



# Humanist Society of New Mexico



February 2012

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> [zelda@amadorbooks.com](mailto:zelda@amadorbooks.com)

## Quote of the Month

To confine our attention to terrestrial matters would be to limit the human spirit.

Stephen Hawking

## Upcoming HSNM Meetings

Meetings are free and run from 10:00 to noon  
(except where noted)

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**Saturday, February 11<sup>th</sup>**

### Informal Meeting

*General Discussion starts at 10:10am*  
Restricted to Members and their Guests Only. For invitation please contact Zelda Gatuskin at 505-344-6102 for details or questions.

Refreshments: Carolyn Kaye

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

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**Saturday, February 18<sup>th</sup>**

### Topical Discussion – Open to the Public

*How Did We End Up with the 1%?*

Erna Fergusson Library, 3700 San Mateo Blvd. NE

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**Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup>**

### Speaker Meeting – Open to the Public

*Knowledge Bulimia*

Yugal Behl

Humanist Minute: Jerry Gilbert

Refreshments: Bill and Shirley Little

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

## HSNM Family Co-Op Alternative Children's Sunday School

3:00 p.m. first and third Sundays  
Unitarian Universalist Church (UUC)  
Comanche and Carlisle, NE  
Call 505-292-4375 for more information  
or go to [www.Meetup.com](http://www.Meetup.com).

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## Santa Fe Humanists Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am

*People for Peace*  
Guests: Elliott Skinner and Linda Hibbs

Community Room, Main Branch of the  
Santa Fe Public Library, 145 Washington St.

For more information contact Bill Weihofen  
(505) 988-1343

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## Friendly Philosophers

**Monday, February 6<sup>th</sup>** - General Discussion

**Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup>**

*The Changing Face of Holiday Music*

Jane Ellen

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite  
Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room.  
Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

**H**umanism 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.

## **The Humanist Society of New Mexico**

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

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

### **Officers/Committees**

*Zelda Gatuskin: President*

*Roy Moody: Vice President*

*[Education/Programs]*

*Fred March: Past President*

*[Special Projects]*

*Leland Franks: Treasurer*

*Jerry Gilbert: Secretary [By-laws, Membership]*

*Carolyn Kaye, Member-at-Large*

*Randall Wall, Member-at-Large*

### **Ongoing Projects:**

*Ron Herman, HSNM Family Co-op Coordinator*

*Randall Wall, Newsletter Editor*

*Attila Csanyi, Friendly Philosopher's Director*

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$15 annually. HSNM membership is \$15/year (\$20 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](http://www.americanhumanist.org) for more information about the American Humanist Association.

## **President's Message for February**

Hitting a deadline always focuses the mind. It's the writer's version of living on the edge. But I don't put off my task of writing for the HSNM Newsletter merely for thrills, in fact I've usually made a couple of false starts by the time this third Saturday of the month comes around. Sometimes it takes the good conversation of our Topical Meeting to set me on the right track. While I rarely write about the topic that was under discussion, the meeting fills me with ideas, new insights into my new friends from HSNM, and the pleasant feeling of having stretched my mind and imagination. I came away from the January meeting thinking, "It's not 'just talk.'"

I hear that from time to time: "We humanists need to do more than just sit around and talk." I completely agree, especially in the context of how HSNM goes about our education mission. We have to attract some attention in order to bring people to our Speaker Meetings and our Humanist Sunday School, to our website and newsletter and the many resources they reference. One of the best ways for us to get attention and convey our humanist ideals to the wider public is to be out there working visibly in the community on humanist causes. Since a humanist cause is just about anything that reduces suffering, increases personal freedom, promotes social justice, or elevates humanity, there is simply no end to the possibilities for "doing."

So how do we decide what to do? How do we organize? How do we convey to associates in the field what humanism is, what HSNM is, and why we work under the umbrella of a humanist organization? For that matter, how do we process the experiences, rise to the challenges and share the "aha moments" that result from getting out there and working in the community? Regardless of the format or the topic, this is what our "talking" meetings provide every single month - a venue in which to articulate and broaden our opinions and observations of life and society. To be in the company of caring, thoughtful people who are focused on both the objective reality of the world "out there" and the deep inner mysteries of consciousness and emotion is utterly affirming and inspiring. That's not just me cheerleading - I hear it time and again from members old and new.

