



Humanist Society of New Mexico



May 2011

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> zelda@amadorbooks.com

Quote of the Month

If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins to them.

Francis Bacon

HSNM Family Co-Op Alternative Children's Sunday School

First and third Sundays, 3 PM
First Unitarian Church

Call 505-292-4375 for more information
or go to www.Meetup.com.

Santa Fe Humanists Saturday, May 7th, 10:30am

*Guest Speaker, Hank Bahnsen:
Social Security and the National Debt*

Community Room, La Farge Branch of the
Santa Fe Public Library, 1730 Llano St.

For more information contact Bill Weihofen
(505) 988-1343

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

Meetings are free and run from 10:00 to noon
(except where noted)

Saturday, May 14th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion starts at 10:10am

Restricted to Members and their Guests Only. For
invitation please contact Zelda Gatuskin at 505-
344-6102 for details or questions.

Refreshments: Randall Wall

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, May 21st

Topical Discussion – Open to the Public

How Do We Become Civilized?

Erna Fergusson Library, 3700 San Mateo Blvd. NE

Saturday, May 28th

Speaker Meeting – Open to the Public

What's Happening with Women's Issues?

By Juniper Decker

Humanist Minute: Jerry Gilbert

Refreshments: Leland Franks

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

Humanism is an ethical philosophy that derives its principles from science and reason rather than theology. It asserts the worth and dignity of every person, advocates personal liberty tempered by social and environmental responsibility, and promotes democracy, compassion, and justice. It sees human beings as natural organisms, whose values arise from culture and experience, and holds humanity responsible for its own affairs.

**The Humanist Society of New Mexico
(HSNM)**

A Membership chapter of the American Humanist Association.

The purpose of HSNM is to promote ethical, naturalistic, democratic Humanism among its members and within its community.

Officers/Committees

Zelda Gatuskin: President [Public Information]

Roy Moody: Vice President

[Education/Programs]

Fred March: Past President

[Special Projects]

Leland Franks: Treasurer [By-laws]

Jerry Gilbert: Secretary [Membership]

Carolyn Kaye, Member-at-Large

Randall Wall, Member-at-Large

Ongoing Projects:

Ron Herman, Director of Classes

Randall Wall, Newsletter Editor

Phil Smith, Webmaster

Attila Csanyi, Friendly Philosopher's Director

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies AHA/HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$15 annually. Local membership (HSNM only) is \$15/year (\$20 for two adults in the same household); AHA membership is \$35 for the first year, \$45 thereafter. Send local subscription or membership request to: Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box 27293, Albuquerque, NM 87125-7293. Send Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall Wall, paragon2012@comcast.net or 1009 Childers NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. The deadline for Newsletter submissions is the third Saturday of each month.

President's Message

by Zelda Gatuskin

An afternoon or evening in the company of a creative work can be more nourishing than a seven course meal, more refreshing than a good night's sleep. This was certainly true in the case of *La Traviata*, recently performed at the Kimo - a true masterwork beautifully produced by Albuquerque's own Opera Southwest. The leading roles were played by visiting professionals, and guest conductor Francesco Milioto did a masterful job of meshing them with an orchestra and chorus of local musicians. The show provided both balm for the soul and food for thought. Opera can certainly be an acquired taste, and it helps to know the libretto, but the lyricism of Verdi transcends its time, place and language. You could close your eyes and love this opera without knowing anything about it.

Some of us have trouble getting past the pathetic plots which characterize opera in general. This particular tragedy, like all opera tragedies, hinges on the virtue - or lack thereof - of its women characters. Violetta, a courtesan (such a word!) falls in love with Alfredo, a young man of esteemed lineage, but is persuaded to end the relationship by his father (Germont) for the sake of his sister, a chaste young thing betrothed to a nobleman. If the family name is besmirched by the son's liaison, it will ruin the daughter's chance for this marriage. Leading one to ask: What kind of jerk is the father, or for that matter the fiance? God is invoked frequently, with apparent sincerity, by one and all. But the words are sometimes dripping with irony, such as Violetta's adamant, "God forgives but man does not."

