



Humanists Of ID, ID Atheists, Sages, BUUF
Humanists, BSU SSA, West Valley Freethink-
ers, ID Society of Reason, Cosmos Coffee
Club, HumanKind, Sunday Assembly Boise

Free Thought Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason www.tvcor.com.

July 2016

Giving up Miracles Dustin Williams

About a year ago I started a segment on my podcast, the Atheist Nomads, called "Dusting Off the Degree". That degree is a BA in Theology with minors in History and Biblical Languages. I also completed three semesters in the M.Div. program at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary before leaving Christianity.

Webster's Dictionary defines a miracle as **1**: an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs, and **2**: an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment

You'll often hear people describe something as miraculous using definition 2, just that it was amazing, but generally when people talk about miracles they mean that there was divine intervention. In Christian circles you will frequently hear people talk about little miracles, like God helping them find a parking space in a crowded parking lot or helping them find their keys that they can't find, but that is just trivial bull shit and simple probability.

When people are really talking about miracles, they are talking about matters of life and death and they are saying that the person survived because of God. It's almost excusable when it's really just ignorance, such as when my birth was declared miraculous due to the lack of medical data on the fertility and birth defect rates for cancer survivors.

With what we know now, my birth wasn't a miracle, it was just less probable than anyone else's and I'll let you in on a little secret, if there's anything that the 4 billion years of life on earth has taught us, it's that reproduction under any circumstances is not only not miraculous, it's to be expected.

Of course, there is a point where miracle claims get down right insulting, when things go right, the less probable and the more important the success is, the more the person responsible deserves the credit.

One of my nieces survived a car accident where the car she was riding in crashed into a tree at 90 mph. The car was totaled, but no one was seriously hurt.

Some family members called that a miracle and praised God when they should have been writing thank you letters to the engineers at Volvo who designed a car that saved the lives of four teenagers. The simple fact is that car accidents happen all the time and most people aren't so lucky, especially if they're in vehicles that aren't as well designed.

Oh, and that would have looked a lot more like a miracle if the car had spontaneously died and come to a safe stop allowing the police to apprehend the driver and then start up without incident when anyone else got behind the wheel thus preventing the damage.

Then there are stories like those of people who were late to work at their jobs at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and people who miss flights that crash and people who survive natural disasters saying that their survival was a miracle.

How arrogant would you have to be to think that your god who you believe is the master of the universe thought it important enough to save you, but not the thousands of others who died?

When people say something is a miracle and praise god, it's one of the many forms of Christian pseudo-humility. They get to talk about how good their connection is with the most high and don't have to actually give credit where it's due, whether that's to the doctor or engineer or random chance.

It would even be more humble to simply admit that they don't know how it happened, but they'd rather think they're special than to actually find out.

West Valley Freethinkers, Nampa Contact Charlie B
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C of Southern Idaho Secular group see Facebook "Secular Student Alliance at CSI". For Freethinkers Twin Falls Contact is Erica,
erical@eaglemail.csi.edu

COSMOS COFFEE CLUB conversation v begins at 6:30pm 1st & 3rd Mondays at Papa Joe's. Contact Sander Karas at
<http://www.meetup.com/CosmosCoffeeClub>

Humanists in Idaho Falls meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church. Ask Doug at gerstner_doug@yahoo.com

Idaho Society of Reason is part of Treasure Valley Coalition of Reason. <http://meetup.com/nontheist/events> 2nd 3on Boise, & 4th Sundays Nampa at noon. Check meetup for summer changes, events.

Local Objectivists meet monthly, last Wed 6pm at varying restaurants. Ask Tim Scharff at scharffdesignworks@icloud.com

Meet An Atheist or several, socialize 2nd Tuesdays, typically at The Reef. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/IdahoAtheist/>

Human KIND project <http://www.human-kind-project.com/>, Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/humankindproject2014> Sunday Assembly Boise: music, presentations, activities; see Fb

Beyond Belief: the Secret book of Thomas

Christianity for Humanists? Jeanette Ross

Elaine Pagels began this book with a question: when (and how) did Christians begin to prioritize beliefs that defy logic and experience? Why do they continue—and what is compelling about this? Economic and cultural changes in the US, particularly as exhibited in electoral politics, provide perspective for me.. see Trumpish..

