

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

**MIAMI:** For meeting information, call the Atheist Hotline at (305) 936-0210

**NORTHEAST FLORIDA:** No scheduled meeting for January. The next meeting will be **Saturday, February 6**, at the St. Johns County Public Library on San Carlos Street. Meeting time is **1:15**.

We have invited Sherry Ortiz, the president of the Doubtters Club of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to speak on: *Establishing a Freethought Group on a University Campus*. She will be bringing a van full of their members to the meeting so it is important that we have a good turnout. Please try to be there and bring a friend. The Doubtters Club is made up of Atheists, Agnostics, and some fundamentalist members. I am sure that the fundies are looking for weakness in our organization.  
FMI: C.W. Mitchell (904) 808-1884

### Ernestine L. Rose

January 13, 1810 - August 4, 1892

Ernestine L. Rose was the most outspoken atheist in America in the 19th century and the first to lobby for women's rights.

In the 1840's, she led a campaign in New York for legislation permitting women to keep control of property they had owned before marriage. Laws back then gave husbands control of their wife's property. The state legislature passed the bill in 1848.

She also worked to abolish slavery and to end the production of alcoholic beverages.

In 1869, she joined Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in founding the national Women's Suffrage Association which campaigned for women's right to vote.

One of her most memorable lectures was "A Defense of Atheism" delivered in 1861 in Boston.

—R. Porto

**TAMPA:** **Saturday January 30**, (last Saturday of each month), 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. in meeting room B of the Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Clearwater.

#### EVENTS:

\* A public meeting concerning tax supported school tuition vouchers will be held at Stetson Law School on **February 17th from noon to 1:30 pm**. A FREE buffet lunch will be served. Keynote speaker: **Barry Lynn**, National Director, Americans United.  
FMI: Jeanne Pugh 727/360-5823 or Sid Goetz 727/343-8666.

**PALM BEACH:** Meetings are held the **third Sunday** of each month at 2:30 p.m. in Jupiter. Members are notified by postcard. For directions or more information, contact Charles Schisler (561) 624-9359 or 627-6340.

### Becoming *from page 5*

participate in the mass because they enjoy the mystery and the majesty found nowhere else. I also know hardcore atheists who go to Unitarian churches and to Reformed Jewish Temples because we are herd animals and we need to be with others of our kind.

As atheists, we must acknowledge these needs, understand them, and never, never belittle them.

**Under these circumstances**, it is very hard to make a case that an appeal to reason or science will change anybody, especially those people who have been subjected to religions that thrive on fear and guilt.

Well, fellow atheists, what do we have to offer? In exchange for a non-existent God, we offer the great collective mind of man. But mind is not enough. Somewhere we need to capture heart.

We wish you, you and you the bestest of new years. Dare we seal it with a kiss? **A**

8 January/ February 1999



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*Atheists of Florida*

# Atheists of Florida

*Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church*

Volume VIII  
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1999



Atheists of  
Florida

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### Lookout, Florida public school system!

WITH HIS HAND literally atop a stack of bibles, Jeb Bush was sworn in as Florida's 43rd governor in January.

"This is our call to arms," said Bush, calling for the state to become a nicer place.

Truer words were never spoken. When the legislature convenes in March, we can expect a calculated effort to dismantle the public school system of Florida by activation of a voucher program. Of all the school voucher plans formulated in various states around the nation, Bush's program is considered the most dangerous of all. His

All of this will be promoted under the disguise of parental choice, as if school choice is some sort of inalienable right. The same concept of choice in, say, housing or transportation would be ludicrous. If you want to live in a \$2-million house and can't afford it, would you ask the state taxpayers to subsidize you? If you wanted to drive a Jag and couldn't afford it... But for some convoluted reason, every parent who can't afford private education for his/her child is entitled to have the taxpayer subsidized it.

Atheists of Florida is enjoined in a coalition of organizations in the Tampa Bay area forming to oppose school vouchers in Florida (see back page for

"I don't believe you can be the governor unless you believe in a higher authority."

—Texas Gov. George W. Bush at his brother, Jeb's inauguration for Governor of the State of Florida, January 5, 1999

"I used the traditional prayer of 'Lord bless you and be gracious unto you.' I added a few words about peace in the world... and I asked for the president's health to be guarded and that of his family.

It was a routine thing to say. You wouldn't have to have any premonitions to do that."

