



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

NOVEMBER 2014

November Program

Wendy Hughes:

Science Advocacy Blogging: One Volunteer for Two Blogs

Wendy Hughes provides an overview of two projects that support science advocacy with teams of grassroots skeptics. *The Odds Must Be Crazy* is a blog and podcast segment that discusses coincidences.



Healthy Skepticism is a fairly new channel of Skeptic Ink Network. Topics range from psychology to fitness, medicine and other health issues from a skeptical perspective. Wendy Hughes is a skepticism activist in Los Angeles. As hobbies go, this one allows her to indulge her curiosity by exploring claims of the paranormal.

Take a look at The Odds Must Be Crazy website. It has examples of interesting coincidences that are fun to read: <http://www.theoddsmustbecrazy.com/about/>

When: Saturday, November 15th, 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 November 12th to Judy Fontana, judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Call 769-HSSB.

Activities

Judy Fontana

Please join us on November 15th following the monthly program at Vista Del Monte for a delicious buffet and scintillating conversation. This month's menu is tossed green salad, wheat rolls, fresh catch of the day, beef stew, brown rice, mashed potatoes with gravy, steamed zucchini, artichoke vegetable blend, wine, and assorted beverages and desserts. Cost is \$22 person, tax and tip included. Please RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911. Hope to see you there!

News About Members

New Members:

Neal Faught, Santa Barbara
Virginia Schmalenberger, Santa Barbara
Ellie Tuazon, Santa Barbara

Deceased Member: Ken Tucker, HSSB member and retired entomologist, died at the age of 90 on October 17, 2014. Ken was born at Cottage Hospital, and his interest in honey bees and beekeeping as a boy led to his work as an apicultural scientist at the federal Honey Bee Laboratory in Baton Rouge and work on Africanized bees in Venezuela. Kens' widow, Shirley, continues to be a member of HSSB.

The obituary for Ken is here:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newspress/obituary.aspx?pid=172937663>

President's Column - The Measure of a Humanist Society

Colin Gordon

Thanks to those who have worked hard over the years, we now have an active society with a full program of monthly meetings, solstice parties that really should never be missed and a

snug home at Vista Del Monte that provides a welcome retreat from the stresses of the weekday world. Our Publicity Committee draws in the crowds to monthly meetings, set up by our Program Committee, which never fails to provide speakers who are both interesting and informative. Our Events Committee organizes, well, events, not to mention the very real contributions of our Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Webmaster and - have I missed anyone? In short, we have a nice society with well over 100 members that functions smoothly and efficiently to the satisfaction of all concerned.

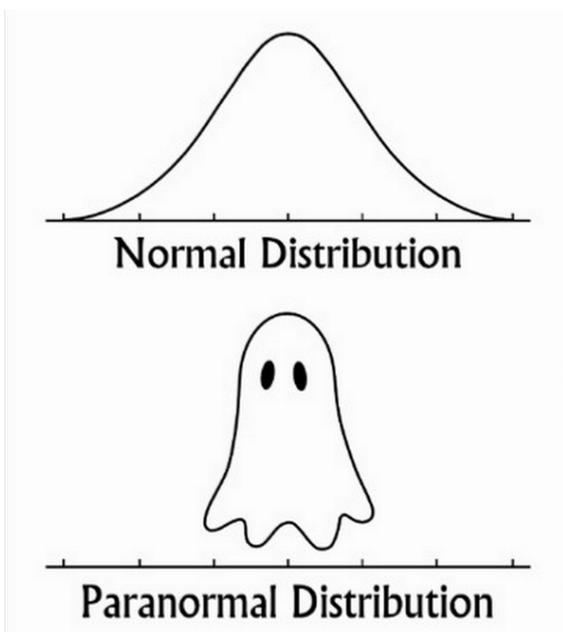
So how are we doing? What is the real measure of a Humanist Society? Perhaps we should do more do spread our beliefs, or lack thereof, to the world outside. Not an easy task in this god-fearing nation where over 80% of the population identifies with one religion or another. At least that is the common perception, but wait, according to *Wikipedia*, Religions by Country, the US is not much more religious than many western European countries. The category that is labeled "unaffiliated," that is, not affiliated to any religion, is headed by the Netherlands with 42%; then Belgium, 29%; and the UK, 21%. The US is not far behind with 16.4%, and that is more than the world as a whole, which comes in at 14%. So maybe it is not a lost cause and a little extra effort could bring our unaffiliated count up to more respectable levels. It is also interesting to note, in view of the success of ISIS, that the Muslim population of western Europe is now 5.8%, while the US is way behind with only 0.9%.