Elaine attended an evangelical church as a young teen, attracted by the mystical certainty of the book of John. She was disenchanted when a school friend's accidental death was discounted because he was Jewish and thus doomed. She learned Greek, entered Harvard and the Dead Sea scrolls translations were available. Now she was able to compare John with the long-lost book of Thomas, then look for answers to her big questions with a scholar's knowledge of early Christian history.

For two hundred years after the death of Yeshua of Nazareth, starting when followers of the new faith were publically considered criminals, Christian scholars carefully selected and interpreted one set of stories and declared the rest to be heresies. They led their new testament with collected stories about the birth and career of one man. The first three books, titled Matthew, Mark and Luke (these are nicknames rather than names of authors) offer varying anecdotes, attributed sayings and description of events.

These early writings (commonly called the gospels, or 'good news') move from early compilations written two generations after the death of Jesus, report the life and importance of Jesus more as admiring reportage. The earliest of them does not include the birth of Jesus to a virgin. The books progress to the book of John, which insists that Jesus was an equal to their creator god., who m Jesus simply calls their father.

Here as elsewhere around the Mediterranean Sea, Greek culture brought trade and prosperity that grew under Roman rule. Many old and new practices, new rituals blended with old and local heroes could gather stories that flourished as their communities grew, also. Home-grown faiths, including Jewish traditions, blended into Christian. When Christianity became the official faith of the dominant empire, one highly edited selection of stories, those emphasizing miracles that 'proved' godlike powers for a charismatic young Israelite, were the only books allowed, the rest declared heresies. Virtually all copies of the forbidden materials were destroyed and known only by orthodox authorities who condemned them.

Then in 1948 a number of the ancient scrolls were discovered, sealed in clay jugs, safe in a desert cave. Access was limited and translations agonizingly slow; there were fears that these 'books' would damage the dominant Christian faith. *Continued page 4*



Humanists of Idaho, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. We meet 3rd Mondays, Jan-Nov, upper room of the Flicks, Boise. Open discussion and dining at 6:30pm; business 7pm; program at 7:30pm. We next meet July 18. with Britini Gates as speaker. **Find more at our meetup page, address below.**

President's Message

It seems that each year's PRIDE Festival is larger than the year before, and 2016 was no different.

One major change this year was moving the festival to Capitol Park, so that the rally, parade, and vendors were all together in the same general location. The weather was ideal, the crowd was large and festive, and the live entertainment was continuous.

I would like to thank all of the volunteers who helped staff the Humanists of Idaho booth for a job well done. We had a steady stream of visitors and the interactions were consistently positive. The one downside of this year's PRIDE Fest was that the Orlando shooting was still fresh in everyone's mind. Fortunately, there were no incidents at the festival, and everyone had a really good time.

For the LGBT community, support and acceptance are increasing at a fast pace and the future looks bright – an encouraging popular trend. Unfortunately, there is a stubborn fringe element that still wishes discrimination and/or harm to come to anyone they view as “different.”

For that reason Idaho specifically, and the nation in general, need human rights protections for at risk minority populations. When the legislature goes back to work in January, we need to get behind the Add-The-Words campaign in larger than ever numbers.

History has shown that pressure from the masses can affect change, and there has never been a better time for such a push. Before the next legislative session, we need to, as voters, try to remove legislators that stand firm on laws of hate and discrimination, and replace them with people who look to the future and seek to represent all Idahoans equally. Voting is not only an American right and privilege, it is also how change happens.

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News editor Jeanette Ross jross@fortboise.org 378-1217; **website manager** Gary Mitchell g05@gmail.com Find more at www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho.

Next up is the 4th of July parade. TV CoR is planning a float for a parade and will be looking for walkers to accompany the float. Parade typically starts at 11 AM, and the route is a little over a mile.

