

## PhillyCoR to erect "Tree of Knowledge" in Philly

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Last year Chester County allowed a variety of holiday displays at their courthouse in a "free speech zone." The Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia erected a Tree of Knowledge to represent atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, humanists, and other rationalists who often feel left out during the holidays. The tree donned decorations made of book covers, celebrating humanity's accumulation of thought and knowledge. Books included the Bible and Koran as a way to show inclusiveness and to acknowledge the influence of those works.

Their efforts were met with some hostility. Fox News reported it as an "outrage" and Christian leader Father Jonathan Morris commented, "You know what? I'm embarrassed. Because you're an atheist, you're trying to say therefore we're going to sabotage what is a holiday, a religious holiday."

Then President of the Freethought Society Margaret Downey responded with, "You should not look at it as a sabotage because your faith should be strong enough where anybody standing there with a question would not intimidate you."

This year the Tree of Knowledge display will be erected at Philadelphia's Independence Hall, and sponsored by all of PhillyCoR (the Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason, [www.phillycor.org](http://www.phillycor.org).)

Thus, we ask for your support with donations. Purchasing the tree, sign, and creating ornaments is quite a hefty expense, and we can't do it without help from our members. Please see [the flyer](#) which includes information about how and where to mail donations. Let's make this 2008 holiday season in Greater Philadelphia, not only for the religious, but for all members of our society.

## Reflections on Fred Kaplan's "Daydream Believers" by Brian Bohmueller

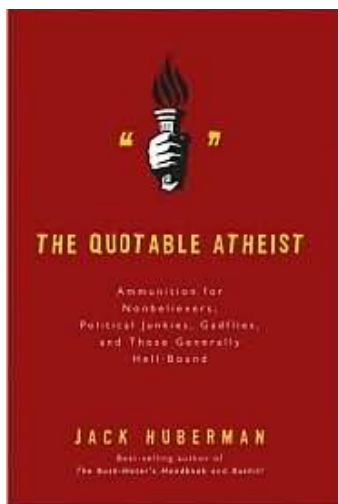
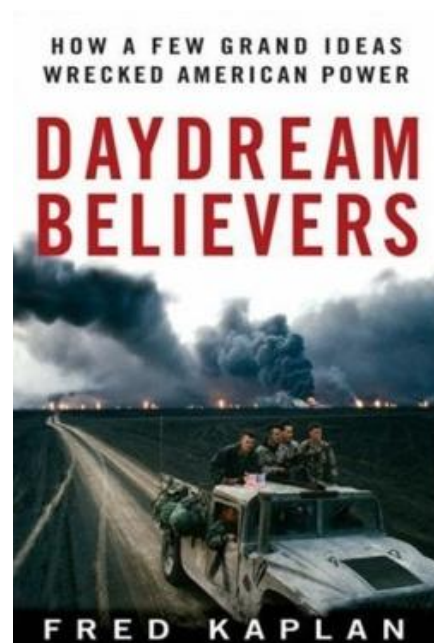
As a pacifist at heart, I yearn for our nation to cooperate to a greater extent diplomatically with other nations toward a more peaceful world. Along with many fellow liberals I've grimaced too frequently at the core of my being at how much the United States expends for its military force and at the same time tolerates the resultant loss of human life. It was with this frame of mind that I picked up Fred Kaplan's "Daydream Believers," its cover picturing American soldiers driving dejectedly away from a horizon on fire into an Arabian desert.

Fred Kaplan, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist for Slate magazine, effectively drew me into his tale of what amounts to a tattered tapestry of American foreign policy and military action dating back forty years. Kaplan's main premise is that Republican neoconservative ideology has derailed American influence in the world, especially over the past eight years.

To this end, the book focuses on how George W. Bush and his administration failed to lead miserably by embracing extremist ideologies. By actively ignoring the inconvenient lessons of history and science, they felt they could do no wrong in effecting their American agenda in a post September 11<sup>th</sup> world. Kaplan illustrates the fantasy convictions that the administration bought into with numerous expert citations and insider discussion threads. He correlates these beliefs to the short-sighted decisions leading to the invasion of Iraq, the discontinuance of negotiations with North Korea, the blind pursuit of antiballistic missile technology, and the boiler-plate application of Democracy as a panacea for humanity's ills.

