



# THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO NEWSLETTER

December 2014

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/>

<http://hsnm.wordpress.com>

[president@humanistsocietyofnm.org](mailto:president@humanistsocietyofnm.org)

## **HSNM Meetings in Albuquerque**

*HSNM meetings are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*

### Saturday, December 13th

**HSNM Human Light Party** 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

For HSNM members and their guests. See inside.

First UU Church Memorial Hall (Old Social Hall)

3701 Carlisle NE, Albuquerque

*Please Don't Forget to Bring a Donation for Roadrunner Food Bank*

### Saturday, December 20th

**HSNM Topical Discussion** 10:00 AM - Noon

*The Book That Changed Your Life*

Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

### HSNM Speaker Meetings

Will Resume in January, 2015

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Meetings by HSNM Affiliates are held throughout the month.

For more information please visit their websites.

**New Mexicans for Science and Reason** ([www.nmsr.org](http://www.nmsr.org))

**First Unitarian HUManist Group**

(<http://www.uuabq.org/classes.html>, 505-344-8930)

**Freedom from Religion Albuquerque**

(<http://www.meetup.com/FFRABQ/>)

**Santa Fe Atheist Community**

(<http://www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Atheist-Community>)

**Roswatheists** (<http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists>)

## **President's Message**

By Ananda Parnell

As the weather has gotten colder and darker, my daughter has been spending a great deal of time baking, warming our home both with the heat of our oven and also with smells of pumpkin cake, peanut butter cookies, brownies, and cinnamon pie. This time of year shares its own traditions for families and loved ones in a variety of traditions, and food tends to be at the heart of each of custom of gathering. In that light, I have my own "Connection Confection," a recipe for maintaining the human element, and generating a sense of warmth and understanding year-round.

With intent blended with vision and purpose, sprinkled in compassion and joy, fully cooked in a warm heart, it is possible to really connect with others, see their suffering as your own and alleviate that suffering. In South Africa, there is a word: Ubuntu. It means that I can only know that I am human when you reflect my humanity back at me. We are ultimately human because we belong—we

The Humanist Society of New Mexico  
A Nonprofit Corporation

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association  
Member of The New Mexico Coalition of Reason

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

Officers/Committees

Ananda Parnell: President  
Randall Wall: Vice President/Speaker Programs  
Cynthianne Yabut: Secretary  
Zelda Gatuskin: Past President  
Richard Grady: Treasurer  
Ashley Jordan: Member-at-Large, Newsletter Editor  
Cheryl Gatner: Member-at-Large

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Send Newsletter submissions to:  
Editor, Ashley Jordan, AshleyNJordan@GMX.com  
or to Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box  
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line for Newsletter submissions is the third Friday  
of each month. Website submissions may be sent  
to [president@humanistsocietyofnm.org](mailto:president@humanistsocietyofnm.org). HSNM  
dues are now paid separately from AHA dues, vis-  
it [www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org) for more informa-  
tion about the American Humanist Association.

Humanism is an ethical philosophy that derives  
its principles from science and reason rather than  
theology. It asserts the worth and dignity of ev-  
ery 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.

are because a community of two people happened, as  
Desmond Tutu explains. That belonging can actually be  
a positive change in any workplace—from corporate to  
classroom—and generate the deepest meaning in times  
that seem absolutely fraught with hopelessness, fear, and  
despair.

*Ingredients...*

Intent: With a strong resolve to achieve your goals,  
anything is possible!  
Purpose: Tempers intent by focusing on a specific  
goal. What do you want to accomplish  
today?  
Compassion: When you focus on your own wants, also  
remember that others will be affected by  
your actions.  
Listening: Truly hearing what is happening in the  
moment without trying to control or judge it.

1. ½ hour—Set your focus and intent for the day, truly  
listening to yourself, and also recognize how your  
choices, deeds, and actions will affect those around you.  
It does not take more preparation time to make someone  
else's day sweeter; it only takes the correct mindset!

2. Connect with your heart center (focus on the beats of  
your heart until you feel a warmth and almost expansion  
in your chest). As you breathe in, focus on your intent,  
purpose, compassion, understanding, and listening. As  
you breathe out, exhale any stress, negativity, exhaustion,  
etc. Move the focus of mixed ingredients into the  
warmed and expanded center of your chest.