Details should emerge on the various meetup and Facebook pages soon. I encourage everyone to either join the crew in the parade, or support us from the sidelines.

This will be the 5th year of our having an entry in the parade, and past year's experiences have been very positive.

Britini Gates will be the featured speaker at our next HOI meeting (July 18, Flicks Theater, 7:30 PM), on the topic of gender identity studies – an interesting and currently relevant subject. Bring your thoughts and questions. Discussion to follow. Hope to see you all there.

D G Van Curen
President, Humanists of Idaho



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More from Beyond Belief

If being a Christian doesn't mean believing in Jesus as a mystical part of the universe's creation and control, if he isn't a being to be capitalized (that whole capitalization process was added by early Church founders), what is it that holds together those who claim the label of Christian?

As those who had known him scattered, they gathered their own believers. Some said that Jesus' intent was to purify his own people. Others emphasized converting Gentiles, the outsiders, into their company. Pagels says that the writer of the book of Mark believed that Jesus was divinely chosen to become king of the Jews— a very physical, real kingdom.

Mark has Jesus ask his followers, "Who do you say I am?" The response, "messiah," in Hebrew, is now interpreted to mean something identical to "Christ" or part of Jehovah. At the time, though, the word translates as "the anointed one," chosen to be the king of Israel. The word "Christos" is Greek, probably then meaning something very similar to what Mark intended— a righteous messenger. Here and in the other approved books in the new testament, a very different interpretation of the kingdom is played down.

The alternative appears emphatically in the Book of Thomas, which was written at about the same time, about forty years after the death of Jesus. In Thomas, **Jesus** has a very different message: *"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."* This could have been wise words from any era, including ours. Elaine asks herself why these words were hereti-

cal. John writes to enforce orthodox and unquestioning faith; Thomas has Jesus say that what saves is inside each individual to know and express. Alone among the 4 gospels, John insists that Jesus is divine (expressed by capitalizing the nouns/pronouns referring to Jesus, a convention not in Greek writing. John and Thomas were probably written about the same time, 200ade (Thomas written in Syriac?) John seems to be responding to, expressing his own version of Thomas. EP compares how they use the metaphor of 'light,' with Thomas seeing it as a human capacity, a light Jesus shows that all others have, at least potentially. For John it is the light of god that signals Jesus' unique status.

The book of Mark was written 40 years after the crucifixion and introduces but does not resolve the question of Jesus' true identity. Luke, 29 years later, has god raise Jesus to divine status after the crucifixion. John insists Jesus is, and was, divine; Paul has Jesus equal to his father. Thomas is probably a compilation of sayings, some contradictory, some hints that certain secrets are not for everyone. And he chides those looking for signs of the end of the difficult times. 'Salvation' for the Jesus in Thomas' book was purification of a people, not access into a paradise after death.

What can be sought is recovery of the initial light, the pure heart we were each born with, that which we could be again. The Thomas gospel has a poetic, dramatic style of "cryptic clues, not answers." To those looking to find god or godliness where Jesus finds it, Thomas has him respond that the living Jesus will turn out to be the twin of the self.

In John's story of Jesus the healer making a blind man see by spitting on the ground, mixing saliva with mud to put on closed eyes— but this gives insight, opening his eyes to be able to see Jesus as son of god. John adds his own fictional end to the story, saying that the synagogue tossed this now enlightened man out for the sin of knowing Jesus as divine. The author of John also maligned Thomas by inventing the character of doubting Thomas who resists unquestioning acceptance/faith. Thomas' version is more appealing now.

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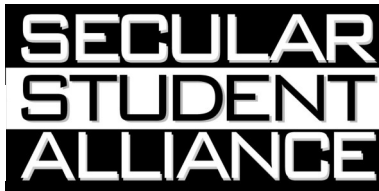
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Donations (tax deductible) through Idaho Atheist website (mailbag@idahoatheists.org), or contact us to donate via PayPal.

