

First Coast

# FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

April 2005

Volume 3, Issue 4

## Humanists of Florida Leadership Conference

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The January retreat in Orlando for leaders of the Humanist of Florida Association (HFA) was excellent. Specialists presented 22 one-hour sessions on various topics related to improving the services of the organization. Topics included leadership, lobbying, campus groups, fundraising, managing volunteers, using the media, talking to strangers and telling them what humanism is, and similar content.

Some sessions were so good they should be presented to our chapter. One was how to write a letter so it is likely to be printed in the local newspaper, another session was how to recruit members. The one on lobbying was presented by a woman who

has been pushing full time for several years for the Florida legislature to pass an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); she showed how persistence, good research, and presentation are essential.

Socializing was equally important as it allowed the sharing of ideas, with incidental information that was invaluable. The contributions of people with their wide knowledge about many subjects showed talents which can contribute to carrying out plans; the quality of the attendees was suggested by at least six persons having doctorates in their varied fields.

The planning of Carl Sagan Academy, a public charter school with a humanist curriculum, has

taken two years and is supposed to open later this year. The two developers have provided more detail and sophistication than many other applications approved in Florida. If this academy is successful, two more charter schools will be developed.

Furthermore, the HFA is developing humanist centers to provide various services to their communities. Five colleges have humanist chapters, but they are sometimes unstable because their officers often graduate without leaving replacements, so HFA is developing a plan to train successors.

Outreach, publicity, and progressive social activism are planned. A humanist center in Miami is

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*"By maintaining the separation of church and state, the United States has avoided the intolerance which has so divided the rest of the world with religious wars."*

Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz) U.S. Senate Address, September 16, 1981

### April Meeting

Guest speaker:

**Dr. Jerry Lieberman, President, Humanists of Florida Association**

"Let's Make Humanism Matter: Pathways for humanists to gain greater acceptance and influence in our society."

**Monday, April 11, from 6:30 to 8:30 pm**

Unitarian Universalist Church

7405 Arlington Expressway - in the sanctuary

## President's Message

### Find your own moral compass

I used to work with a young girl who was raised a Jain. Jains believe that they should never cause harm to another living thing. Jain monks and nuns in India wear masks across their noses and mouths to make sure they don't inhale a small insect and cause its death. They are also vegetarians. My friend no longer believed in the Jain religion. As a teenager she came to the conclusion that she didn't believe in any religion at all. At 23, this woman uttered one of the most simple and profound statements about religion that I have ever heard. She said, "religion is what people do to keep from going crazy."

Even though she had become an atheist, she still was a vegetarian. While the religion died in her, the ethical argument

remained. She developed her own moral compass to direct the course of her life, because she no longer had religion to do it for her.

In our little group, I often get requests from members not to publish their names in our newsletter or to call them at work for fear that family, friends or coworkers may discover their true beliefs. I have the same fears myself. I have often allowed someone to believe I am a Christian so that they don't think badly of me. Being an atheist in Jacksonville is close to being the antichrist. To many Christians, it is the same thing.

Now that I have become President of the FCFS, I can no longer keep my atheism a secret and I have to face my fears and be open about my beliefs. It is

simply another step in the process of deciding to be an atheist. These decisions are difficult and many of us choose to keep our atheism or agnosticism a secret. It is a perfectly reasonable response to a rabidly religious society. It is also tragic, because I believe that living as an atheist or agnostic is a brave and noble choice. It is making the commitment to find one's own moral compass - to take the time to think about each moral choice rather than following a self-styled prophet's command. It forces the conclusion that no greater being is causing the evil in this world or will save us from it.

We no longer have God to keep us from going crazy. We must do it ourselves.



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## First Coast Freethinker

The *First Coast Freethinker* is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and obtain information from many sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

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We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the end of the second week of the month for the following month. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Web site submissions: Carrie Renwick, carrieren@att.net.

## The Proper Role of Education

By Curtis Wolf

On February 20th, an article by Matt Crenson titled, "Children caught in the crossfire of culture wars" appeared in the *Florida Times-Union*. In the article, the reporter wrote that "in America's culture wars, school children are on the front lines." The battles fought on the front lines involve what school children are taught about science, sex, and religion.

