

Wing from page 1

Having had all day to make the trip, we decided to "drop in" on Niagara Falls for the day, clear customs in Buffalo, then complete the trip to Maryland. A rented van took us to the Falls and back to the aerodrome by 2:30. Departing St. Catharines, we had just crossed over the Niagara River when the problem began.

Because of the short trip to Buffalo we only climbed to 1,500 feet. Throttling back to level off, the linkage which connects the cable to the air intake completely wore through causing the engine to reduce to idle power. Ahead lay an enormous reservoir for the Niagara hydro dam and dense residential areas beyond. Back to the west in Canada were farm fields. The instant choice was to attempt to return to St. Catharines about six miles distant and, failing that, to set down in one of the open fields.

Within a few short moments, the connection had completely failed and an off-field landing was inevitable. A plowed field had already been selected and there was just time to lower the wheels, flaps, and open the doors. Regrettably, the landing site was too soft to support the wheels which dug into the earth rather than roll on top. Instantly the front wheel anchored into the ground and was sheered completely off. The view through the front windshield became nothing but earth and within a second the plane flipped straight over coming to a complete standstill upside down on its back.

There wasn't even time for fear. A maneuver I had routinely practised during twenty years of flying was called to the test and executed like another drill. And practice pays off...we all walked away with only minor bruises.

Media arrives

Even in a rural area, word about an airplane crash gets out fast and the media was soon present.

"Where are you from?"
"Tampa."

"What were you doing all the way up here?"
"We were attending an atheist/Humanist convention in Toronto."
"R-e-a-l-l-y!"

I could tell the whole story to three or four different reporters and what do you think they selected for the four-second sound bite?

"We were on our way home from an atheist convention. I guess you know who *wasn't* my co-pilot."

They all loved it. Here is a family of atheists who walk away from an airplane crash and none of them were "converted". The issue became more of a focal point of the story than the crash itself. Both print and TV dwelled on it.

Losing an airplane that one has been flying for ten years is like the death of a family pet. But what the heck...they make 'em in factories. I've already replaced it and yes, mum and dad, both in their seventies, are ready to go. Monica copped the inaugural flight. And all those silly remarks about how "God was with you" prompt me to respond that if God caused our plane to crash, isn't he culpable for four counts of attempted manslaughter?

"Well, it isn't blah, blah, blah..."
Sure.

Just the facts...

Did you know there are an average of six general aviation crashes in the U.S. every day? About half are ultra-lights, and most of the rest are caused by pilots doing "unconventional" flying...buzzing low over power lines and the like. Ninety percent are pilot error. We were in that unfortunate 10% of unplanned landings caused by mechanical failure. But bear in mind that thousands of planes take off and land uneventfully each day and they are generally very well-built machines. Getting up in the morning is a risk, as is anything we do in life. I may not ever trust an airplane as much as I once did, but I'll continue to fly them as long as I enjoy them, the places they take me, and that remarkable view of the world from beneath the wing of a Cessna. **A**

ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Volume III Number 6

July, August, September, 1994



On a wing with no prayer

How many times have you seen it? Some disaster survivor, standing among catastrophic ruin, gives praiseful thanks to some god for his miraculous escape from the clutches of death while we atheists wonder in awe how it is that he fails to hold the same god responsible for the disaster itself.

Where've we been?

The problem with an all-volunteer organization is that when the newsletter editor gets bogged down in his business, the newsletter production gets delayed. Such has been our case. We mean to make every effort to produce 10 newsletters a year but occasionally it just doesn't happen. Thanks for your patience. — Ed

Atheists United
Los Angeles
Atheist Coalition
San Diego
Atheist Network
Houston
Minnesota
Atheists
Atheists of Florida
Francisco Region
Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin
Atheist Centre
Vijayawada, India
Atheist and Other Freethinkers
Sacramento CA
Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia
Pocapapan PA



— by Ed Golly
THAT WAS THE HEADLINE in the St. Catharines (Ontario) Standard announcing the crash landing of our airplane.

No U. S. intervention
in women's wombs

— Bumper Sticker



P.O. Box 530102
Miami, FL 33153-0102

ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED

Atheist invocation?

Public invocations often attempt to be non-denominational in context to avoid offense. But the only way to be genuinely so is to replicate the "invocation" given at the Cobb County, GA commission meeting in February.