Boise State


 The logo for the Secular Student Alliance, featuring the words "SECULAR STUDENT ALLIANCE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, stacked vertically on a black rectangular background.

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 advisor Robin W Allen

BSU SSA is a home for secular students., encouraging critical thought, open, rational, scientific examinations of the universe and our place in it. We believe ethics and morality can be based on humanistic and rational values. We present a positive view of various -isms and non-religious worldviews through debates, workshops, speakers, movies, book club, discussion, and social gatherings.

Do We Have fixed Personalities? J Ross

We all prefer stability and predictability at the same time that we love novelty, change; we are also social beings responding to each other. Jean Piaget observed the changes in his own children; Later, Lawrence Kohlberg suggested that our understandings of our role in the world begins with focus on safety and basic needs, with both trust and resentment of those who control us, those who feed and comfort and play with us. If basic needs are met, we learn how to direct ourselves as we venture into the world.

The balance of encouragement and punishment affects what we do next and how we do it. Both children and adults who feel powerless remain fearful and angry; they mistrust those with more opportunity and advantages.

The lucky ones given opportunity and a variety of choices, can explore and grow in confidence. They enjoy manipulating, pushing, changing, constructing; if praised for this, by the age of three children will pick up language to express their needs, preferences. They talk about what they are learning and get praised for that as they learn more about their feelings and their world. They join a tribe.

There are personal variations within families, communities, sexes, cultures. Stable communities provide benefits that allow the combination of stimulation and re-creation, rest and play—exploring, recovery from mistakes and losses, with encouragement to start over and do it differently next time.

Preliminary studies in the previous century established some categories, domains that affected choices. One was degree of **extraversion**: how assertive, confident, independent, sociable, outgoing are we? This was labeled as a personality type but further observation showed that a certain kind of background, with supportive, nurturing adults who balanced encouragement with clear guidelines produced a high number of so-called extroverts. Adults with such qualities support others and are positive, self-directed.

Outgoing types are trusted by others, and if they have absorbed the social rules (they attend to such things) will rise into leadership positions. Such individuals also tend to be **conscientious**, persistent at tasks, dependable, reliable—they are goal oriented. They are aware of duty and obligations and in very different cultures tend to be trusted by others. Those who direct their actions, learn from mistakes and find opportunities expanding with their mental as well as physical efforts are characterized by openness, curiosity, inventiveness. Culture has a major affect here; the security and encouragement to enjoy open, curious and engaged lives. Stable work and income help, don't they?

Those who continue to value community above all put an emphasis on fitting in. They emphasize **agreeableness**, not disturbing status quo. In our society they are church-goers, cooperative, kind persons who are trusting and optimistic. They follow social rules, play their part in keeping a family stable, staying connected to others in the community. They may feel threatened by those who don't fit the majority mold, and don't change opinions easily—they have fixed behaviors and expectations, assumptions, and easily apply labels to others..

Kohlberg's lowest level of moral reasoning is a primary concern for **personal safety and advantage**. Those who continue into adulthood at this level explain their own and behavior of others in terms of benefits and punishments. What is normal for three year olds, who seize opportunities without concern for others is, in the old system of labels called **neuroticism**, Advantages and promotions go to others; the self-involved may not learn from mistakes, will blame others. When they suffer they complain but do not necessarily self-correct. Evangelical churches play to the search for enemies with demonic powers; this summer we have a candidate for leadership of our nation who has this style. .

Kohlberg did not specifically consider the world's skeptics, doubters and self-appointed change agents, the ones who ask embarrassing questions and test assumptions. Some may make this a career and add to our sum of knowledge or skills or products. Some may run for office (Yikes!) and others may write letters that attempt to bring our laws and practices into accord with our highest ideals. Some nations (and all that agree to universal rights and principles accepted by the United Nations) at least theoretically work to bring these goals into law and practice.

To seek change, then, is to be willing to correct and change oneself. We are not fixed in the past. We can't predict what future understandings and opportunities will demand of us.