Daydream Believers clearly documents how the fanciful Republican ideological world view has resulted in a series of foreign policy blunders. Beyond that assessment, Kaplan goes on to conclude that foreign policy is a thing of nuance, as there is an art to wielding diplomacy, world partnership, vision, and military power in the context of the real world.

After reading Daydream Believers, I can see my yearning for a world at peace is a pretty simple vision at heart, ironically as simple as the Republican ideologies unveiled in this book. And yet the book has opened my eyes to the fact that a cohesive American foreign policy that can succeed in the long term will require patience, empathy and hard work that transcends presidential terms, all in conjunction with the diplomatic efforts of other countries. All in all, it is a tough lesson to learn that the rest of the world doesn't march to the beat of any of our individual, ideological drums.



Quote from "The Quotable Atheist," by Jack Huberman.  
(Suggested by Jim Talbot)

*From the first moment I looked into the horror on September 11, into that fireball, into that explosion of horror, I knew it. I recognized an old companion. I recognized religion.*

--Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete, prof. of theology, St Joseph's Seminary, NY.

## Excerpt from *Branton's Blossoms* by Waymore Dendrites

(This is a book by a local freethinker. Waymore Dendrites is a pen name to protect his identity. It is written to be especially appealing to children, but ultimately for all ages. The book is available on Amazon.)

So now it is time to tell you how the red coated dog got me to thinking about whether or not there was a God. It happened just after sunset after I had eaten and turned on the lamps in the kitchen.

The dishes were washed and I was sitting quietly and reading when I heard this noise outside the cabin. I couldn't imagine what it could be. I never had heard anything like it before. I left the cabin to investigate and found my red coated friend holding something in its mouth. That was where the noise. A screaming sound, was coming from. I shined my flashlight on its face and saw the dog was holding on to a tiny animal. The little animal was screaming in terror and misery. I ordered the dog to drop it and, much to my surprise, it obeyed me. The little thing, only about three inches long, dropped on the ground.

It was very strange looking and hardly had any fuzz to cover its pink skin. I guessed it was a new born of only about three days old. First, I thought it was a squirrel baby although it didn't really look like a squirrel. Before another minute went by I heard some more crying. Nearby I found a small hole covered with grass and inside the hole were three more babies who were crying too. The dog stood close by with a curious tilt of its head as I looked at the babies. I then realized that they were ground hog babies.

If the babies were close to me this meant their mother could not be far away. Animal moms almost never leave their babies for very long. As I thought about where this ground hog mom might be there was a movement behind me and in a flash Red Coat snapped at something.

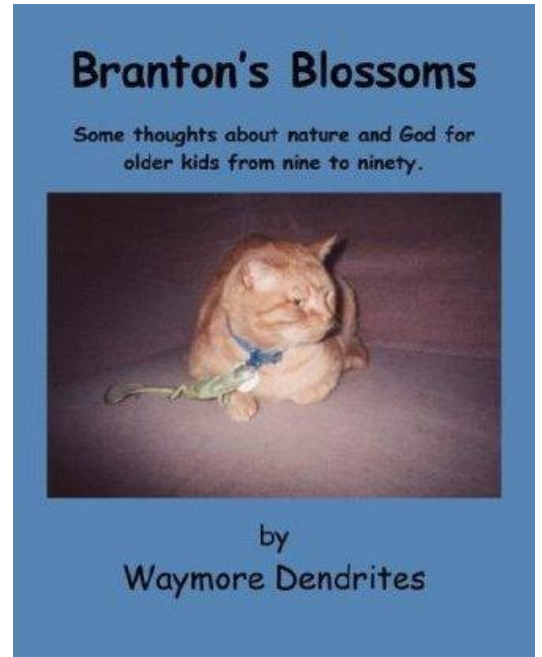
Again I ordered it to drop whatever was in his mouth and again he obeyed. I shined my flashlight on whatever it was and saw it was the mom ground hog who had run out to protect her babies. It had been killed with one snap of the great jaws from Red Coat.

After I chased the dog off I gathered up the ground hog babies into a small plastic bowl from the cabin. I lined the bowl with a few paper towels. I had no idea what to do with the crying babies. They lived on their mother's milk and now their mom was dead. The only thing I could think to do was to take them inside out of the cold.