What is the proper role of the educator in teaching about these and many other subjects? I believe that the teacher should teach the consensus of experts in the academic subject area. If there is no consensus on a specific controversy within the subject area, then the prevailing theories should be presented. What should not be presented is the teacher's pet theory masquerading as the final word on the subject. This does not mean that the teacher cannot present his or her point of view. But if it is not the scholarly consensus on the controversy, the teacher should clearly identify it as his or her own personal belief and be honest enough to acknowledge that it is outside of the mainstream. To do otherwise is intellectual hubris.

Does this mean that students should be spoon fed the

prevailing wisdom without questioning its supporting premises? I believe in critical thinking. No student should ever be taught to accept without question anything on the basis of authority and sacred dogma. This violates one of the basic axioms of freethought: That all knowledge should be tested by evidence and reason.

However, it is important that teachers and students understand that before they can question conclusions reached by experts in an academic field, their criticisms must rise to the sophistication of the arguments and evidence used to justify these conclusions. Experts spend several years of their lives seeking PhDs and then spend even more years in their fields doing research and publishing their findings which are then probed for weaknesses by their peers in the field. Hopefully, these findings will help lead to a consensus among the experts. Otherwise, more research is needed. This amount of effort should not be taken lightly.

We must understand that critical thinking requires sufficient knowledge before it can come to valid conclusions. It was absurd for the Cobb County school board to put stickers on science textbooks which supposedly call for critical thinking and open minds. Most students do not have adequate

knowledge of biology or the scientific method to make sound assessments of the theory of evolution. It is doubtful that the limited time given to evolution in high school will be sufficient for students to properly evaluate the evidence for or against evolution.

Instead of dismissing the conclusions of experts when these conclusions do not fit into their belief systems, teachers and students should be encouraged to get their own PhDs and do the kind of research that changes the minds of the experts concerning a particular idea. Only when they convince the experts that their conclusions are wrong and that a new consensus is needed should this new consensus reach the classroom.

The failure to do this is why many biologists are furious with Intelligent Design proponents. As noted in the *T-U* article, even Discovery Institute's John West recognizes the wisdom of proving Intelligent Design before teaching it in public schools.

Human knowledge is not a popularity contest. What is taught in public schools should be based on the conclusion of experts whose hard work in an academic field should be recognized by teachers and students no matter how much they personally disagree with them.



### First Coast Freethought Society 2005 Events

April	11- Monthly meeting	17- Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale
May	9 - Monthly meeting	15- Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale
June	13- Monthly meeting	19- Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale

## My (Brief) Life in the Bush of Scientologists (or Lessons on the Road to Freethinking)

By Fred W. Hill

The night they put their sights on me, I made a great target. It was 1984, when I was 21 and had recently dropped out of San Jose State University due to a deepening depression, crippling social anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and confusion as to what to do with my life. It had been another grueling day at my dead-end job at the Brothers' Pizza Galley, and I was relaxing in the small apartment I shared with my alcoholic mother, when I heard the knock on the door. I opened the door to find two nicely dressed young men whom I had never seen before standing in front of me.

They asked if they could just take a few minutes of my time to tell me about a questionnaire that they were passing out. "Well, sure," I warily but politely responded. They handed me some papers which as they explained contained questions designed to elicit responses from which a unique personality profile could be made. I could answer the questions at my leisure, and then call the number provided for information on how to receive a free evaluation. Admittedly I was very intrigued and it didn't seem that I had anything to lose. So I agreed. Unbeknownst to me, I had just had my first encounter with Scientologists.

Before then, I had never heard of either Scientology or of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard. So when I visited their building for

the evaluation, the name of the organization meant nothing to me. Oh, yes, as it was explained to me by a pleasant female evaluator, this is a group dedicated to helping people better their lives through "proven scientific methods" which will enable them to overcome negative mental blocks that prevent them from achieving their full potential. It wasn't exactly news to me when she explained to me that my profile indicated I had several psychological handicaps that were obviously weighing me down. We can help you, she assured me, through the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard, all outlined in his book, *Dianetics*, which, she insisted, I urgently needed to read. But if I really wanted to improve my life, I needed to sign up for the courses of study in Dianetics offered at this branch of Scientology. At this point they were emphasizing the "science" of Hubbard's teachings and making no reference to its religious aspects yet. Somehow, it all seemed very reasonable to me. I knew I was going nowhere in my current situation and wanted to change. I wanted to overcome my shyness, to make more friends, to find love. Scientology seemed a means to this end. I got out my checkbook and spent about three hundred dollars on books and courses. I was vulnerable, I had some extra cash and they were reeling me in with finesse.

