



SECULAR Center Newsletter

3rd Quarter 2009

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
Secretary: Beverly Stevens
Web Design: Mathias Glass

We welcome contributions to, comments about, and suggestions for the newsletter.

We reserve the right to include or not include contributions and to edit contributions.

Our Email:

secularcenterusa@gmail.com

Our Website:

www.secularcenterusa.org

SCUSA NEWS and EVENTS

We now have over 225 members in 4 different countries and 14 different states! Our latest online venture is a weekly blog to keep in touch with you more often about SECULAR Center news and activities. Please sign up to follow our blog at www.secularcenterusa.blogspot.com!

SCUSA values your feedback! Please visit our website to take our [survey](#) and give your input about our mission and future activities.

Volunteering

Past Events:

We had a wonderfully successful charity event at a local no-kill animal shelter, Friends for Life, on August 15th! More than 20 SCUSA volunteers helped the shelter with numerous tasks including organizing their storeroom, data entry, making a sandwich board, creating a white board by applying special paint to the wall, cleaning cages, and much more!

Photos of our past events can be seen on our website [events](#) page.

Future Events:

In September we will be hosting two volunteer activities.

1. On September 20th from 2-4pm we will be playing games with and reading to seniors at a nursing home on Eldridge near Highway 6.
2. Do you like to be outside and get your hands dirty? Then join us on September 26th from 9-1 for a fun volunteer event at a local park. We will be removing encroaching weeds to allow the native plants to thrive.

October is going to be a fun month!

1. On October 10th we will have an event in celebration of National Freethought Day (actual date October 12th).
2. We will also be volunteering at the Monster Mash Fun Run on the morning of October 31st. If we get over 10 volunteers the host of the Fun Run will make a donation to SCUSA! **Please RSVP ASAP** so that we can register our volunteer team early to qualify for our free donation!

Visit our [website](#) for more SECULAR Center news and events! Please RSVP to secularcenterusa@gmail.com if you want to attend any of our events.

SCUSA is coming to Seattle!

The President of the SECULAR Center is coming to Seattle and will be meeting with Seattle Atheists and the Northwest Freethought Coalition to discuss volunteerism in the Seattle area. Please join us at Romio's on Sunday, September 6th at 2:00pm for some fun and lively discussion about Seattle volunteering!

"Prying Open My Skeptical Third Eye"

I was born to the humid disposition of Houston, Texas on February 24th of 1986. My parents had moved to Houston from a small, fairly religious town in Jalisco, Mexico called Teuchitlan (a town small enough to where practically everyone knew who you were by church attendance or other such gatherings and festivities). This is not a story of said town, though. This is about how I came to the conclusion that we simply do not know the conclusions to our ends; therefore it seems rather silly to jump to any sort of conclusion!



I was raised a Catholic child... or rather a child of Catholic parents. I was taught the commandments, the prayers, went through the rituals of confirmation, attended Sunday school, and believed in the faith as any person raised under such conditions, without question or room for thought, aside from what "God" would have me do.

It wasn't until around the age of thirteen that science piqued my interest, thanks to a movie based on a book by a very well known scientist: Carl Sagan's "Contact". My first time watching the movie was a severe disappointment. I was thirteen. As such, I was expecting to see aliens, lasers, and scenes filled with explosions - the like reminiscent of George Lucas' Star Wars. Instead, I was witness to a movie full of scientific jargon that I couldn't understand. I was taught to believe that a god had created the earth and everything in existence. The thing was, I wasn't taught about stars, nebulae, galaxies, super-clusters, and what have you. My world view was just of this world. I didn't know that we resided on a sphere, hanging in a void alongside, at the time, eight other such worlds and one massive, yet small in comparison to others, spherical nuclear reactor that we lovingly call "Sol". I never questioned anything else, even as I could see the sun shining bright in the sky and the stars littering the night-sky. It wasn't until after that movie that I wondered about what they had talked about. What was an Einstein-Rosen bridge? What was a constellation? Why, of all horrid things, was math to be considered the universal language? While I didn't particularly like the movie, it did get me thinking.

In class, I began to focus a little more on science than I did on social studies or any other subject. Especially when it came to aspects of Astronomy! I was like a sponge for this information that I found so fascinating: the life and death of stars, the formation of planets, the clues left behind found in asteroids! If it was taught in middle school science classes, I probably knew it.

