



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

JULY 2025

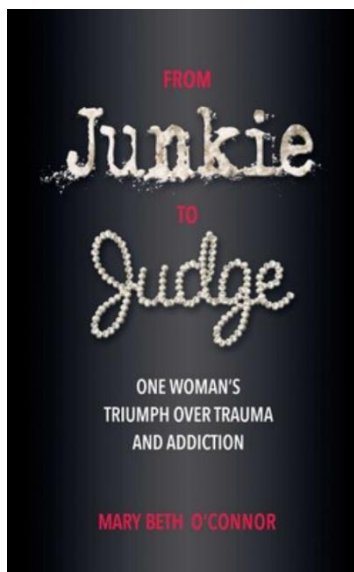
*Join us on Zoom for our July Speaker...*

## ***Mary Beth O'Connor: From Junkie to Judge...Without God***



**Our Program:** Mary Beth O'Connor will describe her long history of injecting methamphetamine. She will describe how she responded when her rehab ordered her to comply with the God-based approach of Alcoholics Anonymous and how she built a secular recovery program. Mary Beth then will provide an overview of substance use disorder and treatment options. This will include six peer support groups and a study comparing the efficacy of several of them. She will explain the benefits of building a personalized secular recovery program and the obstacles to doing so. Mary Beth will provide recovery resources and take questions.

**Our Speaker:** In her award-winning memoir, *From Junkie to Judge: One Woman's Triumph Over Trauma and Addiction*, Mary Beth shares her three-phase journey: the abuse and trauma that drove her to shoot methamphetamine at 17, the chaos from her addiction, and how she developed a personalized recovery plan, without a higher power, that led to twenty-nine years of sobriety thus far.



Mary Beth is a Board Member for She Recovers Foundation and a Director for LifeRing Secular Recovery. She regularly speaks on behalf of these organizations and about multiple and secular paths to recovery. She had an op-ed in The Wall Street Journal, [\*I Beat Addiction without God\*](#), and one in Recovery Today, *How I Attained 28 Years Sobriety by Rejecting my Rehab's Submit to AA Order*. Professionally, 6 years into recovery, Mary Beth attended Berkeley Law School. She worked at a large firm, then litigated class actions for the federal government. In 2014 she was appointed a federal Administrative Law Judge and retired in 2020.

**When: Saturday When: July 26, 3:00 – 4:30 pm PST.**

**Where: On Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>**



## The HSSB Secular Circular – July 2025

### Summer Solstice Picnic

Photos by Marian Shapiro and  
Robert Bernstein

We had a beautiful summer day for our annual Summer Solstice picnic in Stow Grove Park, with a nice turnout of about 20 attendees. We honored Mary Wilk, an HSSB member since January 1996, and Membership Chair for 30 years!

Big thanks to Phil and Judy for providing BBQ Tri tip and all the fixings for sandwiches!



*Mary and Judy. Photo by Robert.*



*David and Mary.  
Photo by Marian.*



*Above: Pat and Mary.  
Below: Ron, Wilma, Diana and Bruce.  
Photo by Marian.*



*Nancy and Suzanne.  
Photo by Marian.*







*Meredith and Judy. Photo by Marian.*



*L to R: Pat, Robert, Mary, Nancy, Wilma, Judy, Suzanne, Wayne, Ron, Diane, Marian and Diana. Mary in front. Photo by Robert.*



*Above: Phil. Below: Sylvelin. Photos by Marian.*



*Above: Robert. Below, front row: L to R: Nancy, Mary and Pat.*

*Back row, L to R: Wayne, Diane and Ron. Photos by Marian.*





## Honoring Mary Wilk

Mary Wilk has been a member of HSSB since January 1996 and has been the Membership Chair for 30 years! She has been a stalwart member of our organization and even now, she is a member of our Board of Directors.

When we had in-person meetings, Mary was the person that members and visitors regularly contacted at the welcome table for the meetings. But Mary also served as a recruiter, sending out personal letters or emails to visitors, with a copy of our brochure and an invitation to join HSSB. Mary also regularly contacted members whose membership had lapsed, reminding them to rejoin our organization. She definitely contributed to sustaining our membership numbers!

The following is an article copied from the *Santa Barbara Humanist Society Freethought News and Bulletin*, December 1998 (the precursor of The HSSB Secular Circular); with a little bit from the March 2003 issue. Mary wrote this article herself, and it provides a great overview of Mary's life and her humanist values.

