

# Manitoba Humanist



"No winter lasts forever, no spring skips its turn."  
- Hal Borland

Happy Winter Solstice!

Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

*"We are beyond belief"*



[www.mb.humanists.ca](http://www.mb.humanists.ca)

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME!**

To all members of HAM:

Just a reminder that all memberships will expire as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. In order to remain a member in good standing, with the right to vote in the upcoming Executive elections, you do need to ensure that your membership is renewed before then.

Membership dues have remained the same for a few years, but we've found it necessary to raise them by just \$5 this coming year.

Dues for limited income households remain the same, but individual and household memberships have each increased by \$5, to \$30 and \$50 respectively.

You'll be receiving reminders and forms from our Treasurer,

Helen, in the mail shortly.

And... if you've considered joining our group but haven't gotten around to it yet, this is the perfect time to send in your membership form!

## **DONATIONS ARE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!**

Just a reminder that tax deductible donation receipts are issued for donations to HAM. Soon it will be time to file 2011 tax returns, and your donation receipts will help to reduce your tax payable.

But most of all, you will assist in putting HAM in a position to consider activities for which we have not had money, such as maybe a bus advertising campaign. This is just one

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

All of our upcoming events can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.



Happy Holidays!

idea that the executive has wished we could consider.

Please send your donations for 2011 to HAM, 7 Pinehurst Lane, Mitchell, MB R5G 2J3.

## **JANUARY ELECTIONS**

As always, at our Annual General Meeting in January, HAM holds elections for places on the Executive Committee.

This is where you, the members, get to participate by voting people into various positions. Not all positions are up (they are 2 year posts).

If you think you fit any position or know someone who does, please notify any of the current execs. To qualify as a candidate, you must be a paid-up member for at least the previous 6 months.

Open positions this year are Secretary and Treasurer, or you can simply be a Member at Large.

- Donna Harris

## **NOVEMBER MEETING REPORT**

Our special guest at our November meeting was J. Anderson Thomson, Jr., MD, Trustee and CFO for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. First, we watched his video, then Dr. Thomson joined us for a Q&A session via Skype.

We watched Prof. Thomson's video, *Why We Believe in Gods*, in which he speaks about the scientific basis for why we have religious, or god, beliefs. What he largely focused on was emphasizing our brain wiring – the neural circuits in our brains.

If you weren't able to attend the meeting, you can find the video on Youtube. Just search for Andy Thomson, *Why We Believe in Gods*.

As a follow-up, Thomson has written a book on

the topic: "*Why We Believe in God(s): A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith*". In the book, he talks about other factors that contribute to those god beliefs, such as our attachment system (the mother-child bond) and our tendency to attribute events, such as a slamming door, for example, to an agency of some sort (also known as our Hyperactive Agency Detection Device).

The book also discusses the role of ritual in religion. It's no surprise that many religious experiences include the elements of song, dance and trance. These activities (just like another evolutionary development, our penchant for foods heavy in salt, fat or sugar), cause the pleasure centres in our brain to release neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin, which give us a wave of pleasure that ensures that we want to repeat the experience. Mix these with deep emotions and possible sleep deprivation (think of religious revivals where people dance and sing for hours), and you have a potent combination.

Think these topics sound interesting? You'll have to read Dr. Thomson's book. We JUST happen to have a copy to give away at our Solstice Party, so don't miss it!

We are grateful to have Dr. Thomson take the time to speak to our group, all the way from Virginia, USA. And it was a special treat that our "high tech" video conferencing worked so well. It certainly upped the "wow" factor for many of us.

Special thanks also to Jeff Olsson, for arranging the event with Professor Thomson.

## **OUR WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY!**

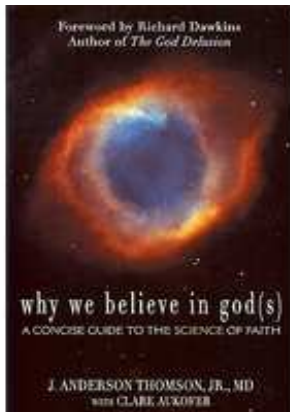
Mark Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup> on your calendar, and plan to join us at our annual Winter Solstice Party.

This year, we're gathering at Affinity Vegetarian Restaurant, located downtown at 208 Edmonton Street.

The party gets started at around 5:30 pm.