The dog had killed its natural enemy, the ground hog. The dog killed by instinct and according to religious teaching didn't possess a soul. Only people were supposed to have souls that God would save. This is what people who believe in God say. The dog killed without thinking. That is what instinct is. But people kill each other and do it not by instinct toward natural enemies, but with thinking that it is a good thing to do. Yet these people who kill so cruelly and deliberately were supposed to have souls while the dog was not supposed to have a soul.

Standing in my cabin with the bowl and its crying babies in my hand I made a decision. I call it a turning point on how I thought about God. I made up my mind now. The misery and cruelty that was taking place now in my cabin was only a tiny example of all the misery and cruelty in the world.

At that moment I stopped wondering whether or not God or the soul exists. At that moment I knew the suffering of these poor babies and all the rest of the suffering in the world meant that neither God nor the soul existed. If the dog in its instinctive cruelty had no soul, then neither did people, who often are deliberately cruel, have souls. If there is no soul or no God, I couldn't see much purpose in believing in religion either. Religions say they will save your soul from suffering, but if there is no soul then it doesn't exist and so there is nothing to save.



# A "Heaven's Gate" Story submitted by Bill Reitter of Glassboro

I have been an atheist and humanist for over 43 years. I was actually studying in a Catholic seminary when I woke up and realized that we were all being indoctrinated, since birth, in a pack of myths and falsehoods. Though today reason and freethought are very serious issues, we must never lose our sense of humor. Here is one of my favorite "heaven's gate" stories.

A priest and an atheist went to heaven and met at the pearly gates. The priest gave the atheist a look that said "What are YOU doing up here?"

St. Peter was overjoyed to see the priest and welcomed him with open arms. He gave the priest a beautiful mansion overlooking a scenic lake.

Next, turning to the atheist, St. Peter said " Although you have been a good person and lived a exemplary life of service to mankind, you will only get a small shack on the back road of heaven." When the atheist questioned the unfairness, St Peter explained that, in heaven, atheists were just "a dime a dozen" while priests were special, and very rare indeed.



## Save the Date!

The 2008 HumanLight/Winter Solstice Party is scheduled for **Sunday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**, 1pm at the Williamson Restaurant in Horsham, PA.

We have a fantastic lineup this year! Entertainment includes **musician George Hrab** – who recently played at James Randi's Amaz!ng Adventure in the Galapagos Islands, and **storyteller Bill Wood** who delighted young and old at HAGP's 2006 HumanLight festivities.

The keynote speaker is **Tony Hileman** Senior Leader at the New York Ethical Society and former President of the American Humanist Association.

Also, this year the HumanLight/Winter Solstice party is sponsored by all of PhillyCoR (Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason – [www.phillycor.org](http://www.phillycor.org).) showing off our unity. Don't miss the fun!

## SPECIAL EVENT on U Penn Campus: Nonviolent Communication Workshop

Join us for an Introduction to Nonviolent Communication, a workshop conducted by **Keith Pacheco**. Pacheco has over a decade of experience with peace action, including two weeks spent in Israel and the West Bank visiting and listening to various sides of the Middle East Conflict to gain insight, perspective, and understanding. He has facilitated nonviolence workshops for a wide spectrum of communities in the United States and in Zimbabwe.

November 22 Sat. 11am-4pm  
Houston Hall Room 311 (Griski Room)  
3417 Spruce St. Philadelphia, PA 19101

We will break for an hour lunch at 1pm, please either bring a lunch or be prepared to buy one at a nearby restaurant.

**Note: There is a suggested donation of \$10.00** for adults, and **\$5.00** for students (free for children.)



# Demographics of Non-Belief by Alita Kelley

At one of HAGP's recent book discussions each person present was asked to tell of a personal experience relating to his or her current belief in and practice of Humanism. It ensued that most of the people there had belonged to a religious community in his or her childhood, and several had parents who either were god-fearing or paid lip service to one of the organized religions. Several of our members were actually raised "within a faith"

I was glad to find that I was not (as has almost always been the case in any secular group meeting I've attended) the only person present who was born of non-believers, but there were very few of us. During the discussion, the topic arose regarding the percentage of believers vs non-believers "in the population today" which numbers I immediately forgot. I do remember though, that the non-believers were very few indeed but nobody ever clarified which population we were talking about. Was it that of the U.S, the Western World or the Whole Globe?. After the discussion, as we headed for our customary restaurant ("never a meeting without drinking and eating") a few of us expressed astonishment at the figures quoted. and decided the person speaking must have been talking about the U.S, that couldn't be true of Europe!

