

FACT
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A Matter of *FACT* & The Voice

November 2007

FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists serving the purpose of preserving the separation of church and state and promoting Freethought through education.

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November General Meeting

The Guest Speaker at the November meeting of FACT will be Carol Grosser, who will bring us up to date on the issue of "Peak Oil", the view that the earth is reaching the end of its petroleum reserves and its ability to keep up with the growing demand for energy throughout the world. Carol recently attended a meeting in Houston on this topic. People like T. Boone Pickens point out that currently the world produces 85 million barrels of petroleum a day and the world consumes 135 million barrels of petroleum a day. Attention to this matter is long past due and members of FACT will have the most current knowledge about the problem and the lack of solutions now facing humankind.

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After the break for refreshments (thank you Sally) we will hold elections for two FACT Officer positions: Vice President and Secretary. According to the recently revised FACT By-Laws, the election will be held among the members present. So, come to the meeting and register your vote!

Winter Solstice Party

Mark your day-planner
Put an X on your calendar
Update your PDA

The FACT Solstice Party will be held in the afternoon of Sunday, December 23rd. We will have a private party room all to ourselves. There will be catered food. Don Lawrence, a former FACT President, will be the guest speaker. Join us for around general merriment as we celebrate the Winter Solstice.

Details, cost, and location will be announced later, but for now, just be sure to set that date aside.

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

September Meeting Review

Elected Positions:

President, Nick Lee
 Vice President, OPEN
 Secretary, Jim Evans
 Treasurer, Cathy Howard
 Publicity, OPEN

Appointed Positions:

Newsletter

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens
 Webmaster, Jim Evans
 Discussion Group Host, OPEN
 Librarian, Jimmie Barnes

Texas Hill Country Freethinkers

(No Officers)
 For Information contact
 Julie Fisher:
 zoezappa@hughes.net

FACT MEMBERS:

FACT wants your participation in communicating through our newsletter. Please contribute letters, articles, book reviews, highlights and comments on church/state separation, quotes, drawings, cartoons, etc. Please send contributions to FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org.

All submissions are subject to editorial revisions at the discretion of the publisher.

Nick Lee introduced the main topic at the October General Meeting, the literature and philosophy of Ayn Rand. Born in Russia in 1905, Rand's outlook on life was indelibly marked by her experience when the Bolsheviks confiscated her father's pharmacy, thereby undermining the family's comfortable middle-class way of life.

After attending college in St. Petersburg, including graduate work in the new field of Cinematography, Rand came to Chicago in 1926 to visit relatives, and vowed never to return to Russia. She made her way to Hollywood to get a job as a screenwriter. A chance meeting with Cecil B. DeMille accomplished her goal, and she worked there for a few years, doctoring up other peoples screen plays.

Rand's first literary success came in the form of a stage play, "The Night of January 16th", which ran on Broadway for two seasons, and which pressed members of the audience into service each night as jurors in the courtroom drama. After a couple of minor novels, Rand hit the big time in 1943 with her novel "Fountainhead", a black and white study of good and evil as an heroic architect pays a heavy price for refusing to compromise his principles or alter his plans. Her second major work was "Atlas Shrugged" published in 1957, in which heroic industrialists go on strike against government interference in the economy.

It may be a stretch to call Rand's literary work novels, since they were really thinly disguised philosophy tracts which illustrated her overall world view that she came to call "Objectivism." The guiding principle of Objectivism is that each individual man is the measure of all things and an end in himself, answerable only to himself. Reason-driven self-interest should reign supreme over altruism and societal restrictions.

This principle led not only to Rand's atheism, but to her support for an unfettered form of free enterprise capitalism, without any governmental regulation. She maintained that this was the purest form of economy and had enabled the industrial growth of the United States in the Nineteenth Century by allowing innovative entrepreneurs free rein.

Perhaps Rand's biggest error was the extremism of her philosophy of individualism in reaction to her early experiences and distain for collectivism. Although Objectivism has not gained wide academic recognition, it continues to pique the interest of new generations, and her "novels" continue to appear on best-seller lists.

After the break Nick accepted nominations for the two officer positions that are to be filled. Jane Tuck was nominated for Vice President. Jim Evans was nominated for secretary. Elections will take place at the November General meeting.