But do we really want to do that? Are we not quite content just not believing in any of those curious supernatural beings that so many other people find essential to their daily lives? This contrasts with the evangelicals who fervently wish to convert everyone to their particular set of beliefs. It is strange that, for the missionaries who come to my door, it is so important that

saving my soul from an eternity of perdition is so important to them. I suppose they are just trying to do me a good turn, as Christians are wont to do. It is true that most religions, but not all, have cleaned up their respective acts from what they were in previous centuries. A few thousand years ago, the chosen people massacred the Canaanites; Moses ordered them to offer the residents of any city the choice of surrendering to become slaves or, if they refused, to "... kill every man in that city with your swords. But take the women, the children, the cattle, and ..." Well, you get the idea. Later on, the Inquisition took its toll of non-believers but finally ran out of steam, perhaps for lack of heretics. So the major religions are now fairly benign and many churches are mostly social gatherings with a veneer of religious mysticism that few really believe or even understand.

We are not likely to disentangle a devout Catholic from his rosary or separate a Mormon from his rituals, but we could do more to spread the word of Humanism to those who already have doubts about their religious beliefs. They need an escape route and they should know that Humanism is here for them.

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**October Program:
Toni Broaddus:
End of Life Issues in California
Robert Bernstein**

Oregon passed the Death With Dignity Act twenty years ago and it was enacted in 1997. Why don't we have such a law in California?

Toni Broaddus of Compassion & Choices (C&C) told us the history and her hope that we can soon have such a law.

The case of 29-year old brain tumor patient Brittany Maynard is putting this front and center in the news. As a young, attractive woman with a supportive family, she stepped forward to promote the cause. At <http://www.thebrittanyfund.org/> you can watch her six minute video. In just a few weeks it had 8 million views and the C&C web site was overwhelmed for awhile.

Brittany and her husband moved from California to Oregon just to have the peace of mind of knowing she has the option to end her life on her own terms, rather than waiting for the tumor to cause intolerable pain and complete loss of control. The Oregon law is quite conservative. It requires a doctor to certify the patient is mentally competent and has a terminal illness with less than six months to live. The doctor can prescribe medication for the patient to take to end his or her own life. The doctor does not assist.

Between one-half and one-third of patients don't use the meds. Having the meds gives all of them a sense of control, though.

California has tried six times for such a law, twice by Proposition. One failed because not enough signatures were obtained. The other one lost as a proposition in an election. Four more times it was tried in the Legislature. The last time was 2007.

Politicians are usually followers, Broaddus explained. It is up to the people to lead. A C&C poll shows that 64% of Californians support the right to die with dignity. Overall US figures are similar.

Who opposes the law? The California Medical Association and the California Conference of Bishops. The Church went after Latino legislators in the past. Called them out at Mass. Threatened them with possible excommunication.

Many doctors do support end of life choices. The classic Hippocratic Oath seemed to forbid taking a life. But the current 1964 version does not. It just says to “tread with care in matters of life and death.” It also emphasizes the importance of “sympathy and understanding.”

Disability rights organizations are also concerned. Broaddus thinks this is misplaced. Many disabled people want this choice.

For many, palliative care works. But for some, pain can be untreatable and unendurable.