Later, Violetta sings, "Religion is a great comfort to those who suffer." At the performance I attended, a good half of the audience twittered at this line. I wondered if our modern sensibilities caused us to read into this a modern disconnect between genuine grace and mere palliative, until I studied the program notes and learned that the opera is based on a novel by that clever cynic, Dumas. Indeed, it is the father who must suffer remorse and atone, not the so-called fallen woman, whose dignity and virtue were apparent at every turn. Germont sends Alfredo back to Violetta, and himself offers her fatherly love and blessings whilst she dies of tuberculosis. Well, she has to die. Dumas was no dummy. Mores of the

time, not to mention theatrical convention, demanded nothing less.

Much as I enjoyed the music, staging and performances of *La Traviata*, I came away thinking that for all the lip service paid to protecting women's virtue and honor, there is little honor actually paid to women - no more now than ever - and hardly anything like fatherly love in the general sense. Women as a class continue to be treated callously and disrespectfully in much of the world including here at home. That said, let's not forget that Violetta is the one consistently admirable character in the story. She was played by diva Shana Blake Hill, who stole the show with her vibrant and virtuosic performance - a real-life super-hero of song and role model for free and accomplished womanhood.

We are highlighting women's issues for our May Speaker Meeting, and in the months to come we will consider other undervalued segments of society, because a humanistic worldview respects and supports all of the players on life's stage.

HSNM Governance Notebook

by Zelda Gatuskin

The next HSNM Governing Board meeting will be held on Saturday, May 14 at the Summit Apartments immediately following our monthly Informal Meeting. Members wishing to address the Board or submit a particular issue for discussion should contact any Board member. HSNM members are welcome and encouraged to sit in on the meeting to observe your GB at work.

Next Speaker Meeting Bio and Introduction

Juniper Decker obtained her undergraduate degree from the University of New Mexico in Family Studies and is currently completing her degree in Counseling Education. She holds a position as Breastfeeding Support Coordinator for the Women's Resource Center at UNM. Juniper is an officer for Chi Sigma Iota Counselors Honors Society. She heads and is active on social justice committees both in her Honors society and at the Unitarian Universalist church here in Albuquerque.

Juniper and her family have lived in New Mexico on and off since 1994. Juniper has been a strong advocate and social activist for human rights and justice for many many years. She plans to continue her work in social activism through the lens of mental health and prevention as a counselor in the community.

Juniper's talk, "What's Happening with Women's Issues?" will address: The war on women's rights in the

current political arena; issues affecting older women such as health care, retirement, and financial equality; and gender inequality in research.

The Humanist Minute

by Zelda Gatuskin

For the April Humanist Minute I shared a couple of items. One is a poem by Gregory Corso called "The Whole Mess...Almost" which is easily found on-line (poetryfoundation.org) and in print collections. Take a look, as it is a decidedly humanist poem (originally published in 1973) and a lot of fun to read aloud.

The other piece I read is reprinted here with permission of Uncle River, an author living in Catron County, NM and dear friend of the late Harry Willson. Some of you may have met River or heard him speak at the Amador Publishers Book Bash last October. We had been corresponding about writing, of course:

"Your comments about contemporary fiction and its emotional flatness ring all too true to me, and remind me of something I was struck by even more when watching TV. I don't have a TV, and don't like the medium. So I commonly go months without seeing any. But I have some friends...who watch a lot of TV. And when with them, I often get quite a dose in a brief time. It was while seeing the cluster of shows that followed one on another...that I was struck by a realization. The writing actually had improved over TV writing of 30 or 40 years ago. And characters often were better developed than in quite a bit of the printed contemporary fiction I see these days. But essentially all the shows were set in Hell. Dramas. Comedies. Whatever the genre, they all seemed to me to be set in worlds where the only reality the characters knew, to do whatever they did and in which to interact with each other, struck me as a Hell world, utterly and intrinsically alienated and alienating, and I believe would strike a large percentage of the world's people of all traditions, including our own up to about 40 or 50 years ago the same.