Rev. Barry Lynn in San Antonio

Reverend Barry Lynn, Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, is scheduled to visit San Antonio on November 13, 2007. Rev. Lynn will tell you why the religious right's dream for America is a nightmare. His evening presentation will focus on the explosive issue of religion in public schools, explaining why true religion doesn't need the government's assistance. Lynn will be available after the presentation to sign copies of his new book.

November 13 | 7:00 pm (free admission)

Temple Beth-El

211 Belknap Place

RESERVE YOUR SEAT TODAY! (call Ryan at 512-322-0545)

Into the Lion's Den

by Frank Hernandez

Well I had quite an experience this Sunday! This girl wanted me to go to Cornerstone Church with her to see a play called "Last Chance" that deals whether you are saved before SOMETHING may come along and relieve you of this earth. Hagee wasn't there but his clone son was....good Lord, he not only looks like his dad, but sounds like him also! ~Strange~

Basically it seemed like a money-making venture to me. They had T-shirts, DVDs, CDs, for sale as well as ushers trolling their pans for money. The whole plot of the play dealt with a family and the generations that followed. Each family member met with either a natural or tragic death, was then sent to heaven and judged whether they kept the "10", yes only 10 commandments of God. If they did, a Jesus character would come out and the person would run to him and give him a big hug shouting "Thank You Jesus".

What I thought was unhealthy (besides the whole thing) was that they staged a school shooting skit where at the end the shooter places the gun under his chin and a loud blast goes off. The unhealthy part was that there were lots of little kids present, who, by the looks of some that were near me, looked quite shocked.

Of course if you weren't prepared, or decided to accept Jesus right there and then...well it was just a little too late and you couldn't get any slack from JC. These unprepared people would then get whisked away by demons.

The stage itself was rather tacky with some sort of foil covering the background and stairs, people dressed as angels holding swords, and the JC character in his usual sandals and white robe. JC, get a clue, autumn colors are in!!!

At the end, you had the usual hold your hands up if your saved and come to the stage if you want JC in your heart. I stood there confounded with Lori as to why all these "Christians" still had to rush the stage to get saved....AGAIN!

Some tall Christian then tapped my shoulder and asked me if I had found Jesus. I promptly told him I didn't know he was missing and whether we should send out a search party. He then told me that I had "freedom of choice" with JC. Of course I told him this was false because I would get condemned by His interpretation of "freedom of choice"! Funny but he weakly agreed with me? He then told me about the gift of eternal life, to which I told him my visible friends are gift enough from Him, and that I had no need for eternal life.

At that point I turned and asked Lori, my Christian friend, if she wanted to go have a drink or two and then go back to her place to make-out! ;-)

Ok- so she doesn't exactly follow ALL the commandments...why should I correct her?

It was quite a hoot, and if any of you should ever get invited to one of these plays --- go. It will quickly convince you of WHY we're not Christians...Thank God!

What Happened to Me!

by Len Wheeler

Many of you know that an scheduled to lead a class at the Academy of Learning in Retirement, which I call "Impact of Freethinking" Recently, I received a call from a board member of the Academy who said that she had been asked to not use the word "agnostic" in the catalog description of my Class. Let me say that I teach this class to people over 50, that it is strictly an elective and that 74 other classes are taught, one of which is called "Lost Christianities".

Of course, I said I would not change it and will not unless the person who complained to the superintendent is willing to sit down with me and is able to convince me by some rationale that I should. Of course, only if I get the chance to change her mind also. I'm trying to hold my temper.

I have called Americans United and they said to take notes on everything that happens and perhaps I could solve the problem myself without giving in. If not, call them. Where does the superintendent get off with this request? Of course, it is going through many peons trying to convince me, I bet. I may have to go straight to the top after I talk to the head of the community education for NEISD.

My grandchildren are in Round Rock where AU already has a suit. I've been surrounded again!

Texas Freedom Network's Legislative Wrap-Up

The 80th Regular Session of the Texas Legislature brought evidence that the Texas Freedom Network's fight against the religious right is gaining momentum. Today, much of the far right's legislative agenda lies in pieces, after major defeats in its efforts to undermine public education, religious freedom, medical research and civil rights. Following is a summary of the session's legislative history.

