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December 2014

Volume 13, Issue 12

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December Meeting

- **What:** ANNUAL HUMAN LIGHT CELEBRATION
- **Who:** No official lecture tonight, just a party for installation of new officers and to celebrate the season!
- **When:** Monday, December 15, 2014, 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

- **Where:** BELLA VITA ITALIAN RESTAURANT, 3825 Baymeadows Road, Jacksonville, FL 32217. See <http://www.bellavitajax.com/>.
- **RSVP:** To Carrie Renwick at carrieren@att.net or call 904-268-8826, **NO LATER THAN Friday, December 12**, if you plan to attend!
- **Guests:** Your guests are welcome. Just be sure Carrie has the head count of your party.

Meetings Free and Open to the Public • Plenty of Free Parking

Meeting Description

This will be our Eleventh Annual Human Light Celebration in which we install the new officers, celebrate past success, and look to future goals. We'll enjoy a brief social hour starting at 6:30 p.m. and dine at 7 p.m., ordering from a party menu. Ceremonies will follow.

In order for the restaurant to schedule enough staff to accommodate us in a timely fashion, you must RSVP if you plan to attend. The DEADLINE to RSVP is Friday, December 12. Please RSVP to Carrie, at carrieren@att.net or call 904-268-8826! Otherwise, the restaurant cannot provide appropriate service.



The "Human Light Celebration" was conceived as an alternative seasonal celebration which nonreligious persons could enjoy. It allows humanists and nonreligious persons of all varieties to celebrate this holiday season and express their good wishes to others in a spirit of hope, love, and understanding, unencumbered by religious dogma.

Human Light is designed to celebrate and express the positive, secular human values of reason, compassion, humanity, and hope. Human Light illuminates a positive, secular vision of a happy, just, and peaceful future for our world, a future which humanity can build by working together, drawing on the best of our capacities. For more information, see the Human Light website at www.humanlight.org.

December President's Message - Reflections on *Waiting for a Donut* Earl Coggins

The year 2014 is a blurry patch of real estate in my brain's memory storage. Blurry because it went by as if carried away in a landslide. A large portion of my 2014 was consumed with writing the play, *Waiting for a*

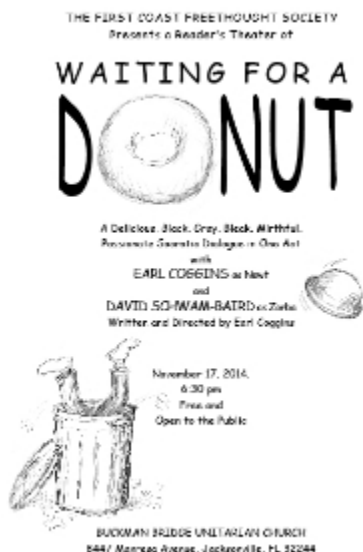
Donut. Theater is a great device for disseminating new ideas. What a great way, I thought back in January, to bring free and critical thinking to the masses. Everyone loves to hear and see a great story, so why not a story filled with thinking and debating in the spirit of the *Socratic Dialogues* and inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*?

So off I went in February, thinking that by March I would have a 10,000-word document, profound in content and vast in scope, and more importantly, ready for rehearsal. Grand intentions sometimes turn out to be grand illusions. But I was determined to stay the course. Turns out, I was adding, subtracting, rewriting, and editing *Waiting for a Donut* all the way up until the night David Schwam-Baird and I presented it to the fifty or so people who braved bad weather to come out and see what we had to offer.



Writing *Waiting for a Donut* humbled me because writing is hard work (and acting even worse). I am truly in awe of the writing process. I never dreamed that an idea could have a thousand paths and a million possible characterizations. This play started out as a heated debate in an elevator between a drinking, swearing, Baptist preacher and a hard-core atheist and ended up as the musings of a pantheist and a soft-core atheist-agnostic in a back ally, behind a pastry shop.

***Waiting for a Donut* is a witty, contemplative, one-act play, written and directed by Earl Coggins, and presented at the November meeting of the FCFS.**



I wanted to write a play about the relationship between two good friends who happened to be at opposite ends of the world-view spectrum: a theist and a nontheist living day to day, hand to mouth, on the streets of any city in America, struggling to find meaning. Significantly, these two friends with conflicting world views have risen above the conflict so often associated between people with differing religious views. I wanted to portray them as caring, thoughtful individuals who just happened to live under-the-radar of mainstream society—free range humans who contemplated the universe, just like you and me. I portrayed them as street people because I feel strongly that most people do indeed contemplate the universe in a meaningful manner, be they prince or pauper.

