

# Suffolk Humanist News

SUFFOLK HUMANISTS— The Suffolk Humanist Group

October 2005

## Colchester Meeting, Wednesday 12th October

On Wednesday 12th October, we're meeting in the James Parnell Room at the Friends' Meeting House, 6 Church Street, Colchester. We hope some of you from the Ipswich area will come to meet our Colchester members. If you have difficulty getting into Colchester, please phone 01473 658828 ASAP for a lift—and if you can offer a lift, we'd love to hear from you.

We'll be discussing whether it's possible to be reconciled with religion, as this was the subject of a recent Forum of Faiths meeting in the town. Our member **Yvonne Peacock** gave a Humanist point of view. This is an abridged version of what she said...

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### Reconciliation

Speaking as a Humanist, I don't think reconciliation is quite my cup of tea. In fact, I sometimes think we should be less conciliatory and more assertive, especially when I hear what some folks say about Humanism.

I have heard it said, "I suppose it just means you're all humans and can do what you want," or "oh no, it can't be included in the religious education curriculum because it's not a religious faith," or "oh Humanists! You're the lot who

don't believe in anything."

In a book by John Carroll, it was described as promoting thinking like that of an animal, "that the good life is to consume, to procreate and to sleep."

At best, we are invisible; at worst, predatory.

Humanism certainly concentrates on what it is to be human. Clearly, we do have difficulties with reconciliation between Humanism and religion but can live and work happily alongside people of all religious persuasions as long as there are no attempts to impose beliefs on anyone else. A level playing field is all we ask

Personally, I cannot see Humanism as an easy option. For us, "the notion of human responsibility is the nuclear idea in the definition of Humanism." We as individuals are responsible for shaping our own lives and to help create a society which allows each one of us to fulfil his or her potential. It is an approach based on reason and our common humanity founded on human nature and experience alone. Not much if you say it quick.

Our goal is to be inspired by love and guided by knowledge and is a dynamic call to work on our personal evolution and contribute

to improve human existence elsewhere.

However, David Attenborough a while ago advised us to remember that humankind is only part of the great living earth. That interdependence between man, all other living creatures and vegetation is crucial. Until now, no species has ever had such wholesale control over everything on earth. Responsibility indeed!

When explaining the meaning of Humanism to young people, we sometimes talk about living on a space ship called Earth. So if a bit goes on fire or we spring a leak, it behoves us to work together to sort it out – fast – to ensure our survival.

As Yevtushenko neatly put it: "In the final analysis, humanity has only two ways out – either universal destruction or universal brotherhood."

The world is full of horrors and sadness. Across the planet, we have hurricanes, drought, famine, forest fire, and tsunamis. Some disasters, like earthquakes, we can do little about but we are clearly responsible for much of the havoc and have had warnings from scientists and thinkers for a long time. We are all citizens of planet

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Earth and it is about time we began to act as world citizens. There is no room for differences based on purely human conventions when survival depends on acting as one human race.

Attempting to think on this scale is of course scary and quite demoralising. How can one small voice have any effect? Here I have found the Humanist perspective helpful. It never denies the minuteness of the lone person, but has always celebrated our individuality—vive la difference! But also by putting on us that feeling of responsibility for our

world, it makes us aware that every word we speak and every action we take matters and can move things on.

I would like to conclude with a little reading, which you may well have heard before, but which comforts, indeed reconciles me a bit to my insignificance:

“My favourite symbol is the Tree of Life. The human race is the trunk and branches of this tree, and individual men are the leaves, which appear one season, flourish for a summer, and then die. I am like a leaf of this tree, and one day I shall decay and fall, and become a

pinch of compost about its roots. But meanwhile I am conscious of the tree’s flowing sap and steadfast strength. Deep down in my consciousness is the consciousness of a collective life, a life of which I am a part, and to which I contribute a minute but unique extension. When I die and fall, the tree remains, nourished to some small degree by my brief manifestation of life. Millions of leaves have preceded me and millions will follow me; the tree itself grows and endures.”

(By Herbert Read, from *The Falcon and the Dove*)

## Dates for your Diary

Wednesday **12th October**, meeting in Colchester.

Wednesdays **9th November & 11th January**—meetings at Castle Hill Community Centre, Ipswich.

Tuesday **22nd November**—Fish ‘n chips & a showing of the film ‘The God Who Wasn’t There’, a film that aims to prove that Jesus didn’t exist, “with a grand sense of humour, and a forensic logic” (NSS). Phone 01473 658828 by 18th November to order your supper.

Wednesday **8th February**—meeting at the Friends’ Meeting House, Colchester.

## What’s happening...

On 8th October David Mitchell represented the Suffolk team of ceremonies celebrants at a meeting of the Independent Association of Humanist Celebrants in Birmingham.

The BHA has appointed a

committee to investigate why so many people have given up their BHA accreditation (such as David and I), in accord with a resolution passed at the AGM.

On 10th October I’m attending a second workshop where Suffolk Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education members will be developing the new agreed syllabus for the county.

On 20th October I’ll be contributing (for the 3rd time) to a Matters of Life & Death Conference for Year 11 students at Kesgrave High School.

On 7th December I’ll be talking to Suffolk County Council staff about Humanism. It’s one of a series of talks arranged by the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource.

The ‘Remembrance Service’ (we’d prefer to call it a ceremony, not a service) to be led by me at West Suffolk Crematorium has been postponed until ‘early in the new year’ by the Westerleigh Group plc because they’ve been busy refurbishing their chapel.

Demand for humanist ceremonies

continues to rise, though it’s been quiet lately. We’ve had a few enquiries about training as humanist celebrants, but only from people who were not at all interested in humanism. As I’m not doing many ceremonies these days (I’m generally only available for group members or friends), we need at least one more celebrant to help us. If you or someone you know might make a good humanist ceremony, please get in touch to find out more about training.

Margaret

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Newsletter contributions to the above address

The Suffolk Humanist group is affiliated to the British Humanist Association, the National Secular Society, and the Suffolk Inter-Faith Resource.