School Vouchers

In March, supporters of private school vouchers suffered their biggest defeat ever in the Texas Legislature. During debate on the state appropriations bill, House members voted 129-8 to bar public funding for private school vouchers. Contact from TFN activists also helped bury two major voucher bills in the Senate. One voucher scheme would have shifted hundreds of millions of dollars from public school special education budgets to private schools. Another bill would have created a massive pilot voucher program in the state's largest urban counties. Neither bill made it to the Senate floor.

Prayer in Schools

The far right chalked up one victory in the last weekend of the session, barely passing a bill promoting organized prayer and other religious activities in public schools. TFN and other groups that support religious freedom warned that House Bill 3678 would permit organized efforts to promote the religious views of some over all others in our state's public schools. Supporters of the so-called "freedom of religious expression" bill even stripped out a provision prohibiting schools and students from using such expression to discriminate against those who don't share the same religious beliefs. But in stripping out this provision, far-right pressure groups and their legislative supporters revealed their own intolerance of any religious beliefs but their own.

Public School Bible Classes

Bipartisan efforts led by TFN thwarted an attempt to require that all of the state's public high schools teach classes about the Bible. The revised bill no longer requires schools to offer Bible classes and includes key safeguards such as stronger protection for the religious freedom of all students, training for teachers, and sound curriculum and textbook standards. The nearly unanimous votes for the revised bill in both chambers were stunning defeats for far-right groups that sought to turn our state's public schools into Sunday schools.

Science Education

TFN alerted news media to a Georgia lawmaker's anti-Semitic memo circulated to Texas legislators. The memo attacked the theory of evolution and promoted the idea that the sun revolves around the earth. But legislative efforts to undermine the teaching of evolution in the state's public schools failed to materialize.

Stem Cell Research

Strategically timed press events and grassroots action organized by TFN prevented any bill barring embryonic stem cell research from ever reaching the House or Senate floors. Moreover, TFN activists helped set the stage for passing legislation in two years that will promote this research and give hope to families with medical conditions such as juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's disease and spinal cord injuries.

Sex Education

Efforts by far-right lawmakers to further restrict access by students to critical information about responsible pregnancy and disease prevention failed to pass. TFN was successful in bottling up this irresponsible legislation in committee.

Lesbian Foster Care

Far-right groups have long attacked the rights of gay and lesbian Texans, seeking to divide our state for political gain. This session, TFN joined with Equality Texas and other partners to prevent efforts to bar or restrict gay and lesbian families from caring for foster children. In the face of continuous communications from TFN, Equality Texas and other activists, lawmakers never considered one such bill or amendment. TFN will continue to oppose mean-spirited, divisive attacks on gay and lesbian families.

God versus Satan

by Louis W. Cable

Satan, known also as “the Devil”, stands as the most heated, despised, contemptuous character in the entire Bible. To be fair, however, it is worth noting that, compared with many of the atrocious acts of God, Satan comes off as a relative paragon of virtue. Satan is in fact guilty of just three main misdemeanors. First, according to a passage which sets the moral tone of the Bible, Satan, in the guise of the serpent, tempts Eve with the forbidden fruit of moral enlightenment, fruit from what is described as “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). One might have thought it a good thing for Satan thus to start her on the path to moral education. But God didn’t want her eyes to be “opened”; as Gen. 3:5 puts it; he demanded nothing less than blind obedience. So God, responding in typical fashion, not only punishes Eve for an act she didn’t know was wrong until after she’d performed it. He also punishes Adam, and all their descendents, including you and me. He imposes on us all the burden of what theologians call “Original Sin” by which none of us can start life with a clean slate. At the very least, this action could be characterized as over-kill.

Satan appears next in 1 Chron. 21:1, where he plays the very same role that was assigned to God in 2 Sam. 24:1. So, wherein lies his wrong this time? If it is good enough for God to order David’s census-taking, can it be evil for Satan to do so?

Satan’s third appearance is in the book of Job, where he makes life difficult for God’s protégé. But that, it should be noted, is only because God has issued him a challenge to do so.