We had 17 people at January's Topical Meeting. If you sat down and took an inventory of the professional, volunteer, creative and educational pursuits of the assembled, it would blow your mind. I have found this to be true of any and every gathering of HSNM members and prospective members in any number and combination. The breadth of experience our group comprises (which takes some probing to uncover since this is not a boastful bunch) informs our meetings such that they never fail to educate, challenge, and energize.

When HSNM asks for your involvement, it is not the "Uncle Sam Needs You!" appeal for an army of rough cut followers who will be shaped body and mind to the service of a hierarchical machine. We are not proselytizing for a higher power or loftily ordained mission. We are seeking individuals in all their individuality and diversity to shape and enrich our organization from the ground up. It's a lot of talk, but not just talk. I hope more of you will use this Newsletter to join the conversation, to let us know about what you think is worth doing to back up the talk, and to find other members to team up with who are also looking for outlets for humanist and humanitarian action.

*In February, our Topical Meeting moves back the Erna Fergusson Library; our Speaker Meeting on the intriguing topic of "Knowledge Bulimia" will be presented by Yugal Behl. In March, Bill Kimbrough will finally give his talk on "The Social Determinants of Health," which he kindly postponed to give us a chance to hear from AHA leaders Roy Speckhardt and Maggie Ardiente during their visit to New Mexico.*

### **Next Speaker Meeting Speaker Bio**

Yugal Behl teaches Math and Engineering college courses at Central New Mexico Community College and UNM; and has also taught Math at the College of Santa Fe and Physics at NMSU. He has also been involved in the brain research related to learning and memory. Before 2000, he had been involved in the R&D projects for the Defense Department in White Sands Missile Range, San Diego and Albuquerque and the nuclear waste management projects at the Sandia National Lab. He holds a Ph.D. in Physics from NMSU (1977). Yugal's wife Poornima was an elementary school teacher in India. After devoting full-time to motherhood for about 20 years, she joined APS about 10 years back as an Educational Assistant in an elementary school.

### **Treasurer's Annual Report for 2011**

Beginning of year: General Account and Dedicated Funds	<b>\$16,182</b>
Receipts: Dues	\$2,015
Donations	\$892
Other	\$151
<b>Total Receipts:</b>	<b>\$3,058</b>

Expenditures:	
Newsletter	\$1,171
FamilyCoop.	\$1,031
AHA Conference	\$1,040
Humanist Scholarship @ UNM	\$1,000
Other	\$809
<b>Total Expenditures:</b>	<b>\$5,051</b>

End of year: General Account and Dedicated Funds  
**\$14,189**

HSNM members may direct questions about this summary report to the Treasurer:

Leland Franks, Ph. 505-247-1537; Fax. 505-247-1538;  
Email <lelandof@gmail.com>

### **HSNM Family Co-op**

by David Metzler

The HSNM Family Co-Op has been meeting twice monthly for over a year in a room at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. We have had seven families participate at one time or another throughout the year, with a core group of four families. Leadership of the meetings rotates between the different families. Each family has a different style, but we always start with a welcome (often a song or two) and a story-time or activity. The texts range from fiction to nonfiction, from science to history to ethics, and often come from various cultural traditions around the world. For example, in December, we talked about solstice traditions from around the world, and compared how prescientific societies explained the movements of the sun to our own understanding (demonstrated with a light bulb and a globe). After outside playtime and snack (always a highlight for the kids) we do a science experiment and close with another song. (Constructing a battery using just a lemon, a nail, and a penny was a big hit.) The Co-Op provides a supportive space for parents who wish to raise their children in a mindful but nonreligious manner and who want to connect with others who feel the same.

We welcome any families who want to come and see what fun a humanist “Sunday School” can be.

## **The Pledge to the Flag**

by Ron Herman

Thanks to Jerry Gilbert for his article on “The Pledge of Allegiance” in our December newsletter. It was interesting to see the progression of the Pledge since 1892. He asks “How would you rewrite the Pledge?” I think we should look at the historical significance of the fact that the pledge was originally made to the flag of the United States of America.

Our flag is more than a symbol of patriotism or just a representation of freedom, democracy, and love of country. Flags have long been used as a notice of life-threatening conditions or safe harbors for boats and ships at sea. For a fortress on land, a flag sends a similar message; it signals to friend and foe that the post is held by a force willing to defend life, property, and principles. In protests flags are held up to symbolize a cause, perhaps at the risk of confrontation, persecution, or prosecution. Our flag is no exception. Furthermore, our flag is unique in that it also signals that we will fight to preserve our form of government that is based on (1) our original 13 colonies that produced our Constitution, symbolized by the 13 red and white stripes, and (2) the federal union of our now 50 separate states, represented by the stars on the blue field.