### Introducing...Mary Wilk, Humanist

I come from a diverse national background, as my father was German, my mother English and my husband, Polish. I grew up in England, fortunately in a non-religious family. Nominally belonging to the Church of England we



only ever visited a church on ceremonious occasions. At school, morning prayers were compulsory, also a weekly "Scripture" lesson, but these were presented so perfunctorily that they had very little effect.

In my teens, through the persuasion of a friend, I became entangled with an evangelistic group who worked hard to convert me. In spite of their efforts, I resisted coming forward and accepting Christ as my Savior, and after several months, they finally gave up. This left me with an uneasy feeling that I was probably a sinner and had rejected my chance of salvation!

Soon afterwards I met my husband, who had escaped from Poland and joined the R.A.F., in World War II. He was a lapsed Catholic and introduced me to the works of such Freethinkers as Bertrand Russell and H.G. Wells. With immense relief I realized that I need no longer feel like an outcast, and from then on gave up all pretense of believing in God.

My husband and I emigrated as stateless persons to the U.S., where we later became citizens. One thing that surprised me on coming to this country was the pervasiveness of religious faith. In spite of this, we managed to raise our three

children with very little exposure to such beliefs. I wondered how this would affect them later on in life, and it has turned out that they are neither for nor against religion but find it merely irrelevant.

My career has been mostly in manufacturing, having supervised the business side of various enterprises that my husband and I operated in Southern California. Upon the incapacity of my husband ten years ago, I took over and continued to run our metal-finishing company, Electromatic, Inc., headquartered in Goleta. The firm, with facilities also in North Hollywood and Santa Fe Springs, specializes in electro polishing, somewhat the reverse of electro plating, working mostly with stainless steel for fabricators including Boeing.

Many years ago, we started a chapter of the American Humanist Association in Santa Barbara, but it never really took off, and eventually disbanded. However, thanks to many active members, our S.B.H.S. is thriving.

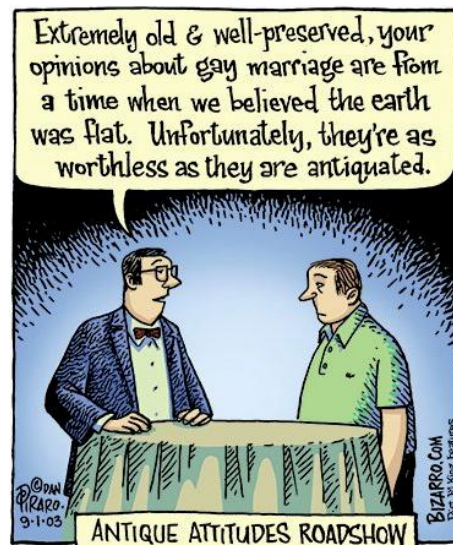
I am concerned at the growing political influence of the Churches, and the increase in superstition and gullibility among much of the population. While as Humanists we pride ourselves on our tolerance, we must not let this deter us from actively protecting our right to independent and rational thought.

## New Membership Chair: Mary Taylor



Mary Wilk, who has been our Membership Chair for 30 years, has stepped down from her role. Mary Taylor has agreed to take on this important job.

Huge thanks to both Mary Wilk and Mary Taylor for supporting our organization and humanism! You can contact Mary at [HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com](mailto:HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com)



## Supreme Court Opens Door to Religious Veto of Public School Lessons, Starting with LGBTQ Books

*Excerpted from The Friendly Atheist, June 25, 2025*

In a disturbing ruling ripped right of the Christian Nationalist playbook, the Supreme Court’s 6-3 conservative super-majority [ruled yesterday in \*Mahmoud v. Taylor\*](#) that parents who don’t want their kids reading books in school with LGBTQ characters and themes could “opt out” due to their religious beliefs.

The implications of the decision are staggering.

The majority took the side of the religious zealots—a group of conservative parents including Muslims and Catholic—who didn’t want to expose their children to the reality that they live in a pluralistic society with people who may not believe what they believe, love as they love, or fit a particular gender mold. They claimed that the Montgomery County Board of Education (in Maryland) was “undermining” their faith by reading books in class that treated same-sex couples and trans people as—wait for it—*normal*.

The decision explains:

*The books are unmistakably normative. They are designed to present certain values and beliefs as things to be*

*celebrated, and certain contrary values and beliefs as things to be rejected...*

*... The storybooks present same-sex weddings as occasions for great celebration and suggest that the only rubric for determining whether a marriage is acceptable is whether the individuals concerned “love each other.”*

The horror.

