

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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JULY / AUGUST 2013



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

How to Say Goodbye When There's No Heaven

I was visiting NYC Atheist's support group, "Living with Atheism," led by therapist Linda Blaikie, when one of the participants, whose mother was dying, confided that she envied religious people because they could face death more complacently, confident that they will meet their loved one in heaven someday.

"Atheists know that these after-death reunions do not happen, so the death of a loved one is harder for us to bear," the woman said. "For us, death is the end."

It was a solemn moment in the room, and many of us, saddened by our Atheist colleague's plight, had nothing to say. It is true, Atheists do not believe that we will ever be physically reunited with our departed loved one. Life is finite.

How Do Atheists Grieve?

So, what is the answer for Atheists? How do we face the loss of a loved one? I thought about this conundrum for months after that support group session and I realized that there are some helpful secular ways of handling a loved one's death that may ease the grief.

After all, the religious answer is illusory. The "comforting" belief in life-after-death is a superstition that is thought to hark back to prehistoric man. Anthropologists have theorized that primitive man did not understand the nature of dreams, so after a person died, if they saw that person in a dream, they believed that the dead person was alive and living in another world. Don't ask me how anthropologists came to this conclusion; I'm sure they must have interpreted some cave drawings somewhere. But the vividness of some dreams might certainly have made it hard for a caveman to differentiate between the dreamworld and the waking world.

Religion absorbed this prehistoric belief in a world of the dead--as religion has absorbed many prehistoric beliefs--and incorporated it into its own belief system. Religion further amplified the idea of an afterlife with heaven's opposite, hell, to increase the church's control over your psyche. What better way to torment and control its followers than the promise of reward or the threat of punishment after you are dead?

Some Practical Things

We Atheists do not believe in primitive illusions. But we do have some scientific and practical suggestions that may help you cope with the death of a loved one. Here are a few things that may possibly ease the pain:

- **Consider molecular immortality.** When humans die, their bodies disintegrate and rejoin the molecules of the earth, creating a form of immortality, if you will, when those molecules join the plants and flowers arising from that earth. Some find it comforting that the body's elements live on in our planet's living things.
- **Appreciate the cycle of life.** The editor of this newsletter, Jane Everhart, told me that what gave her comfort when her daughter died three years ago in the early autumn was watching a golden maple leaf gently fall from a tree that year. "I realized," Jane said, "that though the leaf fell and would die, the tree itself would go on. In the spring, new leaves would grow. It was the cycle of life. It was a very consoling thought."
- **Videotape your loved one.** If you know your loved one is going to die, this is a good way to remember them as they were. In fact, it is a good idea to videotape your parents, grandparents and other

loved ones early in life, since death can be unexpected.

- **Have closure discussions.** If you and your loved one know that death is imminent, you might want to have closure discussions and resolve issues relating not only to your relationship with that person but also relating to the end of life, such as where they want to be buried or their ashes scattered, and how they want their belongings disposed of, especially if these questions aren't completely covered in a will.
- **Have a positive Memorial Service.** If you decide to have a memorial service, make it a happy celebration of the life of the deceased. Show their video tape, focus on the happiness they enjoyed and brought to others. The Irish, masters of the happy wake, have been known to sing and dance at funerals. And in New Orleans, the jazz musicians' joyous funeral march to the cemetery is legendary.
- **If your grief seems overwhelming, consider a Grief Support Group.** You may be focusing on unresolved conflicts with the loved one, or feelings of guilt that you did not do enough for the deceased. These feelings are not uncommon, and temporary supportive therapy may be helpful.

- **Consider preparing for your own demise.** After all, since none of us gets out of this world alive, why not prepare for the inevitable? Make sure you have a Living Will as well as a will that records your other wishes. A Living Will is important for medical decisions that may stump your family if they do not know your wishes. Giving instructions for your own wake or funeral may seem morbid, but it provides something for your survivors to do. In a way, it is simple consideration of them; it takes the burden of decision making off them and keeps them busy making arrangements at a time when grief may feel overwhelming.

And, of course, consider your Atheist community as a resource of compassion in your grief. In the nine years that I have been president, I have had to arrange for hospice for members, I have visited members in hospitals, taken members to hospitals and attended weddings, funerals and memorials. We don't do quite as much of the birth-to-death things that churches do, mostly because we haven't been around for 2,000 years to develop the means or the rituals, but we are a community, and we do try to do our best to help our members at crucial times in their lives. ☐

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PROUDLY AND HONESTLY
AS AN "OUT" ATHEIST**

**YOU HAVE ONLY ONE LIFE TO LIVE
THIS IS THE ONE**

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**This newsletter is published by
New York City Atheists Inc.
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Renew your NYC Atheists Inc. Membership!

