



The Ethical Humanist

The Newsletter of The Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island

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From Our Religious Director



Calvin Dame
Religious Director, EHSIJ

This article is edited from the blog posted on the EHS website recently under the heading Requiem For An Atheist

Christopher Hitchens, described by the New York Times as a "slashing polemicist", died at 62 on December 15 of complications arising from the esophageal cancer that he had, quite publicly, battled for the last year. His death is a great loss.

Hitchens was brilliant, widely read, passionate, partisan, irascible, vehement, cutting, charming and combative. He was the kind of public intellectual who, even when we disagree with them, deepens the conversation and sharpens our thinking. And, though he wrote knowledgeably and passionately on an astonishing array of topics, in the last few years he was perhaps best known as the public face of an assertive and pugnacious atheism. His best-selling 2007 book, "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," is not merely a case for atheism, it is a battle cry against every form of religious superstition, ignorance, pomp or influence. Hitchens loved a fight and relished the opportunity for public debate of his views. He was in great demand, religious and conservative thinkers lined up to debate with him. Though his arguments made quick work of mushy thinking and religiosity, it would seem his charm, wit and charisma were irresistible.

Christopher Hitchens was a fundamentalist atheist in a way that I am not. In fact, as a religious humanist, I generally find his kind of fundamentalism uninteresting and counterproductive. For some atheists, humanist or other, it is not enough to hold this view, not enough to have the freedom to believe or disbelieve, but they will not rest easy until the last believer is argued into apostasy. That is not and has never been the position of Ethical Humanism. We take no position on the question of religious belief, holding that in this area each person is guided by their own experience and thinking. Rather, we hold, it is how we live our lives that matters, and we come together to learn to live loving

and engaged lives.

But Hitchens has been important to us despite our differences and his death is our loss, as well. There is a deep rooted prejudice against atheists in our culture. Discrimination is rampant. Just one example: it is nearly impossible for a non-believer to be elected almost anything in our present society. A profession of faith, however disingenuous, is a requirement for public office. And Ethical Humanism, whatever our position on belief, is tarred in the public mind with this same ignorant brush. So, I am grateful to Christopher Hitchens and mourn his loss. Despite, I must add, differences with him on a number of public issues. But, in this case, his public voice, his intelligence, his passion, his pugnacious spirit have helped to extend the boundaries of freedom and tolerance for atheists, humanists and non-conforming religious views in our time.

— Calvin Dame



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HAVE YOU MAILED IN YOUR 2012 PLEDGE TO EHSIJ? OUR SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON YOU!

Events with Calvin

Wednesday Lunch Discussion Group

January 11: Bring your lunch and join Calvin at the Society at noon for a discussion of Bill Moyer's Nation article: "How Occupy Wall Street Occupied America." Copies of the article will be available at the EHSIJ office.

Ethics Café

Participants at the December Ethics Café decided to join the annual Garden City Interfaith Study program. Scheduled for four Wednesdays in January, the January 11th program will be meet at the Garden City Jewish Center, 168 Nassau Boulevard, from 7:15 to 9:15 PM looking at "Our Various Faith Traditions on Wealth and Poverty."

Sharon Stanley's Blog

Darwin Day and the EHSLI

Historically I have always had an affinity toward secular holidays and when I first heard about Darwin Day, I felt this was a perfect celebration for every Humanist group. The American Humanist Association began the International Darwin Day Foundation, which has celebrated Charles Darwin and "Darwin Day" over 10 years ago. Other ethical societies in the movement have been celebrating this event for that long as well. Since this is a time in America where the separations between church and state have slowly blurred and in some cases, whittled away, it's important to create celebrations that do not have a religious history and can also educate our children and provide moral examples without the use of superstition and false "truths."



Sharon and son Gabriel

However, as I researched Darwin Day activities and celebration, I learned that most are geared toward adults and the debate about evolution vs. creation theories. (It is incredible to think that this is still up for debate, but it is.) These events might be appropriate for high school or college aged children, but not for middle school age or younger. These are especially formative years because at this age it is difficult to determine which events will impact their lives and for some children and preteens, they do not always express these thoughts and feelings in a way that is obvious for parents, teachers and other adults to recognize or understand.

As a veteran elementary teacher, I felt it was essential to create a celebration that was intergenerational. That is why began to coordinate our Darwin Day celebration with a festive atmosphere. We decided to add the "Stand Up For Science" part because this way we are open to include all aspects of science, not just evolution and natural selection.