I wanted Newt and Zorba to be the Skipper and Gilligan from *Gilligan's Island*, grasshopper Caine and the

blind Master Po from *Kung Fu*, or perhaps Crusoe and Friday from *Robinson Crusoe*. I wanted them to be funny like Martin and Lewis, or Laurel and Hardy. I wanted rebellion: shards of Jagger and Richards, pieces of Lennon and McCartney, scraps of Page and Plant, perhaps. Notably, I wanted Newt and Zorba to agree some of the time, disagree just as often; but at the end of the day, they agree to disagree because they are friends for life, brothers-in-arms in the fight to build relationships based on mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding.



Newt: “Wow, Zorba. You don’t believe prayer works, but you tolerate it anyway. Why do you tolerate my religious beliefs?”

Zorba: “Because I want you to tolerate mine.”

I have a dream that someday people of all world views will live together in peace. Grand undertakings start small and grow, no differently than not-so-grand undertakings, in that they both require someone, somewhere, to take the first step. I hope *Waiting for a Donut* inspired everyone in attendance to embark (if they haven’t already) on such a journey—the grand undertaking of working towards a state of mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding—insuring through everyday practices that someday, people of all world views will live together in peace.

December Olive Garden Social

- Where: **OLIVE GARDEN** on Philips Highway, across from the Avenues Mall. The hostesses will know where we are seated. Proceed directly to our room.

- When: Tuesday, **DECEMBER 23**, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Social hour at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. We order from the menu.
- RSVP: E-mail CarrieRen@att.net (or call 904-268-8826) by Tuesday morning, if you plan to attend!

Utopian Visions

Fred W. Hill

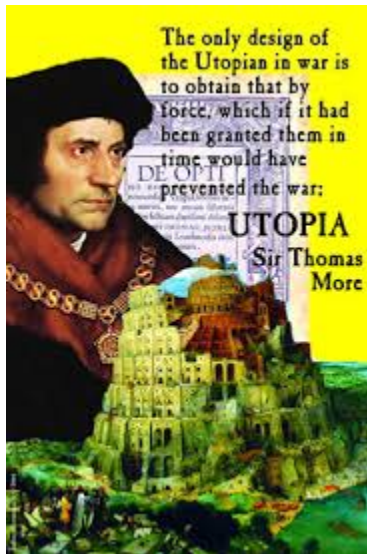
We don't live in a perfect world. Not an original observation, by any means, but nevertheless true. Oh, certainly, Earth is perfect enough to support multitudes of complex life forms and so far is the only planet within our reach that can do so, sci fi fantasies notwithstanding.

Unquestionably, there is much beauty all over this globe—majestic mountains, butterflies, a breaching blue whale, a soaring eagle, waterfalls, and so much more. There is also much ugliness, both that which is simply part of life and that which humans, in our grand mixture of clever inventiveness and idiocy, have inflicted on our one and only home planet. Our microscopic ancestors of billions of years ago evolved to feed on other organisms as part of the struggle for survival. Defecation, death and decay have been necessities of life since the beginning. Even the most beautiful people in the world must routinely relieve themselves, like every other animal. And eventually every living thing will die and ultimately be reduced to so much star dust when our sun expands and consumes the Earth in five billion or so years. Not much can be done about any of that, but for ages people have dreamed—dreamed of a more perfect world



that once existed or of one that could exist in the future. A world without want or war, where everyone gets along and willingly takes their most suitable roles in society. A utopia, that is. The English statesman, lawyer, social philosopher, and future Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, coined the word in 1515 from a Greek phrase meaning “no place” but which in the English pronunciation also meant “good place.” Apparently, More intended the double-meaning of what was essentially a good place that could not exist, as described in *On the Best State of a Republic* and the *New Island of Utopia*, a translation of the full Latin title of his fictional work more commonly known simply as *Utopia* (1516).

Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) and visions of Utopia

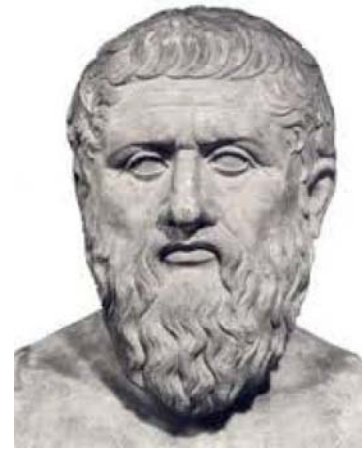


In conceiving *Utopia*, More was likely influenced by Plato's dialogues, *Timaeus* and *Critias*, written in 360 BCE, wherein he referred to the island-continent of Atlantis which, in Plato's description, lay beyond the Pillars of Herakles, was larger than North Africa and Asia Minor combined and was ruled by a confederation of kings with incredible powers. For all their power, however, the Atlanteans (in Plato's account, set over 9,000 years before his time) fell out of favor with the gods, and their immense domain was destroyed by a series of earthquakes, leaving no remnants. There is no evidence that Plato's Atlantis was anything other than a fictional tale to tell a particular story, although possibly based very loosely on a volcanic eruption circa 1650 BCE on the island of Satorini, resulting not only in the destruction of much of that island but also of the Minoan civilization based in Crete.

It is in an earlier dialogue, *The Republic* (380 BCE), however, that Plato more fully describes his ideal society. Citizens shall be divided into three classes—commoners, soldiers, and a ruling aristocracy which alone shall have the right to tell lies. A rigid censorship shall be enforced, barring the tales of Homer and Hesiod, for example, because they depict the gods behaving badly, as well as both men and gods weeping tears at the loss of friends or laughing in response to amusing situations, thus failing to display emotionless decorum. All dramatists must be banished because in Plato's world, all plays must feature only "faultless male heroes of good birth," (*A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell, p. 110), which may be possible but not with results most theatergoers would want to sit through twice unless they enjoy being bored. Music in turn could not express sorrow, discord, or even encourage relaxation, but must fill listeners with courage and self-restraint. Plato's paradise would be communist, with no accumulated wealth and no poverty, and while commoners who show talent may rise to one of the other classes, essentially everyone will do their assigned jobs and not interfere with the other classes. As Russell notes, Plato is basically describing Sparta, an ultra-militarist city-state, which the philosopher appeared to favor over his native Athens, whose limited democracy and greater allowance for artistic expression he held responsible for the famine and military defeats it had suffered during his lifetime. Athenian citizens just had too much freedom and mocked the gods and mortal authority too much!

Plato (circa 428-348 BCE)
In his perfect society, you'd

probably be as bored stiff as his bust.



Neither Sparta nor Athens would survive as independent city-states even a generation past Plato's era, both falling in turn to Macedonian, Roman, and Turkish conquerors. Most of Europe was ruled by kings or emperors during More's lifetime, although there were a few independent city-state republics—ruled by elected representatives, rather than by hereditary royalty, and most were in or near what is now modern Italy. More himself was a subject of the Kingdom of England and apparently had no qualms about the form of government he lived under and worked for.

More's Utopian society, however, was a sort of communist republic, wherein all things were held in common. One's clothing depended not on class or individual whim but solely on sex and marital status, such that all married men would be dressed alike and so on. "Some men were elected to become men of learning," as described by Russell's summary (*ibid.*, p 519). The government is run by those selected from the learned and led by a "prince who is elected for life, but can be deposed for tyranny" (*ibid* p. 520). All men and women worked six hours a day, or less in times of surplus. Divorce may be granted upon request by both parties or a finding of infidelity on the part of one party who would be punished by forced servitude. All men and women were trained to fight in case of war—to protect themselves or allies against invasion or to free an oppressed nation from tyranny. Utopians, however, preferred to hire mercenaries to fight for them and schemed to get other nations into their debt to be worked off by supplying mercenaries. As individuals, Utopians held the trappings of wealth in contempt, using gold to make chamberpots and chains for bondsmen. A diversity of religious beliefs was accepted, although atheists were held in contempt, denied citizenship, and barred from participating in politics, but otherwise left alone. Not quite a progressive paradise, but still better than the treatment non-believers could expect pretty much anywhere in the known world in the early 16th century, when proclaiming disbelief in god was pretty much like begging to be burned at the stake.

