

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

September 2007

Volume 5, Issue 9

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Contrary to the idea that without god there can be no morality, humanists have a very strong moral code that guides our behavior. Ours is a compassion-based ethic. Put simply, if it helps humans, it is good. If it hurts humans, it is bad. And if it does both, then try to do as little harm as possible while doing the most good.

--Jennifer Hancock, excerpt from her website sumogirl.com.

Carrie Renwick

You will want to mark your calendars for the week of October 22-26, when the Interfaith Center of the University of North Florida is hosting "Religious Awareness Week." A plethora of interesting events will be going on, several of which are of particular interest to freethinkers.

Imagine my surprise and delight when I received a phone call from the UNF Interfaith Center inviting the FCFS to participate in Religious Awareness Week (RAW) because they "want a nonreligious perspective at the table." Wow!!

The purpose of the week is to "open the dialogue about the role of religion in higher education. It will provide diverse opportunities to facilitate a sharing of beliefs in an atmosphere of open inquiry... The week is designed also to promote an understanding and appreciation of, and for, other religious traditions."

Needless to say, I hastened to gather the most articulate and experienced presenters in the FCFS to provide the requested nonreligious perspective. FCFS founder and spokesperson, **Earl Coggins**, agreed to represent us at the RAW planning meetings. He will present,

"Defining Atheism: Dispelling the Myths/ Exposing the Taboos" on Monday, *Earl Coggins* Oct. 22, at a Brown-Bag Lunch, 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. and on Wed., Oct. 24, 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.



FCFS member and Humanists of FL Assoc. Executive Director, **Heather Wellman**, will present, "The Culture Wars: How the Nonreligious Fit In" on Thurs., Oct. 25, 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. and Fri., Oct. 26, 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. You will find further details in the Oct. *FreeThinker* and in e-mails. We are honored by UNF's invitation to participate in RAW.

September 2007 Meeting

Jennifer Hancock, writer and humanist activist

"The Pursuit of Happiness: A Humanist Mandate"

Monday, September 17, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

- When:** 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
- Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:
- September 16, 2007 - *The Assault on Reason*, by Al Gore
 - October 21, 2007 - Any book by Kurt Vonnegut



Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922-2007) was an American novelist and essayist. He was known for works blending satire, black comedy, and science fiction. Including *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *Breakfast of Champions*. He was a humanist, an atheist, a lifetime member of the American Civil Liberties Union, and served as Honorary President of the American Humanist Association. Vonnegut was an outspoken critic of the Bush administration and the Iraq war.

June Applen will introduce us to the author and lead a discussion on the man and his writings.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.

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 diverse 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. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the following month's issue. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit web site contributions to Carrie Renwick at the e-mail address above.

A Mormon For President

Fred W. Hill

The next Presidential election is still over a year away, yet the campaigning has already heated up. One of the leading Republican candidates is Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts and potentially the first Latter Day Saint, aka Mormon, to become President. Of course the ultimate success of Romney's campaign remains uncertain, and I remain doubtful that he will occupy the White House in 2009. However, Romney certainly has a better chance than did the first Mormon Presidential aspirant, Joseph Smith himself, the founder of Mormonism.

The year was 1844 and the hottest political issue of the year was whether or not to annex the then-independent nation of Texas and thereby risk war with Mexico, as well as further expand slavery in the U.S. Joseph Smith, however, was more concerned with expanding his own power. The self-styled prophet, who dreamed of ruling the nation as a theocracy and enjoyed dressing in military garb despite never having served in the U.S. military, declared his candidacy in February, intent on promoting his new and improved brand of Christianity and forestalling further persecution by incensed gentiles.

Originally designated the Church of Christ, Mormonism, by which it became much better

known by polite detractors (the less polite subtract the second 'm') was founded on April 6, 1830, by Smith and six other adherents in Palmyra, New York. By 1844, the new faith had approximately 200,000 followers in several northeastern states, as well as Canada and England.