And so for the next two months I attended the course,

four hours a night, one day a week. It was a friendly atmosphere and I got to know a very attractive young woman and actually worked up the nerve to ask her to go out with me to a concert – the first time I'd ever asked any woman out on anything even resembling a date. Yes, I had been that shy as a teenager. Shockingly, she agreed to go with me. I was elated. And the instructors told me that I exhibited great potential and thought I'd be ideal for a job with the group as their Communications Officer. Very flattering! The prospect of taking the job filled me with some anxiety but I thought at the least I would give it a try, since it was a great opportunity that would at least look better on a resume than "cook" if I ever hoped to find better job prospects. Yes, things seemed to be looking up for me.

Even so, there were aspects that troubled me. I was irritated by constant efforts to get me to buy more books and very expensive tapes of L. Ron Hubbard's lecture series and pay high fees for more classes. Do they think I'm made out of money, I wondered. Moreover, I discovered that my primary task as Communications Officer was to pester other members of the church to write letters to potential recruits, to get more fresh blood in. Every day I had to ensure more letters went out than the day before. I had to meet ever rising quotas. I quickly came to hate it. I was

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## Happy Second Birthday to the Freethinker!

The first issue of the First Coast Freethought Society's *Freethinker*

appeared two years ago this month. A status report is due.

Circulation is about 70 mailed copies, and 200-plus copies sent by e-mail. Cost is about \$53 for printing eight pages plus \$26 for postage. The maximum size currently is 12 pages because six sheets of letter size will go for one 37 cent stamp.


Recent copies contain eight pages because this can be produced more easily. In this limit several required items appear: title, meetings and other announcements, calendar, photographs and graphics, membership application, book discussion, information about the

organization and its officers, and a half page for addresses, return address, and stamp. This takes about three pages.

Five pages are available for *Freethinker* readership to be informed. They can make judgments if given enough information. Some articles look back in time but most deal with the present. The purpose is to find content which is pertinent to freethinkers who have wide interests. It should be non-partisan, relevant, informative, helpful, thoughtful, important, accurate, different from the current topics on television and radio and in newspapers. Should Islam be a subject? We all need to know something about this religion, but maybe other topics are more

important. Needless to say, the staff has diverse views and has to compromise on content.

Newsletter items are often based on published articles because they provide data but which require attribution. Contents are squeezed to fit the allotted space. The language is grammatical, evocative, revised, correct. There is always room for improvement and comments are welcome. Writers are welcome to submit materials. The text is proof read by several people but errors do appear.

When the newsletter finally goes in the mail and through the Internet each month, the staff gives a sigh of relief and thinks, "We did the best we could." 

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## The Humanist Ten Commandments

These "commandments" did not come from the top of a mountain, but they represent human reason at its best.

1. THOU SHALT NOT BELIEVE ALL THOU ART TOLD.
2. THOU SHALT CONSTANTLY SEEK KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH.
3. THOU SHALT EDUCATE THY FELLOW MAN IN THE LAWS OF SCIENCE.
4. THOU SHALT NOT FORGET THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF GOD.
5. THOU SHALT LEAVE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.
6. THOU SHALT LIVE IN PEACE WITH THY FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS.
7. THOU SHALT LIVE THIS ONE LIFE THY HAVE TO ITS FULLEST.
8. THOU SHALT FOLLOW A PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS.
9. THOU SHALT MAINTAIN A STRICT SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE.
10. THOU SHALT SUPPORT OTHERS WHO FOLLOW THESE COMMANDMENTS.



### **Humanists of Florida Leadership Conference**

*(Continued from page 1)*

under development. All these activities are given in more detail in the Five-Year Strategic Plan (2003-08). Some two dozen News Alerts have been issued about activities. Many of the outreach social activities will be carried out in partnership with other organizations that share humanist values. A statewide Internet communication system is under development.

A plenary session at the end of the conference allowed solicitation of ideas, which are now being collated, for improving the organization. Another goal is to identify characteristics of the tenth of the 1.6 million Floridians with college degrees, identify characteristics of 10,000 of them, and recruit 3,000 as paid members. Also, a plan is underway to contact reporters in the ten largest media outlets who may be interested in reporting on humanist activities and to cultivate their cooperation.

The long-range planning, organization, and the quality of participants and chapter members suggest a very promising future. Florida is one of the most innovative states. For more details about the above highlights, [www.FloridaHumanist.org](http://www.FloridaHumanist.org) offers many publications to be downloaded.