More himself, as Lord Chancellor, was much less inclined to show religious tolerance than the governors of his fictional realm, rooting out and prosecuting heretics in the name of the crown, until the bearer of that crown, King Henry VIII himself, took a heretical stance, declaring himself head of the church in England, enabling him to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, grab sizeable chunks of English real estate and wealth previously held by the papacy, and marry Anne Boleyn. All of this put Sir Thomas More in a serious bind, as he placed greater fidelity to the Roman Pope than to his English king. He was practical enough to wish Henry and his new bride happiness, but declined to attend her coronation and refused to take an oath accepting the crown's supremacy in religious matters in all its domains. More stood firm on his principles and theology and consequently lost his head.



Nearly five centuries after More's execution, England and much of the rest of the world are far more accepting of religious differences, and kings and churches hold far less power now than they did then. Human societies have advanced because people have not only dreamed of nations with greater justice, governments that represent and act on the will of the majority, but also respect and protect the legitimate rights of all individuals; but have worked, and even died, to make those dreams a reality. Of course, an ideal that will please everyone is an impossible objective. Part of the problem is that universal agreement over what is ideal is itself unobtainable, and attempts to impose any particular ideal have resulted in horrendous violence. More himself may have preferred to be beheaded than to see England become more like the Utopia he wrote of, where there would be no king and no dominant faith. Fortunately, nonviolent persuasion and appeals to reason have resulted in some progress, such that we enjoy far greater rights than did either Plato in classical Greece or More in Tudor England and their contemporaries ever held. We're far from Utopia, but then Utopia will always be nowhere, ever beyond our grasp. Which is good because I can not only keep my possessions and don't have to dress like every other male bachelor, but even though I am an atheist I'm still a citizen of my country and can participate in its political discourse, however nauseating the results may be at times. Reality isn't always pretty, but we can't live in utopian fantasies.



Local AU Update

In this regular feature, you will be kept apprised of the actions of the local AU chapters which include the AU of Northeast Florida (Jacksonville) and the Clay County Chapter, should you wish to participate. If separation of church and state issues are important to you, we encourage you to join Americans United, on the local and/or national level.

Bad News

There is bad news. Clay Yarbrough, City Council President, appears to have no intentions of allowing any but explicitly Christian prayers at Jacksonville City Council meetings.

Good News

There is good news. If Jacksonville citizens, along with AU members, participate in a sustained campaign to stop the lack of inclusion of any but explicitly Christian prayers at Jacksonville City

Council meetings, we can stop the exclusionary practice.

Action

The AU of Northeast Florida met recently and decided the **United Not Divided** campaign needs citizens to attend council meetings and sign up to speak for 3 minutes about the exclusionary invocations at City Council meetings. AU also needs citizens to write letters to the *Florida Times-Union* and *Folio Weekly* newspapers regarding the exclusionary invocations at City Council meetings, and equally important, contact the City Council about this issue via emails, letters, or phone calls.

AU of Northeast Florida is urging citizens sympathetic to the **United Not Divided** campaign to request to give an invocation at a City Council meeting. Anyone volunteering to speak at a City Council meeting should contact the local AU chapter at au.ne.fl@gmail.com so that arrangements can be made to have volunteers accompanied by AU board members.

More on United Not Divided

Thanks to everyone who has already signed the petition! We have over 500 signatures but we want 1000. If you have not yet signed the petition, or joined the Facebook campaign, here is the information you need.

Sign the Petition

The first component of the **United Not Divided** campaign is a **petition** you can sign. We are urging everyone who cares about this issue to sign the petition and share the link to the petition with your friends and family. To sign the petition, click:

<http://www.change.org/p/sign-our-petition-in-the-name-of-unity>

Facebook Campaign

The second component of the **United Not Divided** campaign is Facebook. You can send a friend request to the Northeast Florida Chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State's Facebook page dedicated to the City Council Invocation issue. Please share this Facebook page link with your friends, family, and anyone you think would want to support this cause. Or, simply go to the Facebook page and add yourself to it. Raise your voice with ours, as we call upon the City Council of Jacksonville to discontinue a practice that divides us, favors some of us over others, and tears apart the fabric of our community!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/uniteustocareaboutourcity/>

To Join AU on the Local or National Level

Local: <http://www.meetup.com/AU-Americans-United-for-Separation-of-Church-and-State/>

National: <https://support.au.org/donate>

FCFS Annual Planning Meeting

Carrie Renwick

Attention members: Mark your calendar and plan to attend the FCFS Annual Planning Meeting!