—Morning benediction given by the Rev. Granville Walker, pastor of University Christian Church, on November 22, 1963 at a breakfast for President John F. Kennedy.

information about voucher opposition meetings in the bay area). The coalition will engage in lobbying in Tallahassee against the vouchers.

One of the most important things you can do is let your voice be heard. Write to your state representative and state your opposition to any form of school voucher program. **A**

*It is up to us, the free-thinkers, secularists, humanists, atheists to lead the parade for a world wide educational promotion of the United Nations declaration of Human Rights.*

## Education for Civic Responsibility

—Annual message from Dr. John Xanthopoulos, Chairman, Atheists of Florida, Inc.



ing address at the World Rights. June 14th 1993. "the human rights we are to discuss here in Vienna are not the lowest common

Civic responsibility is not only intended for the local level, but for the national and global as well. Civic responsibility rests on society's understanding of human rights, and both depend on education.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, U.N. Secretary General, said in his opening address at the World Rights Conference on Human Rights, June 14th 1993. "the human rights we are to discuss here in Vienna are not the lowest common denominator among all nations, but rather what I should like to describe as the 'irreducible human element' in other words, the quintessential values through which we affirm together that we are a single human community."

In our quest to educate people about civic efficacy/responsibility we have to turn to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that was inaugurated what it was hoped would be an era of understanding, peace, and prosperity based on respect for human rights. The Challenge for all human

beings in general, and the members of the AOF in particular is to enhance and sustain their commitment to the realization of all human rights: civil, political, economic, social, sexual, and cultural. Through education, we all should proclaim daily in our routines that:

1. Human rights are fundamental privileges or immunities to which all persons have a moral claim.
2. International law views human rights as personal legal entitlements and liberties that include prohibitions against certain types of conduct directed against persons by states and governments.
3. Neither approach regards human rights as "gifts" to be withdrawn or withheld at will.

Education and activism from all of us should be one of our paramount goals. All of us should try to

1. Reform local, state and national laws.
2. Advise officials on electoral procedures.
3. Assist in informing fellow citizens where there is practice of legal discrimination, i.e. discrimination against homosexuals.
4. Support democratization always and everywhere
5. Strengthening the rule of constitutional law.
6. Support public education in general, and civic education in particular.

Finally, support the U.S. Bill of Rights. Free information is a powerful deterrent to human rights abuse. Unfortunately, it is often the people whose rights are being violated who are the least informed about their rights. It is up to us, the free thinkers, secularists, humanists, atheists to lead the parade for a world wide educational promotion of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. I am looking forward to being part of that parade.

*John A. Xanthopoulos, Ph.D.*  
Chair, Atheists of Florida, Inc.

*Dr. John Xanthopoulos is Adjunct Professor of Education and Social Science for Palm Beach Community College.*  
E-mail: jxanthop@acc.fau.edu.

## Atheists of Florida Bookstore

Author	Title	Price
Joseph Lewis	<i>American Atheist Heritage</i>	\$ 4.00
Robert Ingersol	<i>65 Press Interviews w/ Ingersol</i>	6.00
Mark Twain	<i>Letters From Earth</i>	15.00
Rick Will	<i>Religion and Marx</i>	10.00
Robert Ingersol	<i>Some Reasons Why I'm a Freethinker</i>	3.00
Robert Ingersol	<i>The Great Infidels</i>	3.50
Bertrand Russell	<i>Why I Am Not A Christian</i>	15.00

Call Ed Golly for complete list of books & periodicals 813/839-7567. If books are to be mailed, add \$2 for first book, \$.50 each additional book. Make checks payable to Atheists of Florida.

concerned about the power of the religious right. Republicans for Choice, an organization to which I belong, is actively engaged in this battle. And, of course, everyone is free to vote for any party when election time comes around.

*Myrtle Brickman*  
Pompano Beach, FL

## Grant Pushes Amendment

### Display

The divisive effect of the Far Right's insistence on displaying the ten commandments on government property must be transparently clear to any person who is aware of the growing multicultural composition of our population. But this means nothing to our Right Wing State Senator who would rather promote his personal religious agenda than consider the sensibilities of any of his constituents.