Your dues and contributions to NYCA (educational 501- C3) are 100% tax deductible.

If you are a basic member now, consider increasing to a higher category: Basic \$25.

Basic Plus, \$50; Friend, \$100; Sustainer, \$250; Patron, \$500; Benefactor \$1000; Life \$5000.

You can donate via check or web site. Make checks payable to NYC Atheists Inc. and send to:
NYC Atheists Inc. (Membership), P.O. Box 6060, New York, NY 10150-6060.

Or there is a donation form on our website: **www.nyc-atheists.org**

And remember NYCA in your estate planning! Why leave your money to a religious person?

Our civil rights efforts for Atheist goals can move ahead faster if you make NYCA the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, IRA or property. Let your money work for YOUR cause when you no longer need it.

Editor's Q and A

What Youth Issue?

To Those Who Claim Atheism Has a Youth Issue: Not To Worry!



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

Every time I go to an Atheist event, I hear the same complaint: The Atheist movement has a dearth of young people. People moan and groan, why don't more young people get involved and come to our meetings? Ms. Editor, you are the only one I've ever heard saying, "Oh forget it, it's no big deal." Don't you think you are being politically incorrect? Shouldn't you be more concerned? After all, doesn't the future of Atheism depend on the young people taking our place in the movement?

Michael from Mt. Vernon

Dear Michael,

After nine years in the Atheist movement (I became Director of Communications for NYC Atheists in 2004), I've come to certain conclusions about the so-called shortage of young people in the movement. I think there are sound, reasonable explanations for it, and I think worrying about it is a waste of time. You may be surprised at some of my reasoning, but keep an open mind and think "out of the box" as you read my analysis:

(1) Our schools don't teach what is wrong with American society. Our kids are exposed to patriotism, American supremacy and jingoism in their schools from Day One. They go from kindergarten to college being told what's right with America--but not what's wrong. Historian Howard Zinn had to write a controversial volume, "*A People's History of the United States*," to correct the bad history and civics our children are being taught (such as that America had a "manifest destiny" to move the Native Americans off their lands.)

I have a friend who was born and raised in the deep South, who tells me that all her life she believed that the South had won the Civil War until she came to the Northeast to go to college because that's what she was taught from elementary school to high school in Columbus, Ga.

Our youngsters are being taught that America is the epitome of democracy, that it is the pinnacle of god's intentions, the highest form of society possible and all's

right with the world. All you need to do is work hard in America, be a good citizen and you will become successful and rich. I think it takes a lifetime to discover that your history and civics books were full of fabrications, half truths and coverups, that America is a flawed democracy, often run by greedy corporations, crooked political leaders and prurient clergy.

It Takes a Lifetime

I think it takes a lifetime to try to "make it" in the America you envisioned, follow the rules and do what's expected of you before you realize, Hey, things are not what Miss Bullock in eighth grade said they should be. And one of the ideals that goes down the tubes as you age in America is, you discover that the church, that apex of morality, is really immoral, that priests rape altar boys, that there is no god, no heaven, no hell and what the heck do they do with the tithing money you've been giving them over the years?

The 22-year old in our society hasn't discovered this yet. The 22-year-old is still trying out his skills, seeing if he can make it in this most perfect of all societies. Didn't Steve Jobs make it? Didn't Bill Gates? Hey, even a nerdy guy like Mark Zuckerberg can become a gazillionaire! So our 22-year-old is going to try. It isn't until he hits his 50s and hasn't accomplished it that he starts questioning why. But there's still the mortgage and the kids to get through college.

Ready to Raise Hell

When our guy hits 60, maybe 65, things begin to free up and those thoughts that have been festering in his mind for 40 years take hold. Those fundamentalists who are spreading the word that you will get your reward in heaven for trying hard all those years? They're the first that our long-patient average American is going to rebel against. He hits age 65 and dials [212-330-6794](tel:212-330-6794). That's the NYC Atheists' phone number. He's ready to raise hell.

And that, Michael, is why I think we have so many seniors in our movement: They've come to that point in

their lives where they know what's what. We have to wait for our 22-year-olds to experience that kind of epiphany in more cases than you can imagine.