Following a complaint by the ACLU regarding pre-meeting prayers, one of the commissioners agreed to accommodate all persuasions.

Stephen Kilbride decided to accept the offer delivering this oxymoronic "atheist invocation" before the February 22 meeting:

"As our Commissioners embark upon the business of government there is one quality they will find above all others — that quality is *Courage*.

Elected office is a daunting task where character is constantly put to the test. For politicians are elected by the majority and there is great temptation to represent *only* the majority.

May our Commissioners find the courage to protect and serve *all* of the citizens of Cobb county —

Minority as well as Majority
Non-Christian as well as Christian
Gay as well as Straight

May they find the courage to realize that morality is not the copyrighted property of any one religious group but simply the avoidance of behavior that hurts and divides and the advocacy of behavior that heals and unifies. For in the words of Robert Ingersoll: "Hands that help are better far than lips that pray."

May they find the courage to resist those who would gleefully dismantle the wall of separation between church and state for their own selfish purposes and to realize that even invocations such as these, no matter how comforting or traditional, no matter how generic or nondenominational, *always* exclude someone and have no place in government. Government is for *everyone*.

And, finally while we recognize that there are no gods or deities to turn to for solutions to

Forum needs help

One of the elements we never factored into our dues was the production of the Atheists of Florida Forum. In order to maintain copies of the programs to run on other cable outlets around the state and even in other states, we need to purchase tapes. If you have viewed a Forum production, you know how well they are done. If you can assist with our production costs, please send your donation to Atheists of Florida, PO Box 530102, Miami, FL 33153. Your generosity helps us all.

the problems that confront us may they find the courage to utilize logic, reason and the sum of human experience to boldly address these problems.

Thank you and good evening.

Pray not in the synagogue

Unless, of course, you aspire to shove your religion down everybody's throat.

Hypocrisy seems irrelevant to those with a religious agenda. "See you at the pole, the National Day of Student Prayer" has perhaps become the modern version of "See you at the stake, the Town Day of a Witch Burning" when on Wednesday, September 21, public school students gathered around flag poles at their schools around the nation to join in a public demonstration of superstition.

Having begun in Texas four years ago with 46,000 students participating on 1,200 campuses, the annual event has now spread all over the nation. Sponsor: the National Network of Youth Ministries. The idea is to conduct the exercises before the beginning of the school day to avoid objection by the school boards. In fact, it's an obvious effort to shove the nose of the camel under the edge of the tent.

And on the homefront...

A story in Sept. 26 *Newsweek* describes the Noah Webster Academy and its effort to secure up to \$5,500 of public money for home schooling which is primarily religious indoctrination. It's part of the "charter-school" movement which seems to be the next extension of the school voucher effort. It works like this: public-school districts give "charters" to groups of educators who want to run experimental schools. The state aid then follows the pupils into their academies; read: home school.

Webster is the brainchild of Lansing, Michigan lawyer David Kallman. He has about 2,000 children already signed up utilizing a curriculum developed by the private Calvert School in Baltimore which has a 12,000 student correspondence program. But parents may also choose their own substitute lessons, including Christian-oriented textbooks.

Eleven states have already written charter schools into law. But the Michigan ACLU has joined in a lawsuit to block public funding and have the state's charter law declared invalid. Their argument: the choice to educate children at home does not create the right to have that education funded by the public.

If successful, Noah Webster will be due nearly \$11 million of per-pupil state aid each year. More significant is that if Webster survives the legal challenges, it is certain to be imitated by home schoolers across the nation.

CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI

Sunday, October 23 at 2:00 pm in the Board Room of the Ft. Lauderdale Main Library. Topic: *The Big Bang Theory as it relates to Atheism*. Call the Atheist Hotline at (305) 936-0210 for more information.

MANA-SOTA

Mana-Sota Chapter will meet on October 30th from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at the Marie Selby Public Library, 1001 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota.

TAMPA

In lieu of a meeting, the Tampa Bay Chapter will participate in the Circus McGurkis, the People's Fair, on Saturday, October 29. Rain date is one week later. The Circus is held at Lakeview Park behind St. Joseph's School at 20th Street and 28th Avenue South in St. Petersburg. Set-up time is 8am; the Circus opens at 10am and ends about 4pm. Please come help man our table (see photo page 4). For more info, call Jerry Moore at 572-7714 or Ed Corl - 321-6217.

one or both of their own parents?

