



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

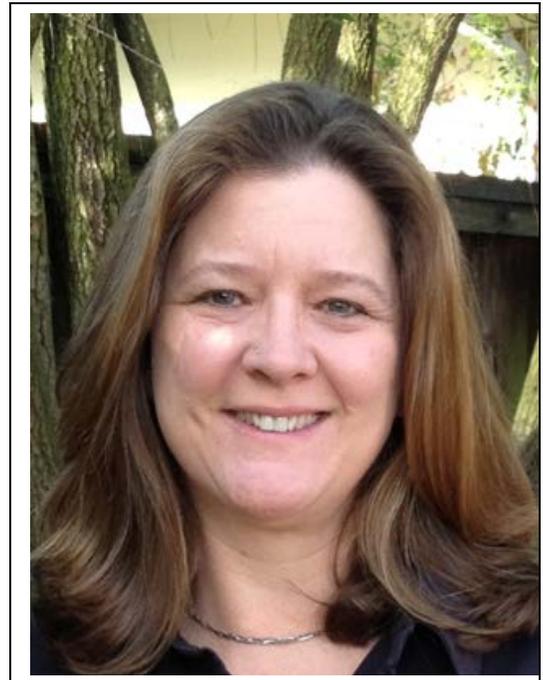
OCTOBER 2014

October Program:

Toni Broaddus: End-of-Life Issues in California

Everyone dies, but not every death is peaceful. For Californians with terminal illnesses, the prospect of a painful and prolonged death can be more frightening than the idea of death itself. Yet medicine can provide not only the means to prolong life, but the means to die with dignity. A majority of Californians support a Death with Dignity law that would allow physicians to provide medical aid in dying to terminally ill, mentally competent adults. Despite overwhelming voter support for this medical service, six different attempts to pass Death with Dignity laws over the past two decades in California have failed.

The organization Compassion & Choices (C&C), the nation's leading organization supporting and advocating for patient-centered end-of-life care, is determined to change that over the next five years. Toni Broaddus, C&C's California Campaign Director, will discuss the political challenges of Death with Dignity in our state and C&C's newly launched grassroots campaign designed to build a movement for change.



A graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Boston and Stanford Law School, Toni practiced law for a brief period, representing LGBT families as well as plaintiffs in employment discrimination and therapy malpractice litigation. Toni helped found the first statewide gay rights organization in her home state of Oklahoma and has been an active supporter of women's rights.

When: Saturday, October 18th, 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 by October 15th to Judy Fontana, judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Activities@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org or call 769-HSSB

Activities

Judy Fontana

We had a great turnout for the buffet following the program last month. Conversation was lively and the food was great as usual. The meeting on the 18th of this month will be followed by a buffet of green salad, roasted pork loin, catch of the day (always my favorite), bulgar pilaf, sweet potato fries, chef's vegetable blend, green beans, whole wheat rolls, and assorted desserts, beverages and wine. Cost is the incredible bargain of \$22 per person, which includes tax and tip. You must RSVP by October 15th.

Please RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911.

News About Members

New Members:

Deborah Rogers, Santa Barbara;
Bruce Walter, Carpinteria.

President's Column - Morality Without God

Colin Gordon

Morality is a slippery customer, very difficult to define or even describe with any accuracy. What is moral to some is immoral to others. Fortunately we live in a society where the lines are fairly well drawn and the rules are embodied in a set of laws which seem to separate right from wrong. Where, we might ask, did these rules come from? Was it from the teachings of our religious leaders, as they would have us believe, or is there some other source of moralistic behavior?

News Flash: Iran has executed a 37-year-old psychologist, apparently in part for the grievous crime of believing that the story of Jonah—which appears in the Koran as well as

the Bible—is a symbolic tale instead of a true account of a prophet who survives three days in a whale's belly. Mohsen Amir Aslani was hanged last Wednesday on charges of “corruption on earth and heresy in religion,” reports HRANA. *Iran Wire* quotes a source as saying that he “gave classes on reading and interpreting the Koran,” but that the classes “did not meet the approval of the Intelligence Ministry.”