Mr. Gilbert’s focus is on support for the Constitution, and that is certainly the most important guiding document for our nation. I think it is appropriate that a pledge specifically be made to preserve, protect, and defend that constitution, as our government leaders so pledge upon taking office.

Let us also remember that the original pledge was written soon after the Civil War, when our “one nation” was almost divided, perhaps irreparably into many independent nations doomed to frequent conflict. Thus, “one nation indivisible” takes on an immense significance and should not be omitted.

We are making our pledge of allegiance to this nation united under the constitution, not to “the people,” as Michael Moore suggested. As Jerry points out, we are a diverse people, rarely unified, some better informed and more open-minded than others, so it is not clear how we could pledge allegiance to “the people.”

Jerry asks whether “equality” might also be important to include. However, that is a term that is difficult to legislate and enforce. I think it is assumed that liberty and justice under law should insure equal opportunity.

There is probably no argument within HSNM that “under God” should be deleted. Of course we can

forcefully argue that our nation was not created, nor is it preserved, by any god. Few people in history – even 1700 years of Christians - ever had American freedoms until 1791. Even after that, it took another hundred and sixty years for everyone in this country to gain those freedoms, and some are still fighting for them. We have minority rights and common law not because we are God’s chosen people, but because Americans, religious and non-religious, fought and died for them. We could lose our freedoms at any time, and no god would intercede for us. Our nation’s founders mentioned a Creator in the Declaration of Independence to rally their people to war, just as other leaders throughout history have invoked their god or gods. In practice even our founders knew that we have no “God-given rights,” only those that we carefully articulate and fight for.

Hopefully, our government will never ask us to pledge to uphold the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or any church doctrine, although “under God” has unsaid implications and is getting dangerously close to that. Already some of our leaders have made a pledge to Grover Norquist, so who knows what might be next.

So, my rewrite of the pledge would be only a minor revision plus a second pledge:

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. I pledge to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States of America.”

If you feel our current representatives in this republic have failed us, perhaps now is one of those times when we should be repeating this pledge and waving the Red, White, and Blue. We humanists are just beginning to fight for our rights as non-believers, and we can do so only as patriots under that flag.

## **No Train Back to Eden**

by Laverne Rison

Excerpted from “Sing Long and Loud of Leafy Trees”

In the garden of Eden  
When the Devil tempted Eve  
It was not with an apple  
As so many believe  
But knowledge  
And knowledge means power  
Over all the creatures  
That creep or crawl  
Or exist at all  
The power of life  
And death

When Eve ate the fruit  
And Adam followed suit  
And the long, long fall began  
They boarded a train  
On a one-way track  
And once aboard  
There was no turning back  
There was no turning back  
At all

When man seizes power  
From the hands of God  
Even a little bit  
Enough to plant a seed  
Or pull a weed  
Then God no longer prevails  
And man must take the blame  
When locusts attack  
Or the train jumps the track  
When babies cry  
Or eagles die  
After Eden, there's no turning back

"We can't play God,"  
Some people cry  
Even today  
Father, forgive them  
For they know not what they say  
After playing God all these years  
Since Eden  
When Eve ate the fruit  
And Adam followed suit  
And the long, long fall began

Prodigal sons in a pigsty  
We sit amidst the ruins of our Eden  
Viewing with dismay  
The poisoned streams  
The ravaged hills  
The general disarray  
Crying out to God to save us  
We cry, but we cry in vain  
There's no train back to Eden  
We can never go home again

**Janqueler Acknowledges Glee**  
by Jean O'Hara, August 24, 1994

See the day we went to Chicago.  
A flower blooms to die too soon. "Live", said  
The poacher; nothing is happening, no  
Wives, pardoners, nun's lawyers' tales that led  
To the none, yet the lonely heart there got lost

Like the bleeding heart flower that's no one's.  
Remember its name because it is bossed  
By Columbine with precious dripping plums  
Turned purple and whose staining petals Earth  
Has accepted to remove the memory  
Because everyone was not of worth  
That saw the inversion that happened, see;  
So, if multitudes miss the changing skies,  
Then, it is the flower that lives: man dies.