But even more egregious is his ignorant or intentional misreading of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. He is quoted as saying that the Constitution guarantees "the freedom of religion. Not freedom from religion." Not so, senator Grant. Our U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the First Amendment to protect freethinkers, atheists, and any variety of non-believers. Witness the following quotations from the Court's decisions:

- ❖ "the court has unambiguously concluded that freedom of conscience protected by the First Amendment embraces the right to select any religious faith or none at all." Wallace v. Jaffree (1985).
  - ❖ "neither a state nor the federal government can constitutionally pass laws or impose requirements which aid all religions as against non-believers." Torcaso v. Watkins (1961).
  - ❖ "The First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and non-religion." Edperson v. Arkansas (1968).
- Should Senator Grant dismiss the foregoing statements as but recent misinterpretations of the original

content of the Framers. I would refer him to President James Madison's remark in a letter to E. Livingston, dated July 10, 1922. "religion and government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together."

For your information, Senator Grant, James Madison is known as the father of the U.S. Constitution.

*Sid Coetz*  
Gulfport, FL

## Religion inappropriate in politics

*Yacwi responds to another letter he saw in the Tampa Tribune titled: When did God become a dirty word?*

The letter writer repeatedly asks (in various versions) the question: "When did God become a bad word if used with politics?" I must respond with "Always was, always will be." Of course, lets not limit to god or gods or Christians or Christian principles or Muslims or Jews or Hindus or... well, let's just say that any belief system based on faith rather than reason should be included. Any time a person decides that his or her beliefs convey the right to force their ideas on another, solely because of that belief, then it's a dirty word.

Prove to me that your source (not the book or the human that wrote it, but the so-called supernatural being behind it) exists anywhere other than in your own mind, and I might start to listen. Prove to me that your source gives advice that protects my rights as a human being—which are just as valid as your right to believe whatever it is that you believe—while improving humanity here on Earth (not in some never-never land), and I'll take you seriously.

And whether you can call yourself Christian, Scientist or New Age guru matters not a whit to me. I have no intention of giving you control over my life, and any politician who bases his actions on unproven beliefs is as dangerous as those infamous leaders we so love to vilify: Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, Khomeini; the list goes ever onward.

*Brent Yacwi*  
Tampa

## Mark Twain Scholarship Fund needs you!

The Atheists of Florida official scholarship fund has again been accepted to the Combined Federal Campaign and the Florida State Employee's Charitable Campaign. That means that federal and state employees can *and do* contribute to the Fund.

Our scholarship is being offered in many of the major colleges and universities in Florida. This year's topic is "Imagine a world without militaries."

To help fulfill our pledge for this year's grants, past A of F president Christos Tzaretakos has donated a beautiful 14K gold ladies ring with matching earrings to be raffled by the Fund. Both

feature an opal stone surrounded by 16 diamond chips on the ring, ten on the earrings.

Although we've had a good response so far, we still need to sell a few more tickets to reach our minimum for the raffle. To purchase, send \$5.00 for each ticket to:

Twain Scholarship Fund  
P. O. Box 3893  
Ft. Pierce, FL 34948

This is the only fund-raising drive for our scholarship. Please be as generous as you can.

## Atheists of Florida

Published eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit, educational organization designed to heighten public awareness about atheism and to provide intellectually stimulating contacts for the membership.

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Membership dues:  
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The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters from our members are published on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

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## Logic dug up

Dear Editor:

Flo Morgenroth's excellent piece on "Atheists in foxholes" (December, '98 issue) re-visits a tired, unsubstantiated claim of theists who are desperate to force their God belief on everyone. But these kinds of statements only harm their cause.

# Letters



First the contention that there are no atheists in foxholes is wildly dogmatic. Indeed, only a god could be able to have this kind of knowledge. How could any theist possibly know the thoughts of every person who has ever spent time in a foxhole?

Second, let us say that there are no atheists in foxholes. In times of fear and stress, people tend to be in their most irrational mental states. Therefore, the implication would be what we atheists have contended all along—that a belief in God is highly irrational. The theists would have a better chance if they dogmatically asserted that there are no atheists in philosophy, science, and other areas where evidence is consistently valued. Even theists are not that foolish.

Third, even if all warriors believe in God, this would not prove God's existence. I am sure that one could argue that all Greek warriors believed in Zeus. But where is the theist who will argue that this contention is evidence of Zeus' existence?

All theists share one problem: they have no strong evidence to substantiate their belief in God. They depend upon faith. But as Bertrand Russell wisely observed: "We may define faith as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence... we only speak of faith when we wish to replace evidence with emotion."

No matter what happens in foxholes, as long as theists have no evidence to substantiate their beliefs, there will certainly be atheists among people who think.