So even with religion, but lacking the separation of church and state, the boundaries of morality are blurred, to say the least. Looking back in history we find a litany of conquests, pillage, plunder, and massacres, most in the name of religion or perhaps using it as a pretext for commercial or political gain. In case we think the western countries were more enlightened, we have only to look at the Crusades. There were nine major Western Crusades from 1095 to 1290, some of them involving massacres that are too many and too brutal to describe in detail, notably at Jerusalem in 1099 and Acre in 1191, after which Richard I of England proclaimed himself “Lionheart.” That was not the nickname conferred on him by the Arabs and Muslims. Perhaps the most bizarre and pathetic was the Children's Crusade of 1212, when about 100,000 Western European children, mostly French and German, set out for the Holy Land. They got as far as Marseille, where most were sold into slavery to the Arabs by their fellow Christians.

So however much we may recite the Ten Commandments, it seems that religion has not done too well in the morality department. Imagine then a world in which there is no religion whatever; the word “atheist” would not exist because there is no theism. Would we then have moralistic tendencies or would there be relentless competition for resources and a struggle for existence? The biologists tell us that, along with our physical development, morality has evolved as a behavior pattern that

favors groups which cooperate rather than compete as individuals. This is clear in our everyday lives. In business ventures, public works and all projects where teamwork is essential, people cooperate. We do not act in this way from religious teachings but simply for the common good and the general welfare. So perhaps this Brave New World of atheism will be blessed (so to speak) by behavior that reflects moralistic ideals that are inbred within us, inherent in our highly evolved psychology. Let's hope so.

**September Program:
Ross Blocher:
Joining Religions So You Don't
Have To – And Making Friends
Along the Way
Robert Bernstein**

Ross Blocher grew up in an evangelical home in the Assemblies of God church. But he was always curious and asking questions. As a child he loved to read about paranormal phenomena, the Loch Ness Monster and the stories of *The X Files*. In college he was president of the Bible study group "Living in God's Hands Today" (LIGHT). He was a true believer, married with his first child at 18.

In college, he took a science class that offered extra credit for going to talks and writing them up. He didn't need the extra credit but he loved attending talks like "the history of the Y chromosome" and "the edge of the galaxy," sponsored by the Skeptics Society.

He started to get cognitive dissonance from the talks. And from "coming out of the cloister" and meeting openly gay people who seemed perfectly fine. The Skeptics Society was a "gateway drug." He lives in Los Angeles and discovered the Center For Inquiry (CFI) and attended their talks.

His priorities had always been God, Truth, Family and they still were. Except he reordered them as Truth, God and Family.

For the first time he allowed himself to question God's existence in the name of seeking Truth. At this time, he felt unfaithful by doing so.

Conversions can happen quickly. Deconversions are usually slower. His took about 18 months. He was driving from LA to Santa Cruz and had his last conversation with God. He asked for evidence of his existence. He stopped for gas in Atascadero and looked up at the sky. It seemed very thin with no god up there. And that was OK.

What did not change: Ross is still interested in people who disagree with him. Still open-minded and interested in truth. Still willing to change his belief based on truth.

He decided there were good reasons to stay involved in his church (Presbyterian): Keep tabs on what is new. Maintain friends. Show that belief doesn't fully define our relationships. Prevent Christians from stereotyping "those atheists" by knowing he is one. Prevent him from stereotyping "those believers."

It would remind him of where he once was. He would make a commitment to staying open-minded. It offered opportunities to serve alongside believers. And it would lead to new interactions and conversations. They were happy to let him serve as an usher and to run their web site.

Ross asked us to raise our hands if we ever once believed something we no longer believed. Surprisingly (to me), not everyone raised his/her hand!



September speaker Ross Blocher. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Ross joined the Independent Investigations Group (IIG), which offers a \$100K prize to anyone who can prove a paranormal ability. He showed an example of a dowser searching for a water bottle in a box. The “dowser” was himself surprised to find his ability did not work.