Thereafter, Satan does almost nothing of a dubious nature except for tempting God himself, in the person of Jesus, during his forty days in the desert – an exercise doomed to futility.

What is remarkable, in light of the bad press Satan has subsequently suffered, is that he, unlike God, doesn’t violate a single one of our important moral principles. He does not slaughter the innocent as God did in the Great Flood of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other occasions. He does not give helpless captive virgins, including children, to the troops for their sexual pleasure, as God does in Num. 31:18. Satan never condones child sacrifice as God did in Judges 11:31. Satan never condemns to eternal torture in Hell all those who refuse to recognize Jesus as their lord and savior. Satan did not lie or teach people to steal, as did God in Exodus 3:18-22. Last, but by no means least, Satan did not create evil.

That distinction belongs exclusively to God (Isaiah 45:7).

Your Burka: Harmful To Your Health?

Researchers at the United Arab Emirates University examined the vitamin D levels of 178 women many of whom “dressed to cover their whole bodies, including their hands and faces, while outside of their homes” — a significant fact because sunlight (in the form of U.V. rays) is the body’s main natural source of vitamin D. The initial result? The researchers found that all but two of the women were deficient in vitamin D.

Not to provoke yet another raging debate on Muslim dress, but it does make me wonder — for Islam and all other religions and cultures that require women to cover their entire bodies — whether a compromise could be reached that would accommodate religious beliefs, personal freedom and now, it turns out, nutrition.

Source: Broadsheet, salon.com, June 26, 2007



FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)

Small-XLarge.....\$12.00	3X.....\$15.00
2X.....\$14.00	Vests (Red).....\$17.00

To order or for further information, contact Catherine Howard
 catherine.j.howard@jci.com (210) 545-4235

Dating In A Christian World

by Frank Hernandez

I decided to write this little article for our members to read how my life is like a Jerry Seinfeld episode when it comes to life and women.

I bumped into a long time friend in August named Lori. She had always been just a friend, although I did harbor thoughts about her and I in bed since we always had this chemistry between us. So, I started dating her in August, knowing that she was a Christian. For three months we had a great time dining, dancing, drinking, and some extra activities.

A couple of weeks ago the ugly head of God reared up in our relation. Lori asked me if I would convert to continue our relation into the next step because she felt couples need to be in even keel in order for "things to work."

Things began to whirl in my head, God + hot body or No God – hot body! What a dilemma! I decided that a half effort was best and told her I would attend bible classes with her in order to learn more. I figure that would buy me some time in order to think of some cunning way to get to the next step, plus I could always innocently throw a wrench in the bible class.

As things stood, I had to fight a deity (JC) in order to bed Lori. Oddly I felt like some ancient Greek warrior sailing on an adventure battling the gods that be. I felt that I should be awarded a "Bachelor of the Century" award because WHO in their right mind would battle GOD for the love of a virgin maiden? Ok...skip the virgin bit. The SAME God that destroyed a world through floods, the SAME God that destroyed two cities, one full of gay people! The SAME God that destroyed an Egyptian army! Who was I, but a grain of sand in this vast universe that God created. Yet there I stood spitting in the wind, defiant and proud of my atheism.

Last night, another wrench was thrown into our relationship when Lori asked if I believed in evolution because that was anti-Christian. Now, Lori is a nice simple girl. I don't expect her to start spewing out mathematical equations while in bed with me, nor telling me the difference between the 1-2-3 and 2-3-4 morphology theory in limb development, or even holding a sophisticated conversation! I was beyond that! I had gone down that path before with smart, aggressive, sophisticated women. Now I was breathing nothing but raw chemical body reactions. I did tell her that there were many Christians who did believe in evolution and there was nothing wrong in that.

Finally, I realized I met my match. God, Jesus, Evolution, the Bible were all plotting against me and my raw chemical drive so I got up and left Lori's apartment. There was a reason this woman has never been married, has never been able to hold a steady boyfriend, and I had faced all those reasons. Love is rare in this world. It is up to us to seize the moment and face the Daughters of Necessity (Themis) that have put us together to see what happens, because the "what ifs" are a far more worst fate to face.