People can be arrested and put in jail for minor roles in a person ending his own life. The television program *60 Minutes* had a segment on Barbara Mancini in Pennsylvania. She had handed her father his morphine which he took for pain relief. He drank the whole bottle and she followed his directive not to send him to the hospital. She was arrested and he was sent to the emergency room against his wishes. He suffered greatly in mental distress for several days until he died.

Broaddus is optimistic that the time is right to pass the Oregon law in California. C&C selected Santa Barbara as an important action center. It is not “too easy” like San Francisco or Berkeley. Nor is it impossibly conservative.

Cecily Hintzen was hired to coordinate action in Santa Barbara. Action will happen at all levels.

Locally, prosecutors are asked not to prosecute such cases. Doctors and nurses are being asked to stand up and say the California Medical Association does not speak for them. At a state level, the hope is for a law. Our own Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson is a great advocate and is one of the few who met with C&C in person in Sacramento. She shared her own personal story.

Small choices of wording can matter a lot, as C&C's polls indicate. “Death with Dignity” polls well. What does not poll so well is talk of “rights” as Broaddus learned from her previous work with HIV/AIDS and LGBT issues.

“Family, love and commitment” are words everyone can relate to. Talk of “people” not “patients” also makes people realize it could be about them.



October speaker Toni Broaddus, left, with HSSB member Marian Shapiro, on right. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

C&C came together from several previous organizations working on end of life issues, including the Hemlock Society. They are a compromise of different views, avoiding euthanasia and focusing on the terminally ill.

C&C is also careful to distinguish between death with dignity and any form of “suicide.” Broaddus explained that suicide is a term generally associated with mental illness.

Celebrity support has come from Olympia Dukakis, "Dear Abby," Archbishop Desmond Tutu and had been coming from Joan Rivers until her unexpected death.

Personally, you should all have an advance directive. POLST (Physician's Order for Life Sustaining Treatment) is a form your doctor can complete and is the most effective. The C&C web site has all of this information:

<https://www.compassionandchoices.org/>

Broaddus also asked us to contact our state legislators (Das Williams and Hannah-Beth Jackson locally) to support an Oregon type Death With Dignity Law in California. The time is right!

Letter to the Editor

The talk by Toni Broaddus at the meeting of October 18th made me think about the different way we humans can come to the end of our existence.

I was born in the Netherlands and was drafted into military service in September of 1938, when I was 19 years old. In May of 1940, the Germans invaded our country and our company was sent to the airfield Valkenburg, close to the town of Leiden where we were stationed. The Germans came down by parachutes there after having bombed the few planes. The battle there lasted about three days and then we had to move out again because our outdated weapons were no good against theirs. During the fighting, several of the fellows I had trained with were killed but I came out unscratched.

During the occupation by the Nazis, my mother and I who lived in Haarlem then moved to Oosterbeek by Arnhem, on advice of my sister who lived there with her husband. They talked my mother to sell her house in Haarlem

because, according to them, she would be safer there. Holland was close to the coast and occasionally the British airmen bombed coastline targets.

This was the wrong move, because during the battle of Arnhem and Oosterbeek, we lost everything we owned. But this happened later. In Oosterbeek, I came into contact with a small resistance group who, when they found out I had a knack for drawing and was able to falsify signatures, had me sign the name of the German Commander of the city of Arnhem, on official papers that they had got their hands on. These papers were given to men who were in danger of being sent to slave labor camps in Germany.

Also we stole food coupons and handed these to people who were in hiding. This worked alright until someone gave my name to the Germans, and when I was warned in time I had to leave town in a hurry. This was the winter of 1944, one of the worst in the history of the Netherlands. Since there was no public transportation, I had to walk; bicycles were taken by the Germans. Luckily I had some money and foodstuff and found a place to sleep at night, sometimes in a farmer's barn and sometimes in a small hotel, but only if the hotel owners did not give a list to the Germans of who was staying there, which was a law.

