

# FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS  
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 4, No. 4

December 2006

Four pages

## SKIRMISHES

### A resignation

• Rev. Joel Hunter, the minister elected to take over the Christian Coalition, has said he will not assume the role because of differences in philosophy. Hunter said he was stepping down because the national group would not allow him to expand the organization's agenda beyond opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage. He resigned on November 21 during an organizational board meeting. The Christian Coalition was founded by religious broadcaster, Rev. Pat Robertson, in 1989.

### A free-for-all

• Reporting in the New York Times on Nov. 21, George Johnson describes a forum at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, Calif, as a free-for-all between science and religion which "...began to resemble the founding convention for a political party built on a single plank; in a world dangerously charged with ideology, science needs to take on an evangelical role, vying with religion as teller of the greatest story ever told." One can only hope!

## Inside ...

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- New Members ...page 3

## Carl Sagan remembered

By George A. Ricker

People who know me well enough to have a valid opinion will tell you that I don't do hero worship. I have no use for the cult of celebrity that infects our culture. I have written one fan letter in my life. Count 'em. One.



Dr. Carl Sagan: 1934-1996

But on December 20 we will observe the 10th anniversary of the death of Dr. Carl Sagan, and I can't let that date go by without acknowledging what he meant to me and my life. It may seem strange to say that about someone I never met, never really knew at all on a personal level. But there it is. Consider this fan letter number two.

He was only 62 years old when he died of pneumonia at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. He had been battling a bone marrow

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## Atheists for Christmas

By Dianna Narciso

We put up our Christmas tree this past weekend and gathered the family for an eggnog-sipping evening of ornamenting. We have ornaments from all the states we've visited and specialty ornaments from the many tourist places we enjoyed: Carlsbad Caverns, Denver Zoo, Yellowstone, the White House, New York City, Philadelphia and more. We have ornaments representing the things we love, like cats and Harry Potter, and things we once loved, like the old Power Rangers ornament. And we have ornaments with pictures of the children on them, and ornaments made by the children when they were very young.

Our tree is like a family history, a testament of our love for one another, that grows richer every year. We share in it every year, marveling at it for about a month, before we pack it all away again and wait out the long lonely months without Christmas.

Christmas is the culmination of the year. It's the celebration of the passing of time. Without it, we'd have

See **CHRISTMAS** on page 2

## HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association holds its December meeting from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 3 at Melbourne Public Library, 540 E. Fee Ave., Melbourne. This meeting will be in the large conference room - on the right as you enter the library. This month's topic is "What's wrong with Santa?"

SCFA meetings are free and open to the public. Come and join the conversation about the need for a wall of separation between government and religion and the importance of freedom FROM religion.

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Our next Adopt-A-Road cleanup will begin at 10 a.m. on Dec. 10. We meet in the parking lot of the Atlanta Bread Company Restaurant, located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Palm Bay Road and Stack Boulevard.

.....

The Space Coast Freethought Association is planning to hold its Second Annual Winter Solstice Party on Dec. 16 from 7:30 p.m. until ... ? The party will be held at Judy and George Ricker's home in Palm Bay. For more see page 3.

See **HAPPENINGS** on page 3

# CHRISTMAS (from page 1)

# CONNECTIONS

to create something else. But I like Christmas just fine. I like the cookies I will bake; and I like that I'll try to forget about my weight for just a while. I like the family dinner of turkey, stuffing, and sweet potatoes. I like Christmas carols, all about Jesus and the Lord and the King. I like the story about Jesus being born in a manger and wise men visiting him. Peace on Earth, Good Will toward Men, and all that.

I get all mushy and teary eyed, still, when I watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. But even better, I have a long list of holiday movies that have to be watched every year: *Christmas Vacation* with Chevy Chase. *A Christmas Story* with Ralphie and his dad's leg lamp. I have a new ornament this year that is a small replica of that famed major award. *The Muppet Christmas Carol*—possibly the best version ever. *A Christmas Carol* with Alastair Sim—probably the best version ever. *It's a Wonderful Life*; and it really is. *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. No Christmas is complete without that one.

## Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.

The Space Coast Freethought Association is a Florida nonprofit corporation, based in Brevard County. To join the online discussion group go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

Our mailing address is:

Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.  
PO Box 60448  
Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448

For more information, contact President Dianna Narciso by email at [catspah@cfl.rr.com](mailto:catspah@cfl.rr.com). or visit our website at:

<http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/>

Some atheists don't get why I celebrate Christmas. It's simple. I celebrate it because I was brought up with it. There is nothing in it for me to reject. There were no religious undertones to any of it when I was a child, and no religious messages pop out at me when I enjoy it now.