*BUUF Humanists meet 3rd Sunday, 11:15:am, in the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship library, July 17
Sages meet 2nd and 4th Thursdays, usually 9:30am, at the Kopper Kitchen, near the Boise airport.*

BUUF SAGES NEXT CAREER

It's not just adolescence that's getting spread out these days; the transition from full-time work to retirement, once imagined as the last day at work and gold watch presentation, can take decades. One author (Dan Lyons, no relation) went from being a magazine writer to "Marketing Fellow" at a startup. Our own marketing fellow, Jim Lyons will lead the discussion about first, second, and next careers, when the BUUF Sages meet again, Thursday, July 14, 9:30 am at the Kopper Kitchen (2661 Airport Way), over a no-host breakfast.

For our second meeting in July, Chuck Hansen has offered his home for a **summer potluck**, with no particular agenda but enjoying each other's company. He's near Cole & Northview on the west bench, and we'll gather just a bit earlier to beat the heat: 9:00 am, Thursday, July 28, at 2415 N. Eldorado. Newcomers are welcome! No reservation needed. Contact Tom von Alten (tva@fortboise.org or 208 378-1217) for more information.

On family influences, for better or worse... J Ross

Our June humanist meeting at BUUF, in honor of Father's Day, considered those fatherly figures who left their print on us.

First, an important truth: relationships with fathers were not some abstract ideal. Fathers had weaknesses and flaws, and not everyone reached acceptance. And those who admired their dad may have had unexpected consequences; females raised in earlier times could be intimidated by expectations that didn't match the qualities they picked up from family. At least three of our older women did not match the passive home-centered ideal for females in the 1950's. and 60's. One still thinks of herself as a metalsmith who can fix almost anything, including broken toys for neighbors. She was spared the harsh treatment and unreasonable expectations laid upon her brothers and spent years sorting through community and religious expectations to find her own sort. She has proved to be a careful thinker who can still fix anything, and at the same time has been caring of others. Another woman, who has lived an active and productive life says she didn't forgive her father.

After some prodding, a third woman spoke of her father—'colorful' hardly covers it. He was outgoing, temperamental, and inadvertently entertaining for her friends. Finding a partner and establishing her own life took some time. A fourth among us spoke glowingly of her father and his generous encouragement of her. She used the times and places of her adult years to develop a craft to high professional level, and those several generations younger await her contributions to our conversations. But she said, when pestered by a friend, that she isn't ready to talk about her mother.

Only two from our group had unblemished, or at least balanced perspectives on their fathers. One, a daughter: "I loved my dad." His work varied from natural sciences to re-education and a last career as a prison counselor who was friends with clients and coworkers., developing new skills and understandings along the way. Another series of positive memories came from a son with a father who was part of an 'old Europe' tradition: although the son was part of a very different world he felt that his father appreciated his adventurous spirit.

Three men spoke of the difficulties involved in moving out of the religious communities in which their families were and to some degree still are embedded. One had to threaten to sue the leadership of his family's faith in order to be released from membership rolls. Now, he says, he and the still-practicing men in his family all get along. Later years and efforts to find common ground have allowed all three to achieve mutually satisfying family relationships. The time allowed for our conversation didn't allow consideration of why this was, at least among us, so much easier for men than women.

I'll finish with Woody, who doesn't mind if I quote him. That's good because he's so quotable. His father died when he was a toddler, so he's had to invent himself. He says that he expected marriage to make life wonderful but all that changed is that he and his wife were not only each other's best friend, and in fact their only friends. Church friendships were shallow and not mutually supportive. After some years, when he wanted to go out and do something with a friend, his wife objected. He still lives in her basement. Right now he's building an addition to the house for her mother. His philosophy: "I'm happy for what I'm getting, not what I don't have. I've always gained by the changes I've made, willingly or not.

July 2016

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Snake River Alliance is partnering with local installers to offer free site assessments and bids for installation of photovoltaic panels on your house or business. It's a limited time-offer, with a goal to add 50 new installations in the Treasure Valley.