*Norm R. Allen, Jr.*  
Amherst, NY

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MARY BENNETT HUDSON

Hello from Northwest  
Florida.

Just a short line to say  
that the piece by Flo  
Morgenroth "Atheists in  
Foxholes" was most inter-  
esting and speaks to one  
of my favorite subjects.

On the off chance that

Mrs. Morgenroth (and the staff at A of F) might find it of interest I've taken the liberty of enclosing an essay of mine "Reflections of a None" written on the same topic but from a more personal perspective—and because she has been so involved with the battered women problem. I thought the essay "Victims All" might also be of interest to her. It addresses the equally disturbing problem of child abuse.

Enjoy the essays and continued good health and good fortune to all at Atheists of Florida  
Best regards,

*Norman B. LeClair*  
Navarre, FL

*LeClair served in Viet Nam. His essays will be published in future newsletters this year. —Ed*

## Is Voting Republican Unforgivable Heresy?

Dear Sir:

Flo Morgenroth is absolutely right when she questions whether democracy can survive in the face of the enormous amount of money that right-wing organizations command. But she left out an even more important point.

The reason the religious right dominates the Republican party and therefore the U.S. Congress, even though they have only 13% of the voters, is that *THEY ALL VOTE IN THE PRIMAARY ELECTIONS*. That puts the moderate Republicans at a great disadvantage because so many of them get knocked out in the primaries, even though the moderates constitute the majority of the Republican Party.

The reason that the 19% of the voters who are not the non-Christian left have so little political power is that *THEY DO NOT VOTE IN THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES*.

The mission of all right-thinking Americans, regardless of political affiliation, who are concerned about the future of this democracy is clear. It is to attack the religious right where it counts: *BEFORE THEY VOTE IN THE REPUBLICAN PRIMARIES*, where the religious right wields its greatest power. To do this in Florida the voter has to register as a Republican.

This is easy to do. Just fill out the form in your voter registration card and mail it in to the supervisor of elections. Then watch the newspapers for the date of the primaries and the names of the candidates' positions on matters like abortion and physician aid in dying, opposition to which is a hallmark of the religious right.

There are those who cannot shake the convictions that registering as a Republican is unforgivable heresy. To those people I say: Take those blinkers off. This issue is too important for that kind of parochial thinking. Remember that MOST Republicans are not religious fanatics and many of them are greatly

Y'all Come to AUSTIN, TEXAS

Easter Weekend, April 2, 3, 4, for the  
5th Annual Atheist Alliance Convention

# It's FREETHOUGHT ROUNDUP Time!

## SIGN UP TODAY!

1. Make room reservations at the downtown OMNI Hotel, 700 San Jacinto. Call 1-800-THE OMNI, or 512-476-0700 in the Austin area, or see the OMNI website: [www.omnihotels.com/](http://www.omnihotels.com/)

Convention rate is \$73 per night. Say you are with the Atheist Alliance convention OR Freethought Roundup to get this rate. The OMNI is a block from 6th Street's live music venues, great restaurants and the hottest night life in Texas. See most of Austin from the rooftop pool!

2. Register for the convention.  
Costs per person:  
Registration 50.00  
Friday night "Esther's Follies" 15.00  
Saturday luncheon 25.00  
Saturday night banquet 35.00

An excellent program is being planned. This will be an exciting, informative and revitalizing event!

## SPECIAL ADDED ATTRACTION:

We plan to visit Comfort, Texas. The town was settled by 19th century German freethinkers and is the site of the current cenotaph controversy. When you register, please state if you are interested in taking a chartered bus to Comfort on Sunday afternoon.

Make checks payable to

ACA ROUNDUP COMMITTEE

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ROUNDUP REGISTRATION

P. O. BOX 3798

AUSTIN TX 78764

Please include the names of all persons in your party so we can make name tags. Print clearly. Use extra sheet if needed.

