

"I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires."  
—Susan B. Anthony

# Critical Thinker

The Quarterly Newsletter of United States Atheists | April/May/June 2005

## Atheist Mom & Son Win in Oregon Appeals Court

by Nancy Powell Vice President, United States Atheists

On March 2, 2005 the Appeals Court of the State of Oregon confirmed the lower court ruling, affirming that the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is a discriminatory organization, and that the public schools of Oregon should not let them recruit schoolchildren during the school day. How does it feel to win in appeals court?

The answer is *great*, that's how it feels. It feels great to know that you are not alone in how you look at things. To know that our courts, at least in Oregon, have not been stolen away by the Christian agenda Bush would like. That a financially powerful group such as the Boy Scouts can't just buy a victory. At the last school board meeting I testified at, the Scouts were there, saying that they should be allowed to at least send information home with kids because not letting them do so was discrimination against religion. What a difference a few years have made. As a result, I have new friends and the everyday person is generally more educated than when we began. There is no one who still says "What are you talking about? The Scouts don't discriminate." There has been reason for much elation but it has not all been fun and games.

It has been a long and complicated battle in which my family was portrayed as evil-doers out to get the "apple pie" organization Boy Scouts of America. We were told we were liars and hateful. We were told we would burn in hell.

Our house was picketed. We received threats, and Remy was forced to testify in court, in front of reporters and many people who didn't want us to prevail. We had Jack Bierwirth, then Superintendent of Public Education for Portland, appear on the news and denounce our complaint because "...the Scouts allowed every boy to join." Later, we found out he was in fact the board member and vice president in charge of recruitment for the Scouts. We uncovered documents in which he told the BSA board that he would use his principals to gain more members for the group by having them recruit during the school day. After the ACLU took up our cause, the district offered to settle the lawsuit, only to withdraw their offer later. It wasn't until some time later that we discovered the settlement withdrawal was due to the Scouts' offer to pay the district's legal fees if they would not settle the case, as had been offered. In fact, the Scouts paid tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees (\$32,276 according to *The Oregonian*). How could Portland Public Schools possibly make a decision against the Scouts while they were in the Scouts' pocket?

To say the least, this has been a heated battle. The kind that makes you wonder why anyone would take on such a large organization and be



Remington Powell

Photography by Frank Barnett, Photography, Portland, OR

## Upcoming Events

### Summer Solstice Party

*Tuesday, June 21, 7:30–9:00 PM*  
Please join us as we celebrate the Summer Solstice. Refreshments will be served during our meeting at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Road in Portland.

### Weekly Meetings

*Every Tuesday, 7:30 PM* Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Road, Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome.

April 5, 12, 19, 26

May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

June 7, 14, 21, 28

### "Bunk Busters"

"Bunk Busters" is the cable TV show produced by USA and co-hosted by Jerry Billings and Kendall Auel. It is cablecast in the Portland metro area, Vancouver and Yakima. Contact: Alfredo Torrejon at [bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com](mailto:bunkbusters@unitedstatesatheists.com).

#### Portland Metro Schedule:

Tuesdays 7:30 PM Ch. 22

Saturdays 1:30 PM Ch. 23

[www.pcmtv.org](http://www.pcmtv.org)

#### Fort Vancouver, WA Schedule:

Mondays 11:30 AM Ch. 11

Thursdays 8:00 AM Ch. 11

Sundays 5:00 PM Ch. 11

[www.fvtv.org](http://www.fvtv.org)

#### Yakima, WA Schedule:

Call 509-575-6092

*All schedules are subject to change.*

## Web Site

[www.unitedstatesatheists.com](http://www.unitedstatesatheists.com)

## Dial-An-Atheist

Call 503-ATHEIST (503-284-3478)

## Critical Thinker

The deadline for the next issue is June 15, 2005. E-mail submissions to [criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com](mailto:criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com), or mail to the USA street address.

## Address Changes

Please send address changes to us at [membership@unitedstatesatheists.com](mailto:membership@unitedstatesatheists.com), or mail to the USA street address.

see **POWELL VICTORY** on page 2...

