

AAIDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

(formerly Awl Weave Ghat)

The Newsletter of the *American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disorders'* (AAIDD) Humanist Action Group – December 2009, v.3 issue 4

This newsletter expresses the opinion of members of this subgroup and not necessarily of AAIDD

All data presented are opinions and alternative opinions may be printed in later issues. Send feedback and submissions to jrmullin@verizon.net

Notable quotes

From the September 2009 Skeptical Briefs (a Council on Secular Humanism newsletter):

““In those parts of the world where learning and science have prevailed, miracles have ceased; but in those parts of it as are barbarous and ignorant, miracles are still in vogue”
-Ethan Allen, leader of the Green Mountain Boys and American Revolution hero” (pg 15)

“Science flies us to the moon. Religion flies us into buildings” Victor Stenger in an article, “Is Science based in faith?” (He argues “no since lessons from science can be generally seen or tested) (page 13)

News Stories without follow up

There were a couple of local news stories I found interesting over this quarter. The first involved a person I knew when I was in my mid-teens and a counselor at a Scout Camp in New Hampshire. His father was an executive in the local Boy Scout Council and he used to bring his son, Danny, to the camp on occasion. Danny has Down Syndrome and probably functions in the moderate range of intellectual disabilities. Sadly and embarrassingly, we used to make fun of him when he wasn't around: we were young and stupid, I guess. However Danny showed up in the news lately because he was found in his group home in Dracut, Massachusetts with a number of serious unexplained injuries and required hospitalization. The family said he was so traumatized that he could no longer talk.

The second story involved a youngster reportedly with special needs who had drawn a picture of a cross with a man on it and a scroll at the top of the cross. It was around Christmas time. He was sent for a psychological evaluation by the Taunton, Massachusetts school authorities and missed two days of school. The family cried that this was religious prejudice and he was just drawing what he had seen at a local Shrine well known for its Christmas display as part of an assignment.

Both of these stories generated a lot of press in a short period of time and then there was nothing. While I would like to see justice for anyone who violated these people, the occasional comment in some versions of these news stories suggest that each might have a more complicated story.

Danny was older than I was when I knew him over 40 years ago and is 61 now. He also has Down Syndrome. One of the staff from the group home said that he was injured pulling drawers out of the dressers, something a very disoriented person might do, although the news made it look like this was just excuse making. At Danny's age he would almost certainly have some degree of Alzheimer's disease, be disoriented, and perhaps stop talking. This is all conjecture on my part although based on observations noted in the news. I just feel bad that the news stops following these situations.

In the second situation the school maintained that the cross was not labeled "Christ" or "INRI" but rather was labeled with the child's name and the boy indicated that it was him being killed on the cross. It was not drawn as part of an assignment. The school was claiming it was being careful and protecting the child by having him assessed by a therapist before coming back to school and that took two days. In these times, when schools are blamed for missing often subtle clues of impending catastrophes, it might have been a wise move on the part of the school system. I suspect this was not part of the non-existent war on Christmas. Again there was no follow up and I claim no privileged opinion in this matter.

In both cases there may have been more to the story but they were portrayed in the media as nefarious and somewhat frightening. The successful resolution of either of these was never discussed. Was Danny' abuser(s) identified or was the situation dismissed after further investigation? Was the boy with the cross punished for his religious views or was this an over-reaction on the part of his family or worse? News in these types of issues need good follow-up and in both these examples, this was sorely missing. Please advocate for follow up if exposed to these types of situations and you have any influence.

In the next issue I want to discuss the possible etiologies of some myths. For example one researcher is suggesting the elephant skulls, with the huge hole where the trunk comes out, could be the basis of the cyclops with the one eye in the middle of his head. We can also discuss dragons and what I call "campfire stories". Hope I can make it interesting!

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