It's a story that we have molded over time into a grand wish for peace and love.

I don't think that celebrating a secular Christmas aids religious fanaticism in any way. I don't think it helps religion at all. In fact, I think it damages it. The more Christmas becomes 'of the world' the more it loses its religion.

As we celebrate it century after century with trees and shopping and a good meal, its origins fade into nothing more than a sweet story. It's clear that this transformation is already underway in the desperate attempts of the religious to 'put Christ back into Christmas' even while they engorge themselves on the secular side of it.

Atheists for Christmas should unite to keep Christmas all the year, because there's nothing wrong with taking the religious bite out of a good party and small acts of kindness. And there's nothing wrong with galling the fundamentalists into showing their true colors and seducing the moderates into secularizing their holy days. Just as life evolves, so does Christmas.

© 2006 by Dianna Narciso

*Like rolling uphill: realizing the honesty of atheism*

By Dianna Narciso

is available at most bookstores and online book sellers.

We are,  
therefore  
we think!

<http://www.carlsagan.com/>

The Carl Sagan Portal is dedicated to the life and work of the late Dr. Carl Sagan, who died 10 years ago this month. Here you'll find biographical information as well as material about his books and the Cosmos television show. His widow, Ann Druyan, has included a remembrance of her husband and is scheduled to begin a blog on the anniversary of his death, December 20th.

<http://www.booktalk.org/index.php>

"BookTalk.org is a FREE online book discussion community that promotes quality reading, freedom of inquiry, and intellectual growth. We read and discuss both fiction and nonfiction books and host live author chats."

Registration is required if you want to participate in any of the discussions, but there's no charge and the process is relatively painless.

*Freely Speaking* is the newsletter of the **Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.** It is published monthly and distributed free as a pdf file. Print copies are available to members on request.

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*Freely Speaking* invites articles which promote freethought and church-state separation and announcements relating to groups and activities which do the same. Email submissions to [gricker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com) with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

Inquiries about *Freely Speaking* should be directed to George Ricker by email or by mail to: SCFA, PO Box 60448, Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448 - att: newsletter.

SPACE COAST FREETHOUGHT  
ASSOCIATION, INC. WELCOMES  
ITS NEWEST MEMBERS:

**PATRICK FORD**  
**AND**  
**LAUREN ESPOSITO**

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**Join us!!!**

*Become a dues-paying member of the  
Space Coast Freethought Association.  
Annual memberships are \$15 for individuals,  
\$25 for couples and  
\$10 for seniors (65+) and students.  
Applications are available at our meetings,  
online and by mail on request.  
Join the fight against religious extremism  
and for separation  
between government and religion.*

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If you would like to comment on an item in our newsletter or on the activities of the Space Coast Freethought Association, write a letter to the editor and email it to George Ricker at [gricker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com). Please use the subject heading "Letter to the editor." Letters should be no more than 200 words long and will be subject to editing. They must be signed. If you prefer to mail your letter, send it to *Freely Speaking*, Letters to the Editor, PO Box 60448, Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448.

**SPACE COAST FREETHOUGHT  
ASSOCIATION**  
A non-prophet organization

<http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/>

*The Space Coast  
Freethought Association*

*invites its members to a  
Winter Solstice Party  
on December 16  
from 7:30 p.m. until ...?  
at the home of  
George and Judy Ricker in Palm Bay.*

*Help us celebrate the reason for the season.*

*Please R.S.V.P. by email to  
[gricker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com) or by phoning George  
Ricker at (321) 727-8386.*

*Refreshments will be served.*

**SCFA store open at CafePress**

How would you like to buy a tee-shirt or a button with the Space Coast Freethought Association's logo on it?

Check out the new "Space Coast Freethought Association" store at [cafepress.com](http://cafepress.com). You'll find the site at: <http://www.cafepress.com/scfreethought>

**SCFA Board of Directors (officers)**

Dianna Narciso (President) ...George Ricker (Vice Pres.)  
Cameo Cramer (Secretary) ...Toni Sweeney (Treasurer)  
Doug Cramer ...Mike Sweeney...Charles Trantham

**HAPPENINGS** (from page 1) \_\_\_\_\_

**The Humanist Club at Barefoot Bay** holds its next meeting from 2 to 4 p.m. on December 9 at the South Mainland Library, 7921 Ron Beatty Boulevard, Barefoot Bay. Contact George Oertel at 772-664-0170 for more information.