**About Margaret Thatcher**  
by Lois Reisz Kimbrell

It was in 1970, when my sister, Marge, and I were in London to see the theatre season, and decided to attend a debate in the House of Commons. Marge decided we should attend after she read an article about a conservative politician name Margaret Thatcher, who was, possibly, a future prime minister. I scoffed at the idea. The British would never tolerate a female prime minister. They just wouldn't, period. Marge insisted that we attend the debate because the subject was to be the British educational system, which interested her. We were staying in the Royal Horse Guards and the House of Commons and just a short distance away, and so we walked over after supper.

We were seated in what was called The Strangers' Gallery. After all, we were Americans. Our view of the floor below was the opposite of what I had expected. I'd expected the conservative Margaret Thatcher to be seated on our right, and she was seated on our left. Even more unsettling was the fact that she had children with her, a boy and a girl. Each child carried a fairly large file box and was in charge of its contents. They provided Thatcher with information as needed throughout the evening. She had a remarkable memory and didn't need much assistance. Probably, she didn't need any. I suspected that there was another reason for the children being there – a defense against the argument that went - "A woman should stay home and take care of the kids."

We had read that Maggie lacked a sense of humor and was inclined to scold like a bad-natured school teacher. She met the description. There was not a spark of humor in her throughout the entire debate, and other people's humor did not amuse her. Instead, it baffled her as though she didn't understand what it was for. At times, she'd snap something like - "We should be ashamed of the poverty on this island." Once, she turned to The Strangers' Gallery, where we Americans were seated, to soften the blow she had just delivered to

the British tourist industry. She suggested more places in England we really should visit before going home. I was to see her make that maneuver again years later, a sort of super-hostess invitation at odds with what she had just said in criticism of her own country.

Other than that – Margaret Thatcher's presentation was terrific. It was said that she was so great because she worked harder than anyone else did. For example, her research was always outstanding, and she took voice lessons to be sure that her vocal pitch was low enough. I said to Marge, "Can you think of an American politician who could have done that?" Marge thought a long time and finally said, "Franklin Roosevelt."

Yes, in style, but not in content. Roosevelt was extremely persuasive, too, but devoted to liberal concepts. An evening of Thatcher and Roosevelt would have been historic.

The morning paper carried every word of Thatcher's debate – plus pictures of the children with their file boxes, and Maggie was on her way.

#### **Letters to the Editor**

The latest edition of our newsletter had two articles on Christopher Hitchens. One was entitled "Humanists Mourn Christopher Hitchens." The other contained a number of quotes from his book, *The Portable Atheist*.

I think Hitchens was and will continue to be an important influence on many non-believers. He was a good source of encouragement for standing up for our non-beliefs.

Although missing him is warranted, "mourning" him sounds excessive. I am not into hero-worshipping, and some of the reverence I have heard attached to him and the other members of the "four horsemen" strikes me as somewhat inconsistent with humanist values. One of the quotes in the first article is "Picture all experts as if they were mammals." To me this suggests he wasn't into hero-worshipping either.

Many of the quotes attributed to him are quite inspiring, but I would take issue with one of them: "Distrust compassion." I think compassion is an important part of humanism, and I would hope that the HSNM membership would agree.

Jerry Gilbert

### **Dates to Remember**

**February 12, 2012**

Darwin Day

<http://darwinday.org/>

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**February 26, 2012**

Day of Solidarity for Black NonBelievers

<http://humanistinstitute.org/news/day-solidarity-black-non-believers>

### **First Unitarian HUmanist Group**

**February 14<sup>th</sup>, 7pm**

7pm to 8:30pm

Social Hall, First Unitarian Universalist Church,  
3701 Carlisle Blvd. NE

Open to both Religious and Secular Humanists

Meets the second Tuesday of each month

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### **The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico**

<http://atheists.meetup.com/75>

**Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 9am**

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice,  
202 Harvard SE

**Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 6:30pm**

Social Meeting at 6:30pm at Mimi's Cafe, 4316  
The 25 Way, Near Jefferson and I-25

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### **New Mexicans for Science and Reason**

**Wednesday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 7pm**

*NY Times' Sandra Blakeslee on Helping Scientists  
Communicate with the Public*

UNM Law Building, Room 2405

*1117 Stanford NE*