

Ontario Humanist Society

Newsletter

February 2011

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Quotable Humanists

"The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts."

Bertrand Russell

Inside this issue:

President's Message	1
Updates	2
Ethical Actions	3
Volunteering	3
Member Profile	4

Message From the President

Winter Issue

Dear OHS members,

I begin with New Year's greetings and a humanist hope for a prosperous year going forward. The OHS Board appreciates the support that you have provided to the Ontario Humanist Society in its first full year of operations. As a volunteer run association, our strength is drawn from our membership. By joining us, you have demonstrated your commitment to organized Humanism in the Province of Ontario and you have strengthened the Humanist voice. In the interest of strengthening Humanist Networks, we have affiliated with the International Humanist

and Ethical Union and are in the process of affiliating with our national association, Humanist Canada.

In the coming year, our energies will be directed at strengthening organized humanism in the Province through a number of initiatives. We want to engage in a dialogue with you that will increase our understanding of the concerns of individual humanists and local groups. We hope to accomplish this by speaking at your program meetings; or for a less formal setting, meeting for coffee; email communication, telephone conversations and Skype meetings. We will also be hosting our Annual General Meeting in Toronto at the Peace

Centre, O.I.S.E. on April 9th. Our AGM committee is planning activities in conjunction with the meeting that will be educational and entertaining. So please join us if you can. Your ideas are significant and we hope you will share them with us in person, by telephone or email. And if you wish to become more actively involved, your participation is welcome!

In humanist fellowship,

Gail McCabe PhD RSSW

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Need to Contact OHS?

- Website: <http://ontariohumanists.ca/>
- Call: 1-877-343-7323
- E-mail: info@ontariohumanists.ca

Updates

Elections: A Boost to the OHS Board

By Peter Moller and
Cortney Pasternak

OHS looks forward to recruiting up to three new board members after recently voting to expand the number of people on the board from six to nine. New members will have had to have been with OHS for a minimum of one year instead of the previous two years. The board is hoping the move will mean more

engagement and wider input among members on key issues of interest to the OHS.

OHS would like to congratulate members on a strong voter turnout for this past election but it would also like to know whether you found the voter system accessible. Please feel free to post comments or questions to Peter Moller at treasurer@ontariohumanists.ca.

For more details on the election results, please visit the OHS website.

Program Updates from the OHS Ceremonies Committee

By Gail McCabe

In its first full year of operation, OHS has established a vibrant Ceremonies Program. The objective is to serve Humanists and the general public who wish to have secular rites of passage ceremonies. We began with five experienced Humanist Officiants and have since welcomed eight more. We are also planning a training session in Toronto at the end of March 2011.

Humanist Officiants mark the passages of life events in a joyous, respectful, community-oriented celebration, reflecting our Humanist understanding of the shared responsibilities of

life, the commonality of all persons, and the individual wishes and reflections of the persons we are celebrating.

A Humanist Officiant takes the role of a facilitator of such rites of passage, providing resources, guidance, ideas and original writing for those who wish to use them in the design of their own ceremonies. The individuals decide what elements to include and what the meaning of the rite has for them.

Our goal is to expand our program so that Humanists across the province will have access to a Humanist Officiant.

Please contact us if you'd like to chat about arranging a visit by one of our Officiants to talk about these subjects:
cc_chair@ontariohumanists.ca

Reviewers Wanted!

Have you read a book or seen a movie that would be of interest to other humanists? Let us know! We'd like to feature short reviews by our members every month. If you've come across something compelling, drop us a line as we would love to include it.

Send your ideas or submissions to: terri@rbhope.ca.

Ethical Actions

The OHS Ethical Actions Committee

By Matthew Bin

Is humanism an issue of religion (or lack of it), or is it a positive, active response to the issues that our society faces? For many humanists, it's the latter -- a dogma-free way of promoting rights and well-being for all people. Within the OHS, the Ethical Actions Committee is the group that works to find the issues that are critical to humanists in Ontario, and show how they can take action on them.

If you want to see what the Ethical Actions committee is doing, take a look at the newly-revamped blog at www.ontariohumanists.ca, and select the Ethical Actions category

on the right to see the most recent ethical actions blog posts. You can also subscribe to the OHS blog by e-mail, or in your feed reader if you use one.

Some of the ethical actions you can get involved with now:

Although the UN has marked 2011 as the International Year of the Forest, residential developers and the City of Ottawa aren't paying attention. In fact, they are preparing to cut down a massive old-growth forest in the Ottawa region -- only 20 minutes from Parliament Hill, threatening 10 natural habitats and 20 known species at risk. Go to www.ottawagreatforest.com to

learn how you can help stop this from happening.