Attack by Internet

(2) Don't underestimate the psychological and internet warfare against Atheists, especially the younger ones. I think I first became aware of how subtly and determinedly our opposition is undermining us when the Rational Responders closed down. You may not remember the Rational Responders. They were a group of young Atheists in Philadelphia who had an Internet-based site called The Blasphemy Challenge. High school students could go on The Blasphemy Challenge site and say on camera, for all the world to hear, "I think god is a piece of [expletive deleted]" and all their friends would cheer them.

It was great fun, and a learning experience of sorts, at a time when blasphemy was daring, and thousands of young people from coast to coast took the Blasphemy Challenge. The two young men who ran the web site, B and R., became famous on the internet. They lived together in a house in Philly with their girlfriends, in a sort of commune, tried to make money with online ads and generally had a ball.

Undone By Threats

But the Rational Responders were undone by a strange group of trolls or hackers who threatened harm to them and to their house. B had custody of his child by a previous relationship and when child social agencies found out about the threats to the house, his custody of the child was in jeopardy. The Blasphemy Challenge was closed down and the Rational Responders soon went down too. The destruction of the Rational Responders by anonymous hackers should go down in the history of American Atheism.

Who were these anonymous hackers who successfully closed down the Blasphemy Challenge? To this day, no one knows, but there is evidence that they were located in different states, were connected in some way with each other and had a deep knowledge of internet technology. Is it possible they were connected with some religious organizations? Or even hired by them? We may never know. Crime on the internet is very different from crimes committed in person, and we have not caught up with it yet.

Turnoff Techniques

(3) Don't underestimate the psychological whisper campaigns against Atheism, I learned years ago that religious undercover organizations like Opus Dei are well versed in propaganda techniques. I once sat beside

a person at a Publicity Club of New York luncheon who gave me his business card, which indicated that he was a public relations agent for Opus Dei. He told me that Opus Dei has a whole floor of public relations people in a Manhattan skyscraper.

Are the Catholic publicists as adept at planting propaganda as Radio Free Europe? You bet they are. We suspect that some strangers who come to our meetings and then report all over the youth Internet that we are "uncool," or social misfits or whatever is considered uncool these days, are persons who are well versed in what turns off youngsters. No youngster worth his salt will go to a meeting of a cause that is "uncool." Do those P.R. people on the Opus Dei floor have youth consultants? What would you like to bet that they do?

A Moveable Feast

(4) Young people are in transit. We've had lot of wonderful young workers for Atheism who simply went on to other things. One of our fabulous discussion leaders, Nathaniel "Natty" Adams, went on to graduate school and a new career in journalism. Another discussion leader left to get married. Young people are in transit, going on to new jobs, getting married, starting families, moving to other parts of the country.

I have found, on the other hand, that our senior activists are steady, constant, devoted and very knowledgeable about how religion impacts our society. They seem to be the mainstay of the Atheist movement all over the country at present and maybe that's as it should be. After all, George Washington was a white-haired guy when he led our country in its first revolt. Ben Franklin was his most feisty and rebellious long after what then would have been considered his dotage. Atheists Bertrand Russell and George Bernard Shaw did some of their best Atheist writing in their old age (Shaw was still writing plays at 94).

Of Atheism's Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, three were already gray or white-haired when they wrote their best-selling Atheist books (Richard Dawkins, Chris Hitchens and Daniel Dennett) and the youngest, Sam Harris, is now 46. Atheism's famous rebels and dissenters have never been youngsters.

As for those young people you're worried about--hey, we'll wait for them. They will be banging on our doors in a few years.

In the meantime, we welcome those young people who have the audacity, the courage and the foresight to come to our meetings and work for the recognition of civil rights of nonbelievers. You are 40 years ahead of the game! □

Drones: Weapons of Choice for Fundies

Religious School Gets \$ from U.S. Govt. for Military Training



By Tyson Gill, PhD

In the 2012 feature film *Jack Reacher*, Tom Cruise plays the title role of a military police officer working in an elite investigations unit. While tracking down a rogue ex-military assassin, Jack observes that:

“There are four types of people who join the military. For some, it's family trade. Others are patriots, eager to serve. Next you have those who just need a job. Then there's the kind who want the legal means of killing other people.”

But Jack clearly omitted fifth general category

“And finally there are those who believe it is their holy mission.”

For Evangelical Christians, the military is not a secular institution in which Christians merely serve as good citizens; it is--or should be, they think--a Christian institution, a mighty holy sword that must be wielded by god's chosen ones to smite nonbelievers. Toward this end, evangelicals have been working tirelessly since the rise of evangelism in the 1960's and before. And this consistent, long term effort has not been wasted. The occasional high-profile news scandals of indoctrination by chaplains, of bible verses etched on guns, and of Generals making frightening religious proclamations are not anomalies but are rather indicative of a deep systemic infestation of religious fundamentalism in our military.

