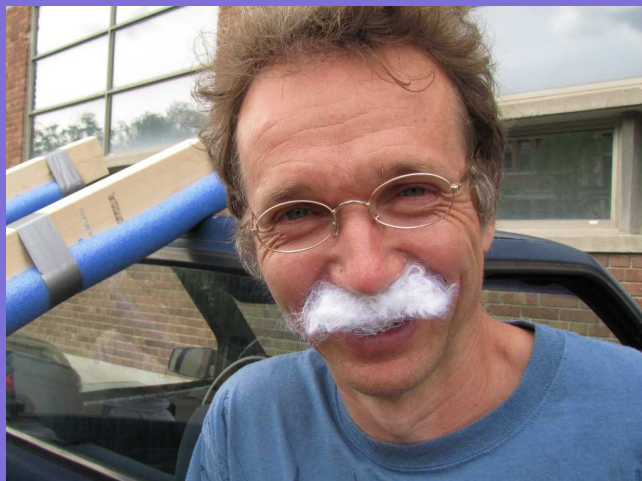


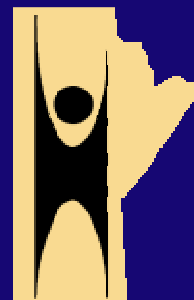
Manitoba Humanist



Our April Speaker, Joe Ackerman, PhD candidate in Biosystems Engineering

Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

“We are beyond belief”



www.mb.humanists.ca

APRIL MEETING – SPECIAL DATE!

Please note that our April meeting is on a different day.

It's on **Saturday, April 16th**, which is the 3rd Saturday of the month, rather than the 2nd.

We're still meeting at the Canad Inn Polo Park, at the usual time: Meet and Greet at 5:00 p.m., Meeting starts at 5:30 p.m.

Thanks for your understanding!

LET'S LEARN ABOUT LAKE WINNIPEG

We all know clean fresh water is essential for life. And we're fortunate to have plenty of sources close by, almost in our back yard, so to speak.

As one of those sources, Lake Winnipeg is important to us for several reasons, including tourism, recreation, commercial fishing and hydro electric power.

At our April meeting, we're pleased to have Joe Ackerman speak to us on Phosphorous and how it related to the health of Lake Winnipeg. Joe is a PhD candidate in Biosystems Engineering at the University of Manitoba.

He'll be addressing such questions as: Why is phosphorus a problem in Lake Winnipeg? How were things in the past and how have they changed? What's so bad about the current phosphorous situation? How difficult will be it be to change



April 22 – Earth Day

things? What is happening in the research and policy worlds?

The area of land that drains into our lakes, rivers and streams is called a watershed. As you can see below, the Lake Winnipeg watershed is enormous – the second largest in Canada. It stretches across parts of four provinces and four states. Which means any solutions are complicated by the variety of players and the numerous sources for pollution.



Source: Western Canada Wilderness Committee

Joe Ackerman's Bio:

Joe grew up in Winnipeg and has always been curious and keen to understand the world. Putting off "higher studies" until he really knew what he wanted to study, he enrolled at U of W for an environmental studies/chemistry degree in 1998 and has since completed a Masters and is now almost through a PhD in nutrient reclamation.

Along the way he has done some work with dragonflies, toxicology, the global commons, and energy efficient retrofitting. He considers himself a humanist (or at least a human) and holds self determination and human inter-connection as necessary contradictions in life. He has two children and lives in a mosquito friendly part of the city.

Come on out and join us for this interesting event!

THE COLD CITIES PROJECT - OUR MARCH MEETING

Last month, we met Dr. Andrew Woolford and

learned about his research project, which involves a look at social service agencies and the people they help.

With today's emphasis on risk management and accountability (known as neoliberalism), social agencies are taking on more of an entrepreneurial role, where they compete for dollars and programs. Increasingly, the work they do must be justified as saving money, or result in a cost benefit.

In short, Prof. Woolford's findings appear to indicate that this trend is not entirely positive. Helping agencies are tending to look at people not as individuals, but as someone who needs to fit into a "box". It's more difficult to see what each individual needs when your time also involves other duties such as completing forms, logging data and looking for grant money. And when it comes to criticism, it may be harder to be critical of the same government "partner" who provides your funding.

Ultimately, these changes may be creating a greater distance between the agency and the individuals they're trying to help, which means people may not be getting the help that they really need.