It surprises me that more children's programs do not celebrate Darwin Day. Children are fascinated by science and how our natural world works. We have created a "Science Fair" atmosphere. Last year our event began with Dr. Victor Schuster as he led a science-themed platform talk. Dr. Schuster gave a wonderful demonstration of the scientific method during his talk. He posed a situation that also included an ethical dilemma and he elicited audience participation in solving the dilemma. During his entire presentation Dr. Schuster reminded us how we were using the scientific method; problem, hypothesis, test for consistency and resolution. Who were the ones with their hands up the most? It was the children from our Sunday children's ethics program.

After lunch, which was available for purchase, all children and adults were invited to participate in a variety of "hands on" science activities. Our ethical society is fortunate to have Dr. Joan Petersen, a biology professor and parent of children in our Sunday program. She came up with activities that included dissecting owl pellets to identify what owls eat, extracting DNA from Strawberries and "Predator/Prey B-I-N-G-O."

As the resident elementary teacher, my challenge was finding an activity that is appropriate and fun for children of all ages. On the internet I found a high school exploration that I rewrote for children ages 5-13. I call it the "Survival of the Fittest" game. Briefly, the children are randomly given two utensils to simulate different kinds of appendages. Some children have two forks; others have two spoons, two knives and two chopsticks. Using only these utensils, the children are engaged in a timed race to see who can pick up the most beans. After a few minutes, the group with the least amount of beans "dies off." They then pick up the utensils which gathered the most beans. At the end of the game, two or three "species" have died off and only one or two exist. It is a fun way to show how different appendages affect how different species found ways to survive. It may not surprise anyone that the chopstick species was the first to die off, but we were surprised to learn that the forks were able to collect up more beans than the spoons. It was great fun for the children to crawl around the floor collecting beans and it was even more fun watching their delight and their creativity in trying to figure out how to get the most beans. The children naturally began to work together in teams, once again demonstrating how collaboration is the best way toward survival for animals and humans.

This year, on Long Island, The Ethical Humanist Society will celebrate our fourth annual "Darwin Day/Stand Up For Science" celebration and as luck would have it, it will be on Darwin's actual birth date, February 12, 2012. Our celebration begins at 11:00 AM. Our children eagerly look forward to this annual event and specifically ask about it. Most have begun planning their science projects and demonstrations. Not only are we fortunate enough to have Dr. Schuster reprise his scientific method and ethical dilemma presentation, this year, we are happy to include our local Amateur Observer's Society. Linda Prince will be running two activities called, "Astronomy and the Night Sky" and "Meteorite / Meteor Wrong - How Do You Know that a Rock is a Meteorite?"

Here is a niche that our humanist organizations and ethical societies should fill. Children are naturally inquisitive so science lends itself to the kind of fun children enjoy and they like the educational process this allows them to participate in. Parents would feel comfortable allowing their children to participate in these activities because it increases their academic skills and involvement in a variety of ways. Most importantly, it is FUN for all involved.

As Humanists, we are awed by the mysteries of the natural world and support the use of science to reveal those mysteries. Ethics guides us to be mindful of our individual responsibility to preserve the earth's beauty and resources for future generation and that science and technology can help us achieve this goal.

For more information about our "Darwin Day/Stand Up For Science" celebration, or the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, please contact me at lihumanist@hotmail.com or check out our web site; www.ehsli.org. The Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island is located at 38 Old Country Road, Garden City, NY 11530. 516-741-7304.

— Sharon Stanely, Public School Teacher and EHSLI member

Excerpts of this blog appear in the January/February 2012 issue of *The Humanist* magazine: <http://thehumanist.org/january-february-2012/why-aren%E2%80%99t-more-kids-celebrating-darwin-day/>



Goings on at EHSIJ and Around

Exercise Classes for Seniors: Classes for seniors are led by instructor Sue Salko. Classes meet 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Classes are geared to the needs of participants while addressing flexibility, balance, strength and endurance. Bring light weights, stretch bands (are available from instructor), wear comfortable clothing and sneakers. Suggested contribution: \$5 per class.