It seems to me that the only thing obvious about child-care centers striving to be "like home" is that no one really knew any better. "Like home" isn't where daddy comes home drunk most nights, beats his wife, who then turns around and beats little Johnny. "Like home" doesn't mean a home where mom brings home a new "boy-friend" every night, since dad got so mad when he caught her before that he refuses to pay support and she can't make enough cash working at the Burger King. "Like home" is an idealistic fantasy that

matches reality in all too few cases.

But even in less extreme examples, where mom and dad are good, honest, loving parents who happen to be a little on the slow side, why should little Janey Genius have to do without the proper education and equipment to compete in the modern world? As a society, shouldn't our number one priority be making maximum use of mental resources, no matter who their parents are? As Dan Quayle tried to say once, though he never quite managed it, isn't a mind a terrible thing to waste?

Continued next month's *Cynic's Corner*. **A**

Message from the President

JoAnne Holman
Clerk of the Circuit Court
218 S. Second Street
Ft. Pierce, FL 34950
July 25th, 1994

Dear Ms. Holman,

I am writing in response to the summons for Juror service.

As a United States citizen and taxpayer, it is my privilege and duty to serve for the St. Lucie County Circuit Court.

In order to exercise the above privilege and duty, having previously served as a juror in Dade County, I would like to bring to the Court's attention the following:

The current oath to prospective jurors contains the phrase "So help me God."

Administering such an oath is a violation of the United States Constitution.

We can thank our nation's founding fathers, particularly Madison and Jefferson, for our right under the First Amendment to profess belief or disbelief in a "God" which, to an Atheist as myself, seems to be a mythical and unscientific idea. The result was far more freedom and less persecution and strife than when religious notions were a part of government and law. Only a few states still require professed belief in a "Supreme Being" in order to hold public office.

Federal and local governments are slowly coming to realize that Article 6, paragraph 3 of the US Constitution means that no religious tests should be applied.

The part of the oath "so help me God" to be uttered by jurors and many others, has forced Atheists and other non-believers, perhaps 30% of our total population, to either lie about their non-belief or be singled out as miscreants not worthy of testifying. Either choice can be very painful emotionally for those exposed to this situation.

The phrase "So help me God" in the jury oath constitutes endorsement of religion by the government and is in violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments (see also case law *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488, 1961, 81 S.Ct. 1680; 6 L.Ed 2d 982).

Our country is a secular one and so must be the oath for jury or any other office. Begging the question that there actually is a "God" somewhere paying attention to jurors, invoking divine guidance does not contribute much to justice in the courtroom or elsewhere.

Therefore, I respectfully request that the insulting phrase "So help me God" be deleted from the Jury oath.

Thanking you in advance,

Sincerely,
Christos Tzanetakis
President, Atheists of Florida, Inc. **A**

70 YEARS LATER

June is the anniversary month of the "monkey trial". Atheists of Florida Board Member Jim Strayer reminds us that the issues dealt with so many years ago remain in the forefront of our present society.

Insight

IN THE SUMMER OF 1925, a young science teacher in Tennessee was arrested for teaching the theory of evolution. It all really started because of an accident at the Cumberland Coal and Iron Company in Rhea county, Tennessee. An eight year old boy had been killed and George Rappelyea, the manager, was attending the funeral. Rappelyea objected when the minister said the boy was now "writin' in the flames of hell" because he had not been baptized. It was shortly after this that he read an ad in a Chattanooga newspaper that the American Civil Liberties Union was asking for someone to come forward to test the anti-evolution laws that were pending in many states. Rappelyea approached John T. Scopes with the idea.

John T. Scopes had taught evolution in his general science classes while a substitute teacher in the Rhea County High School. The trial took place in Dayton, Tennessee. William Jennings Bryan, former presidential candidate, Secretary of State and US Representative offered his services as a lawyer

to the prosecution. He saw the trial as a way to defeat the atheist and agnostic professors that he believed were teaching against the Bible. The ACLU accepted the offer of Clarence Darrow to defend Scopes.