No one, of course, was ever stopping religious bigots from treating LGBTQ people as inhuman or second-class citizens. (We have plenty of evidence of that despite the progress we’ve made regarding LGBTQ rights.) But, to quote **Justice Sonia Sotomayor’s** dissent, the decision says that being *exposed* to the very idea that “LGBTQ people exist, and that their loved ones may celebrate their marriages and life events, the majority says, is enough to trigger the most demanding form of judicial scrutiny.”

The irony is that even if certain books were approved by the Montgomery County Board of Education for use in the classroom, there’s no evidence of how those books were even being used, or how often they were read, or what conversations occurred because of them. The SCOTUS conservatives [invented facts to fit the conclusion they wanted to achieve](#), refusing to wait for a legal record of those details to even be established.

The bottom line is that this decision allows parents to remove their kids from

the classroom if something they're going to be taught might offend their religious sensibilities.

How could that possibly be implemented? How can a school district know what religious beliefs everyone has? How can public education *even occur* if the curriculum can be micromanaged by every single parent?

The slippery slope here is obvious. There are religious zealots who might object to interracial marriage, and evolution, and historical records showing that slavery in America was enforced and perpetuated (and also opposed!) by Christians.

Justice Samuel Alito writes in his conclusion:

*Specifically, until all appellate review in this case is completed, **the Board should be ordered to notify them in advance whenever one of the books in question or any other similar book is to be used in any way and to allow them to have their children excused from that instruction.***

Even that poses all kinds of administrative burdens, though. If a student can opt out of a lesson because of the family's religion, either that student misses out on a valuable lesson or the book can't be used at all. If enough students opt out, the teacher can't teach...

There's no telling which parts of an education could offend someone because religious conservatives are offended by

damn near everything outside their bubble. That said, Millhiser [Ian Millhiser, in *Vox.com*] adds, the way the decision is written, having LGBTQ characters alone may not be reason enough to object. It's *celebrating their identities* that crosses the line. What if there's a novel where that's just one element but not the core theme? In theory, that book could escape the grasp of the bigots. But what counts as *celebrating* who they are? Is a character coming to terms with being gay or trans considered *advocacy* for those views? What if some characters in a book are happy about their friend's same-sex marriage—as any decent friend would be—even if that's not the focus of the book? (That's literally what the conservatives cherry-picked as an example of a book that went too far!)

That's the problem here. The ruling is so vague that the only way to avoid legal entanglement is to never use books with gay characters at all, effectively erasing them from the entire curriculum as if they don't exist.

Still, schools will likely struggle to determine when they are required to warn parents of a particular lesson under *Mahmoud*. And schools that draw the line in the wrong place now risk being dragged into an expensive lawsuit...

Sotomayor also laid out the slippery slope that extends from this decision:

***Books expressing implicit support for patriotism, women's rights, interfaith marriage, consumption of meat,***



*immodest dress, and countless other topics may conflict with sincerely held religious beliefs and thus trigger stringent judicial review under the majority's test. Imagine a children's picture book that celebrates the achievements of women in history, including female scientists, politicians, astronauts, and authors. Perhaps the book even features a page that states, "Girls can do it all!" That message may be "directly contrary to the religious principles that" a parent "wish[es] to instill in their chil[d]"...*

She said the ruling "threatens the very essence of public education"—and that is why conservatives are so excited. One of their long-term goals is eradicating public education entirely.

This case is ultimately a win for conservative bigots, a loss for public education, and another blow to church/state separation. If we allow religious parents to dictate what their kids can and can't learn in public school, it harms *everybody*. LGBTQ-themed books may be first on the chopping block but there are others that could easily follow...

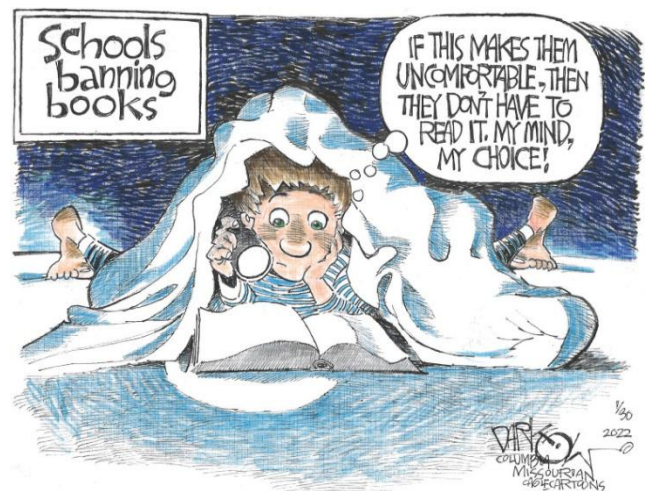
It's a perfect encapsulation of how Christian Nationalists are now dictating public policy. I've said this before, but they treat neutrality as oppression. The Supreme Court's right-wing majority has now made clear that neutrality is no longer acceptable if it clashes with the religious whims of conservative bigots.