Reason Rally: the largest secular event in world history. It is sponsored by many of the country's largest and most influential secular organizations. It is free to attend and will take place in Washington DC on **March 24th**, 2012 from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Find out more at <http://www.americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2011-09-save-the-date-reason-rally-to-be-held-march-24-2012>. Bus leaves from Amtrak (Penn Station) Round Trip \$50. Price for the bus goes up after Jan. 24. <http://reasonrally.dcrallybus.com/Travel/From/NewYorkCity>. Chris, Gabriel and Sharon Stanley are thinking about attending the rally. We want to know if anyone else from the Ethical society would like to join us. Call us at home at 516-333-1968 or e-mail lihumanist@hotmail.com if you would like more information.

Meet EHSIJ Online!

EHSIJ Website: <http://www.ehsij.org>

EHSIJ on Twitter — follow us at www.twitter.com/ehsij

EHSIJ on Meet-up: Don Morgenstern has set up EHSIJ on Meet Up, a great networking website. Follow the link to <http://www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanist-Society-of-Long-Island/>. This site lists a full schedule of our events. Visit the site and support us by becoming an EHSIJ meet up member.

Leader emeritus Arthur Dobrin is blogging weekdays. You can read his blog at arthurdobrin.wordpress.com

Sunday Meetings

January 8: *Remembrance Sunday*

January 15: *Calvin Dame*

January 22: *Mike Lyndon*

From Street Plans Collaborative

January 29: *Greg Bush*

Prof. of Economics from SUNY Suffolk

Sunday Meetings begin at 11:00 AM

Sunday Colloquies begin at 9:30 AM

Movie Group: next meets on Saturday, Jan. 7th at 2:30 PM. The two movies that will be discussed are *Descendents* and *A Dangerous Method*. Led by Al Zeiger, filling in for Ken Schwartzman.

Free Yoga Classes: led by Sylvia Silberger, Gentle and Restorative Wed's 5:30-6:30 PM and a Vinyasa-style yoga Mon's 7-8:15 PM. Email Sylvia at matsbs@yahoo.com if you are interested in attending so that she can inform you of changes and cancellations.

The Caring Connection: our commitment to taking care of those of us who are sick or in need. We encourage involvement from all, as this is core to who we are as Ethical Humanists.

Annual Food Drive: Members of the EHSIJ are collecting food items for **INN (Interfaith Nutrition Network)**. Please bring in non-perishable food items to the basket in the lobby.



Annual Interfaith Study: Hosted by the Garden City Clergy Fellowship on *People of Faith in a Material World: The Challenge of Wealth and Poverty*. During this time of stress in our nation we will explore together issues that affect us all. . . 4 Wednesday Evenings, 7:15 - 9:15 PM

January 4 - Garden City Presbyterian Church, keynote speaker: Richard Koubek, Ph.D., Jobs with Justice Realities and Programs on Long Island

January 11 - Garden City Jewish Center, Our various faith traditions' perspectives on wealth and poverty and distribution of wealth

January 18 - St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church, Self-worth vs. net worth: the association so many people tend to make between money and human value itself

January 25 - Garden City Community Church, 76 million Baby Boomers are now approaching retirement, pensions, Social Security, and mounting health care needs. We will hear from individuals with particular insight into these concerns.

~ Childcare will be available ~

Membership Meeting!

January 15th, after the platform.

Members: please make every effort to attend.

Kids In Deed!



Our class met twice in December. Our December 4 lesson covered four basic emotions and how we, as humanists, use these feelings as the basis for our ethical actions. The four basic feelings are "glad," "sad," "mad," and "bad." Family and fun activities lead to feeling glad, which leads naturally to gratitude. Gratitude leads to contentment. Sadness occurs as a result of loss through illness, death, failure, or disappointment. One student said he never liked to feel sad or even think about it-- and he was right. The point is not to become depressed. However, sadness on a more mature level can be viewed as compassion-- a type of awareness that combines concern for others with a desire to make others' lives better. The third emotion, "mad," happens when we become angry. Bullies, people who break rules, or people who hurt others make us mad-- and this becomes the foundation of a desire for justice. Finally, "bad" refers to feeling guilty, as we have all said and done things that we know have led to hurting someone else. However, like "sadness"-- the point is not to go around feeling guilty all the time. The point is to become aware of our own actions, take responsibility for them, and develop both a con-



Winter Festival Penguins painted by Sebastian Niculescu and Tina Goparaju of the YES group.