- Donna Harris

MY CONVERSATION WITH SHAHINA

Recently, the Millennium Library ran the Human Library Project. This event offered the public an opportunity to "borrow" a human book for up to 30 minutes. The intent was to give us a chance to get to know more than just someone's surface – but to ask them "so, what would YOU like to have people know about you?"

There were a variety of people: a druid, an Aboriginal person, a young black immigrant woman, a homeless person, someone with an addiction, etc. One of the "books" was Shahina Siddiqui, a Muslim woman and Executive Director with the Islamic Social Services Association of Manitoba.

I jumped at the chance and booked 30 minutes. If there had been someone else explicitly religious, I probably would have wanted to converse with them too. I've always wanted to sit down with a religious believer and just basically ask "Why? Why do you believe in a god when there is no evidence?"

I was over-prepared for our meeting. I googled her, and ended up with 2 pages of questions. I don't much like conflict, so my intent wasn't to slam her or her beliefs. I sincerely did want to learn more about her. So I started with general questions such as where were you born, do you have children or grandchildren, do you have any hobbies, do you have any pets.

What I found is that she's a delightful woman – warm, smart and funny. Since I didn't ask her permission to share our conversation publicly, I'll just say that we had some things in common, and I wish I'd had more time to talk with her.

I was just getting deeper into the harder, more focused questions, when our time was pretty much up, but I barrelled on! It was so interesting! When we talked about Islam and its tenets, I believe I glimpsed that religious blind spot that I think all intelligent believers must live with. There must be a cognitive dissonance that allows them to maintain belief, and even more deeply cement their faith.

For example, she and her family went on Hajj to Mecca in 2005, and it was such a moving experience for her that she deeply wanted to go again, but had no plans. The next year, out of the blue, she received an invitation from the Saudi government at the last minute. The sceptical mind would chalk it up to a coincidence, but for her, it only meant that her prayers were answered.

Alas, our time was up. I had actually kept her overtime. I didn't even get to tell her that I was a humanist and atheist. I feel guilty that her next "borrowers" didn't barge right in and demand their time. I probably owe some overdue fines! But it was fascinating and well worth it.

I do hope the library brings the event back last year, as it was a great opportunity to find out

more about someone who you normally might not cross paths with.

- Donna Harris

READING AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

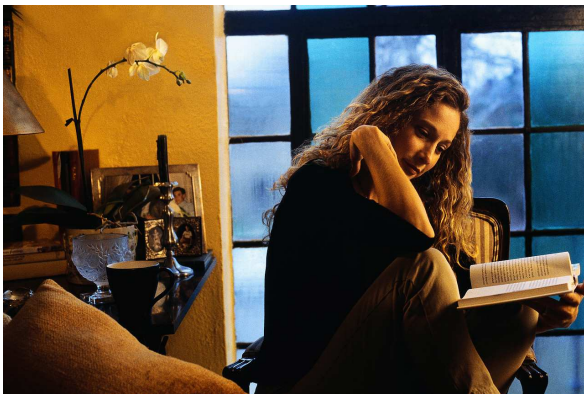
Recently, I took on the job of librarian for HAM and despite wondering where I am going to store all these books, I have to say I am pretty excited to have all this new reading material in my house. I have always loved to read and in fact I can remember the exact moment when my "reading light" turned on. I could hardly wait to get home to tell my mom and she was excited for me too. Little did she know, she would be spending a lot of time looking for me over the next dozen years, as I was often found hiding from household chores with a book in my hand. This love of books has followed me into my adult life and I usually have many books on the go. I particularly love Canadian literature, some of my favourite authors include Alice Munro, Margaret Lawrence, Robertson Davies, and Carol Shields. I often read and reread my copies of their books with comfort and the pleasure of being with an old friend.

My journey to humanism and freethought began with a book. One day, while wandering around the house, bored, with nothing new to read, I decided to investigate the books on my husband's shelves. I happened to pick up his copy of "Wonderful Life" by Stephen Jay Gould. I was hooked within a few pages. The late Stephen Jay Gould was an evolutionary biologist and incredibly gifted popular science writer. He was able to write books about science that were accessible to the average person like me who thought that science was not particularly interesting. Boy, was I wrong!