It's another reminder of how the conservatives on the Court don't care about the facts of the cases in front of them—they're always willing to rewrite the case to justify the outcome they were always going to support.

There's one more interesting hypothetical here: Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana have all passed laws requiring Ten Commandments posters in the classroom. (Louisiana's law has been deemed unconstitutional, most recently by an appellate court. Lawsuits have been filed in the other two states.)

But what's stopping parents from suing school districts in *those* states using the now-valid argument that the first few Commandments violate their religious beliefs, and their kids shouldn't be subject to that kind of proselytizing?

Read the entire article here: [Friendly Atheist](#)





## Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Submitted by Diane Krohn & Melanie Jacobsen

- July 6: Rev. Jonathan Young: *Frida Kahlo: Image & Vision*. Reflects on the shamanic Mexican artist and her inspiration from nature goddess tradition as depicted in the 2002 film, *Frida*. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Avenue, Goleta, CA 93117. [LOUUC](#)
- July 10: Virtual event: *Beyond the Bench: Faith, Freedom and the Supreme Court*. Sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. [Beyond the Bench](#)
- July 13: *Unexcused Absence* Rev. Rod Richards, retiring UU minister in San Luis Obispo, who explores the saying, "Wherever you go, there you are." Says Rev. Richards, "Well... not quite." Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Avenue, Goleta, CA 93117. [LOUUC](#)
- July 18-20: Scopes Trial Centennial Conference, Chattanooga, TN. Hosted by the Center For Inquiry and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. [Scopes Trial Centennial](#).
- July 20: Rev. Kristen Rohm: *Centering in Chaotic Times*. Once member of Live Oak, now ordained UU minister and Spiritual Care Counselor for Hospice of Santa Barbara, Rev. Kristen considers how we find our center and spend more time there when life is challenging. She shares some wisdom from clients with serious illness and a little yoga as we explore centering in these days of uncertainty. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Avenue, Goleta, CA 93117. [LOUUC](#)
- July 27: Kendra Wise, Live Oak member. Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 820 N. Fairview Avenue, Goleta, CA 93117. [LOUUC](#)

## HSSB Contact Information

**Officers:** *President & Editor:* Judy Flattery,

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*Treasurer:* David Flattery,

[david.flattery@post.harvard.edu](mailto:david.flattery@post.harvard.edu)

### Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Judith Fontana, Gary Noreen, Mary Wilk

**To Join or Donate to HSSB:** Annual Membership dues \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via

- PayPal (Paypal.me/SBHumanists or QR code below). At the PayPal site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the



transaction. or

- 
- Zelle ([HSSBpayments@gmail.com](mailto:HSSBpayments@gmail.com)) or
- Checks made out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mailed to Mary Taylor, HSSB, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130.
- Please include your name and contact information when submitting payments.
- Membership questions? Contact Mary Taylor at [HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com](mailto:HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com)

Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.



## The HSSB Secular Circular – July 2025



Humanist Society of Santa Barbara  
P.O. Box 30232  
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

### HSSB Calendar

**Tuesday July 22. 5:00 pm HSSB Board Meeting.** Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

**Saturday July 26. 3:00 pm. Retired Judge, Mary Beth O'Connor.** *From Junkie to Judge—Without God.* Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>

**Tuesday August 12. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

**Saturday August 16. Private HSSB Tour of Mt. Wilson Observatory *Plus* Half Night Viewing through 100" Telescope.** Space is limited to 15 on the tour and 20 for the viewing. Contact Gary Noreen at [Yoda@ardio.com](mailto:Yoda@ardio.com) to reserve your spot.

**Tuesday September 16. 5:00 pm HSSB Board Meeting.** Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

**Saturday September 20. 3:00 pm. Dr. Christopher DiCarlo. Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity.** Hosted jointly by HSSB and The Freethought Society. Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>