During the trial Scopes had admitted that he had taught evolution because it was covered in "Civic Biology," the textbook required by the state. The jury was only present in the courtroom for a couple of hours during the eight day trial. They heard the prosecution witnesses but none of the defense witnesses. Bryan and the other prosecution lawyers did not want the jury, or any one else, to hear the defense witnesses.

Bryan accepted a challenge to take the stand as a defense witness—an expert on the Bible. He was sure that with God's help, he could defeat the agnostic Darrow.

He couldn't. It was a slaughter. Darrow showed the courtroom crowd, the newspaper reporters, and the world wide radio listeners that Bryan really didn't know much about the Bible or evolution and had never tried to inform himself on the subject. The jury heard none of this.

It took the jury nine minutes to find Scopes guilty, without ever hearing any testimony for the defense. Scopes did not testify and the judge fined him one hundred dollars.

The case went to the State Supreme Court in 1927. They did not rule on the constitutionality of the law, but struck down the one hundred dollar fine. In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a similar law in Arkansas was unconstitutional because it violated the constitutional ban against establishment of religion.

Bryan and Darrow did agree on one point: Education affects people's acceptance of the Bible. The more people lack an education in science, the more they accept the literal interpretation of the Bible.

Even though science is slowly winning over the general population, we must, as Darrow said, remember that something like this is never finished.



Tampa Bay and Mana-Sota chapters combined to staff an Atheists of Florida table in downtown St. Petersburg at a public assembly in June. From left: Edwin Corl, Ed Golly, Nan Owens, Sid Goetz, Flo Morgenroth, Ed McDougall, Sr., and Jerry Morgenroth. Note background.



First Annual Atheist Alliance Convention Set

THE ATHEIST ALLIANCE, an international organization of atheist groups, will hold its first convention over the Easter weekend, April 14, 15 and 16, 1995, in Los Angeles. Please let us know if you have an interest in attending the convention so we can arrange for adequate facilities. You do not have to make a firm commitment-all we need at this time is to know how many people think they might attend the convention. Call either Christos or Ed Golly or mail a note to the post office number.

The site chosen for the convention is the Beverly Garland Hotel in the San Fernando Valley. The hotel is close to many tourist attractions and eight miles from downtown Los Angeles.

Atheist Alliance Report

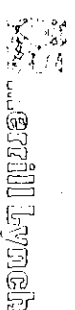
Logo & Motto Contest

A search has begun for a MOTTO and for an image that will become the SYMBOL-LOGO for the Atheist Alliance. You are invited to submit ideas for a Symbol-Logo and a Motto and the competition is open to all the members or even non-member artists of Atheistic convictions.

The winner for the best logo, if adopted by the Board of Directors, will receive \$100.00, pledged by Mr. Robert M. Langaster, member of Atheists of Florida, Inc.

The winner for the best motto, will receive a one hundred dollar bill minus the "In God We Trust" which is pledged by Mr. and Mrs. C. Tzanetakos. If you wish to pledge additional money or other awards, please notify either of the co-presidents in writing.

Both winners will be honored with a plaque of recognition at a special ceremony at the first Atheist Alliance convention in April, 1995.



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Angels.

Atheists United, of Los Angeles, will host the convention. Plans are being laid for an exciting weekend of speakers, workshops and socializing. The theme will be "The Atheist Role in Society A Conference to Foster Growth and Empowerment". We expect this convention to signal a major turning point for atheism in the United States. The Alliance has become the only purely atheist organization with affiliates throughout the country (plus one in India) capable of functioning at local levels.

Early estimates of costs indicate the convention fee will be about \$60, with dinners and other activities added on at convention-goers' discretion.

Again, let Ed or Christos know if you are at least considering attending the convention.

The deadline for entries is March 1, 1995.

Entries should be mailed to:

Atheist Alliance
P.O. Box 530102
Miami, FL 33153-0102

The following form should be attached to each entry and must be signed. If the contestant's age is under 18, the form must be signed by a parent or legal guardian.

ENTRY FORM

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____

By signing this, I transfer all rights and title, including the copyright, and interest in the attached motto/symbol to Atheist Alliance, Inc., and I waive any residual rights in the motto/symbol. I attest that this is an original design and not a copy or imitation of any other symbol.

Signature _____

Entries without a signed form will be disqualified. If you wish to receive an acknowledgment for your entry, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Christos Tzanetakos, Marie Castle,
Co-Presidents, Atheist Alliance

