



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO NEWSLETTER

September 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, September 14

10:10am to noon

HSNM Informal Meeting

HSNM Members and their Guests
Only. For invitation or questions,
please contact Zelda Gatuskin at
505-344-6102

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian
School NE, Albuquerque, NM
Refreshments: Richard Grady

Saturday, September 21

10:00am to noon

HSNM Topical Discussion

Sound Bites and Slogans
Special Collections Library
423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, September 28

10:00am to noon

HSNM Speaker Meeting

The Expert Brain
Yugal Behl

CNM - Montoya Campus, 4700
Morris NE, Rm H-128
Humanist Minute: Randall Wall

HSNM Family Co-Op

Alternative Children's Sunday
School

Classes for kids of all ages at 10:00
AM on the 1st and 3rd Sundays
each month at a local private
school.

Call 505-292-4375 for more in-
formation or go to www.MeetUp.com/Humanist-Family-CoOp/

Other Meetings of Interest

Tuesday, September 10

7:00 to 8:30pm, **First Unitar-
ian HUmanist Group**, 1st UU
Church, Fellowship Hall

Wednesday, September 11

7:00 to 9:00pm

NMSR

Creationism Across the Pond
Michael Roberts

Museum of Natural History and
Science

Roswatheists

Roswatheists meets every other
Saturday. To find out more please
visit <http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists>

President's Message for Septem- ber 2013

The pair of Cooper's hawks that
nests in the fringe of trees lining
the irrigation ditch has been quite
visible this past month. I have de-
lighted to see them maneuvering
through the treetops with strands
of dried grass and vine for their nest
or flying low in a zig zag pattern
over the ditch to flush out prey. I
startled one out of the brush grasp-
ing a fresh kill in its talons, and I
saw one up in the cottonwood tear-
ing into its meal and then cleaning
it's beak on the rough tree bark. The
dogs are well aware of the discards
of the hawks' kills, and occasion-
ally the hawks themselves leave a
feather behind for me to wear in

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.

the band of my straw hat.

Sometimes a hawk will pay me a call. The hawk perches on the cable over the back alley, and we get a good look at each other out from under cover of the trees. But it is disconcerting to have the predator lurking around my own turf.

There is a pair of thrashers living in the walking stick cactus at the back of our property. We (humans, dogs, thrashers) have grown used to each other. One evening I got to see three baby thrashers pop out of their hiding places and perch on the tips of the cactus, waiting for their parents to bring them bugs. Over the next week, I watched the chicks practice hopping from the cactus to the back wall, then flutter up into the tree. Soon they were following their parents around the yard. The hawk started showing up late morning hoping to catch one unawares.

“Oh no you don’t!” I told the hawk, whom I had watched for eagerly not half an hour before and just half a block away. “Go hunt somewhere else!” I paced around the cactus protectively while the thrasher shrieked. (One of the adult thrashers will sound the alarm to get everyone back into the cactus and then keep shrieking as long as the hawk is perched overhead.) The hawk reluctantly gave up and glided slowly northward, hunting. The thrasher popped out of the cactus, and we stood companionably watching the sky for several minutes to be sure the hawk wouldn’t circle back.

The hawks have their own demanding young to feed. I have seen them too. And I wonder if my sentimentality has subverted some precise, passionless law of nature such as: for every three baby thrashers born, one must be taken by a hawk. And if such a rule exists, are the hawks themselves aware of it? If the hawk were to snag one of our thrasher babies, would it move on to another nest? More likely, wouldn’t it come right back and try to repeat its success? I’m not sure that the hawk has a sense of fairness, or that the thrasher would be philosophical about the loss of even one chick.

One can get into trouble ascribing human feelings and reasoning to other species. But we can learn quite a lot from watching the variety and interplay of life around us, as well as our reactions to it. Fairy tales and fables feature much interaction between people and animals and often the transformation of one type of creature into

another. The animals and plants with their characteristic traits provide metaphors for all of the internal, interpersonal and practical conflicts that plague the human mind. The imagery of the plant and animal kingdoms surely preceded language, and is still pervasive in our thoughts whether or not we live in close proximity to nature. While there are many environmental reasons to protect the diversity of species and prevent extinctions, I think that our inner lives would also be far poorer without the wild things.

