



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO NEWSLETTER

December 2013

A Membership Chapter of the American Humanist Association

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

HSNM Meetings in Albuquerque
HSNM meetings are free and open
to the public unless otherwise
noted.

Saturday, December 14

4:00pm to 7:00pm

HumanLight Party

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian
School NE, Albuquerque, NM

Please Don't forget to bring a dona-
tion for Roadrunner Food Bank

Saturday, December 21

10:00am to noon

HSNM Topical Discussion

Special Collections Library
423 Central Ave. NE

The Speaker Meetings will resume
in January

Quote of the Month

“If Jesus is not your savior,
Christmas is not your holiday.”
Tom Flynn

Other Meetings of Interest

Tuesday, December 10

7:00 to 8:30pm

**First Unitarian HUumanist
Group**, 1st UU Church, Fellowship
Hall

Wednesday, December 11

7:00 to 9:00pm

NMSR

*The Facts and Misconceptions of the
TWA 800 Accident*

Mel Baer

Museum of Natural History and
Science

Saturday, December 28

1:00pm

“An Atheist Musical Holiday” with
Dan Barker

Freedom from Religion, Local
Chapter

See [http://www.meetup.com/
FFRABQ/](http://www.meetup.com/FFRABQ/) for meeting details

Roswatheists

Roswatheists meets every other
Saturday. To find out more please
visit [http://www.meetup.com/Ro-
swatheists](http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists)

President's Message for December 2013

by Zelda Gatuskin

Here we go again. The winter holi-
days are upon us, and like it or not
we will soon be awash in an amal-
gam of patriotic, religious and
commercial messages. As I write,
the tidewaters are yet just swirling
around the ankles. On a short visit
to San Antonio, I saw the first of the
Christmas tree displays being as-
sembled on their Riverwalk, right
outside the Mall. Over the next
several weeks, we will be assaulted
by a mind-boggling mash-up of
secular-sacred-pagan-pop-culture
decor and entertainments.

The deeply devout, perhaps even
more than nonbelievers, are dis-
mayed by this pairing of religious
tradition with hyped-up consumer-
ism that we call the Holiday Season.
But tie it all up in a big ol' patri-
otic bow, especially in these tough
economic times - add a dash of statis-
tics showing how many livelihoods
rest on Nov-Dec sales - and one
way or another, we will feel like ter-
rible scrooges if we don't partici-
pate in some way. It really isn't to
the point of humanism to brush off

The Humanist Society of New Mexico

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

Zelda Gatuskin: President
Bill Kimbrough: Vice President/Speaker Programs
Leland Franks: Past President
Richard Grady: Treasurer
Jerry Gilbert: Secretary/Membership
Jay Lee Evans, Member-at-Large
Ashley Jordan, Member-at-Large
Randall Wall, Member-at-Large

Ongoing Projects:

Ron Herman, HSNM Family Co-op Coordinator
Randall Wall, Newsletter Editor
Sylvia Ramos, Chair, Feminist Caucus-HSNM

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$20 annually, HSNM membership is \$20/year (\$30 for two adults in the same household. Send 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. Website submissions may be sent to president@humanistsocietyofnm.org. HSNM dues are now paid separately from AHA dues, visit www.americanhumanist.org for more information 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 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.

opportunities for friendly contact and generosity. Thus we have Human Light, our own secular festival, in which we offer mutual appreciation, caring and support, human to human.

HSNM will join into the camaraderie and giving spirit by once again holding a potluck dinner and party dedicated to raising donations for Roadrunner Food Bank. We were honored to receive a commemorative plate from RFB for last year's donations, which provided or purchased a total of 2,228 pounds of food. With food stamp allocations recently cut, our efforts to combat hunger are more important than ever. Please mark your calendars to join us in celebrating our humanist community and demonstrating our commitment to our broader local community and the entire family of humanity. (Plus you'll get to see the plate!)

HSNM Human Light will be celebrated on December 14 from 4 to 7 PM at the Summit Apartments. The event is open to members and their guests. See below for details, and please volunteer to help with a task small or large so that no one falls into that "holiday blues" syndrome of taking on too much to enjoy the festivities. We want to borrow the positive elements of the holiday season and not duplicate the things that make us crazy.

Now, in the middle of working on this message, I had the pleasure of seeing Tom Flynn's presentation at the Special Collections Library on "The Trouble with Christmas." (Big thanks to Ron Herman and the Secular Humanist Meetup for coordinating the event!) After Tom very entertainingly and informatively deconstructed - you might say debunked - Christmas as observed in the U.S., he went to work on some of the new versions of winter holiday. Pagan throw-backs to Yule and Winter Solstice met with a strong critique for their affinity for superstitious myths of old, and Human Light was not exempt.