Religion Instilled in Military

In their 2006 book, *With God on Our Side: One Man's War Against an Evangelical Coup in America's Military*, Michael L. Weinstein and Davin Seay detail the widespread and concerted program of religious indoctrination at the U.S. Air Force Academy and throughout our entire military. They document what they call “a program of Christian fundamentalist indoctrination ... befitting a theocracy ... utter disregard for the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.”

Christian zealotry is not merely the isolated culture at the U.S. Air Force Academy, but saturates our military training institutions and extends throughout actively serving soldiers - and particularly among the leadership.

According to the Washington, DC-based Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), 63% of chaplains are evangelical, serving only 18% of self-proclaimed evangelicals in the military population. There are at least a dozen major Christian military boarding schools that intentionally conflate service to god with service to country. How often do we hear “god and Country” or “Guns and Bible” inextricably linked?

Marketing Drone Warfare

Perhaps the most ambitious institution to actively work to co-opt our military is the patriotically named Liberty “University” – (*sorry but I cannot legitimize them by allowing them to adopt the word University without quotes*) – which has recently launched a major marketing campaign to promote their new drone warfare training program. Liberty “University” is not some tiny Christian enclave. Founded by the late evangelical Southern Baptist pastor and ultra conservative Jerry Falwell, it has 12,000 students on campus in Lynchburg, VA and another 60,000 online. More than 23,000 of these online students are in the military.

As with most Christians, Liberty “University” loves guns. The bigger the better. And drones are the biggest and best guns we have right now so naturally they want them wielded by Christian Soldiers. Now, their side argues that such programs are merely job training: that their only goal is to prepare their students for good jobs and careers in the blossoming drone warfare industry that are the opportunities of the future. They also argue that since drones are a reality in today's world, it is best that they are wielded by soldiers with a sound Christian moral and ethical foundation.

Fanatics With Trigger Fingers

But regardless of these innocent sounding rationales, as a secular citizen, nothing frightens me more than yet more fanatical Evangelical Christians with their fingers on the triggers of yet more devastating and powerful weaponry. Remember that their Christian moral foundation teaches them to have no problem with killing whatsoever. For them, the commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill, is widely open to interpretation. Clearly god

did not mean killing, he meant murder. Any kind of justifiable killing is fine, that's not murder - as in the case of Trayvon Martin. All State-sanctioned killing is just fine. All killing in the name of god is just fine. In fact, the only killing that god apparently prohibited with absolute dogmatic clarity is when it involves unborn fetuses.

Beyond the clear agenda of these Christians to co-opt the military from within and without, there is another reason to be deeply concerned. Do we really want Christians training our military instead of secular military leaders? How can secular military leaders instill their essential institutional values when their recruits have already been indoctrinated in a deeply disturbing vision of the military's holy mission under god?

Got \$420 Million from Govt.

Religious military training feels like a technical "loophole" around the spirit of the Lemon Test for

separation of church and state. In 2010, Liberty "University" received over \$420 million in financial aid from the government. As such it was the #1 recipient of Pell Grant money in the state of Virginia. Christian-style military training, especially in glorifying and legitimizing the highly questionable ethics underpinning drone warfare, is certainly not something that the ethical foundations of most atheists would easily rationalize, support, engage in, or condone.

We atheists must take a public ethical stand for moderation and sanity with regard to the proliferation of drone weaponry and other highly controversial tools of war. We should also push back against religious military training programs that are designed to co-opt rather than simply support our military. In these ways we can very clearly expose the twisted ethical façade of the Religious Right as well as tangibly protect our separation of church and military. □ *Tyson Gill is the author of "Belief in Science and the Science of Belief: A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking."*

Celebrate July 4th the Atheist Way!

NYC ATHEISTS - JULY 4TH - BYOL (BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH) ROOSEVELT ISLAND (SOUTHPOINT PARK)

Breathtaking river views of the Manhattan skyline with plenty of flora and green spaces.

Until the mid-20th century, Roosevelt Island in the East River between Manhattan and Queens was known as Welfare Island—a site for hospitals, penitentiaries, and asylums. In the 1970's, the island was developed as a residential community and is now home to 14,000 New Yorkers. Shortly, the new Cornell University Technology Campus will begin construction on Roosevelt Island in the area south of the tram and Southpoint Park.

How to get to Roosevelt Island:

Option One: Roosevelt Island Aerial Tramway at 60th Street / 2nd Avenue.