Come to a Meeting!

by Zelda Gatuskin

This is the first of a sometimes series about HSNM meetings. In this episode, we check in with the Topical Discussion, held in Albuquerque on the 3rd Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. to noon. Our Topical Discussion meeting is open to the public; it has moved around as library space has been available. We met regularly at the Erna Fergusson Library for a long time and will try to reschedule there starting in January. After several months at the North Valley Library we are now meeting at the Special Collections Library at Central and Edith.

Discussion of at these meetings is free-flowing. Everyone is encouraged to participate, but monopolizing the conversation is a no-no. (Don't make Salem get out the 3-minute timer.) When there are more than 10 people, having a moderator is helpful. That can be me or another member of the Board, or it might be the person who had recommended the topic or anyone else who wants to volunteer. Before the end of each meeting, those assembled pick the topic for the next month. It is not necessary to do homework and study up on the topic ahead of time, but some folks do come with a statement they have prepared or relevant articles, jokes or quotes.

Attendance at the Topical Discussion varies from around 12 to 20, but lately we have had fewer. If you have stayed away because you are concerned about parking at the current location, fear not - there is parking east of the Special Collections library, across Edith, where the fast food place has closed. There is also a cafe that is open across Central, where you can get a very good cup of coffee before or after the meeting. (Refreshments are not allowed in the library.)

I hope more of you will drop in on the Topical Discussion and share your perspectives and ideas for topics.

There is always something insightful and surprising to learn from (and about) your fellow humanists.

Humanist Speaker Meeting September 2013

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.

Speaker Topic

The Expert Brain

We, and especially our education system, are fascinated about the experts in various human activities. Many of us believe that experts have special ways of learning and that is why they are experts in what they do. We want to find those special ways and share them with our students so they can become experts as well. Our students are still not doing so well. So what seem to be the problems. I will share my thoughts on this subject in the presentation.

It's HSNM Membership Renewal Month

All renewing and enrolling members are asked to send in their dues by September 15. Please contact a board member if you did not receive a renewal notice. We will recap the status of our accounts, projected expenses, and donations and membership statistics in the October Newsletter. Thank you for your support!

Letter to the Editor

Way back in 1920, it was estimated that half of the professional actors working in America received less than half of the pay stipulated in their contracts. As for working conditions, filth prevailed in many back stages. Generally speaking, actors were often on the move and unable to linger long enough to insist on safe, sanitary and fair working conditions.

Today, we have three professional actors' unions to promote fairness and good working conditions. They are The Actors' Equity Association - stage, The Screen Actors' Guild - film, and The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists - TV and radio. A professional actor belongs to all three and activates the membership under which he is currently working. Reciprocity is maintained among the three.

The actors' unions have done very well as far as pay is concerned, and working conditions have been vastly improved. Safety remains a problem. There seems to be a contest about making films that are increasingly dangerous to make.

That was true about film acting way back when I was a student in the Pasadena Playhouse's California College of Theatre Arts. Around the time of World War II. There were about 16 in my class, all talented. I was proud to belong to that group. But two of my best friends were hurt badly after they began working in films.

Bill was doing a war scene and, by accident, faced an explosion. He had been very handsome, and nothing could be done to recreate his good looks. He used his settlement to set up a detective business. Virginia played a scene in which she was supposedly shot in the heart. The explosive was placed inside her clothing and was meant to explode outward, Instead, it destroyed her left breast. Do I need to go on?

Shows become increasingly violent in order to be increasingly successful, and it follows that more people are hurt for foolish reasons. All kinds of safety measures are taken, and there are stunt people who are extremely adroit, but injuries occur all the same, and it is possible that no film sold an extra ticket because Virginia lost her breast or Bill lost his face.

Lois Reisz Kimbrell

What Was Once

by Jean O'Hara

The lingering life that spawns and thus threads
The wisdom that one decent author gave
To another to avoid the dark dreads
Of a city polyglot that shouts, "Save,"
Can just live and breathe with good memories.
Washington, D. C. has too many men
Pretending on too many committees,
Who cannot separate the dark glade, a fen
Which contrasts to the bright chaff near the wheat
That's sighted from the country roads viewing the field.
The men say, "The rapprochement is meant to be the meet."
Therefore, the best answer to Death belongs to this life's
yield.
So, good men when you meet to decide fates,
Remember the great democratizer is Death, he waits.

Funniest God Joke Ever*

by Emo Phillips

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"

He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!"

Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

*According to The Guardian