Our bread feast consisted of tortillas, cornbread and challah.

science and a moral code that guides us throughout life. The simple awareness of our own feelings -- glad, sad, mad, and bad-- becomes the basis of living an ethical life.

Our December 11 lesson centered around BREAD! We learned that people have made bread for thousands of years. Had they not made bread to sustain themselves, we might not be alive today! Our ancestors nourished themselves with bread, giving themselves-- and later us-- life.

Bread is made either from wheat, corn, or rice. The grain a community chooses to make bread from comes from where that community lives in the world and what crops will grow. Wet climates like southeast Asia are perfect for rice, hot climates like Mexico are good for corn, and the American plains are great for wheat. We saw some photos and videos of people making different types of bread that are native to their culture.



*Alison Pratt,
KIDS IN DEED Director*

People have incorporated bread as an important symbol in their religious thinking. Ancient Egyptians put bread in the tombs of the dead, so that the person would have something to eat in the afterlife.

In Jewish legend, hungry people prayed to God for bread, and God sent them "manna from Heaven"--a phrase that is still used today to describe an unexpected and much-needed gift. Challah bread is used in Jewish celebrations. Challah bread is made of two braids of dough. This symbolizes a Bible verse that said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but rather by what comes forth from God's mouth does man live" (Deuteronomy 8:3). When people eat Challah bread, they remember to sustain the body with bread and the soul with their relationship with God.

Article continued on Pg. 6

YES!

The 18th annual YES Pasta Dinner took place on Saturday, December 10th at the Society, and it was truly out best yet! Our first time holding the dinner in the winter worked out great, with a large crowd of Society members, teens, friends and visitors. Our theme “at the South Pole” helped get everyone into the holiday spirit, with twinkle lights and penguins covering the auditorium. The YES group gave a presentation where they shared some favorite YES memories, ranging from the recent National YES Conference upstate to simply making good friends. Some YES alumni stopped by and spoke as well, including Mayra Fournier and Amy Antoniazzi. The Pasta Dinner featured Roy Klein, board president of the NYCLU Nassau Chapter, who spoke about local human rights cases that have had a big impact on issues such as prayer in schools and cyberspeech. The entertainment portion of the evening featured YES members Ryan Dobrin, Chloe Agostino, and Eric Morgenstern gracing us with their talents, plus a great set by Hicksville High School classic rock band *Members of the Press*. The pasta buffet was delicious--special thanks to all the parents who volunteered their time and energy to help out with the food.



Dan, Priya, Maggie, Tina and MacKenzie at Pasta dinner

The teens raised more money than ever before, donating \$250 to the NYCLU and saving the rest to help subsidize travel for next year’s National YES Conference in St. Louis.

Stay tuned for more YES events and fundraising efforts in the coming months: we will be presenting the Sunday Meeting on March 4th, traveling to New Orleans in early April, and much more TBA! Thanks to everyone who came out to support the YES group this year!!

Tara Klein

Tara Klein, YES Advisor YES@EHSLL.org



Left: Ryan and friends



Left: Mayra and Dan



Above: Sebastian telling the crowd his favorite YES memory
Below: The band “Members of the Press”



Quite the crowd listening to Roy Klein speak

K.I.D. CONTINUED

Continued from Pg. 4

Christians refer to the Bible (or the word of God) as the "Bread of Life" – words that can sustain people spiritually as bread sustains the physical body. Jesus was born in Bethlehem ("Beth-Leham") which means House of Bread. Jesus compared bread and wine to his own body and blood, and asked people to remember him when they ate, which today is a special Christian ritual called the Communion. One of Jesus' miracles was to multiply a few fish and loaves of bread to feed a large hungry crowd. He taught people that generosity and sharing was better than selfishness.

As humanists, what meaning does bread have for us? First of all, eating is a basic human need. We are aware that bread is a common food for people of all cultures, around the world and across history. This connects us with every other person,

everywhere. People who don't know each other well can come together and eat and form friendships. Today, some people will bring a gift of bread to someone who has moved into a new home. It symbolizes a wish for nourishment, happiness and friendship in the new home. We are also grateful for having bread and food– grateful to the farmers who grow the grain, to the people who make flour, to the cooks who bake it, to others who share it. And of course, as humanists, we are always aware that there are people who don't have enough to eat. This compels us make other people's lives better if we can.