Around 6:00 or so, we'll order dinner individually from the Affinity's delicious menu. Check out their offerings at [affinitygarden.com](http://affinitygarden.com). The restaurant has some delicious sounding dishes.

Be prepared for a good meal, good conversation, and some laughs. There will be games and prizes, never fear! One of our door prizes will definitely be a copy of Andy Thomson's book, *Why We Believe in God(s)*, autographed by the author himself!



## **SOS!**

S.O.S, Secular Organizations for Sobriety, or Save Our Selves, is a group dedicated to helping those who wish to achieve and maintain their sobriety. They are non-profit and have many groups that meet in many cities around the world.

S.O.S. was first organized by Jim Christopher in California in 1985 and offers an addictions support group that is an alternative to traditional support groups. S.O.S. takes a self empowerment approach to recovery and maintains that sobriety is a separate issue from everything else.

In S.O.S., sobriety (abstinence) is "priority one, no matter what!" Ultimately the individual is credited and responsible for achieving and maintaining his or her own sobriety. All paths to sobriety are respected and S.O.S. is not opposed to or competing with any other recovery programs.

A Winnipeg S.O.S. group has recently started up and has been meeting once a week. The group AHA!! (All However Addicted) follows the principles of S.O.S. The group and methods of achieving sobriety aren't structured in any one way; the focus is really on the individual to find their own path to sobriety.

AHA!! Is a non-religious, secular group, but welcomes individuals from all walks of life. The only prerequisite is for a member to sincerely want to become sober. AHA!! Is non-profit and does not accept any outside support, it is self-supported through member contributions.

The Winnipeg AHA!! group currently meets weekly at the Millennium Library. For more info please contact John Hansen Ph/txt:204-0349 or Email:[johngansen\(at\) @ hotmail.com](mailto:johngansen@hotmail.com)

– John Hansen

## **DEAR LIBERAL CHRISTIANS**

You are my friends, family members and co-workers. I've been trying to have a conversation with you about a subject that is important to us for quite a while now, and frankly, I feel like we're not getting anywhere. I have so many questions that I'd like answered and I'm getting a little discouraged that we're not making any progress. I'm getting a little tired of feeling like I've committed a social faux pas when I try to talk about this with you in person. I see how you avert your eyes and change the subject when I bring this up, so I'm going to try writing some of my thoughts down and see if that will help clarify the situation.

First of all, I would really like to know what you believe and why you believe it. You seem to have a lot of respect for the Bible as the source of your beliefs, yet it is not clear to me why this is so. Is it inerrant, inspired or simply a guide for good living? You tell me that God is love and the main message is to follow the Golden Rule, but I have to say, when I read what's in the Bible, that is not the overwhelming theme that jumps out at me.

Are we talking about the same book? Have you read it? If you have read it, how do you reconcile all the nasty things commanded and done by your God and still defend him as a God of love? Did you not notice that God condones slavery and that Jesus never bothered to change this? OK, maybe you were not aware of the whole slavery thing, as I know it is one that liberal ministers sometimes neglect to mention, so let's talk about a story I know you're familiar with.

What do you really think about the Noah's Ark story? Do you think that God drowning everyone, babies and puppies included, was a loving thing to do? Wouldn't you say it was a bit over the top? And if it didn't really happen, as some liberal Christians believe, then what is the point of the story anyway?

Let's talk about something else for a moment. I'm pretty sure that you accept that evolution is a fact and that we share a common ancestor with all other living things. I also assume that you know that humans are not the first hominids in our line. So I'd like to know at what point exactly did God decide we were human enough to be responsible for our moral choices and what is the fate of all our pre-human ancestors, or for that matter anyone who lived before the time of Jesus? Are Lucy, the Australopithecus and Otzi the Iceman in Heaven or Hell? Is there a third option?

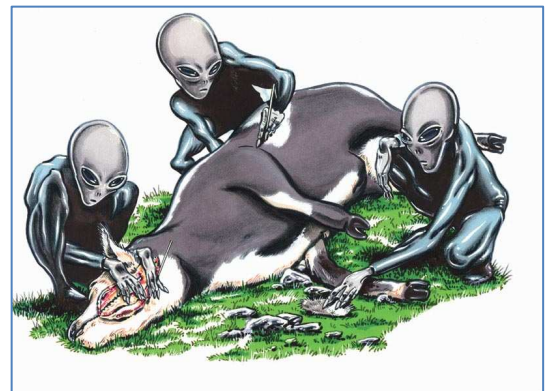
Which bring me to another question. I don't know for sure whether or not you believe in a literal Heaven or Hell, but I'm pretty sure you believe in some kind of afterlife for those who believe in Jesus, whatever form it takes. So please explain to me exactly how this works. I know that when I die, my body will cease to function. We know from science that my mind is dependant on my brain functioning properly. Given that all that I am appears to reside in my brain, my thoughts, experiences and memories, what part would be left to continue on when my brain no longer functions? You tell me that my soul will still exist, but what evidence do you have that such a thing even exists? What is a soul?