3. As you go through your day, your intent, purpose,  
compassion, understanding, and listening skills will be  
honed to make your voiced expressions sweeter and  
warmer. In this way, you will be able to connect with  
others to yield a stronger communication and more  
positive energy. Even in a stressful work environment  
or strained family situation, others will recognize your  
light, and positive change will be the outcome. In only 24  
hours, you can change your whole physical environment,  
as well as the environment of those around you.

Spread our Human Light with joy and gusto! Sharing our  
customs, our recipes, and our traditions should be done  
in such a way that allows our love and light to expand  
to all people—regardless of our closeness, our distance,  
levels of socioeconomic need, and political differences.  
May we all be blessed with the love we ourselves create  
and share.

### **Reminder: No Speaker Meeting In December**

Despite being Humanists, December can still become a very chaotic month for most of us, as we drift away to spend time with relatives or lock ourselves away from the Christmas Chaos. HSNM has always opted to give our members a break for the last meeting of the year, so mark your calendars-- if you show up to Botts Hall on the 27th, you will find yourself alone!

### **HSNM Human Light Potluck Lunch and Collection for Roadrunner Food Bank**

Saturday, December 13th, 1:00 - 4:00 PM  
First UU Church Memorial Hall (Old Social Hall)  
3701 Carlisle NE, Albuquerque

Our Humanist Light Party is just around the corner! We are having a potluck lunch on December 13 at the First UU (where we have had some Speaker Meetings in the past) instead of the informal meeting we would normally have at the Peace Center. There will not be a meeting the morning of December 13; come to the UU at 1:00 pm instead with a dish or beverage to share and your contribution to the Roadrunner Food Bank - canned and boxed foods and/or checks made out to Roadrunner. Bring your loved ones!

RSVPs are helpful but not required. Call or email Marilyn Brownstein at (505)-293-0556, [msbrownstein18@yahoo.com](mailto:msbrownstein18@yahoo.com). We could use a few helpers to stay for clean-up 4-4:30; let Marilyn know if you would like to volunteer. If you'd like to help set up or run activities for our Humanist children in attendance, you can contact Ashley Jordan at [AshleynJordan@gmx.com](mailto:AshleynJordan@gmx.com).

### **HSNM Family CoOp Talks About Heaven**

Last month's Family CoOp meeting found our humanist parents and children discussing the many different variations on the idea of Heaven. After learning about different Heavens, from Christianity's interpretation to Hinduism's to Islam's, the children were asked to draw their own Heavens. While many of the children's ideas overlapped-- the theme of endless supplies of clean fresh water and miles of untouched green land appeared in almost all of the drawings --there was also a unique individuality to everyone's idea of the perfect way to spend eternity. This fun, artistic exercise ended with many of the children concluding that while it would be fun to spend time in these places, they didn't think they really existed because they had just made them up.

We've invited the families and children from the CoOp to our Human Light Party instead of holding a class in December, so be prepared to see some young faces at our annual potluck. They love to talk about their interests and ideas, so don't be afraid to engage them! And if, you have ideas for activities for them, feel free to contact [AshleyNJordan@gmx.com](mailto:AshleyNJordan@gmx.com).

### **A Day at the Opera**

By Zelda Gatuskin

Move over Santa Fe, Albuquerque has put itself on the cultural map with Opera Southwest's "New World premiere" of *Amleto* on October 26, 2014. Why not the whole world premiere? Because the opera had already been performed in Italy - exactly once - in 1865. This rendition of *Hamlet*, composed by Franco Faccio with libretto by Arrigo Boito, proved to be not only a moving exaltation of Shakespeare's art, but a genuine overlooked masterpiece in its own right. Dating from the height of grand opera (think Verdi), the work is notable for its emotional, evocative score -- a seamless ebb and flow of vocal and orchestral, solo and choral elements, building to triumphant ringing ensembles or heart-wrenching arias from tormented souls.