# SAGAN (from page 1)

disease, myelodysplasia, a form of anemia also known as preleukemia syndrome, for some time.

And though his life truly was, in the words of a Neil Diamond song, "...done too soon," it also was a life filled with accomplishment. He was a noted astronomer and planetary scientist, professor of astronomy at Cornell University, author of hundreds of scientific papers and of numerous best-selling books on science, including a Pulitzer Prize winner, *The Dragons of Eden*. He was heavily involved in space exploration and consulted on a number of projects with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and was an experimenter on several planetary probes. He was the creator and host of the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning PBS television series, *Cosmos*, and author of the companion volume, which was, at the time of his death the best selling science book in the world. He was the recipient of honorary degrees, awards and accolades too numerous to mention in this brief essay. He had many other interests, many other accomplishments. He served in a variety of capacities in numerous organizations.

For most of his adult life, Sagan was engaged in promoting science and scientific literacy. He thought it essential that all human beings have an understanding of, at least, the basics of science and scientific inquiry. He thought it was especially critical for the citizens of a highly sophisticated, technologically advanced society to have that understanding. And he thought it extremely dangerous if they did not.

Speaking before the annual convention of CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal) in Seattle, Washington, in 1994, Sagan stated, "We have a civilization based on science and technology, and we have cleverly arranged things so that almost nobody understands science and technology. That is as clear a prescription for disaster as you can imagine. It's a combustible mixture of ignorance and power. And while we might get away with it for a while, that mixture, sooner or later, is going to blow up. The powers of modern technology are so enormous that it is insufficient to say, well those in charge of those powers, I am sure, are doing a good job. This is a democracy, and for us to make sure that the powers of science and technology are used properly and prudently, we ourselves must understand science and technology."

***Godless in America: conversations with an atheist*** by  
George A. Ricker  
is now available at book retailers everywhere. For  
more information go to:  
<http://www.godlessinamerica.com>

Like many Americans, I first learned of Sagan when *Cosmos* began airing on PBS. I was captivated not only by the story being told but also by the exuberance of the man telling it. His love of science was infectious. It sent me off to the libraries and book stores, determined to correct some gaping holes in my own knowledge.

Since then, I have read most of Sagan's books and read numerous articles by him. I recommend them to you without hesitation. He was an engaging writer and a gifted explainer. That's not to say he was infallible. Who among us is? But time spent with such a mind is rarely wasted. Of the books he wrote, my personal favorite is *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. A primer on science and critical thinking, it was one of the last books he wrote, published the year he died, and may have been his best.

But Sagan didn't just rekindle my long dormant interest in science. He reminded me of the integration of all knowledge and the need to understand who we are and how we came to this time and place in the life of the cosmos. He didn't worship science, but he understood its value and saw clearly the dangers of scientific illiteracy.

He ended *The Demon-Haunted World* with a chapter called "Real Patriots ask questions."

Sagan wrote, "Education on the value of free speech and the other freedoms reserved by the Bill of Rights, about what happens when you don't have them, and about how to exercise and protect them, should be an essential prerequisite for being an American citizen—or indeed a citizen of any nation, the more so to the degree that such rights remain unprotected. If we can't think for ourselves, if we're unwilling to question authority, then we're just putty in the hands of those in power. But if the citizens are educated and form their own opinions, then those in power work for us. In every country, we should be teaching our children the scientific method and the reasons for a Bill of Rights. With it comes a certain decency, humility and community spirit. In the demon-haunted world that we inhabit by virtue of being human, this may be all that stands between us and the enveloping darkness."

I didn't idolize Carl Sagan, and I certainly don't worship his memory. What I do feel is a profound sense of gratitude for his tireless advocacy of science and reason and his patience in sharing his love of both with the rest of us. So this is my belated "thank you" for all of that.

The world is a poorer place without him in it, but it is far richer for the legacy he left behind.

• Those who would like to learn more about Dr. Carl Sagan should go to the Carl Sagan Portal at <http://www.carlsagan.com/>. Be sure to read the moving essay "Where Would We Be With Carl" by his widow, Ann Druyan, while you're there.

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