Finally, I'd like to talk about our values. I know

from our conversations and from the way you live your life that you and I value similar things. You believe in fairness, equality, justice and freedom. I know that were we marching together on the issue of equality for homosexuals, for example, we'd probably be on the same side. If asked, you would probably cite your religious beliefs as one of the reasons for standing up for equality for this cause. Maybe you would cite the Golden Rule or be able to quote some Bible verse to support your stance, but haven't you noticed that the people on the other side, the ones holding placards that read "God Hates Fags" are quoting from the same book that you are? They are just as convinced that they are doing what God wants as you are. What do you think about that?

Sincerely, Your Atheist, Humanist Friend

- Diana Goods



## **ODE TO CATTLE MUTILATORS**

When the stars are ablaze and dazzle our gaze  
On those evenings so crystalline clear  
If you're lucky – or not – to be in the right spot  
You may stumble on something quite queer  
For on the broad chaparral like sous chefs from hell  
The ETs descend to procure  
Great samples of steak and leave in their wake  
A carnage that's hard to endure

With surgical precision they make each incision  
Upon our bovines quite dead

But to see fascination in cow desecration  
Is exceedingly hard on one's head  
I mean over and over while crouched in the  
clover  
They snip and they cut like a thief  
Livers, and slivers from old Clarabelle  
But what need for those mountains of beef?  
All of the specimens – thousands by now  
Of this one unremarkable kind  
You'd think that the thrill would have gone with  
the chill  
Of that first night with Bossy entwined

Which leads one to ponder whether those from  
out yonder  
Aren't all their cracked up to be  
Though they might flash through space  
In a time twisting race  
From their part of our shared galaxy  
It seems while they're tracking our missiles  
they're lacking  
In science quite simple and crude  
A bucket of ice, to be more precise  
Though to say so, I'm told, is quite rude

Yes they find us with chips that they ram up our  
noses  
And float us away by the tips of our toeses  
Yet with cold cuts turned fungus  
Those hidden among us are driven to pastures  
at night  
To slice yet again poor Ferdinand's friends  
And give humans a terrible fright

Well I have a suggestion to aid our digestion  
And to mollify all of our fears  
Guys, come back later, this refrigerator  
Should be good for the next twenty years

Just a small gift to patch over the rift  
It's a Kenmore large size and frost free  
It will keep your cow sushi from going all moo-  
shee  
Back home in your laboratory

- Ian Monteith

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Saturday, December 10, 2011**

### **Solstice Party**

Location: Affinity Vegetarian Restaurant, 208  
Edmonton Street

Time: 5:30 p.m. until 9 pm?

Dinner: Order individually from the Affinity  
Restaurant menu

**Saturday, January 21, 2012**

Annual General Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: August Berkshire

**Saturday, February 11, 2012**

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: TBA

**Saturday, March 10, 2012**

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: TBA

**Executive:**

**Jeff Olsson, President**  
**Donna Harris, Vice President**  
**Helen Friesen, Treasurer**  
**Heather McDonell, Secretary**

**Members at Large:**

**Greg Christensen**  
**Myrna Donald**  
**Diana Goods**  
**Barry Hammond**  
**Allison Nelson**  
**Jake Peters**  
**Grant Rogerson**  
**Sophie Shulman**

Newsletter Editor:

Donna L. Harris  
ham\_librarian@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

[mb.humanists.ca](http://mb.humanists.ca)



Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member       Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership      \$30.00
- Individual Limited Income      \$10.00
- Household Membership\*      \$50.00
- Household Limited Income      \$15.00

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

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone#: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell #: \_\_\_\_\_

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

\*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:

- \$10     \$20     \$30     \$50     \$100
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

PAYMENT:     Cheque       Money Order  
                   Visa         Mastercard     Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque or money order payable to:  
**Humanist Association of Manitoba** and mail to:  
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,  
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.