### USA Board Expands

In March 2005, United States Atheists board members James Archer, Nancy Powell and Jerry Billings voted to expand the three-member USA board to five members. In a unanimous decision, the board appointed Alfredo Torrejon and James A. Smith to the board. Alfredo has been a member of USA since 1999. Since 2000 he has acted as video editor and engineer for “Bunk Busters,” the cable TV show produced by USA. He has also helped with other projects, including highway cleanup, painting the exterior of the Atheist Community Center and helping keep the Center clean. James has been a member since 2002 and currently serves as editor of the *Critical Thinker* newsletter. He has also helped organize various USA parties. ■

### Support Our Scouts Act

According to a position statement on the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Web site ([www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org)), in March of 2005 a number of United States senators introduced legislation that would, according to the Scouts, clarify federal law “so that no local, state, or federal agency can deny Scouts access to public government property.” The Scouts go on to say that “in recent years, the Boy Scouts has been under a legal assault by those who would deny it the same relationship with government as other youth and community organizations.”

The position statement fails to mention the reason BSA has faced a “legal assault”—the fact that they blatantly and unapologetically discriminate on the basis of religion and sexual orientation (barring Scouts

and employees who are atheist, gay or part of some other groups). The Scouts are being singled out no more than any other discriminatory organization.

The legislation, titled “Support Our Scouts Act of 2005,” was introduced by Senators Bill Frist, Lamar Alexander, George Allen, Sam Brownback, Jim Bunning, Conrad Burns, Saxby Chambliss, John Cornyn, Larry Craig, John Ensign, Michael Enzi, Lindsey Graham, Chuck Grassley, James Inhofe, Ben Nelson, Bill Nelson, Rick Santorum, Jeff Sessions, Gordon Smith, Jim Talent, and David Vitter.

Oregonians who would like to voice their opinion of this legislation may contact Oregon Senator Gordon Smith in his Portland office at (503) 326-3386, or his Washington, DC office at (202) 224-3753. ■

### Powell Victory

...continued from front cover

exposed to such intolerance. Well I am here to tell you *it is worth it!*

When you are faced with discrimination you have two choices; you can slink away and suffer or you can fight. I, along with your support and help, have taught my son Remy to be a fighter. As a freshman in high school now (yes, there was some question as to the fact that if they appealed enough times they would simply outlive us), he has grown to be a wonderful person. He aspires to be an attorney. I wonder were that came from? He also hopes to donate some of his time to the ACLU. He stands up

for himself and for others he sees are in need of help. He gives speeches in school about discrimination. He has zero tolerance for bigotry. He is proud to have made the world a better place by exposing discrimination for what it is. I'm so proud of him and my 13 year-old daughter Katie, who have both demonstrated compassion and understanding that many adults missed during this entire nine-year battle. Everyone should be the underdog at least once, just to see how it feels. It is life-changing. Win or lose, we knew we were doing the right thing and we grew from the experience. But let's

face it... winning feels *way* better!

As a private organization, the Boy Scouts of America may pick and choose its membership based on any kind of bigotry it wants...but not on the taxpayer's dime, not in our schools, and not to our kids. Together—and I assure you we could not have done this without the support of United States Atheists and the members we are proud to call friends—we have not only helped to spare school children in Oregon but have taught people around America to look at the Boy Scouts of America for what they are. Thanks for all your support. ■

● According to *The Oregonian*, as of December 2004 Portland Public Schools had spent \$232,491 defending against the complaint, while The Boy Scouts of America paid an additional \$32,276.

● To read a complete chronology of the case, go to <http://www.aclu-or.org/litigation/powell/powelltimeline.htm>.

● To read the Oregon Appeals Court decision, go to <http://www.publications.ojd.state.or.us/A117310.htm>

## What Would Jerry Do?

by **Jerry Billings** Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

Dear Jerry,  
*When you atheists are looking at eternity it seems that, then, you all turn to God. You can talk tough now but how will you feel when you are on your death bed?*

—Wally in Oak Grove

Dear Wally,

This is a favorite subject with Christians. But is it true? I recently had a very close non-religious friend die from cancer. The hospital that he was in (Providence) has a strict policy against physician-assisted hastening of death. However, that hospital does allow what they call "pain relief." More on that in a moment. While I was there my friend was asked, "Where do you want to go from here?" I thought they were asking him if he wanted to go home, or to a nursing facility? My friend replied, "To the big house in the sky."