The other thing that sparked my interest was, of course, dinosaurs. I thought of them as the behemoths from the tales of the Bible, walking alongside man. Here was another thing holding me to my faith. I knew dinosaurs existed and I learned that they had become extinct 65 million years ago, but only thought that it was unfortunate that they should die and we survive the K/T event. At one point, I actually "rationalized" that we, the human race, were around 65 million years old. This only made sense to me through my faith. Later, I found out we've only been around between 400,000 and 250,000 years. Even then, I failed to put two and two together. At that point, I began to see science and my faith as two separate things. I must have been sixteen.

I stopped trying to relate the two. Science was telling me one thing and my faith was telling me another. Science told me that we evolved from apes. Catholicism told me that my god had created us from dirt and a rib. While I no longer believed in Santa Clause, the thought of an old man watching over us all from the sky seemed comforting to me. The feeling that there was always someone there to talk to about my problems, someone whom I could go to without fear of judgment but only the prospect of forgiveness, was a great feeling. I was beginning to pick and choose what I wanted to hear from my faith. Science told me everything.

I was slowly waking up from my dream life with my so called savior. At around the age of eighteen, I came to the conclusion that I could no longer believe everything that the scriptures were telling me. I still believed in a god and an after-life, but really only out of the fear of death. To be honest, even now in my atheism, it still sounds like a nice

thought, but that's what it has evolved to. A thought. I no longer believed that we came from dust. I no longer believed that we walked alongside dinosaurs. I no longer believed that all there was to this world was this earth. I began to look into intelligent design "theory". I saw how it all felt like it made sense. How evolution, the universe, and all things could tie into the existence of god. I really began to believe that since everything seemed "perfect" for us as a species, that there just had to be a god! There was no other way! How could everything just pop into existence from nothing!? Here I was, jumping to conclusions! Here I was trying to make sense of the world around me after all my life I had been told how it supposedly all came to be. It all seemed so easy. It all made sense to me, but only because for the longest time I hadn't questioned my belief. I didn't know I could, but I began to find out.

For a long time, my family had stopped going to church except for special events, such as Easter. I could see the fanaticism dwindling away that had been rooted in them from a small town in Mexico. They didn't know that I no longer believed the same way they did. I preferred not to tell them that I no longer considered myself a Catholic, but rather an Agnostic, in fear of what they would think of me. I still believed in a god, though. I thought that was still a good thing.

In the fall of 2006, a book came to my agnostic attention. A book that was held as controversial to many, but to me seemed like a source for answers to questions I had been asking: "The God Delusion" by Richard Dawkins. The day I heard of this book was the same day I went out to buy it, right after work and before band practice. When I arrived at practice, I remember my drummer's reaction to seeing the book in my hands. He said to me "Hey, man, why do you have that book? Don't you know that this guy is trying to make you not believe in God?" I said to him that even if that were true, at least he would have some answers to questions the majority fear to ask.

After reading the first few pages from "The God Delusion", I knew that this was the book I was seeking for a long time. This man had successfully changed my worldview forever! I no longer could think of the god of my younger years, the spiritual route my parents had taken, and the religion that they had taught me as "The one true path". I learned there were a thousand other such paths claiming the same thing and offering the same rewards for the price of your mind.

This knowledge that I craved for so long brought me to a new level of enlightenment as well as to a new level of depression. At the same time I was so thrilled to learn about our true place in the universe and how lucky we really are to be here, I was also heart-broken by the fact that so many people standing on this earth are still sleeping awake.

I understand now why I believed and why so many people still do. The way I see it, at the root of it all, it's a sense of insecurity. It's about a desire to want this life to be one filled with glory and a sense of destiny -one with more meaning than we perceive. The truth I've come to find is that we are all our own masters. We lay down our own paths and create our own meanings. In the end, the only monsters and demons to fear in the dark lay within us.

Three years later, I am still an atheist and proud of it. I know now that I am happier not looking back. I now look forward to the things I will learn and the people I will meet with the freedom to think whatever I want to think. This is the way it should have always been. This is the way I hope it will be someday for every beautiful mind on this earth.

Freddy Tobias Martinez

Houston Partner Events

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, Coffee Social; 2nd Sunday, HCOF Service.

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.