Option Two: "F" Subway Line to Roosevelt Island (station one block north of tram station)

12:15 PM - Meet **Larry Shaw** at the NYCA ASSEMBLY AREA:
East River Walkway near the Roosevelt Tram Stop.

We will then walk (about 10 minutes) SOUTH along the East River walkway pass the Goldwater Hospital to Southpoint park.

Bathrooms and water fountain are available as you enter Southpoint Park.

At the sign for the FDR Memorial Park - there is a small cul de sac - Here is where we will have our picnic (Benches)

After Lunch we go further south (two minutes) to the **FDR Four Freedoms Park**. (No food or beverages allowed) where we see the beautiful monument designed by the great 20th century architect Louis Kahn.

FRESH AIR!

FRIENDSHIP!

GOOD TALK

CAMARADERIE

YOU WILL ENJOY!

For further information, call Larry Shaw at 917-447-1428

UPCOMING JULY EVENTS
CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JULY 10, 2013 (WED.) 7:00 PM
NYC ATHEISTS LIVING W/ ATHEISM
GROUP LEADER: LINDA BLAIKIE, L.C.S.W.



SUBJECT: HAS ATHEISM AFFECTED YOUR LIFE DECISIONS? Has it motivated you to change your career? Get a divorce? Vote differently? Get another degree? Or perhaps you are just thinking about these changes?

LOCATION: Moonstruck Diner - 449 Third Ave. / 31st-2nd Floor

COST: Free to members (can join at meeting if desired), but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Moonstruck for use of their space.

JULY 14, 2013 (SUN.) 12 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH

SPEAKER: STEVEN LOWE, M.A.



Washington D.C. Expert on Robert Ingersoll.

SUBJECT: ROBERT INGERSOLL

Robert G. Ingersoll was famous as an orator and dubbed was The Great Agnostic at a time when oratory was to Americans what television is today. From 1870 to 1899, Ingersoll challenged the Religious Right of his day on issues of theism, the Bible, civil rights and rights for women and children. He has gone down in history as a pioneer in opposing religion.

LOCATION: The Press Box Restaurant, 932 Second Avenue (bet. 49th & 50th Sts.) -2nd Floor.

COST: BRUNCH is \$20, which includes a selection of Buffet Entrees, salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax and tip.

JULY 16, 2013 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION MEETUP

GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: HOW INVOLVED SHOULD THE ATHEIST MOVEMENT GET WITH OTHER SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES, SUCH AS GAY RIGHTS,

MARRIAGE EQUALITY, WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES, RACISM, POVERTY? Some call this "Atheism Plus," others think it detracts from our main goal.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

JULY 19, 2013 (FRI.)
NYC ATHEISTS BOOK AND FILM CLUB

GROUP LEADER: DAVID ORENSTEIN



6:00 PM: HAPPY HOUR
6:30 PM: BOOK & FILM CLUB

BOOK: "Atheism and the Case Against Christ," by Matthew S. McCormick "Best argument I've ever read critiquing the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and other miracles"--Reviewer.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

JULY 25, 2013 (THUR.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: ABBY HAFER, PhD.



Dr. Hafer, who got her Ph.D. in zoology from Oxford University, England, teaches human anatomy and physiology at Curry College in Milton, Mass.

SUBJECT: INTELLIGENT DESIGN IS A POLITICAL PRESSURE GROUP, NOT A SCIENTIFIC ISSUE. Dr. Hafer defends evolution with smart science that shows "Intelligent Design" to be just a political argument by religionists.

LOCATION: SLC Conference Center-- 15 West 39th St.(3rd Floor)

COST: We ask for a donation of \$10 to help cover the cost of room rental.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS
CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JULY 2013

July	4*****	Thur.	12:15 PM	NYCA July 4th - Picnic
July	10*	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
July	14**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
July	16***	Tue,	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
July	19***	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Happy Hour / Book & Film Club
July	25*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

AUGUST 2013

NYC ATHEISTS IS ON VACATION FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

- * Moonstruck Diner – 449 Third Ave. (31st) – 2nd Floor – Manhattan
- ** Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor
- *** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM
- **** SLC Conference Center – 15 WEST 39TH STREET – 3RD FLOOR
- ***** Roosevelt Island – Southpoint Park

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

		<u>TWC</u>	<u>RCN</u>	<u>FIOS</u>
Wednesdays: 5:30 PM	Atheism in History	57	84	35
	This Week in Atheism	57	84	35
Thursdays: 5:00 PM	NYC Atheists	67	85	36
	Atheists Book Club	67	85	36

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