Tom explained that the rituals of deep winter arose out of the ignorance and fears of early humans as they watched their worlds turn cold and bleak, and prayed for the return of the sun. Now that we have electricity, and an understanding of the movements of planets and the change of seasons, modern humans have nothing to fear from the dark of winter, Tom reminded us. But we still like to party and be with our families and friends, we reminded him in turn. Like a good humanist, Tom was not going to be dictatorial about it, but he did say

that we are sending mixed messages every time we go along with something like or in lieu of Christmas celebrations. He suggests that humanists “should be conspicuous in sitting out Christmas, including the secular holidays.”

Personally, I’m comfortable with HSNM’s Human Light, because we do it early in the month, when most of our members will be available to come, rather than pin it to a specific late-December date that adds to the pressure and stress of the season. Once we have had our Human Light party, I happily follow Tom’s advice and sit out the whole thing, as I have done for years. What do you think? If you are doing something different, traditional, rebellious, or solitary to survive the crazy culture clash of Christmas, send a brief report for the January Newsletter and let us know how it worked out.

Looking ahead: Now let’s take a page from the book of holiday hype and get a head start on a uniquely secular commemoration. A concerted effort is underway right now to arrange Darwin Day activities to celebrate Darwin’s Birthday on and around February 12, 2014. HSNM is partnering with other local organizations and educational institutions to plan one or more events for all ages, publicize widely, and raise awareness and appreciation for the roles that education and the scientific method play in our lives. Your help and input is needed. To volunteer contact:

Cheryl Gatner (kewwlnurse@gmail.com, 890-4176) or Jim Peavler (jmp@peavler.org, 296-8775) for planning, presenting or tabling and staffing at event(s); and Zelda for publicity (zelda@amadorbooks.com, 344-6102).

Human Light Party Volunteers Needed

We are still in need of people to bring tables and chairs to the Human Light Party on December 14th so we’ll have enough seating for everyone. We have load in and load out crews signed up, so if your concern is getting it out of the car and up the stairs, you’ll have plenty of help. Pull up to the front entrance to drop off supplies and donations before you park, helpers will be waiting. Contact Ashley Jordan at AshleyNJordan@gmx.com if you can bring something. Every little bit helps.

Marilyn Brownstein has graciously volunteered to coordinate the potluck sign-ups, so if you need an idea for what to bring, have questions, or want to let her know what you are bringing so others won’t duplicate, you can reach her at (505)-293-0556. Everyone is asked

to bring a dish or beverage (non-alcoholic) to share.

Don’t forget to bring your canned goods or monetary donations for Roadrunner Food Bank, which will be collected at the party. Make checks payable to Roadrunner Food Bank.

Finally, if you have ideas or would like to help organize the entertainment, email Ashley to get an assignment. The party starts at 4:00 (though Set Up and Load In crews should arrive at 3:30) and will be a very good time. Hope to see you all then!

The Bad News

Our good friend and frequent contributor to this Newsletter, Donald Gutierrez, died on October 29. He was 81 years old and had suffered a swift decline in health, which was found to be due to a brain tumor. He made his exit peacefully, with family by his side; and he was remembered at a lovely secular Chapel service on November 16, held at the UNM Alumni Chapel. Those who would like to know more about Don and his academic and literary accomplishments will find more information at the HSNM and Amador Publishers websites.

The Good News

Feeling the Unthinkable: Essays on Social Justice has taken first place in the 2013 NM-AZ Book Awards for best political book. The collection of essays and book reviews by Donald Gutierrez was edited by Zelda Gatuskin and published by Amador Publishers. Another book edited and published by Zelda, From Fear to Love, My Journey Beyond Christianity, took first place for best philosophy book in the same competition. From Fear to Love is the posthumous philosophical memoir of Harry Willson, who founded the Amador Publishers with his wife Adela Amador. Visit www.amadorbooks.com to learn more about the press and these humanist works and authors.

“An Atheist Musical Holiday” with Dan Barker of FFRF

by Ron Herman

Dan Barker, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, is coming to town on December 28. He is not Santa Claus, but he promises to bring a little something for every freethinker. He will be playing piano and singing and presenting news from the forefront of freethought activism. His music is fun and sometimes inspirational, but adapted to our skepticism

and humanist viewpoint.

This will be the Winter Solstice Meet'n Greet event for the local chapter of FFRF, FFR-ABQ. It will be an opportunity for you to meet more freethinkers, atheists, and humanists and to hear the latest on hot topics, like the FFRF response to church/state violations and church activism in public schools and government. Join us for snacks, music, and good conversation, too, in Botts Hall at the Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE, at 1:00PM. FFR-ABQ will premier their own short YouTube video and highlight their billboard campaign. There is no charge for this event.