- **What:** FCFS Annual Planning Meeting
- **When:** Sunday, January 11, 2015, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- **Where:** At the home of Mark and Carrie Renwick, in Mandarin.
- **RSVP:** Please RSVP to Carrie Renwick, carrieren@att.net, or call 904-268-8826, if you plan to attend.



Every January, members are invited to a meeting in which they can give feedback directly to the Board. Here is your opportunity to give the Board your ideas on monthly meeting programs you'd like to see, fundraising ideas and strategies, and ideas for special projects. Any other thoughts you may have would be welcome. Do you like the direction in which the First Coast Freethought Society is going? Would you like to see us do anything we are not? Come and share your thoughts! If you have ideas to offer and cannot attend the meeting, please send them to carrieren@att.net. If you ARE able to attend the planning meeting, please RSVP to Carrie for address and directions, at carrieren@att.net or call 904-268-8826, and to let her know you are coming. Thanks!



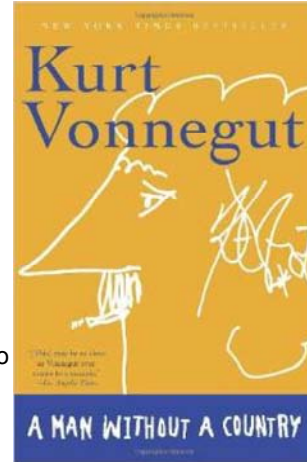
Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville

- **When:** 2:00 - 3:30 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- **Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225.
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
 - January 4, 2015 - *A Man without a Country*, by Kurt Vonnegut

- February 1, 2015 - *Maus, volumes I and/or II*, by Art Spiegelman

A Man without a Country: A Memoir of Life in George W. Bush's America (2005), is a collection of short essays by Kurt Vonnegut, most written for the monthly news and opinion magazine *In These Times*, and was his final work to be published before his death on April 11, 2007.

Vonnegut muses on a variety of topics with his typical acerbic wit, raging against the pitfalls of human behavior but tempered by his humanist outlook.



The following is an excerpt:

"In case you haven't noticed, as the result of a shamelessly rigged election in Florida, in which thousands of African Americans were arbitrarily disenfranchised, we now present ourselves to the rest of the world as proud, grinning, jut-jawed, pitiless war-lovers with appalling powerful weaponry - who stand unopposed. In case you haven't noticed, we are now as feared and hated all over the world as the Nazi's once were. And with good reason. In case you haven't noticed, our unelected leaders have dehumanized millions and millions of human beings simply because of their religion and race. We wound 'em and kill 'em and torture 'em and imprison 'em all we want. Piece of cake. In case you haven't noticed, we also dehumanize our own soldiers, not because of their religion or race, but because of their low social class. Send 'em anywhere. Make 'em do anything. Piece of cake. The O'Reilly Factor.

"So I am a man without a country, except for the librarians and a Chicago paper called *In These Times*." Before we attacked Iraq, the majestic *New York Times* guaranteed there were weapons of destruction there. Albert Einstein and Mark Twain gave up on the human race at the end of their lives, even though Twain hadn't even seen the First World War. War is now a form of TV entertainment, and what made the First World War so particularly entertaining were two American inventions, barbed wire and the machine gun. Shrapnel was invented by an Englishman of the same name. Don't you wish you could have something named after you? Like my distinct betters Einstein and Twain, I now give up on people too. I am a veteran of the Second World War and I have to say this is the not the first time I surrendered to a pitiless war machine.

"My last words? 'Life is no way to treat an animal, not even a mouse.' Napalm came from Harvard. Veritas! Our president is a Christian? So was Adolf Hitler. What can be said to our young people, now that psychopathic personalities, which is to say persons without consciences, without senses of pity or shame, have taken all the money in the treasuries of our government and corporations and made it all their own?"

— Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man Without a Country*

Link to Book Review: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/09/books/review/09scott.html>

For More Info: Contact Herb Gerson at 12herbert30gerson@bellsouth.net, or call 904-363-6446.