SECULAR GREETING CARDS AND NOTE CARDS:

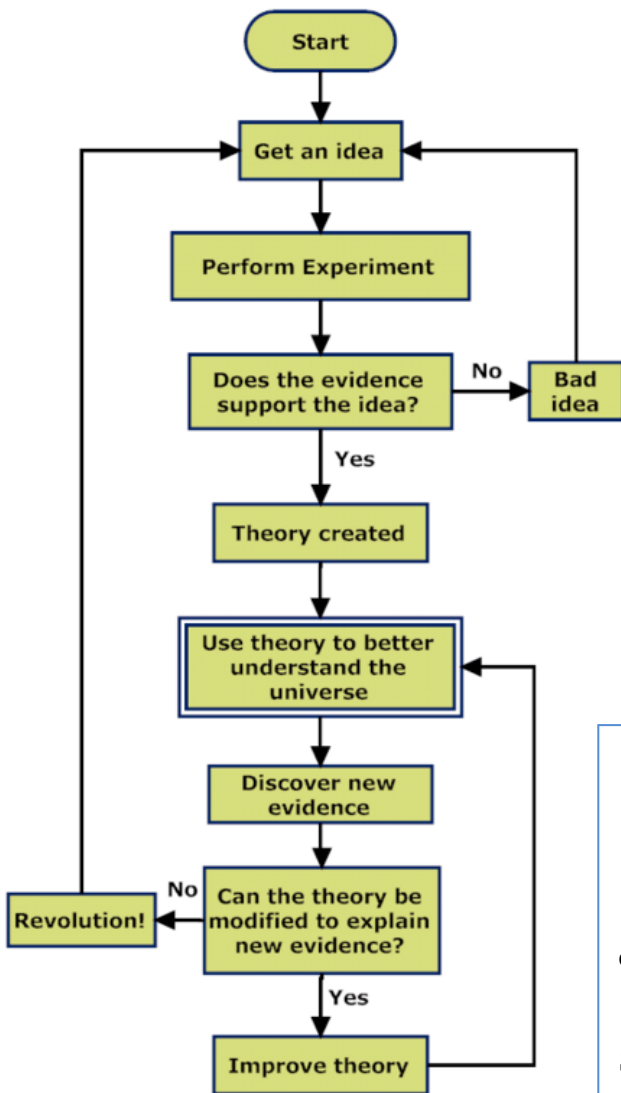
We have recently equipped our website with PayPal for both donations and product purchases. [Click here](#) to view and purchase our reasonably priced greeting cards and note cards.



August 10th, 1862: Remember The Nueces Massacre

Please visit our [blog](#) to learn more about the German Freidenkers (Freethinkers) who were massacred in Kinney County, TX one hundred and forty-seven years ago.

The Scientific Method.



Faith-based methodology



“I contend we are both atheists, I just believe in one fewer god than you do.

When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.”

- Stephen F Roberts

CALENDAR CONTEST: Win a 2010 Calendar!!

Anyone can participate! **Please submit your calendar page idea to the SECULAR Center by e-mailing us!** If your entry is chosen, you will be entered in a drawing to win a free 2010 Calendar.

SCUSA is excited to see your secular calendar ideas. Photos, drawings, paintings, or other 2D formats are welcome. Funds raised with calendar sales go toward future charitable activities. Credit will be given to the artist. The entry deadline is October 15th, 2009.

The Shack by William P. Young

Earlier this year I had heard several people talking about this book. Then two people in my family suggested that I read it. They each said that they had read it in three days and were really moved. It was as if the book was so enlightening that they wanted to share the experience. Because I consider myself somewhat open-minded and curious I decided that I would read it.

At the beginning of the book a terrifically horrible incident was immediately recounted involving the young daughter of the main character. I was shocked at the heartbreaking scene unfolding before my eyes since I was supposedly reading a book about how great god was.

The wife of the main character was a religious health worker who helped people die with god, whom she referred to as "Papa" as she had such a close and familiar relationship with him. Mack, the main character returned to the scene of the crime after a note from "Papa" was mysteriously left in his mailbox.

When Mack arrived at the shack he met god who turned out to be a large, African-American woman who spoke with poor grammar, which made me uncomfortable. I could not understand why the author included this, other than to show that god is uneducated and not at all what people expect him to be. There were two other women who turned out to be other parts of god. Jesus was also there - a Jewish carpenter with a large nose, short in stature and not the least bit handsome as Americans have always pictured him.

At some point, after arriving at the shack, Mack goes outside and the world is transformed into a Disney-like animated movie. It made me think of what the movie might be -- "Roger Rabbit Meets God" or "Bambi and Jesus, Who Knew?"

Apparently Mack has been summoned back to the scene of the crime where his daughter vanished to help him understand that god did not do the crime and does not condone it, but would not stop it either. Mack does seem to come to terms with her death and to quit blaming himself.

The end of the book is just as violently shocking as the beginning and I finished the book wondering what people saw in the book that I did not. I found the writing juvenile, contrived and schmaltzy. I did not have any revelations or any change of my beliefs which must have been the object of my relatives who suggested that I read "The Shack." The only thing I learned is not to waste my time reading books suggested by relatives.

Review by Ginger Bowen

THE LITTLEST ATHEIST