Here are some different figures and if you want more information there's plenty on the Web!

**EUROPE** The results are vary varied among the 27 member countries of the European Union and not all the figures were arrived at the same way (some involved an informal poll and others a national census) The results however are: #1 Nonbelievers are the Estonians, then the Czechs and then the Swedes. While 95 % of the people in Malta said they believe in God. 80% of the Swedes said they didn't. In 2006 in a poll of 1006 Norwegians how could there be so many non believers if 85% of the population are members of the Norwegian state's official Lutheran church? Elementary my dear Humanists, Norwegians get signed into the church at birth. Many aren't aware of it and those who go to the trouble of formally getting out have masses of red tape to unravel.with no noticeable gain since apparently nobody cares. In a 2003 poll in France 33% said they were atheists, 14%agnostics and 26% indifferent and in another there were 32% atheists and 32% agnostics. In 2004 one poll had the U.K.40% unbelievrs, another had 35%.+21 uncertain. More women apparently believe than men and more young than old. Atheism was officially added to religion classes in schools in 2004 as part of the general curriculum. Spain had only 6% declared atheists in 2006 and 11% "non believers". Russia in 2002 had 32% (and of 58% Orthodox 42% had never been to church).

**CANADA** 19-30% described themselves as some sort of non believer.A 2001 census had 42.2% residents of Vancouver as without religious affiliation. A 2008 survey found 23% of Canadians didn't believe in a god.

**U.S.A.** 10% didn't believe in god in 2004. 2005 found only 5% . A 2001 poll had14.1% said they were without religion and 0.4% declared themselves atheists.

**MEXICO** Separation of church and state is guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution, but the majority of the population identifies as Roman Catholic (76.5%).

**ISRAEL** 20% of Israelis consider themselves "secular" but many maintain their religious practices for family or national reasons.

**JAPAN** Most of the population incorporate practices from multiple religions into their lives

**CHINA** 59% of the population claim to be non-religious.

**AUSTRALIA** 2006 census 18.7% /no religion/ or wrote humanism, atheist etc( 3.2% increase over 2001 11.2% didn't answer. 7.5% attend church.

**NEW ZEALAND** 2006 census 34.7% "no religion." 12.2% did not respond or objected to answering.

HAGP hosts  
four events a month  
*All are welcome!*

*First Saturday of each month:*

**Movie Night**  
New Location – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Community Room at the new  
Giant Superstore  
315 York Road  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

Movie night is a showing of independent films and documentaries, utilizing wide-screen projection, concerning the issues of Humanistic interest – followed by spirited a discussion. Topics such as human evolution, the occupation of Iraq, the media, religion and other world and political events.

*Second Saturday of each month:*

**Luncheon at the Olive Garden**  
2328 W. Moreland Road  
Willow Grove, PA

Informal lunches that allow members to interact outside the formal meetings and socialize with other Humanists.

*Third Saturday of each month:*

**Book Club at  
Barnes and Noble**  
102 Park Avenue  
Willow Grove, PA

The Book club is a joint event with **The Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia** [www.fsgp.org](http://www.fsgp.org). We discuss books relevant to values, issues, history, etc. These meetings are designed to build a stronger secular community, develop our thoughts more coherently, and embrace our history. Following the meeting, join us for food/drink/socializing at the Mandarin Garden.

*Last Sunday of each month:*

**Program Meeting**  
Upper Moreland Library  
109 Park Avenue  
Willow Grove, PA

Our monthly speakers cover a wide variety of subjects. This is an opportunity for group members to come together with each other; become educated on a topic by hearing from a speaker; or discuss issues and explore ideas. Following the meeting, join us for food/drink/socializing at the Mandarin Garden.  
**Note:** No program meetings in July or August

## Meet Fellow Humanists & Like-minded Freethinkers

### OCTOBER

**Sat., Oct. 4, 7pm:** HAGP Movie Night showing *Slacker Uprising*. This is the latest documentary by filmmaker Michael Moore.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Community Room at the Giant Superstore  
315 York Road  
Willow Grove, PA

**Thurs, Oct. 9, 7pm:** The Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia presents speaker Paul H. Robinson on *Shared Intuitions of Justice*.

