

# AAIDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

(formerly Awl Weave Ghat)

The Newsletter of the

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disorders (AAIDD) Humanist Action Group

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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](mailto:jrmullin@verizon.net)

**As you may notice**, we have a new title for this newsletter. At one point in time I thought the old title was clever. Now that I've seen it come up in a search engine, I'm not so sure any more. I hope to move group communication into the AAIDD website and you may get a notice asking you to join this group. Hopefully I will be able to structure it so you only have to click "yes".

I'm getting excited about the upcoming AAIDD annual meeting in Providence, RI which is a short trip for me. I expect to have an Action Group meeting there and maybe see some of you.

## Campfire stories

*"No doubt the first humans, sitting around the fires of their caves, told stories relating their life experiences to the power and mystery of the universe"*

Dan Wakefield

(American novelist, journalist and screenwriter)

Picture sitting around a campfire several thousand years ago with a child: perhaps your son or perhaps your granddaughter. The child, as they always do, asks a few questions to which you don't really know the answers:

- Where does the sun go at night?
- What are those thunderous noises during the rain?
- Did our family always live here?
- Will I ever see my mother again since she died?
- From what animal was that big boney skull we found?

What would you say to the youngster? Campfires seem to bring out the tall stories in us all in this era and I expect that it did way back in those very early times. Sometimes the stories were meant to be comforting like in the example of the mother who had died. Sometimes they were questions about history of which there were rarely any written records. Sometimes they were looking for explanations of interesting or frightening natural phenomenon. The best stories were the ones that brought a lot of explanations

under the blanket of a larger story and made it seem like there was another world out there beyond what we normally saw. Some of those larger stories doubtlessly grew into the great mythology of the Greeks and Romans.

I started thinking more seriously about this subject after hearing an interview on NPR .



The interviewee was Adrienne Mayor who wrote the book, *The First Fossil Hunters: Paleontology in Greek and Roman Times*. Her premise was that the ancient Greeks and Romans had found fossils, perhaps while farming, and tried to imagine the organisms that had left them. This is not an original premise and it goes back to at least 1914. In Crete there are fossils of dwarf elephants. The skulls are at least twice as big as a human adult's and have a large hole in the middle for the trunk. Mayor, as had others, suggests that the hole was seen as the single eye socket of a man twice as big as normal. A Cyclops would meet these criteria and made for wonderful story telling. Mayor also suggests that Griffins were created in stories by travelers in the Gobi desert who passed dinosaur skeletons. These stories may not have

been generated around campfires but they made good stories to tell there later

Was Moses the greatest story teller there ever was? He sets out a great story of an exodus from slavery in Egypt, wandering about the desert for years, and eventually settles in Israel. There is debate as to why this is true but there are no records of the Jews in Egypt. Nor are there records of the food and supplies they would have needed and the Egyptians were meticulous record keepers. None of the tribes they wandered past have any record of the Jews being there but this may not be a good argument because there were almost no written records in those times. Moses is also credited with the earlier books in the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible. The source he used for these stories was not identified and the stories may well have been composed by Moses if not passed orally from generation to generation with a gradual drift in content. There is an all encompassing story that ties the parts of the stories apart and as would be found in any long oral tradition, there are slight unintended changes as the story progresses. For example in the earliest books, the god is a real hands-on type of guy and was in close personal contact with the people of earth. Towards the middle he only appears as burning bushes and then only to a privileged few. After Moses he eventually works through angels (which were taken from other religious stories.)

I hope I've made my point: that good campfire stories may have developed in the mythologies and religious stories we hear today. The next question is how to show this point to a person with IDD who might be overly impressed by mythology or even stories on television or the movies. I would like to suggest that you sit by a campfire (or even fishing or sitting by the pool) and both try to make stories that answer some of the questions from the start of this essay:

- Where does the sun go at night?
- What are those thunderous noises during the rain?
- Did our family always live here?
- Will I ever see my relative again since they died?

I expect you'll have a good time and perhaps impress each other with your creations. Hopefully, as long as you are clear that you are making stories, the person you are imagining with may start to see that a lot of stories can be the product of an enjoyable night and an active imagination.

*Next Issue: why does the whole world believe in Dragons?*



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