Ross met a like-minded person in Carrie Poppy, a former believer who shared his passion for exploration and questioning. She had heard about a Kabbalah lecture and they went together.

People who refused to go with them wanted to know what happened, so they didn’t have to go. Ross realized this was a need and an opportunity. They started joining groups, noting “When do they ask for money?” and “How creepy was it?”

Ross and Carrie joined the Mormon Church for six months. The Mormons want to come to your house with an “investigator.” His wife didn’t like that idea. Ross got baptized. If he were directly asked if he believed, he would tell the truth. That kept him on the good side of an ethical line.

But he and they were honest with questions. The Mormons liked the questions. “Glad someone so smart is joining our group.” “Someone with a critical mind.”

They told him when he is baptized he will feel the Heavenly Father. He was open to this. But he didn’t. It was hard to tell them. But he made deep friendships. They keep you busy.

Ross and Carrie tried alternative medical procedures like “ear coning,” acupuncture and hypnosis. Ear candling or coning purports to draw wax out of your ear by burning a paper cone. In fact, he saw that burning the paper just exposed wax in the paper. Carrie did acupuncture and did not like it. Ross was OK with it.

He is open to “alternative medicine” since “established medicine” is just alternative that has been tested. But very little of what they tried seemed to do much.

Meditation is of value and he does recommend Sam Harris’ *Waking Up*.

They went to a Sikh church. Hypnotherapy school in LA. The theory is wrong, but it may help kick a habit.

Tarot card readers. Homeopathy. They swallowed 180 pills, downed with wine. No effect, and it makes no sense.

They brought a geologist to the Creation Museum. They brought a photo of his boss’ dog to a pet psychic who said things that were totally wrong.

They joined the Raelians, who believe aliens are gods who seeded life on Earth 25,000 years ago. The Raelians are one of the few groups who found out about the investigation and issued a Cease and Desist order. In response, Ross came back with the First Amendment and a lawyer and they backed down.

Some things Ross tried he does not recommend. like the Master Cleanse Diet and hydro-colonic therapy; breast and penis

enlargement; juice cleanse; “oil pulling” in the mouth; and a pro-life pregnancy clinic.

They went to an oxygen bar. The oxygen level was the same as air. “That would double your oxygen level.” the bartender said.” No.

The 9/11 Truth group was one of only a few where he really got a “bad vibe.” And the Tony Alamo cult was truly scary. Alamo is in jail now.

Some groups like Scientology are scary and also expensive. Someone would have to fund that. Some projects need more time than they have.

They always use their real names and email addresses. Eventually they may have to find surrogates if they get too well known.

This is still a side job. Ross works for Disney animation and loves it. Amazingly, Ross is still married to his teen bride. She was happy to leave the evangelical world.

Coming out to his father was a bit harder. But his father was relieved that he “eats meat and likes women” -- even though he is eating less meat now.

Lessons learned? Everyone is on a journey. No one wants to be handed information on a platter saying, “You are wrong.” Cognitive dissonance hurts. Better to plant a seed of doubt. Or just be openly atheist and let people see you are not scary.

Ross owns his own deconversion process and each person will have his/her own. “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” The same holds for genes, class and geography.

Demonstrate you love and respect the person, but that you do not agree.

You can find “Oh, No Ross And Carrie” at <http://www.maximumfun.org/shows/oh-no-ross-and-carrie> and on Facebook at “ONRAC.”



Homeopathic surgery

A Rare Opening

It doesn't happen often, but there is a rare opening on the HSSB Program Committee. It you've had thoughts in the past on speakers you'd like to hear at our meetings, now is your chance to act on those ideas. Only a couple hours of your time per month are required. If you're interested, please notify Roger Schlueter, Ray Stone or Jean Olsen, or any Board member.