The book "Wonderful Life" is about the amazing fossil discoveries in the Burgess Shale in British Columbia. These fossils date from the time of the Cambrian explosion, about 500 million years ago, a period marked by the relatively sudden appearance of a huge variety of life. One particular fossil that was discussed in the book was a tiny creature named Pikaia. This fossil is one of the first known examples of a chordate,

the phylum that humans and all other vertebrates belong to. While this classification is not established beyond all doubt, and it is impossible to know if it is one of our direct ancestors, what it did illustrate to me, given the numbers of different life forms that existed in the Cambrian that left no descendants, what incredible good fortune we have had to exist at all. Gould's idea that if we were to rewind the tape of life and replay it, the likelihood of humans existing at all would be very small, was one that captivated my interest and sparked a whole new direction in my reading. The concept that human life being the result of a series of happy accidents culminating in us, these big-brained creatures gifted with our abilities to think, plan, dream, create and experience our lives in meaningful ways made me appreciate all the more, my own opportunity and good fortune to live this life.

One of the other ideas that Stephen Jay Gould is well known for is his idea that religion and science are non-overlapping majesteria. This is often interpreted as meaning that science is useful for answering "how" questions and religion is useful for answering questions of morality and how we should live our lives. Gould, an agnostic himself, could see no inherent conflict between the two. Here I have to disagree with him.



I have taken for granted, living in a free, mostly secular society like Canada, that I can read and explore any idea that piques my interest. My journey of discovery, as I sought out all I could read on science, religion, history, and philosophy was unhampered by censorship or blasphemy laws. The fact that I am a literate

woman is not shared by the majority of women around the world. Religion has been responsible in many ways, for limiting people's access to information and dissenting ideas.

Of course, I realize that oppressive governments that limit their citizens' access to information are not limited only to theocracies. There are many reasons other than adherence to religious dogma why a government would try to control its population in this way, but I do not think that anyone can deny the role that religion plays in this around the world. Even in a free country like ours, many fundamentalist religions seek to control their adherents by discouraging them from reading anything outside the list of approved books or authors. Many self-censor the ideas they are exposed to out of fear of opening themselves to the devil and sin. Religion is at centre of the controversy over teaching of evolution and creationism in schools, at the same time fundamentalists home-school their children with the hope that keeping the outside world from influencing them it will keep them in the faith.

Yet despite all of these negative efforts of the religious to keep people from forming their own opinions, I am increasingly hopeful that the power of the written word will win in the end. People have more and more access to new ideas as the the internet has become accessible around the world. The communication technologies that exist have enormous potential for freeing those still shackled by religious ideology. And I will continue to experience the pleasure of losing myself and finding the world in books.

- Diana Goods

THE INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM

I'm just like many other native Winnipeggers. I'll regularly complain about our weather (too cold, too much snow), or our bugs (dang mosquitoes).

But underneath, there really aren't too many other places I'd rather live. Especially when I think of all the things I'm grateful for by being

fortunate enough to be born and live in Canada.

I recently came across a report on-line that confirms my beliefs.

Published by The Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal, it is a series of ten economic measurements, with the aim of measuring the degree of economic freedom in the World's nations. (www.heritage.org/index)

On the 2011 Index, Canada placed 6th in the world, up slightly from last year.

So, how do they define economic freedom?

According to the study: "economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please, with that freedom both protected by the state and unconstrained by the state. In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself."

The study measures ten components of economic freedom, assigning a grade in each using a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 represents the maximum freedom. The ten component scores are then averaged to give an overall economic freedom score for each country. The ten components of economic freedom are:

Business Freedom, Trade Freedom, Fiscal Freedom, Government Spending, Monetary Freedom, Investment Freedom, Financial Freedom, Property rights, Freedom from Corruption and Labor Freedom.

Please go ahead and log in and check out the report for yourself. It makes for fascinating reading.

- Donna Harris

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 16, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Time: Meet & Greet 5:00 pm

Meeting 5:30 pm

Speaker/Topic: Joe Ackerman, Lake Winnipeg and Phosphorus

Saturday, May 9, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Speaker/Topic: John Hutton, John Howard Society

Friday, June 17th through Sunday, June 26th

Red River Exhibition

HAM and Winnipeg Skeptics' Escape to Reality!

Location: Booth, Exhibition Place

Come on out and visit us!!!!

NOTE: We're still very interested in donations to support the booth. Remember, we we appreciate your time and/or your money! Thank you.

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mb.humanists.ca



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New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

* After July 1st, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31st, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

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Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

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*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

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Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

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Please make cheque or money order payable to:
Humanist Association of Manitoba and mail to:
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,
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Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.