In February, I ended up in the small town of Purmerend in the Province of North Holland. One thing I have not mentioned yet is that I was living with a girl, who wanted to come along with me even after I had warned her about the dangers involved. Since we were far removed from our starting point, we rented a room from a woman who lived with her 18 year-old daughter. This was a terrible time there; most of the country had been liberated by the Allies then, but the Western Provinces were still in German hands, and the Germans took everything they could get their hands on to Germany. Food was not available and

thousands civilians died of malnutrition or froze to death, because no fuel was available. I did get in contact with some fellows in a resistance group who asked me to leave the front door of the place where I lived unlocked, since they wanted to teach the daughter of the woman a lesson because she dated German soldiers. I did this, even though I thought there were worse things to worry about. The girl I was with developed appendicitis and had to go to the hospital to be treated. Being alone in our room the next day, three German soldiers came stomping on the stairway, kicked in the door and slammed me against the wall. The mother of the daughter had given my name this time.

The soldiers took me to an officer who told me that he knew about my involvement with the resistance and the next day he would send me to Amsterdam, where I would be interrogated by the Gestapo and then shot. Now this was different; I was in other situations where I could come close, believe me, I am not a hero but I always was an optimist; but this was different and I cannot describe the feeling that I felt when I heard this. This was it. I was 25 years old and in good health. I would die. I could not face the thought of being tortured and killed.

So the next day, they gave me a bike and surrounded by 4 soldiers, also on bikes (gasoline was scarce even for the Germans), I had to peddle to my own execution. Halfway to Amsterdam and it being noon time, the soldiers stopped for lunch at the German quarters of the town where we were and while they ate, they took me to another officer who went through everything that they had found in my room and then said, all in German of course, "It is pretty stupid to be caught so close to the end of the war," and then he said something that I was not quite sure I had heard right, he said "Get out and go home, the war will be over in two weeks." I was dumbfounded until he shouted "Go before I change my mind!" and I left. I was back on my bike when I passed people who

probably thought I was crazy because I was laughing and crying at the same time. I would live. I could smell spring in the air.

This event changed my thoughts about living and dying and from then on things that used to worry me seemed unimportant. Now I am 95 years old and dying does not scare me, but I love life and hope that I can enjoy it a while longer.

--John Coppejans



Health Care for All California

At the HSSB Board meeting in September, 2014, the Board voted to re-affirm the support of Health Care for All California, promoting single payer health care. Support for single payer health care had been voted unanimously by the HSSB Board on September 15, 2009.

The HSSB Board also voted to support the death with dignity/compassionate choices effort.

Wise Words from Oscar Wilde:

"Religion is like a blind man looking in a black room for a black cat that isn't there, and finding it."

"I don't want to go to heaven. None of my friends are there."

Two Chicks Getting Married

Marian Shapiro

This is to announce the marriage of HSSB member and former board member, Nancy Wahl, to her wife, Melinda Mettler, at the Santa Barbara Biltmore in a lovely garden patio on October 5th. Their relatives came from all over the US to be at their joyful, significant ceremony. The officiant was Loretta Redd, who has been our guest speaker for HSSB several times. On top of the wedding cake, instead of a bride and groom, were two yellow chicks, and the theme of the event was "Two Chicks Getting Married." How very punny! The couple and all the guests did the Chicken Dance and the favors at each dinner setting were two ceramic chick salt-and-pepper shakers. Nancy is a long time HSSB member, and I know our members will want to join me in wishing Nancy and Melinda a long and happy life together. Nancy's two Westies were at the ceremony, adorned with flowers! It was a beautiful celebration, and filled me with pride that finally our gay relatives and friends have the same right to marry as our straight friends and relatives.



(L to R) Nancy Wahl, Melinda Mettler, and the flower dogs! Photo by Marian Shapiro.

How Should We Make Decisions Without Direct Evidence?

Hemant Mehta

(Excerpted from *The Friendly Atheist*)

A lot of popular books about atheism focus on arguments for why God doesn't exist and how various religions are wrong. The authors want you to become an atheist by the time you're finished reading. That's all well and good, but it leaves me asking a simple question: *Now what?*

I no longer need convincing to call myself an atheist, but it'd be nice to see more guides on how to live a fulfilling life without religion. ..