New Service for FACT Members

by Jim Evans

As part of the development of the FACT web site (www.FreethinkersACT.org), we have been able to take advantage of a special feature. All FACT members who currently have access to e-mail through an Internet Service Provider, can make use of another less personal e-mail address linked to the FACT web site.

All mail addressed you at your FACT Email Address will be automatically re-routed to your personal address. This means that you can give out your FACT Email Address to another person, and that person can correspond with you, but will not know your "home" e-mail address. This provides a BIG security advantage!

All current members have already been assigned a FACT Email Address. We have been using it to send you the Newsletter and other correspondence. When official FACT correspondence is sent to you, the e-mail is sent to your FACT Email Address. Then, the Web Site simply forwards it to your home Email address. The Web Site does not retain a copy of the email - it is only forwarded.

This leads to two more member services. We are prepared to produce reasonably priced (cheap!) Business Cards for each individual member. These can be ordered at our General Meetings. The cards will list your e-mail address as the FACT Email Address. Therefore, you can comfortably hand these out to people you meet who might show an interest in FACT. The cards will also include the web site address, so they can learn more about our philosophy and activities.

Secondly, the FACT e-mail Address can be used to produce a Membership roster for distribution among current members. This will overcome some discomfort that has been expressed about using home addresses or telephone numbers in the Roster, for security reasons. Please see Jim Evans at the General Meetings or Discussion Branches for further details, or e-mail him at FACT.Secretary@FreethinkersACT.org

Submitted via e-mail to CNN, August 23, 2007.

Re. God's Christian Warriors

Just finished with Gods Christian Warriors on CNN. I don't care that you have "given your life to Christ". I just want to thank you for being a voice of reason and understanding in all this fundamentalist shouting. The state constitution of Texas prohibits me from holding public office because I don't believe in a "Supreme Being". I find the worldwide wave of religious fundamentalism very frightening. Please keep spreading the word that Atheism (actually I just call myself a nonbeliever) is not only not synonymous with immorality but that we are moral, thoughtful people. I agree that the US culture is too materialistic. Physical beauty is of primary importance. Having expensive homes, cars and gadgets is the way to show how important you are. This has NOTHING to do with secularism for "god's" sake! In fact, as a flaming liberal, liberalism has NOTHING to do with the ills of the world. But I don't have to tell you that. Thank you for standing up for my rights.

Jean Clelland-Morin

Response to Jean's e-mail to CNN.

Re. God's Christian Warriors

Sorry this response is late in getting to you...we're trying to work out of our CNN email slump. ;-)

Thank you! The thousands of emails such as yours have encouraged Greg and the rest of us at Christus Victor Ministries. Multitudes of people around the country have grown concerned about the widespread fusion -- and confusion -- of faith and politics, and they're speaking out! We're excited to be used by God to help people understand the beauty of his Kingdom -- a Kingdom that transcends partisan politics and always looks like Jesus, giving himself in loving service to all people.

Blessings,

Marcia Erickson

Published in San Antonio Express News, October 28, 2007

Re. Explained in their own words

Tony Hall begins his column by saying "a serious study of our history will indisputably show that our laws and policies were founded on biblical principles."

Mr. Hall offers no historical evidence to support his position. America's Constitution was revolutionary in its time for intentionally not attaching itself to the deity of the day, and our Founding Fathers, products of the Enlightenment, were determined to avoid Europe's miserable sufferings under its many awful theocracies. Consider:

"The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion" (John Adams, Treaty of Tripoli, 1797).

"The clergy had a very favorite hope of obtaining an establishment of a particular form of Christianity throughout the United States ... The returning good sense of our country threatens abortion to their hopes, and any portion of power confided to me will be exerted in opposition to their schemes" (Thomas Jefferson, 1800).

"Christianity neither is, nor ever was, a part of the common law" (Thomas Jefferson, 1814).

"The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries" (James Madison, 1803).

There are many more such quotations available to those wishing, and industrious enough, to research them. Seriously under-informed articles do a disservice to the intellectual history of our country and our Constitution.

Philip Krumm

HEY, LETTER WRITERS!

We're looking for well-crafted letters having to do with the separation of church and state, atheism, or any other relevant topic. Members are encouraged to forward published letters, or ones which were rejected by the mainstream media, for publication.