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“When you were five years old and learning English, you never stopped to ask your parents why you weren't learning German. You just learn it. The same is often true of religion. When you're taught about hell and eternal damnation at ages four through seven, these strong concepts are not going to easily leave you. Just like it's hard to unlearn English, it's hard to unlearn the concept of hell.”

Dr. Darrell Ray, Psychologist, quoted in a long article about *The Health Effects of Leaving Religion*. Dr. Ray spoke to the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara about *The God Virus* on March 20th, 2010. Full article (a good read):

http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/09/the-health-effects-of-leaving-religion/379651/?single_page=true

Miscellaneous News from International Correspondent Andrew Hankin

An Oklahoma judge on Friday, September 19th, 2014, dismissed a lawsuit that sought the removal of a Ten Commandments monument from state Capitol grounds as an unconstitutional use of public property to endorse religion...

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma said it would appeal the decision. "We aim to ensure (that) the freedom of future generations of Oklahomans to make their own decisions about faith remains intact and free from political interference," ACLU of Oklahoma executive director Ryan Kiesel said in a statement.

The state preservation commission in late 2013 put a halt to new monuments at the Capitol, pending the outcome of the ACLU lawsuit, after **groups petitioned to have markers for Satan, a monkey god, and the flying spaghetti monster erected near the Ten Commandments monument.**

Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt said in a statement that the ruling sent a clear message that the Ten Commandments could be displayed "because of the historical role the text has played in the founding of our nation."

Original story and picture of the monument <http://preview.msn.com/en-us/news/us/ten-commandments-marker-can-stay-at-oklahoma-capitol-judge/ar-BB4GU43>

On Aging and Aging Well Diane Krohn

Coincidentally with this month's speaker's topic of End of Life Issues, I found a couple of

recent articles about aging issues. These are interesting and provocative articles.

Too Young to Die, Too Old to Worry: This weekend, the singer and songwriter Leonard Cohen is celebrating his 80th birthday — with a cigarette. Last year he announced that he would resume smoking when he turned 80. "It's the right age to recommence," he explained.

At any age, taking up smoking is not sensible. Both the smoker and those who breathe his secondhand smoke can suffer not only long-term but acute health problems, including infections and asthma. And yet, Mr. Cohen's plan presents a provocative question: When should we set aside a life lived for the future and, instead, embrace the pleasures of the present?

Read the rest of the article here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/opinion/sunday/too-young-to-die-too-old-to-worry.html? r=0>

Why I Hope to Die at 75: Seventy-five.

That's how long I want to live: 75 years.

This preference drives my daughters crazy. It drives my brothers crazy. My loving friends think I am crazy. They think that I can't mean what I say; that I haven't thought clearly about this, because there is so much in the world to see and do. To convince me of my errors, they enumerate the myriad people I know who are over 75 and doing quite well. They are certain that as I get closer to 75, I will push the desired age back to 80, then 85, maybe even 90.

I am sure of my position. Doubtless, death is a loss. It deprives us of experiences and milestones, of time spent with our spouse and children. In short, it deprives us of all the things we value.

Read the rest of the article here: <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/09/why-i-hope-to-die-at-75/379329/>

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- October 19: Dr. Bradley Voytek: *Do Zombies Dream of Undead Sheep? A Neuroscientific View of the Zombie Brain*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/do-zombies-dream-of-undead-sheep/>
- October 24-25: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 37th 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>
- November 23: Dr. Tony Barnhart: *The Psychology of Magic* (includes a magic show!). Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/psychology-of-magic/>

Upcoming Events outside of California:

- November 21-23: Skepticon 7. Speakers include PZ Myers, Greta Christina, David Gorski, and many others. Registration is Free! Donations are gladly accepted to pay for the speakers. Springfield, MO.
<http://skepticon.org/>



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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. 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.

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

Saturday, October 18: Monthly Meeting : Toni Broaddus, speaking on End of Life Issues in California; 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, October 26: (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, November 11: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday November 15: Monthly Meeting: Scott Olson speaking on conversion from monkhood; 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.



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