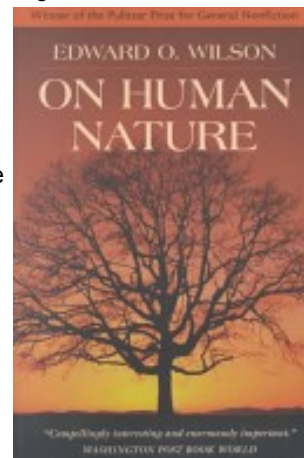
Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **When:** 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., the second Thursday of each month.
- **Where:** Clubhouse at a private condominium in St. Augustine (Anastasia Island).
- **What:** Book planned for discussion:
 - January 8, 2015 - *On Human Nature*, by E. O. Wilson
 - February 12, 2015 - *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*, by Susan Jacoby

No one who cares about the human future can afford to ignore Edward O. Wilson's book. *On Human Nature* begins a new phase in the most important intellectual controversy of this generation: Is human behavior controlled by the species' biological heritage? Does this heritage limit human destiny?

With characteristic pungency and simplicity of style, the author of *Sociobiology* challenges old prejudices and current misconceptions about the nature-nurture debate. He shows how...evolution has left its traces on the most distinctively human activities, how patterns of generosity, self-sacrifice, and worship, as well as sexuality and aggression, reveal their deep roots in the life histories of primate bands that hunted big game in the last Ice Age.

His goal is nothing less than the completion of the Darwinian revolution by bringing biological thought into the center of the social sciences and the humanities. Wilson presents a philosophy that cuts across the usual categories of conservative, liberal, or radical thought. In systematically applying the modern theory of natural selection to human society, he arrives at conclusions far removed from the social Darwinist legacy of the last century. Sociobiological theory, he shows, is compatible with a broadly humane and egalitarian outlook. Human diversity is to be treasured, not merely tolerated, he argues. Discrimination against ethnic groups, homosexuals, and women is based on a complete misunderstanding of biological fact. But biological facts can never take the place of ethical choices.



Once we understand our human nature, we must choose how "human" in the fullest, biological sense, we wish to remain. We cannot make this choice with the aid of external guides or absolute ethical principles because our very concept of right and wrong is wholly rooted in our own biological past. This paradox is fundamental to the evolution of consciousness in any species; there is no formula for escaping it. To understand its essence is to grasp the full predicament of the human condition.

(Publication Description from Google Books)

Link to Book Review: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/62555.On_Human_Nature

More Info: Contact Bill Stroop at bill@strooplaw.com for address, directions, and gate code.

NOTE TO ALL! Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores or online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

NPR Corporate Sponsorship

Carrie Renwick, Fundraising Chair

The First Coast Freethought Society annual summer fundraising campaign to keep our National Public Radio (NPR) announcements about the FCFS and our monthly meetings on radio station WJCT, 89.9 FM, has closed. However, for your convenience, this information listing the different ways to donate will appear in each newsletter. We would love to see NPR contributions come in throughout the year!

To Donate on a Monthly Basis

You can now set up automatic monthly donations which you may find very convenient and easy on the budget. You can do this in two different ways.

1. Go to the FCFS website home page, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find a PayPal button to make an automatic monthly donation to our NPR fund. Automatic monthly donations via PayPal require you to have a PayPal account.
2. Set it up through your online banking system.

To Donate on a One-Time Basis

Should you prefer to donate on a one-time basis, here are the ways.

1. Visit the website, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find the opportunity to contribute on our homepage. You can pay via PayPal or with any major credit card (via PayPal);
2. Mail a check payable to the FCFS to P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255;
3. Bring your contribution to a meeting or another FCFS event and give it to a board member.

Whichever method you select, you will receive a letter from the treasurer, suitable for your IRS records, acknowledging your tax-deductible contribution.

Thank you!

Many thanks to our contributors. Please keep our NPR corporate sponsorship goals in mind throughout the year. Heartfelt thanks to those of you who plan to contribute in the coming months. Our plan is to continue with the same number of NPR announcements that we are currently contracted for, in hopes that continued contributions and membership renewals will enable us fund these announcements. It would be splendid if contributions can continue throughout the year! We will not pester you with fundraising requests until next summer, but please keep in mind that our NPR announcements on WJCT may well be the most significant project the FCFS undertakes for the community and for the cause of the freethought movement. Please support the cause when you can. Thank you for your support!

About our newsletter, the *First Coast FreeThinker*

Information for Readers

The First Coast FreeThinker is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers and members may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy issues free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy. Members are entitled to receive hard-copy should they prefer. The e-mail version is encouraged, as the newsletter is optimized for on-screen reading.

Readers are invited and encouraged to share 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. The FreeThinker is intended to convey ideas that stimulate thought and promote discussion on a variety of subjects.

Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles, poetry, etc., should be e-mailed to Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org. Material may be submitted only ELECTRONICALLY. Submissions may be formatted in MS Word, in a text file, or cut and pasted into an e-mail.

The deadline for time-sensitive material is the THIRD SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue, but submissions are welcome anytime.

We prefer articles no longer than 1,000 words. Longer articles will be evaluated in terms of whether their importance and degree of interest to our readers warrant publication.

Subject matter must tie in with [freethought](#) or with the [Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles](#) (found on our website). All accepted submissions are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Authors (not the First Coast Freethought Society) are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

Why I Am an Atheist

Wilhelmina Walton (1932-2014)

The Program Committee has long observed that stories of previously-religious folks becoming nonreligious and subsequently "coming out of the closet" are always well received and garner positive feedback. The Editorial Committee hereby invites you to tell us YOUR story, and we'll publish it here, in what we'd like to see become a regular feature of our newsletter: "Why I am an atheist, humanist, freethinker... whatever fits you. We thought Wilhelmina's story would be a great way to get started! Submit your story to Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org.

Thomas Paine wrote in *The Age of Reason*, "Infidelity does not consist of believing or disbelieving. Infidelity consists of not believing what you SAY you believe." I have been persuaded, based on my present level of knowledge and understanding of the world we live in, that I do not believe the religious teachings I learned growing up as a small-town Methodist. I worked at "believing" for quite a few years (though not on the fundamentalist level), but I now know I am an atheist, not because this is what I chose, but because I CANNOT be otherwise.

I grew up in the harsh atmosphere of a fundamentalist Methodist church in a small rural town. My father was obsessed with religion and felt strongly that it was his duty to punish any infraction severely in order to keep us in line with the teachings of the Bible. The atmosphere in our home was abusive, and displays of affection were few. My father's erratic behavior created an atmosphere of fear and anger. There seemed to be a large disconnect between Christian love and the reality of our everyday lives.



When I realized I no longer held the Christian beliefs I had grown up with, I was extremely hesitant to announce this to my family and lifelong friends. Since many of the people I loved reviled atheism, I worried if I told them we would become estranged, and I did not want that to happen.

I did not know any other atheists and I needed badly to talk to others who had given up belief in the Christian religion to help me clarify my thinking about being a nonbeliever. I was unsure how I would live my life without religion. I felt isolated. However, I felt strangely relieved that I was being honest with myself; that I could say that the Bible is basically irrational and just does not fit with known facts about life and the world around us. I just knew that I would find better, more satisfying answers to life's problems.

I had been reading a lot about science, books by Lewis Thomas, Edward O. Wilson, Richard Feynman, and other great scientists; and I began seeing many of my same thoughts and ideas expressed by these authors. Eventually, I was able to clarify my thinking about the way the universe works. Logically, I found I could no longer embrace supernatural phenomena. I did finally meet others who felt as I did and like Thomas Paine, "My own mind became my church."

It was difficult to give up the mystery and magic connected with my former religion. But, I have discovered new sources of awe and mystery. There is no awesomeness that compares with "nature's own miracles." The more I learn of the wonderful intricacies that nature has evolved over these several billion years, the more awesome it is. Tears came to my eyes when I watched on television a horse trainer who has discovered the "secrets" of a wild stallion's instinctive behavior, so that in just a very few minutes of training work, the trainer has the horse following him around nudging him in the back with its nose as if the trainer were its mother. This is an example of what we can learn when we explore the depths of nature's secrets.

My world is now immensely more interesting. My view of the world now lets me look at all I see and hear and evaluate each circumstance with objectivity and reason. If something doesn't seem logical and reasonable, I can reject it, but I always have the option to go back and reconsider. As an atheist, I feel more comfortable with uncertainty and doubt because that is the reality of the universe. The faith I have now is that nature's laws are in place, and life will evolve according to those laws, as it must. I have a

philosophy I am working on and that is, "nothing happens until it is necessary." Just an idea I like to play around with.

I know that life holds good and bad for both believer and non-believer, alike, and I am responsible for how I deal with the good and bad. I find that grieving over the losses we suffer in life is no easier with a religious belief than it is without. My life has the meaning I give to it, and I am also responsible for that. I am no longer trying to crack some nebulous code in an ancient book that is filled with myth, folklore, superstition, and hearsay, to give meaning to my life.