Send them to: FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org or PO Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

Tribute to Colonel Ed Verner

by Hugh Henry

Ed Verner, FACT member since 1999, recently passed away at age 92. A West Point graduate, Col. Verner had a distinguished career including service as manager for several technologically complex Pentagon projects. Below is a transcript of Hugh Henry's talk at the funeral, which gives an overview of Ed's projects.

Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line of Radar and Communication in the High Arctic

It began at MIT 1952 with J. Robert Oppenheimer and other Manhattan project veterans at the meeting. It was a chain of 63 radar and communications systems 3000 miles from the north coast of Alaska to Baffin Island opposite Greenland and 200 miles north of the Arctic circle, much of it unexplored country. From a standing start December 1954, completed in 2 ½ years.

"Nowhere has man undertaken so difficult a construction job." Bulk of work in long cold dark Arctic winters - 460,000 tons by air, land water. Scores of pilots flying everything from bush planes to four engine ships.

Building a DEW Line site began with hand shovels and proceeded to bulldozers, with many stops along the way. The first job at each site was to clear enough snow for a primitive airstrip, so that bigger planes carrying heavy equipment could be brought in. It was a maddeningly Sisyphean task. Sometimes the builders would carve out enough of an airstrip for a supply plane to make a tricky landing, unload in a hurry, and take off just in time for another snowstorm to cover the strip all over again.

After several repetitions of this, a plane big enough to carry a small tractor would finally make it in, allowing the men to clear more snow more rapidly and build a better runway for larger planes with heavier equipment. As a construction manager told National Geographic, "The first thing we learned is that you can't fight the Arctic and win. So we decided to roll with the punches.

The biggest technical challenge was communication and Col. Verner was a communications officer. In WWII, short wave radio communicated beyond the horizon, except in the Arctic where I have been stationed in communications. When the Northern Lights are out, you hear nothing. Radio waves don't bounce there then. The answers were torpo-scatter bounce off air currents and, well, clouds, and ionosphere scatter. This is extremely weak. It was only a theory at the time of the DEW Line and involved huge antennas, kilowatt transmitters, and state of the art cooled detectors in the high remote arctic.

In 1985, DEW Line was turned over to the Canadians as the North Warning System which is more deserted and desolate than the DEW Line ever was. About every thousand miles they've got a few people at one site, The fact remains, the DEW Line stood between the Soviet bomber force and the U.S. [and] Canada, and the end result of the Cold War is that the Soviets never came. That has to give all DEW Liners a warm feeling when we think back on those many cold winter nights above the Arctic Circle.

Semi Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE)

Col. Verner was project officer for SAGE, an automated control system used by NORAD for collecting, tracking and intercepting enemy bomber aircraft from the late 1950s into the 1980s. Hand tracking and directing fighter interceptors was no good for the Atomic and Jet age, far too slow. SAGE began at MIT in 1954 with the first system installed in 1957. Physically, the largest computer ever built or likely ever to be built. ½ acre and 275 tons at 23 sites, two machines at each site, one as a hot spare. SAGE was housed in a big, four story windowless building like a brick.

Now, at this time, to run a task or job on a computer, you took a card deck to a desk downstairs and got cards and a printout back. Computers worked in batches. SAGE pioneered real time from a screen with a light pen pointer (here, shaped like a hand drill.) One screen was two stories tall.

SAGE cost more and used more resources than the Manhattan project. From that light pen, instructions were automatically sent to aircraft and missile sites by 100 operators at each site. In peacetime, SAGE did air traffic control. Col. Verner left the Pentagon for assignment at Boston Air Defense Sector and the first SAGE center, close to MIT where the bugs could be worked out.

Our present air traffic control was derived from SAGE. People who worked on it went on to develop the Internet. When you sit at your computer, you don't submit jobs in batch and go away to wait for printout. Or at least not usually. We all play solitaire in real time. Undoubtedly, the first real time computer games were on SAGE. The last massive SAGE center and computer were dismantled in 1983. Col. Verner was again project officer on development and the first implementation.

