Kennedy, writing for the majority, wrote that he hoped Greece “would welcome a prayer by any minister or layman who wished to give one.”

Using a similar justification, a Florida city council also banned all non-religious individuals from delivering opening invocations at public functions.

Read the whole story here:

[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/newsroom/town\\_of\\_greeces\\_new\\_prayer\\_policy\\_may\\_exclude\\_the\\_nonreligious\\_warns\\_secular/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/newsroom/town_of_greeces_new_prayer_policy_may_exclude_the_nonreligious_warns_secular/)

## Movies for Humanists: *Kidnapped for Christ* Diane Krohn

*Kidnapped for Christ* is a recent (2014) documentary movie about teenagers sent to a religious boarding school, Escuela Caribe, located in the Dominican Republic. The school is supposed to provide structure, education, and discipline to “troubled teens” within an evangelical Christian environment. The teens that are sent there have no choice in the matter and find themselves isolated in a foreign country and subjected to physical and mental abuse.

The director of the movie, Kate Logan, started out as a self-described evangelical Christian who did not know about the controversial nature of the school and did not intend for the movie to be an exposé. The film focuses on three students at the school, Beth, Tai, and David. David was sent to the school because he had told his parents he was gay. He was a good student at his school in Colorado, and did not have any disciplinary problems – but he was gay.

As the movie progresses, more information about the various abuses comes out and the director, Kate, has more and more restrictions on what she can film and who she can interview. However, despite the restrictions, she continues to interview the students, but just more surreptitiously. She also interviews former students and associates of the school.

Later in the film, several of David's friends try to get him back into the U.S. right after his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, because as an adult, he should now be able to legally leave the school. But David's parents apparently intervene, and David does not leave Escuela Caribe. He does eventually get back to the U.S. and is happily re-united with his friends.

Beth is also interviewed after she has returned to the U.S., and she states that the school "saved my life," because of the strict structure and discipline. Kate Logan's comments: "Some of the kids go into the program being in trouble with drugs or the law, and then they come out sober and finish high school, and maybe learn some discipline. It's easier to look at that and say, 'Well, it did some good,' than to say, 'I was abused unnecessarily for three years.'"

Escuela Caribe is one of many "Christian reform schools" which has little or no government oversight to ensure educational quality or student safety. It is particularly interesting that the school is located in a country where it is free from U.S. standards or oversight. The organization that runs the school, New Horizons Youth Ministries, claims that being in a foreign country gets the teen out of his or her comfort zone, but my more skeptical view feels otherwise.

The tuition cost of Escuela Caribe is more than the tuition cost of a year at Harvard. Per one source, the cost per student per month is \$6000 (maximum tuition), and students are there year-round. Because the students appear to be doing most of the labor (cleaning, gardening,

cooking, food preparation), teachers were not world-class scholars, and the facilities were not exactly luxurious, one wonders who is getting rich from these schools!

This film is worth looking for. You can see a preview here:

<http://www.kidnappedforchrist.com/>



### October Secular Circular

The October issue of *The Secular Circular* will be a little late, due to the always-seems-to-be-traveling editor. But you will receive an October issue!

### HSSB Board for 2014-2015

The HSSB Board members for fiscal year 2014-2015 are: President – Colin Gordon; Treasurer – Marty Shapiro; Secretary – Suzanne Spillman; and At Large – Wayne Beckman, David Echols, Judy Fontana, Diane Krohn, Anne Rojas, Roger Schleuter, Pat Ward, and Mary Wilk.

Please contact any of the Board members if you have any questions or concerns about HSSB. Also, all HSSB members are welcome to attend any Board meetings, which are always the Tuesday prior to the Saturday monthly meeting.

## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

### Upcoming Events in California:

- September 7: Dr. Katherine Freese: *Cosmic Cocktail: Three Parts Dark Matter*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.  
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- September 14: Glenn Branch: *After Kitzmiller – What?* Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/LA/events/after\\_kitzmiller\\_-\\_what/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/LA/events/after_kitzmiller_-_what/)
- September 21: Dr. Gregory Hickok: *The Myth of Mirror Neurons*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.  
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- September 21: Ed Buckner and Jim Underdown: *Letter to a Free Country*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/LA/events/letter\\_to\\_a\\_free\\_country/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/LA/events/letter_to_a_free_country/)
- October 4: Dr. Steven Pinker: *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.  
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- October 5: Dr. Marcelo Gleiser: *The Islands of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.  
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- October 24-25: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 37<sup>th</sup> Annual National Convention. Los Angeles. Speakers include Sean Carroll, Marci Hamilton, Anthony Pinn, and many others. Special rates at the Millenium Biltmore for the convention:  
<http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention/2014-convention>

“What happens after you die? Lots of things happen after you die – they just don’t involve you.”

-Louis C.K., comedian

### HSSB Contact Information

#### Officers:

*President:* Colin Gordon

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*Secretary:* Suzanne Spillman

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#### Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman	Anne Rojas
David Echols	Roger Schlueter
Judy Fontana	Pat Ward
Diane Krohn	Mary Wilk

#### Newsletter Editor:

Diane Krohn

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#### Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

**HSSB meetings** are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista Del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site:

[www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org](http://www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org). At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

**Annual HSSB membership dues** are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a Society Supporter. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or [mwilk@cox.net](mailto:mwilk@cox.net).

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>



See us on Facebook::

## HSSB Calendar

**Tuesday, September 16: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday, September 20: Monthly Meeting :** Ross Blocher speaking on the paranormal; the Patio Room at Vista Del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista Del Monte.

**Sunday, September 28:** (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

**Tuesday, October 14: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday October 18: Monthly Meeting:** Andrew Seidel speaking on Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) legal cases; the Patio Room at Vista Del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista Del Monte.



Humanist Society of  
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