"By contrast, I just finished reading *Les Miserables*, which I never had read before, whose characters really do spend a lot of their lives in hellish suffering. Yet that tale has a powerful human resonance to it. Unlike a lot of contemporary fiction, and what I was noting on TV, which I say is set in Hell because its inhabitants don't know anything else is possible.

"And I wonder about our own world, which is the audience for contemporary fiction and TV alike.

"Well, life as I know it here in Pie Town certainly isn't Hell. But then, most of the people I know here think our world is off the edge. And it is interesting how old hippies and cowboy Christians coincide in their views."

--Uncle River, 2/22/11

HSNM and SCA

The American Humanist Association, of which HSNM is a Chapter, is a Member Organization of the Secular Coalition for America. Thanks to the initiative of Ron Herman, HSNM is additionally an Endorsing Organization and listed on their website. At the recent AHA Annual Conference, Sean Faircloth, SCA Executive Director, laid out an ambitious plan to establish 50 Statewide Secular Coalitions by December 31, 2019. SCA is a political lobbying organization. What do you think about HSNM helping SCA to establish an affiliate in New Mexico?

About the Secular Coalition for America

The Secular Coalition for America is a 501(c)4 advocacy organization whose purpose is to amplify the diverse and growing voice of the nontheistic community in the United States. We are located in Washington, D.C. for ready access to government, activist partners and the media. Our staff lobbies U.S. Congress on issues of special concern to our constituency.

Our member organizations are established 501(c)3 nonprofits who serve atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers and other nontheistic Americans. Their purpose in founding the coalition was to formalize a cooperative structure for visible, unified activism to improve the civic situation of citizens with a naturalistic worldview. A number of additional organizations have endorsed our mission statement.

The Secular Coalition for America holds that freedom of conscience, including religious freedom, is a fundamental American value as evidenced by the fact that this is the first freedom protected in the Bill of Rights. Freedom of conscience is best guaranteed by protecting and strengthening the secular character of our government. Religious tolerance, a necessary product of this freedom, must be extended to people of all religions and to those without religious beliefs.

more at www.secular.org

Women and the AHA

by Zelda Gatuskin

The concerns of women were highlighted in many ways at the recent AHA Annual Conference in Boston. I was honored to meet Bill Baird of the Pro Choice League and deeply moved by his presentation. Dr. Baird, at 78, continues to fight for reproductive rights for all. Among Dr. Baird's historic accomplishments is the U.S. Supreme Court decision Baird v. Eisenstadt [1972], that

legalized birth control for single people on the basis of privacy rights, and was quoted 6 times in the abortion decision the following year. [more at www.prochoiceligaue.org]

I also had the pleasure of sitting at the head table for the Humanist Awards Luncheon by invitation of Stephanie Downs Hughes, Chair of the AHA Feminist Caucus. What an honor to sit with Stephanie and several of our women organizers and board members (for the first time ever, women now have equal representation on the AHA board), not to mention this year's Humanist Heroine, Judy Norsigian, Executive Director, Our Bodies Ourselves. Having purchased an early edition of "Our Bodies Ourselves" when I was attending college in Boston in the 70's (I still have it), I felt I was meeting my own personal heroine when I got to meet Judy. Like Bill Baird, she is still doing her activist work and public education with wit and vigor. [more at www.ourbodiesourselves.org]

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, May 2nd

General Discussion

Monday, May 16th

Status of the Earthquake-damaged Fukushima
Marshall Berman

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room.

Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico

<http://atheists.meetup.com/75>

Sunday, May 1st, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, May 17th, 6:30pm

Social Meeting at 6:30pm at Mimi's Cafe, 4316 The 25 Way, Near Jefferson and I-25

New Mexicans for Science and Reason

Wednesday, May 18th, 7pm

Seismology's Lessons on the Great Japan Earthquake

Linda S. Gee

UNM Law Building, Room 2405

1117 Stanford NE