(Continued on the next page)

Tribute to Colonel Ed Verner (Continued)

by Hugh Henry

White Alice Communications

Finally, White Alice Communications, an Air Force communications system in Alaska built in 1955 when, for example only one call at a time could go from Nome to Fairbanks and Anchorage residents had to go to one place downtown to call to the lower 48.

There were 71 sites, many on mountain tops with four antennas, 60 or 120 feet tall - A troposcatter system. 14 tons of equipment by helicopter or dogsled just to survey the site. I am sure some of those mountain tops had never been climbed before. Ending in the 1970s, last site used until 1985. Replaced by satellite communication. Col. Verner was project officer.

"In those days, there were giants," and Col. Verner was one of them. Each project was a tower of Babel project with many specialists who spoke in different terms: arctic logistics, mathematicians, dogsledders, engineers of all kinds, Eskimos, psychologists, roughnecks. With each project, they didn't know if they could do it or how. But, like Hannibal crossing the Alps, "we will find a way or make one." Each ambitious project exceeded design and was on time. The people who worked for Col Verner went on to the space projects, computers, and created the modern world. Col. Verner stands firmly between the Manhattan project and WWII and the moon landing as part of a bridge.

We have not done well recently: projects to upgrade and replace air traffic control have failed again and again; the superconducting supercollider here in Texas, abandoned; the space shuttle, not up to expectations; and failed Mars probes. And there's the Microsoft operating systems. Giants today? At best, Donald Trump, at worst, Lake and Fawcett of Enron. They act for greed or power and to deceive, not to serve and protect.

Perhaps it's past time we asked where are the giants of today?

In Memory Of Gregory James Krauter

by Sally Chizek

A good friend of FACT, Greg Krauter, 57 years of age, died by his own hand on Wednesday, October 10th. He had been suffering from a rare form of cancer. After the tumor in his head was removed in 2006, it left him with excruciating pain and the inability to read and write (his two passions). Greg was a sixth generation resident of Comfort, Texas and directly descended from at least six of the original German freethinkers founders and settlers of Comfort. He was extremely intelligent and had a degree in philosophy with a minor in math and classical civilization. He also had degrees in physics and electrical technology. He was one of the most knowledgeable historians of Texas and especially freethinkers of the Hill Country, Texas.

Greg was the fifth generation operator of the Ingenhuett General Store in Comfort. The store was founded in 1867 and was the oldest continuously operated general store in the State of Texas until a fire destroyed it in March of 2006. Gregory was the Past-President of the Comfort Heritage Foundation and served for several terms. He was the co-chairperson of the Monument Restoration Project (Treue der Union Monument). Krauter led efforts to renovate the Treue Der Union Monument that honors locals killed in 1862 by Confederate troops after they refused to support secession. The Treue Der Union Monument is one of six in the United States that may fly the flag at half-mast at all times. He also held the position of Director of the Kendall County Historical Commission for eighteen months. Greg approached Sally Chizek of FACT with a proposal to erect a cenotaph to the memory of Germany Freethinkers who founded Comfort after the first cenotaph (which we all call The Rock) was kidnapped from the park and disposed of in a cattle pasture. We agreed to raise the money for the cenotaph and it was erected in front of the Ingenhuett General Store in Comfort. The fire did not damage the cenotaph.

The funeral was held Saturday, October 20th at Schaetter's Funeral Home in Comfort. Comfort, Texas has a small population of around 1,200, and there were so many people at the funeral home that some of us (including representatives from FACT, and the Atheists Community of Austin) had to stand outside the funeral home and listen to the services broadcasted by a speaker. We have lost a friend and Texas had lost a devoted historian.

“Infidel” by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

a Book Review by Sally Chizek

It is inconceivable to me that any woman would want to be a member of the Muslim religion. I realize that being born into a family of Muslims doesn't give you a lot of options. As Wafa Sultan said in last year's FFRF's convention about being born female in a Muslim country. You are told from a very young age how worthless you are and that you should be ashamed you are female. From there it just gets worse. However, I'm talking about the women who are out of the countries considered Muslim and who choose to continue wearing the "veil" and following the dogma of Islam. In the San Antonio Express-News, I saw a picture of a woman who looked Hispanic, and whose name sounded Hispanic, but was wearing the dark clothing and head scarf and doing the Ramadan thing. I think of all the brave women in America who fought for 75 years to just get the right to vote, and today some women are just throwing their rights away. I am "ragging" on Muslim because the book, "Infidel" is about that topic. Almost no religion is a friend to women, but they don't despise women the way that Islam does.