Ludington Library (Basement)  
5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue  
Bryn Mawr, PA 19010

**Sat., Oct. 11, 12pm:** Informal Luncheon at the Olive Garden  
2328 W. Moreland Road  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

**Thurs. October 16, 7pm:** Atheist MeetUp: Casual conversation, meet other atheists. Join by visiting <http://atheists.meetup.com/215/>  
Cosi, 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Chestnut Street Philadelphia, PA

**Sat. Oct. 18, 7 pm:** Secular Book Club - Discussion of *The Age of American Unreason* by Susan Jacoby, author of *Freethinkers*.  
Barnes and Noble  
102 Park Avenue  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

**Sun. Oct. 26, 1:30pm:** HAGP Program Meeting presents Duncan Crary, the communications director of the Institute for Humanist Studies on *Humanist PR: Working with the Media to Portray Atheism as a Mainstream Worldview*  
Upper Moreland Library  
109 Park Ave  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

### NOVEMBER

**Sat., Nov. 1, 7pm:** HAGP Movie Night showing *I.O.U.S.A.*, a film about the rising debt in America.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Community Room at the Giant Superstore  
315 York Road  
Willow Grove, PA

**Sat., Nov. 8, 12pm:** Informal Luncheon at the Olive Garden  
2328 W. Moreland Road  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

**Sat. Nov. 15, 7 pm:** Secular Book Club - Discussion of *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* by Andrew Newberg, Eugene D'Aquili, and Vince Rause  
Barnes and Noble  
102 Park Avenue  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

**Thurs. Nov. 20, 7pm:** Atheist MeetUp: Casual conversation, meet other atheists. Join by visiting <http://atheists.meetup.com/215/>  
Cosi, 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Chestnut Street Philadelphia, PA

**Sat. Nov. 22, 11am-4pm:** HAGP hosts a Nonviolent Communication Workshop with Keith Pacheco. We'll break for an hour lunch at 1pm. Suggested donation of \$10.00/ adult, \$5.00/student (children free.)  
University of Pennsylvania  
Houston Hall Room 311, Griski Room  
3417 Spruce St  
Philadelphia, PA 19101

**Sun. Nov. 30, 1:30pm:** HAGP Program Meeting: Tim Ridge from the New Jersey Humanist Network gives a presentation about the late, great astronomer and author Carl Sagan.  
Upper Moreland Library  
109 Park Ave  
Willow Grove, PA 19090

## Humanist Celebrant Available

Martha Knox, Certified Humanist Celebrant, would like to remind you that she is available for all your life passage ceremonies, including weddings and commitment ceremonies, baby namings, coming-of-age celebrations, funerals/memorial services, and even divorce celebrations.

Discounts for HAGP members! Contact her at [celebrant@hagp.org](mailto:celebrant@hagp.org).



Keep in touch with humanism and freethought throughout the Delaware Valley – visit [www.phillycor.org](http://www.phillycor.org) and subscribe to the mailing list.



HAGP members who wish to post to the blog, email [webmaster@hagp.org](mailto:webmaster@hagp.org)

### Accepting Submissions for the December/January HAGP Newsletter

Simply email your submissions to Martha at [humanistmarf@gmail.com](mailto:humanistmarf@gmail.com), or if you don't have email, call Martha at 215-475-2573 and we'll work out another method.



Join the fun on Meetup! Go to <http://humanism.meetup.com/152/boards/> to sign up for HAGP's group and be updated on our ongoing events.



HAGP proudly supports Tabor Children's Services, Inc., a private nonprofit child welfare agency serving children, youth, young adults and families. Tabor Children's Services is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization that serves children and families in need in the southeastern Pennsylvania and nearby New Jersey areas.

To learn more about the important work of these dedicated people, check out their web site. [www.tabor.org](http://www.tabor.org)

## JOIN HAGP TODAY!

If you wish to become a member of HAGP, please print and fill out the form below, then mail it with a check for the appropriate amount to:

**Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia**  
P.O. Box 161  
Willow Grove, PA 19090-0161

Type of Membership \_\_\_\_\_

Check One: New Membership  Renewal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner: \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Types:

Individual- \$25.00  
Family - \$35.00  
Student/Limited Means - \$15.00  
Sustaining member - \$50.00  
Patron - \$100.00  
Sponsor - \$150.00  
Lifetime - \$250.00  
Benefactor - \$500.00  
Building Fund - \$1000.00