For more info call Don Rhoades, 612-892-3199; email: [dcmrodz@swbell.net](mailto:dcmrodz@swbell.net)  
Watch the Alliance web site for updates: [www.AtheistAlliance.org](http://www.AtheistAlliance.org)

## COUNT ME IN!

Show how many:

Registration @ \$50  
Friday nite "Esther's Follies" @ \$16  
Saturday luncheon @ \$25  
Saturday nite banquet @ \$35  
Amount enclosed: \$

Name(s)

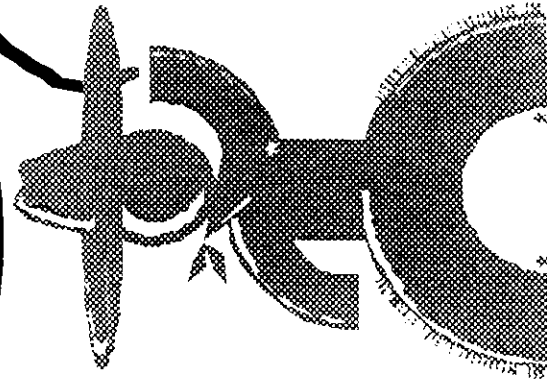
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Phone

Vegetarian? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
Interested in bus trip  
to Comfort?  
Yes \_\_\_  
No \_\_\_

Your Host  
Atheist Community of Austin  
Welcomes You!



IS GOD FAIR? Do we not expect him/her/it to be evenhanded? Let's take sports, for instance. In particular, college and high school sports.

Many coaches and players kneel in prayer before each game. They pray for victory over their opponents. Very often both teams pray. If both teams pray to the same god, are they not asking their god to favor

## Does a just God answer our prayers?

—Sidney M. Goetz

them over their rivals?

Stop and think, please, what such prayers signify. If you ask God to give victory to your side, aren't you asking for an unfair advantage over the other side, a spiritual advantage that is irrelevant to the relative athletic capabilities of the competing teams? If it is dishonest for athletes to pump up their physical abilities by the use of steroids, is it not equally dishonest to beg for victory on the basis of spiritual steroids provided by God's assistance?

But the morality of coaches and players who seek God's assistance by prayer—questionable as it is—is not as reproachable as the image they project of an unfair and unethical God who might answer their prayers and thus play favorites.

The rules of the game permit only a certain number of players on each side. If God were to help one side prevail, wouldn't he/she/it be breaking the rules? Wouldn't he/she/it be unfair and unethical?

We look upon God as a father figure. If God favored one team over another, he would hardly be acting like the father we expect. Would a decent father favor some of his children over the others? Would he cause some of his children to defeat other children and make them feel sad and depressed? Does he measure how devout they are before coming down on one side or the other? Or the sincerity of their prayers? What if one team doesn't offer prayers? Do they always lose?

If your team wins, should you praise God for giving you an unfair advantage? Aren't praying coaches, praying teams and individual competitors who make the sign of the cross really praying to God to be unfair, unethical, immoral and guilty of unsportsmanlike conduct?

*Sid Goetz is a retired attorney, Florida State Board Member of the American Civil Liberties Union, and President of the Tampa Bay Chapter of Americans United. He lives in Gulfport.*

Christian God. But Jesus has more difficult problems to deal with than competing athletic teams.

**He has to deal,** for instance, with two differing views of Christianity in Northern Ireland. The prayers of the Protestants and Catholics in that beleaguered country fill the air each Sunday, and the Christian God has yet to stop the killings. He has yet to bestow the blessing of his victory on either side. Nor has he come up with a solution to stop the bloodletting. I suppose he keeps hands off so as to not show any favoritism.

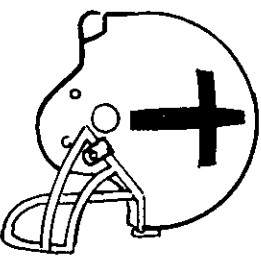
In World War II, Hitler's army appealed to the same Christian God whom the vast majority of Americans and Allied forces worshiped. We won the war, some people say, because God favors the United States. Is that fair? Do we always deserve God's blessing? Some might question that. Why should God favor us among all his Christian children?

Of course, the problem of fairness and justice is not only with the Christian God. It is constantly confronting all the other gods.

Prominent almost daily in the news are those bloody and violent disputes that erupt constantly among those who follow the dictates of different gods. For instance, clashes between Hindus and Muslims throughout the Asian continent have yet to prove the superiority of one of their gods over the other, or the efficacy of the prayers on either side.

The most recent competition between powerful gods of different religions took place during Operation Desert Storm. Our country, our president, viewed our victory as a victory of Christianity over the Muslim foe. Can we ever forget the televised pictures of the enemy leader exhorting his people and the entire Arab world to join him in *jihad*, a holy war against our forces? Did we need God's help to prevail over the enemy, or was it the overwhelming superiority of our armed forces, our resources, and our equipment that resulted in our victory?