Now, back to pain relief. My friend had a morphine patch and was hooked up to a morphine drip with a button that allowed him to give himself an extra boost if he needed it. To top it off he was getting a morphine injection about every fifteen minutes. He thought that he was in a hotel in Seattle and kept asking why he was there. The amount of morphine that he was given would have killed the proverbial horse but it

did not technically qualify as physician-assisted suicide.

To make this long story a bit shorter, I knew that if I had asked him to sign any important document—say, a new will—in his then-current state, it would be invalid. Clearly his statement about the big house in the sky was meaningless and the ramblings of a drug induced, near comatose condition. He died within two hours.

It seems like one preacher or another claims that every atheist made a deathbed conversion. If you use your mind, you will quickly realize that (1) it is simple to tell tall tales about the dead and (2) we cannot place weight upon the rambling mutterings of a person who is under the influence of massive doses of pain medication.

All of the leading atheists and agnostics throughout history have had it said about them that they made a deathbed conversion. A few of them are Charles Darwin, Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, Percy Shelly, Johann Strauss and Voltaire. Every one of these reports was later well documented and shown to be a lie.

As a matter of principle, please do not repeat these false stories about anyone, no matter how much you wish these tall tales to be true.

—Jerry Billings

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Atheists,

I enjoy your newsletter, *but*...J.C. Sammons' article on "Little Known Bible Verses" was misleading. I looked them up. The one about the "Gentile Dogs" was so misleading that it constituted a lie. Now if we lie to promote our beliefs, then we are no better than the Christians.

Apparently "atheism" is as much an article of faith for Mr. Sammons as is Christianity to the Christians. I'll stick to a wholesome uncertainty.

In fact, I have come to believe that a person's enlightenment is measured not by what he believes, but what he doubts.

Thanks again,

Richard Mohley

Richard@meetfunpeople.org

J.C. Sammons responds:

*I resent being called a liar. I do not consider my atheism as an article of faith. The definition of "faith" is to believe in something without evidence. I do not have "faith" in atheism. I am an atheist based on my study of the Bible, and my rational mind. If someone can convince me with evidence there is an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing God, I would change my mind about atheism. The Holy Bible has many errors and contradictions and could not have been written/inspired by such a God. If you read the first two chapters of the Bible you will find two contradictory stories of the creation of the world. In which story did God lie? Do you believe that the world is flat? The Biblical God says it is. I have always had an open mind, and if I am wrong I will change my beliefs.*

Editor's Note: The biblical passages referred to in the original article are Matthew 15:22-26. You might want to look it up and decide what you think.

### REMEMBER UNITED STATES ATHEISTS IN YOUR WILL.

A gift in your will is a sure way to benefit United States Atheists. It can have favorable tax consequences for you since USA is a 501(c)(3) corporation—that's IRS talk for a tax-free organization. Ask your lawyer for the answers to any questions that you may have.

*Join us every Tuesday night at 7:30 for lively discussions at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Road in Portland.*

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I am an Atheist and would like to join United States Atheists.

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If you provide your e-mail address we will add you to our e-mail list to keep you updated on USA news and events. If you do **not** wish to be added to the list, please check this box:

Your personal information will be used only for United States Atheists purposes and will not be sold or shared with other organizations.

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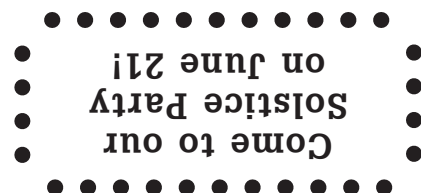
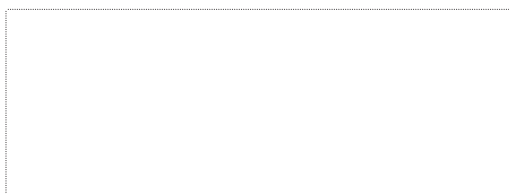
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You may also join at any of our regular meetings, held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 at the above address. Contributions are also gratefully accepted at our meetings.

United States Atheists is a 501(c)(3) educational charity run by volunteers. Donations are tax-deductible. Consult a licensed tax expert for details on how it would apply in your tax situation.

*Critical Thinker* April/May/June 2005



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