The children also participated in the Society's Winter Festival on Dec. 18. The children read poems and rained "snow glitter" on singers who were singing "Let It Snow!" In addition, the KID and YES programs collected nearly 30 winter coats for children that were donated to Ethical Friends of Children.



Above: Alison Pratt with some of the many toys that were donated in the month of December for the toy drive for Ethical Friends of Children.



Above: Lorraine Zeller-Agostino hangs up coats donated for the coat drive for Ethical Friends of Children. About 30 coats were collected.

Alison Pratt



Right: The KID class collected about a dozen of the string book bags. The two Dobrin families have taken them to Kenya for the students at Sema Academy, who can't get backpacks like students use here.



Note from the Editor

Newsletter Editor: Sylvia Silberger

Please send suggestions for additions to future EHSIJ newsletters and comments to

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Sylvia Silberger and Bill Larsen
Yosemite National Park

Submissions due by the 22nd of the month for the next month's newsletter.

Sylvia Silberger

November Board Meeting Minutes

ETHICAL HUMANIST SOCIETY OF LONG ISLAND MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 7, 2011 BOARD

PRESENT: David Sprintzen, Sue Feifer, Liz Seegert, Alison Pratt, Deborah Strube, Tara Klein, Pat Spenser, Don Morgenstern, Jim LoPresti, Wayne Outten, Mel Haber

ABSENT: Carol Smith

GUESTS: Richard Rapp, Calvin Dame, Daniel Harding

1. **Richard Rapp's proposal:** Richard wants to meet with members who have been in the Society for close to 15 years or more to form a committee to resurrect ideas from the past that have not come to fruition, or that have had a brief existence only to expire after a brief period. Richard thinks that two or three meetings a year should be sufficient. Judy Rosemarin suggested to Richard that we put together a book of ideas from the past that will represent a history of our Society. The Board responded enthusiastically to Richard's proposal.

2. **Landscaping progress:** Fencing has gone up on the side of the building. We are planning to have art work placed on the side door.

3. **YES Group report:** The Pasta dinner is scheduled for Saturday, December 10. The YES Group will be returning to New Orleans in April 2012 once again to rebuild houses. This trip is organized by the Washington, DC Ethical Society. Tara asked the Board for funding, and we agreed to give her \$800 taken from the Weill Fund. In addition, funding for the trip will be raised from the Pasta dinner, the Teen Arts Festival, as well as from member contributions given after a Sunday platform.

4. **Upgrade of the A/V system:** The cost will be about \$10,000. As part of the upgrade, Calvin will talk to Chris Stanley, the person who will be coordinating the upgrade, about getting a new podium that includes volume controls. Don will talk with Chris about each item on his proposal, including meeting the needs of the hearing impaired. The Board won't

let renters use the new system. Rather, renters will use our old system.

5. **Our piano:** We've raised \$2,000 so far from contributions to repair the piano. David Sprintzen said that Alice knows a person who repairs pianos who will take our piano and give us a comparable piano in exchange for us giving him \$2,000. The Board agreed to check out this person's piano and see if the trade-in is worth it. Calvin agreed to work with Alice in looking into this.

6. **Financials:** We are doing well. Rentals are up slightly although pledges are down.

7. **Our Web links to non-profits:** Liz Seegert, our Webmaster, will develop guidelines on decision procedures for determining which groups should be linked on our Web site. She includes those groups that are non-profits and are relevant to our Society. If she has questions, she will consult with Alison Pratt and Tara Klein as our IT committee.

8. **Teen Arts Festival:** It is scheduled for Saturday, March 31, 2012. Half of the funds raised will go to Ethical Friends of Children, with the other half going to the YES group to partially fund its trip next year to New Orleans.

9. **Internet report:** Liz said our hits are up by 150. She said we need to keep the content fresh by having people write a piece for our Web site. Don volunteered to write a blog for our site. So that no one steals our name, we will buy a handful of domain names.

10. **The AEU debt:** We are currently paying \$750 per month to the AEU. Don has not heard recently from the AEU regarding their adjusting our debt.

The meeting ended at 9:20 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Mel Haber

Opt-Out of Paper Newsletter Mailings

To save both resources and postage costs, we encourage you to email Sylvia at matsbs@yahoo.com if you would be satisfied with an email-only version of this newsletter rather than a paper copy.



Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island

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Affiliated with
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The Ethical Humanist

The Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island

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