The assessment is FREE and does not obligate you in any way. Sign up by July 31. If you decide to go forward with an installation, it can be scheduled to suit your needs (and based on the availability of parts and labor, of course).

Visit SolarizeTheValley.org to learn more, and sign up!

Fear of Government *notes J Ross*

Last Saturday I parked my car in an unfamiliar Boise neighborhood and started knocking on doors. I was asking whoever would talk to me, "What do you want your state government to do for you? What changes, what laws?" I skipped the house with three signs: "No soliciting," "No trespassing" and "Restore America Now!"

I talked with a young man who said Obama health care is not needed, and he was dedicated to being a better parent

Changing without Supernatural Assistance

There are 2 secular addiction recovery groups in the Treasure Valley. A secular 12 step AA group meets on Tuesday nights, 7 pm, in the Fahs room at the north end of the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Garden City.

Reason & Recovery and meets Thursday nights at 7pm at the Nazarene Church, 2701 S. Five Mile Road in Boise. Contact Robert F. at 208-501-6568 and Wally K. at 208-283-4756. Or contact Aria at 805-363-2961. These groups are open to anyone with any type of addiction--alcohol, drugs, food, etc.

than his own addicted, drug-dealing parents were. Also, no laws at all restricting guns. He added that he was ten years clean; two sweet little girls hid behind his legs.

One young woman, sweeping her parents' garage, told me that the healthcare we have now is no help because she is working. And what she is getting doesn't help with the cost of giving birth, much less raising her three children. Legislation proposed by my candidate would help to close that gap, I said. As I left her mother peeked out. "What was that about?" "I was telling her off," said daughter.

I spoke to a well-tatted male of middle years who was spraying cracks in his driveway from a giant jug of Roundup. Retired military, can't complain, he said. But he had nothing good to say about politicians. His last fave was Reagan, "But I got nothing against Obama. Those SOB's wouldn't let him do anything."

ADDICTION RECOVERY without threats or miracles... Jeanette summarizes recent research

Maia Szalavitz (NYT June 26, "[Can You Get Over an Addiction?](#)") and other health practitioners are offering hope appropriate for freethinkers limited by addictive habits. Cognitive scientists remind us that brains (and the bodies attached) are capable of learning new and more productive ways of behaving. Addicts are neither criminals or victims stuck with choices that interfere with work and family and peace of mind.

When bad habits, in general, are viewed from a neurological perspective, they are maladaptive pathways to pleasure and avoidance of pain. New patterns take effort, planning, and re-starts after any relapses. Those in recovery benefit from a supportive community and mentoring, similar to that provided by AA but without positing a Punisher-in-Chief. Compassionate, positive support and a rewards system of some kind, also in AA-type programs, will be especially effective for the independent-minded persons who place a high value on self-regulation.

And professional help can provide the push needed. Szalavitz mentions cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational enhancement programs. There are many similar variants available. If you try something that works, tell us!

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From Paul Rolig, treasurer of Humanists of Idaho: Doug Van Curen (President), Jan Rowe (Secretary), and Paul Rolig (Treasurer) were re-elected to two-year terms in our latest election. Britini Gates, a new member, volunteered for, and was appointed by the Board, to fill the office of Vice President.

Our May speaker presented lively coverage of human rights in Idaho: Kudos to Robert Franklin for his excellent history lesson at the Humanists of Idaho meeting Monday, May 16. Here are some relevant links:

Wassmuth Center for Human Rights = <http://wassmuthcenter.org/>

"The Color of Conscience" = ~55 minute documentary of the history of human rights in Idaho = <http://video.idahoptv.org/video/1949293974/>

Transcript of interview by Marsha Franklin of Idaho Public TV of Miep Gies, the "helper" who saved Anne Frank's diary after she and her family were arrested, when she visited Boise in 1996 = <http://idahoptv.org/dialogue/diashowpage.cfm?KeyNo=309> (Click on link in page to get to the transcript.)

30-minute video of Marsha Franklin's 2015 retrospective of the above = <http://video.idahoptv.org/video/2365442929/>