A former minister and evangelist, Dan Barker became a freethinker in 1983. His books, *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children* and *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher To Atheist* (1992) are published by the Foundation. His newest book, *The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God*, was published by Ullysses Press in January, 2011. His previous book, the autobiographical *Godless: How An Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*, was published in 2008. A graduate of Azusa Pacific University with a degree in Religion, Dan now puts his knowledge of Christianity to effective freethought use. A professional pianist and composer, Dan performs freethought concerts and is featured in the Foundation's musical CD's "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist" (a 2-CD set), "Beware of Dogma" and "Adrift on a Star," which contains the new song Dan co-wrote with Broadway composer Charles Strouse (of *Annie* and *Bye Bye Birdie* fame). He joined the Foundation staff in 1987 and served as public relations director. He was first elected co-president in November 2004, and he is married to co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor, daughter of Foundation founder Annie Gaylor.

When Words Matter: Would Humanists Benefit From Being More Open to Religious Language?

by Jason Torphy

Humanist Network News

Among atheists, I lament an 'allergy' to certain terms. There is a concern among many that anything with 'church' or 'god' or 'prayer' is tainted and must be purged from culture or at least from the humanist community. This comes honestly as many have been downright traumatized personally by an oppressive religious upbringing and have a concern about the wider culture.

Now this 'allergy,' as I like to call it, is not nearly as bad as the religious right claims it is. They like to marginalize every legitimate church-state violation as just the whining of an offended atheist. All rhetoric aside, many of us could stand some more acceptance of the terminology of religion.

Consider part of this Franciscan blessing: "May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done."

I could "secularize" this, but what would really be the point? The religious wording adds no real value, but there is little value in stripping it out. Why not give credit? Franciscans, at least in this case, encouraged people to reach for their dreams and to seek to do what others say can't be done. We even have the opportunity, as I did, to look up the full "blessing." It is an inspiring encouragement of skepticism, social justice, and compassion as well as meaningful action.

Media is seizing upon "atheist church" of the Sunday Assembly. This isn't strictly atheist, just secular good times that atheists enjoy in a larger proportion to the general population. But it is encouraging when some atheists don't reject a fun time on Sunday morning simply because Christians also do it. Similarly, "spirituality" is a term of great contention. Many humanists freely embrace the term spirituality, while many others pick up a dictionary and point to definitions that exclusively reference ghosts, souls, and woo. The U.S. military has embraced "spirituality" in full force and is locked in a struggle against those fill this spirituality training with Christian messaging and those well-meaning and naive military leaders who think prayer is an activity atheists find comforting to perform (seriously).

While I advocate for incorporating more "religious" terminology, it is clear not all religious wording is innocuous or transferrable. It's not so easy to overlook the changing of our national motto from *E Pluribus Unum* to "In God We Trust." *E Pluribus Unum* means "Out of Many, One" but I don't think a religious monolith is the noblest outcome for our society. Adding "Under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance is similarly concerning. We won World War II as "One Nation, Indivisible" and changes to the Pledge during the 1950s McCarthy era witch-hunts left us as one nation divided by god.

Just prior to Veterans Day, distinguished veteran Congressman Sam Johnson provided another example of how words matter: "Our Founding Fathers declared we are 'One nation under God,' and you better believe

I'll fight like mad to keep it that way," he said. "I can tell you from experience, there are no atheists in foxholes." The Founders had no part in the 1950s change of the Pledge, which was originally written in 1892. Congressman Johnson's disrespect for his fellow veterans is borne of his ignorance of history and the modern diversity of our military.

He made these statements to express his outrage that the Air Force Academy honor code include "So Help Me God" as an optional, rather than required, statement. Johnson, like other "Christian Nation" evangelists, wants to enforce his god-belief on Academy cadets. Neither the Naval Academy nor my own alma mater, West Point, have any reference to a higher power. We needed no divine co-signer on our integrity. The American Humanist Association continues litigation against forced Pledge prayer in Massachusetts schools. In cases like this, words do matter and can't simply be ignored.

Just as we humanists could benefit from more openness to religious language in certain cases, the leaders of our nation who happen to be religious must remember that they deserve no bullhorn, legal enforcement, or official encouragement for their beliefs. Their evangelism will have to stand on its own merits in churches, street corners, billboards, TV commercials, popular media, and private conversations. And we humanists will have equal opportunity to participate. Perhaps we may take that Franciscan encouragement to make change never thought possible.

Counterpoint Appreciates Pastorals

by Jean O'Hara

Complain to the baying dog or leaping
Moon that disappears into the moving clouds.
Do what one will - only read and don't sing
About the change that a sue makes suing crowds.
Even the flowers breathe as darkness dies,
Brown eyed Susans don't worry about night
Or day, they're born to sue once, twice
Or immortally. Wrong is wrong, not right.
So, as each flower has its own, then, does
Each dog has his own day. One quells at the
Thought that compels one to remove the fuzz
From Poesy or a bowser's bark to ja.
A pretty flower or smart stepping dog is
Not going to change it angles to toot, "Not 'tis."