Smith was the autocratic mayor of Nauvoo, a community of about 12,000 Mormons on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River, across from Missouri, from whence he had escaped in 1839 after being arrested for his leading role in deadly clashes

Of course nearly all successful politicians profess belief in religious absurdities; and if I declined to vote for candidates on that basis, I might as well not vote at all.

between Mormons and gentiles in what he had once considered the "promised land" of the northwest corner of that state. Smith was able to avoid extradition by Illinois authorities but was still threatened by Missouri sheriffs who sought to snatch him back. Smith, who was canny enough to realize he had no chance of winning the election, still thought it worth the effort as a means to rectify his precarious situation by proving to the nation that "the Mormons were a political force to be reckoned with." (*No*

Man Knows My History, Fawn M. Brodie, 1995, Vintage Books, p. 362.)

Smith, born in 1805, was raised during the period of the second Great Awakening of religious fervor in America. He was poorly educated but very curious and eager to escape impoverishment. Fraudulent investment schemes involving attempts to locate buried treasure led to his conviction at age 21 as a "disorderly person" and "imposter." He found his fortune, however, not buried within the earth but in the words and forceful will with which he could beguile family, friends, and neighbors.

By 1827, Smith had concocted a fantastic new mythology in which an angel, Moroni, revealed golden plates inscribed with a previously unknown biblical story written in "reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics" which only he was sufficiently pure enough to safely see and hold and translate. The story was about the war between rival descendants of the legendary lost tribes of Israel who had made their way to North America in 600 BC and of whom the valorous Nephites were wiped out by the vicious Lamanites, ancestors of the modern American Indians. The last Nephite hero and namesake of Smith's book (first published in 1830) was Mormon, "more good" in Smith's invented



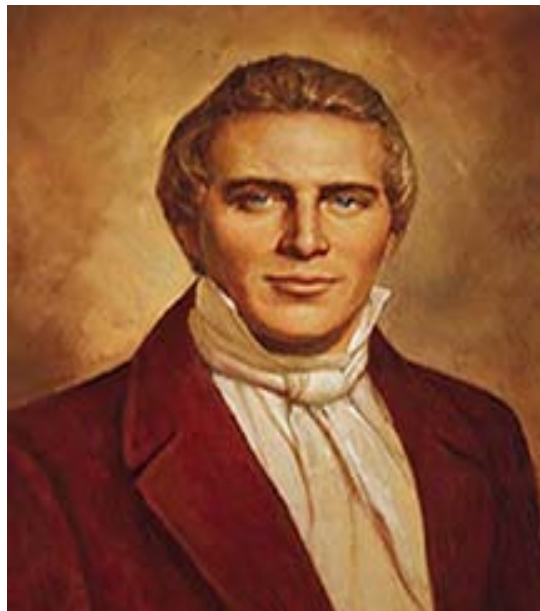
language, whose life and appearance bore a “marked similarity to the emerging young prophet” (Brodie, p. 416).

Needless to say, the Book of Mormon has no basis in fact but became significant in U.S. history because Smith fooled thousands of people within his short lifetime. Knowledge of genuine Egyptian hieroglyphics was scant and while there was some speculation that the American Indians were somehow related to Northeast Asians, the more common hypothesis was that they were descended from Southwest Asians, as advocated by Pastor Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews; or the Ten Tribes of Israel in America*, 1823. Brodie believes that Joseph (no relation to Ethan) was likely heavily influenced by this hypothesis when he wrote his own book (p. 47).

Smith was well-read and knowledgeable enough to fool even older and better-educated men, such as Brigham Young, who would become his most important convert. Even when caught in the most blatant lies, Smith overcame the occasional doubts of most of his flock.

Smith took great advantage of their trust to enrich himself and sate his sexual appetites, initially with the older wives (unlikely to become pregnant) of men he had sent on far-flung missions. After he had a vision in which he received God’s blessing for polygamy, he also slept with as many young women as

he could talk into a “sacred union” with him (about 40 women altogether, according to Brodie’s research). Of course, Smith tried to keep this particular revelation secret as long as he could, to avoid trouble with gentile laws and sensibilities and especially with his first wife, Emma, who seemed to recognize, in this instance at least, that sly Joseph was inventing “divine” instructions to suit his needs and desires.



Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism

Still, Smith’s gifts of charismatic salesmanship had their limits. A schism arose over polygamy and a “reformed” church was founded with its own newspaper, *The Nauvoo Expositor*, which denounced Smith for his megalomania. The active suppression of the newspaper on Smith’s orders sparked the chain of events that led to Smith’s downfall. His enemies used the crime as a pretext to work up public sentiment against Joseph

Smith’s growing despotism, and he went into hiding from lynch mobs and the law. Unwilling to endure life on the run in the brutal American frontier, however, he and his loyal elder brother, Hiram, surrendered on June 25, 1844, to an Illinois militia which escorted him to a prison in Carthage. Two days later, about 200 armed men broke into the jail and murdered the brothers. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Joseph_Smith,_Jr.)

Thus Smith’s Presidential campaign was abruptly terminated, but his revised Christianity survived and flourished into a worldwide organization with millions of believers, albeit with further splintering.

As a child, I lived for three years in Salt Lake City, the heart of the largest Mormon faction since Brigham Young founded the city as a new haven for his own group a few years after Smith’s “martyrdom.” The Mormons I knew struck me as nice, pleasant people, and I never felt ostracized for coming from a “gentile” family. I

learned a bit about Mormon history yet was unaware of the conflicts surrounding the faith.

The lynching of the Smiths was a horrid crime, yet I feel little sympathy for Joseph Smith. As so many other self-anointed prophets have done before and since, Smith built a lasting empire on a foundation of outlandish lies. Mitt Romney, who has already enjoyed far greater political success than Smith ever

managed, appears to sincerely believe those lies.

Of course nearly all successful politicians profess belief in religious absurdities; and if I declined to vote for candidates on that basis, I might as well not vote at all. However, I find the

continued and spreading credulous attitude towards Smith's obvious fabrications even more astounding than that of most other religious groups in their own peculiar myths. Whatever Romney's qualifications to run the nation, I would reckon his capacity for good judgment and

reason circumspect based on his avowed faith in Smith's Mormon nonsense. (Oh, and to avoid keeping anyone not up on U.S. history in suspense, the war candidate did win in 1844. There was a war, and U.S. territory was expanded from sea to shining sea.)



Freethinker Humor

A middle-aged woman has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table, she has a near-

death experience. She floats up to the clouds, meets St. Peter at the pearly gates, and is escorted into a large white room. In this room, God suddenly appears.

Shaken by the implications, she nervously asks if this is the end for her. God says no and tells her that she has another 30 to

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Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *Freethinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

Secular Sunday Morning in the Park (or Atheist Sunday Morning)

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 9 a.m. 'til ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. Bring your own cup and breakfast snack. Most of the time coffee is furnished. Mark your calendar and we hope to see you there!

No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-779-6883.

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
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<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 Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211, (904) 725-8133. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.

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September Social - All Welcome!

WHERE: STEAK & ALE at Baymeadows and I-95 South

WHEN: TUESDAY., September 25, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by September 24, if you plan to attend!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2007 Membership Application



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

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 - 65+ (\$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: _____

***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 will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-288-6291 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Freethinker Humor

(Continued from page 5)

40 years to live. God wishes her well and sends her back to her newly resuscitated body.

Upon her recovery, she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift,

liposuction, breast augmentation, and a tummy tuck. She even has someone change her hair color. She figures that since she's got another 30 or 40 years she might as well make the most of it.

She walks out of the hospital following the last operation and

is immediately killed by an ambulance speeding up to the hospital.

She arrives in front of God again and angrily asks, "I thought you said I had another 30 to 40 years!"

God replies, "Sorry, I didn't recognize you."



Next deadline for article submission: September 23, 2007

First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events

September	17 - Monthly meeting	16 - Book discussion group	25- Social at Steak and Ale
October	15 - Monthly meeting	21 - Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale
November	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

(In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** Ctrl & Click will take you there.)

Return service requested



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