"Infidel" is a memoir of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's harsh life from childhood in Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Kenya and her incredible journey to shake off the braces on her brain and the invisible shackles from Muslimism to atheism. I took away from the story that she was able to do that because she read, even if the stories were romantic novels by Danielle Steel, it gave her a view that life was different for women in other countries. Ayaan, in my opinion, was naturally smart and a good student. She finally awoke to the fact that after all she lived through and the things she saw, she could not believe in the Koran and the religion. She had the will to denounce it. From Somalia, her clan, her experiences to serving in the Dutch parliament, and now living under constant threat from reactionary Islamists, you will just have to read the book it is so incredible. She was named Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2005.

“God is Not Great” by Christopher Hitchens

a Book Review by Margie Farber

Years ago, I read “The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice” by Christopher Hitchens. I was raised a Catholic and spent eleven years of my young life in an orphanage run by nuns. One incident I remember clearly was the time when my body changed from a girl to a woman. Because of the lack of a sex education from the nuns, I was literally shocked into womanhood. No girl should go through an experience of the kind without any idea of what is going on inside her at that time.

Christopher Hitchens gives many great examples of how religion poisons society and civilization as a whole. You can see examples just by looking back in the history of the human race, especially with the monotheistic religions. We have had the crusades, inquisitions, witch trials, anti-Semitism and holy wars (religiously motivated). These holy wars are still going on today. Just look at the Muslims and Hindus in India and Pakistan, the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, the situation in Bosnia, in African countries, and Sunnis and Shiites in the Arab countries. They are fighting each other because they each believe they have the truth while the others are heretics or infidels. The same thing happens in totalitarian states which follow dogmatic policies just like religions do, all in the name of power. The way most religions treat their women is a disgrace to society and civilization as a whole.

This book has been on the best seller list for 16 weeks and is still going strong. Quite an accomplishment for a book that criticizes religion, especially in the United States where religion is prevalent. I highly recommend this book for all our members and freethinkers everywhere.

Source: Rational Alternative, Newsletter of Atheists United, September 2007

READ A GOOD BOOK LATELY? TELL US ABOUT IT.

Send your book reviews, recommendations, critiques, or top 10 list to:

FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org

Or P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

November Events

November 6th - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm: Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)
 Discussion Topic: "Practical Green: What are some new and creative ways to green-up our lives?"

Ping's Restaurant
 (by the HEB in Leon Springs)
 24165 W IH 10 # 221

November 14th – Second Wednesday Lunch

12:30 pm: Join Julie and Janie at a second monthly lunch
 Discussion Topic: "Israel: current negotiations, Rice, Hagee, striking Syria and new book 'The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy' by Mearsheimer and Walt."

Sarovar Indian Cuisine
 10227 Ironside Rd
 New Event!

November 17th – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join the "Lunch Bunch" for good food and great conversation before the General Meeting

Sarika's Thai Restaurant
 4319 Medical Dr, Near Fredericksburg Rd

November 17th – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3rd Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)

Speaker: Carol Grosser
 Title of Presentation: "Peak Oil."

After-break: Election of Officers.

Community Unitarian Universalist Church
 4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

November 25th – FACT Discussion Brunch

10:00 am - Join us for brunch and discussion the last Sunday of every month.

Topic: TBD

Grady's BBQ
 6510 San Pedro (at Jackson Keller)

December Events

Dec 4th — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

Dec 12th — Second Wednesday Lunch

Dec 23rd — FACT Winter Solstice Party

November 2007						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

December 2007						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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ANNUAL DUES (Jan-Dec)

A.	Individual Paying Member	\$30
B.	Family (2 or more members)	\$42
C.	Active Duty Military/Full-time Student (non-voting)	\$15

- Membership dues are due in January.
- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1st month of the year will pay a prorated amount for the remainder of the year.
- Members who paid dues the previous year, but who are paying late, will be liable for the entire year.
- Donations in addition to dues are always welcome.