Executive Director Jennifer Hancock can be reached at [jen@FloridaHumanist.org](mailto:jen@FloridaHumanist.org).



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### **My (Brief) Life in the Bush of Scientologists**

*(Continued from page 4)*

also growing increasingly suspicious of how they all seemed to think that L. Ron Hubbard had the answers to everything. And I noticed that despite all the vaunted claims for how Scientology would make us all better, happier people, several decades-long Scientology adherents I came to know didn't seem all that much happier or well-adjusted than neophytes or "gentiles" as Scientology called new converts.

Everything came to a head on the day I got my first paycheck. It was much smaller than I had anticipated for all the hours I had put in. I protested, stating I could not live on such meager pay, that I had car payments, rent and other bills to pay. I was reminded that Scientology is a religious organization and could not afford to pay much (oh, but I silently countered, too polite to say it out loud, that all those exorbitant prices for the books, tapes and classes must be going to help L. Ron Hubbard live like a king with his mansions, yachts and fancy cars). You should sell your car, they suggested, move in with other Scientologists and become closer with the group.

Externally, I acquiesced; internally, I stewed. The fog was lifting. They were trying to suck me in completely, to render me economically and emotionally dependent on them. Yes, don't worry about life, L. Ron has already done the hard thinking for you, you just have to pay for the honor of receiving gradual glimpses of his oh so benevolent insights.

As of yet, I was not familiar with the term "freethinker", but still I disliked this obvious attempt to reign in my thinking. I may have been looking for some sort of guidance, but I loathed overbearing authority. Despite my terrible youthful naivety and self-doubts, I was no longer fooled into believing that Scientology had anything at all to do with real science. At last, I was ready to take the hook out of my mouth and swim free.

However, I feared confrontation. I didn't want to argue with them. I didn't want to discuss why I wanted to leave. I just wanted to leave. And so I told them I was going out for lunch, drove off and never went back. Conveniently, my mother and I left our old apartment that same week to move in with her new husband. Later, I found out members of the church did go to the apartment looking for me, but they never found my forwarding address.

Since then, I learned much more about Mr. Hubbard and his adherents, enough to become convinced that Hubbard was a greedy, manipulative megalomaniac who cynically contrived Scientology for no other purpose than to make himself fabulously wealthy and obtain a flock of potentially dangerous sycophants to sing his praises, feed his ego and do anything to silence any critics. In 1984, I was not quite yet the avowed freethinker that I am now, but I was at least far enough along to break free of L. Ron's sick but growing cult without having incurred too much damage.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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2005 Membership application



<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Home address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip Code</b>
<b>E-mail address</b>	<b>Home phone</b>	<b>Business phone</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Areas of interest and/or expertise</b>		

**How did you hear about us?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership level (please select one):**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (\$15/yr.)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000)           |

**I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):**

- General member     Committee member     Officer     Financial supporter

**Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, which is only distributed to other members? YES**

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the non-religious population of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, to provide a place for agnostics, rationalists, atheists, skeptics and other freethinkers.

**Meetings**

The FCFS meets the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133 Meeting time: from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

## Humanist Book Discussion Group



*When:* 2:00 p.m., third Sunday of each month

*Where:* Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd.  
519-6500, Books are usually in stock.

*What:* Books planned for discussion:

- **April 17**- *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* by Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan
- **May 15** - *The Fundamentals of Extremism* by Kimberly Blaker, Ed.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Cross at 996-1553

## Project Update - *FREE INQUIRY* - Now in More Libraries!

Thanks to the efforts of project coordinator, Wilhelmina Walton, and the generous support of First Coast Freethought Society members, a five-year subscription to the *Free Inquiry* magazine has been donated to each of Jacksonville's six new public libraries as well as to the libraries at JU and UNF. You may recall that in 2003 we donated one to each of Jacksonville's 15 then-existing public libraries. FCFTS - spreading the word for rational thought!

## TELEPHONE COMMITTEE



Be advised, effective this month, the telephone committee will **no longer** be calling email-less folks with meeting reminders. If you see any activities you would like to attend, **I encourage you to mark your calendar** so you do not forget! If, on the other hand, you feel that telephone reminders are important, someone needs to come forth and volunteer to chair the Telephone Committee. (Let Susan know - her number is listed elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Return service requested

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