One of the great thinkers of history, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once said, "Nothing is at last sacred save the integrity of your own mind." I had to become an atheist to secure "the integrity of my own mind."

Wilhelmina Walton

December 1998

(Ed. note: It is interesting to note, Wilhelmina was inspired to tell her story three months following the founding of the FCFS in September 1998, and in which she was deeply involved from its start.)

About the First Coast Freethought Society



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591

Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591

904-419-8826

<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is an educational, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to supporting nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area and promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. (Driveway located on Collins Rd., 400 ft. east of Roosevelt Blvd.)

Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Other Activities

In addition to regular monthly meetings, we offer:

- two monthly humanist book discussion groups, one in Jacksonville and one in St. Augustine, (current books are listed in each newsletter, or for further details visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/bdg>);
- a monthly social and dinner at the Olive Garden (see details in each newsletter);
- coffee and conversation in the fresh air on a monthly basis at Secular Sunday in the Park. We meet the fourth Sunday of each month, 10:00 a.m. to noon, at Losco Regional Park, 10851 Hood Road South, Jax 32257. (see Activities section of the FCFS home page: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/>);
- Dinners for Doubters (when scheduled);
- volunteer opportunity on a monthly basis at Dignity U Wear (visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150>, currently scheduled for the third Saturday morning of each month, through December 2015; and
- a freethought Yahoo! Group (to subscribe, send a blank message to: jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com).

For information on all these activities, please visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, or see the calendar of events at the end of each newsletter and on the website. You need not be a member to attend these activities!

FCFS 2014 Board Members

President - Earl Coggins: 904-521-5039
 Vice President - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826
 Interim Secretary - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-419-8826
 Treasurer - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390
 At-Large - Herb Gerson: 904-363-6446
 At-Large - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610
 At Large - Richard Keene: 904-386-1121

Other Appointments

Parliamentarian - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896
 E-mail Secretary - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Committees and Chairs

Editorial - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610
 Community Outreach - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-982-8431
 Finance - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390
 Fundraising - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826
 Membership - Judy Hankins: 904-724-8188
 Publicity - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826
 Website - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

All FCFS personnel may be reached via e-mail at info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

January 2015 Meeting

Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

On Monday, January 19, we will welcome recently-elected Duval County School Board member, Scott Shine, who will be discussing the controversial "Common Core Curriculum," at our usual meeting location at the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church.

Bequests

*You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.*

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area.

Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We can provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes. Or, just talk to your attorney. Our EIN is 20-1462737.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-419-8826 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

- First Coast Freethought Society: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>
- Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM): <http://jaxatheists.com>
- Secular Saint Augustine (SSA): <http://meetup.com/Secular-Saint-Augustine>

The FCFS is a proud member of the [Florida Humanist Association](#) (formerly the Humanists of Florida Association).

Freethought Events on the First Coast

- Monday, December 8 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Monday, December 15- FCFS Annual Human Lights Celebration at Bella Vita Italian Restaurant, 3825 Baymeadows Road, Jacksonville - 6:30 p.m.
- Friday, December 19 - [Secular St. Augustine Meetup](#) - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m. (Meetups are generally the third Friday, but you need to visit website to RSVP and for meeting details.)
- Saturday, December 21 - Volunteer at Dignity U Wear, Jacksonville - 9:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, December 23 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, December 27 - FCFS January 2015 Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, December 28 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Sunday, January 4 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, January 8 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, January 12 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Monday, January 19 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buchman Bridge UU Church - 6:30 p.m.

Directions to Monthly Meeting at BBUUC

Our monthly meetings are held at the **Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church (BBUUC)**, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. The address is Manresa, but the main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd..

- From I-295, take the Roosevelt exit. Go north on Roosevelt Blvd. to the first traffic light which is Collins Rd. Turn right onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd., on the right.
- Going south on Roosevelt, look for Atlantic Self-Storage on the left. This is the Collins Rd. intersection. Turn left onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is on Collins Rd., on the right. (If you come to I-295, you've gone too far, turn around, and you will turn right onto Collins Rd.)

MAP ON FCFS WEBSITE

See accurate map at this link: http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/lib/fcfs_bbuuc_map.gif (Please note, Google Maps, as well as other maps, may not be consistent with the actual street signs.)

Membership Application



Use this PDF form

or join on our [website](#).

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