The Oakville Community Centre for Peace, Ecology, and Human Rights is working on a petition for the abolishment of nuclear weapons. If you live in Oakville, go to www.oakvillepeacecentre.org to sign the petition. You can also go to the Physicians for Global Survival site at www.pgs.ca for more information on this worthy cause.

Subscribe to the blog and keep informed of more ethical actions as they appear.

Volunteering

Want To Get Involved With OHS?

By Terri Hope

Do you have some time to volunteer with OHS? We need your skills in the following areas:

- Writing (newsletter and website)

- Web management
- Event organization
- Fundraising
- Financial management
- Board or committee participation

If you would like to get involved in some small or large way, please contact Terri Hope at terri@rbhope.ca. Terri will connect you to the person who can make it happen!

Billeting

By Terri Hope

Can you host a humanist in your home? OHS is always looking for members who will offer a visiting humanist a place to stay while in town.

Currently, Terri and Bob Hope are happy to billet humanists who wish to attend any Grey Bruce Humanist meeting, or other humanist event occurring in the Owen Sound area. Email Terri at terri@rbhope.ca for further information.

Candace Nast would also be happy to billet humanists traveling to the Windsor area. For more information, email Candace at candace.nast@gmail.com.

Member Profile: Gail McCabe

By Cortney Pasternak

Interview Profile is a new addition to the OHS Newsletter. This short interview series is designed to introduce its members to humanists who are contributing to the humanist movement worldwide and also on a local level. To begin this series (one we hope to continue), we felt it was most appropriate to profile OHS President Gail McCabe.

Gail McCabe has professional designations as a Typographer, Social Service Worker and Sociologist. She holds a Masters Degree in Sports Culture and Sociology and a doctorate in Social Psychology. As an academic, Gail has taught at various universities including York and Wilfrid Laurier and currently teaches at a private career college. She lives in Streetsville, Ontario with her long time partner. They have three children and four grandchildren.

You came to humanism (or left conventional religion) pretty early in your life. Can you explain that transformation?

My grandparents were orthodox Jews. My parents were Marxist Jews. I was a red diaper baby. But in respect of cultural traditions, I was enrolled at Jewish school at the age of 8. And we would join my grandparents for the 'High Holidays' at their synagogue. As a little girl, I experienced a sort of enchantment when sitting upstairs with all of the women, nestled right up against my Bubby's soft abundance. I would look up at the domed roof decorated with biblical stories, blue sky and clouds and I would feel closer to heaven.

At the age of 12, my brother began studying for his Bar Mitzvah. This rite of passage, 'boys to men' is

celebrated at the 13th birthday. By reading a passage from the Torah in the synagogue, the boy is welcomed as an adult into the community of the congregation. It was accompanied by a flurry of activity in preparation for the ceremony at the synagogue and the huge party to be celebrated at a banquet hall. I got a frilly, white chiffon dress!

Of course, I wanted to know if I, too, would be having a Bar Mitzvah when I turned 13. At that time, Bat Mitzvah, the female version was not a custom in orthodox congregations or for that matter, in many congregations. At 11 years old, I came to understand that in a patriarchal religion, women were not to be full persons in the congregation nor were they closer to heaven in their segregation from the males at the bema (altar) below. So I left the religion and refused to attend Jewish school.

That was the beginning of a quest for a more equitable model. Not patriarchy, not matriarchy! Humanist philosophy although not a perfect version of my vision offered more promise to women than any of the religions I encountered. So I took it up, not as a faith, but as a moral compass. Humanism subscribes to reason, critical thinking, human rights and social justice. These values are a good fit to the extent that I proudly call myself a humanist. At the same time, they do not encompass all of the values that I embrace. So I also call myself a Feminist, and a Socialist.

Why did you start OHS?

OHS was established by five individuals. As a collective, we recognized that a humanist association at the provincial level would provide opportunities for

strengthening humanist social movement. All five of us were Humanist Officiants and since Ontario is the only Canadian jurisdiction that authorizes Humanists to solemnize marriages, we thought an Ontario-based association would add to the extent of organized Humanist Ceremonies Programs. Given my history and my recognition of the significance of the celebration of rites of passage to the life of the community as well as to individuals living through these passages, I wanted to establish a Ceremonies Program that emphasized at its core the human need for meaningful rites of passage and celebrations of life!

What do you see as the single most important issue that humanists in an organization such as OHS should be working toward in 2011?

The single most important issue for Humanist is to lobby for the right to 'die with dignity,' a phrase that has come to mean the right of an individual with a terminal illness to choose the time and mode of their own death. It differs from assisted suicide in that the individual could choose to be euthanized by a doctor or some other person of their own choosing. The time is ripe because there is a strong, activist movement in Quebec lobbying for the change and if Humanists join them, we may see it happen. If we don't, we will find ourselves in crisis as dementia in our population explodes in pandemic proportions.