**The need to pray** seems to have been inculcated in most people at a very early age, and most of us persist in this exercise even in the face of massive proof that it is ineffectual. What's more, our prayers are mostly selfish and self-serving, and we ask of God decisions and solutions that a fair and just God—with a conscience—would avoid like the plague. Doesn't it strike you as odd that the most devout among us, those who pray the most frequently and the hardest, are the ever-increasing poor, sick, helpless, and deprived people in this country, and elsewhere in the world—and that as their number increases God seems to find it more and more difficult to relieve their plight?



A

What do the following three December 29<sup>th</sup> news articles have in common?

\***STRAY, INDIA**—Hindu radicals burned down a church in Western India and stoned three others Monday with axes, iron rods, and hammers, sending Christian missionaries fleeing for safety, police and witnesses said.

## Atheism is a process of becoming

—Florence Morgenroth

Mobs set a bamboo church on fire in Mulchard. Attackers also ransacked three other churches and a prayer hall in three nearby villages, missionaries said.

All three churches were badly damaged. Police arrested 38 people in the attacks, which began Christmas Day. Members of two right-wing Hindu parties blamed for most of the violence are angered by missionaries' efforts to convert poor, often illiterate tribal people.

\***ZAVAJA, ALGERIA**—Muslim rebels slashed the throats of 19 villagers, including 11 children, a hospital official and survivors said. (No further details given.)

\***JERUSALEM**—An Israeli military court sentenced Abdel Halim Balthis to life in prison for driving two suicide bombers to an intersection in January 1995 where they killed 22 people.

Where is all of the love that religion is supposed to engender? These small incidents occur everyday along with full-scale wars. Why?

Before I was an atheist, at fourteen, I used to wonder why God would allow his people, his creation, to suffer and die just because they worshipped him in different ways. Couldn't He, who was omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent simply send a message through one of his angels, like he did with Lot, or even make a new messiah to end the slaughter that never stops under the guise of religion? Yea and verily, I thought, religion was very dangerous to life and limb, mine included.

At that period in my life I began to think and discuss various thoughts I had with my friends and they were scandalized. What seemed to be perfectly reasonable questions were acary, as hell to them. How dare I question God's purpose? God does not make mistakes! Luckily for me,

*Flo Morgenroth is a board member of family was not religious and I was never censured for my thoughts. So I continued to ponder with greater and greater anger*

such thoughts as: If God could stop the killing and the war and didn't why should anyone worship him? He was beyond contempt. And, if he couldn't stop it he was useless and unworthy of the prayers that glorified and revered him. Where did that leave me? With a mean vicious God, an inept God or, could it be possible, no God at all?

The thought that there was no God at all was intriguing. I had never been able to understand the disasters that occurred that killed thousands of innocent people such as volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, plagues, droughts, fires, diseases, tidal waves, ect., that wiped out whole civilizations. It made no sense. Why would God destroy so needlessly what he had created? I searched the Bible for answers but I only met a vindictive, judgemental, irrational, non-substantial I am in the Old Testament, and his fatherless son, missing 23 chromosomes, in the New Testament. I doubted the existence of Jesus since the Jews would have known if the new messiah had finally come. They would have been the first to know and celebrate, wouldn't they?

The more I thought the more I was convinced that there was no God.

In a way, it was funny. If there were no God, you couldn't blame him. How can you blame something that does not exist? That made me angry, very angry. I needed something to be angry at and there was nothing. Let me tell you, I needed that God to rave to. Where are you God when I need you?

**On the other hand,** I had to face that I was truly alone in the world and would have to depend on myself to define my life. Yet there was no deity to account to and that was a tremendous liberating force. Life is a process of becoming I learned, and so, fellow atheists, is atheism.

We all arrive at the same conclusion taking different roads. There is no one right way. The religion of your parents, your place of birth, your time in history, your very genes, predetermine your life before you are even born. In most cases religious indoctrination begins shortly after birth and continues thereafter until, as an adult, you are required to pass on to your children the prayers, stories, (or should I say myths) and admonishments you have heard your entire life to keep you faithful to the beliefs of your tribe and under its control. There is great power in church music, rituals and sermons, especially from a talented preacher who knows how to use his voice to captivate his flock. These qualities engineer unforgettable experiences, and the ongoing meetings, year after year, bond people together and they become an extended family, thinking as one.

It is very hard for a free-thinker to break away from this background and these ties. I have atheist friends who go to church to listen to the music, and who *(see Becoming, back page)*