



SECULAR Center Newsletter

April/May/June 2009

NEWS and EVENTS

SECULAR Center Information

Mission Statement:

The mission of the SECULAR Center is to further awareness of godless thought systems and morals by actively participating in the community and providing charitable service opportunities for secular volunteers. The SECULAR Center facilitates community education regarding non-theistic practices by bringing together the godless with members of their local community who require support services in a safe location to the mutual benefit of each group.

SECULAR Center Personnel

President: Noelle Dildine
Vice President: Ginger Bowen
Newsletter Editor:
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We welcome contributions, comments, and suggestions to the newsletter. We reserve the right to include or not include contributions and to edit contributions.

Email:
secularcenterusa@gmail.com
Website:
www.secularcenterusa.org

We now have over 175 members in 4 different countries! Our goal is to reach 200 members by June 30th! Check our website, www.secularcenterusa.org, for more SECULAR Center news and events!

Volunteering

Past Events:

The SECULAR Center's first charitable event in Houston – **K9 Fun Run and Walk** - was on March 22nd at the Sam Houston Park. This is an annual event sponsored by the Houston Humane Society. Thank you all for participating!

Our second charitable event was also in collaboration with an existing charity, the **Houston Food Bank**, on April 28th. Thanks to the five dedicated volunteers who processed 2500 pounds of products for Houston's hungry population!

Photos of our past events can be seen on our website events page at www.secularcenterusa.org/events.php.

Future Events:

On June 20th we will be sponsoring volunteer activities at an **animal shelter**. The shelter is always in need of volunteers to give its animals a little love and attention while they wait for their forever homes. Please mark your calendars and plan to participate!

The Houston Pride Parade is June 27th! We are looking into reserving booth space at the event. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer!

Future volunteer opportunities being considered are Adopt-a-Highway, Food Bank Drives/Food Serving Kitchen Help, Nursing Home/Hospital Activities, and Tutoring Students. Please help us locate opportunities by contacting www.secularcenterusa.org.

June 21, 2009: World Humanist Day

Houston Atheists Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/Houston-Atheists> Every Monday night, Freethought Forum; 1st Wednesday, North Houston Meetup; 2nd Wednesday, South Houston Meetup; 3rd Tuesday, Houston Meetup (Memorial); 4th Wednesday, beginning in June, NW Houston Meetup.

Houston Church of Freethought: www.hcof.org 1st & 3rd Sunday of each month, Coffee Social; 2nd Sunday, HCOF Services

Humanists of Houston: www.humanistsofhouston.org 1st Sunday, Brunch; 2nd Saturday, Woman's Club; 3rd Saturday, Monthly Meeting; 4th Sunday, Idea Club and Religious, Social, and Ethics Club

Seattle Events and Calendar: Coming soon!

A Story of Evolution

by Noelle Dildine

How I Found Religion and Became an Atheist



I was born in 1977 and grew up mostly in Seattle, Washington, in a family that did not practice religion at all. Sure, my parents believed in god, but there was little discussion. It never occurred to me that there was anything missing in our lives until I was 13 years old and met Jessica, who taught me about God, heaven, hell, and Jesus. Jessica was a devout Christian and older – she was someone I looked up to in many ways. Her life seemed to be a stark contrast to my own as much as her beautiful long straight brown hair and soft brown eyes were to my frizzy dishwater blond hair and pale acne-spotted skin. I was lonely, from a dysfunctional family, and had no close friends, but Jessica mentored me and showed me that God was there for me. I went home and started asking my parents questions, so they decided to take my brother and me to a Methodist Church. I started going regularly and was baptized and confirmed. I needed something in my life, and the church provided me with a community of ready-made friends who accepted me and said they loved me. I attended church camp regularly and went to church retreats.

After high school graduation I broke up with my long-time boyfriend and was evaluating my life. I didn't know where I was going to go or what I would do, but I wasn't ready for college. As I gained confidence in the choices for my life, I knew the church would disagree, but these felt right at the time and seemed a good fit. I found that I didn't so much need that community that said they accepted and loved everyone in one breath, and in the next made judgments about one thing or another. I started thinking about a god who was supposedly loving and perfect but who also put conditions on people in order to receive entrance into heaven. The religion and god that I needed so badly, earlier in my life, was fading away and all that was left were words on paper and misconstrued ideas.

Soon afterward, I was on my way to an annual church retreat and was driving through the tall Washington forest with some of my church friends discussing religion. Someone said "Religion is like an apple – you can never look at it from the same viewpoint at the same time as another person." It was then that I realized that I would never look at the apple the same way again.



*"With or without religion,
good people can behave well
and bad people can do evil;
but for good people to do
evil—that takes religion."*

Steven Weinberg *American
Physicists and Nobel laureate in
Physics*



Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Ayaan takes us on the journey *she* has taken from stark poverty in Somalia to nationally renowned prominence in this *New York Times* best selling book. It's a story of abuse and cruelty inflicted on a society that insists that church and state are inseparable. She comes from a Muslim world and a war torn country.

She tells us how the custom was to memorize one's ancestry to know your clan, whom you should help, who will help you. She had a distant relationship with her mother and was only in the presence of her father, who took three wives, a few times in her life. She considers herself fortunate to only having been abused, severely, by a man once. In this strongly male dominated, patriarchal society she suffered mutilation and severe and frequent abuse from her mother and grandmother who never wanted their daughters to bring shame and dishonor on their family.

At age 8 she left Somalia to live in Saudi Arabia, then Ethiopia, and then Kenya. She learned several languages including English. Her father decided she should marry a cousin living in Canada and arranged for her to fly there. Having seen so many wives suffer at the hands of their husbands, sanctioned by her religion, and knowing the life of servitude (slavery) she would be forced into, Ayaan was afraid. On route to Canada she escaped to Holland and gained asylum.

Because of her decision to be a free woman, her life is always in constant danger from other clan members in western societies, in the name of Allah. To make matters worse, in their eyes, she became educated and is now a political activist. Her amazing and honest story is one you will not soon forget. *Infidel* is a must read for everyone!

"It's an incredible con job when you think of it, to believe something now in exchange for life after death.

Even corporations with all their reward systems don't try to make it posthumous."

-Gloria Steinem,
women's rights
activist

FUND RAISING PROJECTS

SECULAR GREETING CARDS AND NOTE CARDS:

We have recently equipped our website with PayPal for both donations and product purchases. View and purchase our reasonably priced secular greeting cards and note cards at www.secularcenterusa.org/products.php.



CALENDAR CONTEST: WIN A 2010 CALENDAR!!

Anyone can participate! If you have a calendar page idea, please submit it to the SECULAR Center by e-mailing secularcenterusa@gmail.com. If your entry is chosen, you will be entered in a drawing to win a free 2010 calendar.

The SECULAR Center is excited to hear your secular calendar ideas! Funds raised with calendar sales will go toward future charitable activities. The entry deadline is July 15th, 2009.