Lex Bayer and John Figdor have created just that resource with their new book [*Atheist Mind, Humanist Heart: Rewriting the Ten Commandments for the Twenty-first Century*](#).

In the excerpt below, the authors talk about how to make decisions when there's no direct evidence to help you out:

Let's start with a thought experiment. A woman in a white lab coat is about to ask you a series of questions about what exists or doesn't exist, and you are required to answer them. For every right answer, she will give you a hundred dollars...

The examiner blindfolds you, places you in a windowless van, and drives you off to an unknown location. When the blindfold is finally removed, you find yourself sitting in a white room. The only furniture are two plain stainless steel chairs. You are sitting on one, the examiner on the other. In the corner of the room there is a mysterious, bright-orange sphere that appears to be floating magically in the air. The examiner informs you that you are not to move from your chair or explore your surroundings. She then proceeds to ask you the following questions...

Read the rest of the article here: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/10/30/how-should-we-make-decisions-without-direct-evidence/>

Meet Your Board Members! (Part of a continuing series)

Mary Wilk, Membership Chair:

I grew up in England and immigrated to the US with my husband. We operated several businesses in Los Angeles before moving to Santa Barbara. Currently I am President of a specialized metal finishing company with three facilities in Southern California.

I became a non-believer in England after reading the writings of such authors as Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. From a letter written by Dick Cousineau to the *Santa Barbara News Press*, I became aware of the existence of HSSB, which I joined in January 1996. For the past fifteen years I have acted as Membership Chairman. As an atheist, I am appalled at the havoc in the world caused by aggressive religious fervor. It is my hope that more Humanists will express their views openly, and speak out against the harmful effects of misguided religious dogma.



Mary Wilk, left, with her daughter Diana.



Roger Schlueter

Roger Schlueter:

I was raised in a household in which religion played no role. I did go to a couple of Sunday services at the Four Square church across the street from my grade school but only because that was required to play on their basketball team; I found the church itself a bit creepy. I also was fascinated by a weekly late Sunday evening radio broadcast by a local black minister who really got into the “fire and brimstone” spirit. I’m sure at that young age I did not grasp his larger philosophical views but did think even then that it all didn’t make much sense...but he was one helluva charismatic preacher.

In college, I was a member of a fraternity that had a strong religious background (it was founded by three Episcopalian priests) but our chapter paid very little attention to that aspect of it. Far more important was who was making the beer and pizza run each night.

For all of my post-academic life, religion was of no interest. I had a career and growing family to support. But after returning to Santa Barbara in 1985, I met Dick Cousineau who invited me to a meeting of the Humanist Society. I had no idea what a Humanist was but went out of curiosity. The meeting was probably the worst the Humanist Society ever held but I liked what I saw anyway and came back for more. The rest is history.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- November 16: Ryan Bell: *Living Between Belief and Unbelief*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/living_between_belief_and_unbelief/
- 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/>
- December 7: Paul Scott: *The Case for Electrifying Personal Transport*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/the_case_for_electrifying_personal_transport/
- December 7: Dr. Andrew Hodges: *Alan Turing: The Enigma*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/alan-turing-the-enigma/>
- January 17-19, 2015. Geology Tour! Join the Skeptics Society for a 3-day tour of the highlights of central California. *Central California Classics: Castles, Missions, Wildlife and Geology*. Sponsored by the Skeptics Society.
http://www.skeptic.com/geology_tours/2015/Central-California-Classics/

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/>

HSSB Contact Information

Officers:

President: Colin Gordon

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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, November 11: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday, November 15: Monthly Meeting : Wendy Hughes on The Odds Must be Crazy; 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, November 30: (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, December 16: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday December 20: Winter Solstice Party: Details forthcoming in the December issue of *The Secular Circular*.



Humanist Society of
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