As the story goes, *Amleto* was well received at its May 30, 1865 debut; but an attempt to revive it in the winter of 1870-71 flopped miserably when the tenor was sick and couldn't sing. (Maybe sometimes the show should not go on.) Faccio refused to have the piece performed again. The work was meticulously reconstructed from the composer's original manuscript by Southwest Opera's conductor, Anthony Barese. He worked from microfilm at first, but his eleven-year project ultimately took him to Milan to examine the original document. It sounds like a worthy and scholarly thing to do. But can you really make music that way?

Turns out, you can. After a shaky opening few bars, the musicians settled down and the performance took off. The audience settled in. This was the real deal. All of the singing and acting was terrific. The set and staging were well executed and effective. A great round of applause went up at the end of Scene 1. A man in front of us turned to his companion and pronounced, "That was veeerrry Guuuuuuuuhd." His pompous, inappropriately loud decree made everyone in our row giggle. He was deserving of a Groucho Marx put-down, but he was only expressing the pleasure and relief we all felt. *Hamlet* the

lost opera? I'll be the first to admit that I had feared we were in for a dusty dull Sunday afternoon.

Now, as I reread the program notes, and articles and reviews from around the world, I am struck by the powerful legacy at work here. The human quest for self-understanding and self-expression carries forward through the arts - not single masterworks in isolation but an actual evolution of ideas. Shakespeare is still here, living among us, growing up with us and us with him. At the time Faccio and Boito took on *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's play was already 250 years old. 140 years later still, their "modern" musical version - in the hands of a classically-trained contemporary musician - resonates as a more emotionally direct, more romantic, more humanistic interpretation of the lurid sixteenth-century tale of betrayal, madness and revenge. There's still a ghost and a sword fight and, one of the best parts, a play within a play... within an opera, within a true story of artistic creation, failure and triumph - that happened to culminate right here in Albuquerque.

### **Not Science Fiction: A "Stupidity" Virus Discovered** By Ashley Jordan

Virologists at Johns Hopkins Medical School in Maryland have just made a startling discovery, one that threatens to change our perception of intelligence in people forever. While doing a completely unrelated study into microbes in the human throat, scientists found a virus, now called ATCV-1, which can impair cognitive activity, learning and memory, and essentially make a person who has the virus less intelligent.

This is the first time scientists have ever observed the virus in humans, whereas before it was known to appear only in green algae in lakes and was considered an "innocuous microorganism". Scientists discovered the virus accidentally while working on an unrelated study into microbes in the human throat. Throat swabs drawn from study volunteers showed traces of ATCV-1 in their DNA. "Out of the 92 healthy adults screened, nearly 44 percent of them had the virus," says the study. Study participants who tested positive for the virus performed approximately 10 percent worse on cognitive tests. The presence of the virus also showed correlation with lower attention spans, statistically significant decrease

in visual processing and visual motor speed.

If you're thinking you can't have it because you haven't been swimming in any algae infested fresh water lately, think again. The study found no commonality among people who tested positive for the virus, including hobbies such as swimming or boating. "These are agents that we carry around for a long time and that may have subtle effects on our cognition and behavior," Robert Yolken, the virologist who ran the study, says. "We're really just starting to find out what some of these agents that we're carrying around might actually do."

Of course, there are more scientific questions to be asked as we go forward. What educational backgrounds and opportunities did participants in the random study have? Can the numbers be repeated in larger educational institutions like colleges or high schools? If the virus really is affecting intelligence to such a degree, do carriers deserve a handicap in the game of education? And, perhaps most pressing, is there any way to cure or inoculate for this virus?

The study can be found in the most recent online edition of the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* if you'd like to follow up.

### **Elegy**

By Jean O'Hara

He is gone, nothing is there,  
No footstep on the stair,  
He wanted a reconciliation.  
It is a terrible grief  
And there is no brief.  
I used to hear the garage door open and shut;  
That's how I knew he was home.  
It is all a final but  
I was never without him alone.  
No viable mind with which to flirt,  
Only dirt, dirt, dirt.  
This bereavement does not bespeak of Babbitt.  
Sixty-four years old is too young to die  
When you have everything for which to live  
And love of life is a habit.  
After all he was president of his country club, wasn't he?

### **Food For Thought Quote**

"People are my religion, because I believe in them." - Andrew Jackson Jihad