

# AAIDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

(formerly Awl Weave Ghat)

**The Newsletter of the**

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

**June 2010 , v.4 issue 2**

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

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*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)*

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I had a wonderful time at the AAIDD annual meeting in Providence, RI . I met some great people, co-presented a poster session (essentially on teasing Bipolar-type disorders out of behavioral data which I feel was well received), and attended some rewarding talks and workshops. As I may have mentioned in an earlier newsletter, I commuted but had forgotten what a pain it can be to drive in Providence. Getting to the Hotel was easy but getting home was a nightmare; I did find an easier although longer route on the last day but that was a bit late for all intents and purposes.

I also had the first business meeting of the Action group. Steve Mason, Director of Support Services from the national AAIDD office attended and we had a good conversation on the need for and goals of the group. He doesn't belong to the group but seemed interested by it and sent me a nice email later. As the only member who attended, I voted myself as chair person for another year.

Separate from the business meeting I met members of the Religion and Spirituality Committee. We discussed whether, since Humanists are one end of the spiritual spectrum, we should just combine our talents and let our group be part of theirs. A review of our mutual newsletters, however, shows that we have different, and at times contradictory, goals at this time. We did talk about sharing articles between our newsletters and I plan to offer them a version of the dragon article you will find later in this issue. If they reciprocate, and I hope they do, theirs will be in the next issue of our newsletter. I may also start distributing this newsletter to everyone in AAIDD like some of the other groups have been doing or are planning to do.

As always, I welcome discussion, criticism, rebuttal, and literary contributions which can be sent to [webmaster@AAIDD-Humanists.org](mailto:webmaster@AAIDD-Humanists.org)

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## Daylilies

You may remember a couple of issues ago I wrote about how, although rather involved and taking several years, growing daylilies from seeds can be very rewarding. I also suggested that a good plant could be registered as yours and that might be a lasting

tribute to, and a welcome gift from, a person with developmental disabilities who helped grow the plant.



Here are pictures of two of the plants I've grown from seed. They are in bloom right now. The orange one is a more than twenty year old dwarf plant grown from seeds I purchased from a mail-order seed company. The light yellow one is two and a third feet tall, blooms earliest of my hybrids and was grown from seeds from the plants in my yard. You can also find daylily seeds on

eBay which I have never tried however I have to say that I have always been very happy with the plants I've gotten through them so I would expect similar results from their seeds. Wherever you get your seeds, if you are so inclined as to try this, make sure they've been frozen before you get them or else put them in the freezer for a couple of months before trying to grow them. The seed need to have experienced freezing temperatures (a northern winter) before they will germinate. I went to a daylily farm in Florida once so I suspect that they grow well in warm climates and just need that initial blast of cold to get started.



One last thing: about half of the plants you grow are not going to be good enough to keep. For examples, I got one with a gorgeous red and yellow flower but the stem was so long that it would invariable bend and fall over and I grew another with a splendid yellow flower but the foliage was pale and weak. You have to be ready to discard those after all your work. The ones that you can keep will make up for your loses.



## Follow-up on Rom Houben

If you've poked around the group's website, [www.AAIDD-Humanists.org](http://www.AAIDD-Humanists.org), you may have come across a section on interesting news. In it I briefly discuss an unfortunate Mr. Rom Houben who had been in a persistent vegetative state for many years. Neurologist Steven Laureys, regarded as an expert in this field, on the basis of a PET scan had concluded that there was evidence of consciousness in Rom and enlisted the help of a facilitator to attempt to reach this consciousness through Facilitated Communication. This is another case in which there is a lot of press over an amazing, almost miraculous, event and then no followup once there is more to the story. This regrettable phenomenon was discussed in an earlier newsletter.

Recently a Belgian skeptical society was allowed to test the facilitation. As in most, perhaps all, other experiments regarding Facilitated Communication, after a couple of simple experiments there was no reason to believe that the subject was actually communicating. The examiners felt that the facilitators sincerely believed they were helping Rom but, in reality, had only deluded themselves. There is also reason to suspect that Dr. Laurey's interpretation of PET scans doesn't really identify consciousness but that was beyond the scope of the article. The article, *Fabricating Communication*, can be found in the July/August 2010 issue of *the Skeptical Inquirer*. There is also an article on background brain activity in the March 2010 issue of *Scientific American* which might help explain the readings Dr. Laurey got (I am not a neurologist nor particularly intimate with Dr. Laurey's work or PET scans but I did have to wonder)

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## Why were Dragon stories told all over the World?

Perhaps you are wondering why there is a story on dragons in a newsletter directed to people related to IDD who are Humanists. There are a minority of very religious people who believe that the Earth is less than 10,000 years old. If dinosaurs existed, they feel that they must have lived at the same time as *Homo sapiens* in spite of all the evidence showing a 60 million year separation between them. The Creation Museum in Kentucky has a dinosaur with a saddle that young guests can sit on. They insist that they are not trying to convince children that people rode dinosaurs but the attraction is not marked to say that. Their organization also has songs that talk about dinosaurs being in the Bible. They are not the only ones trying to make this view seem attractive. To people with this view, dragons can be seen as recent vestiges of the dinosaur population and may even be the leviathan mentioned in the Old Testament.

So what do you do if you hear a catchy song about dinosaurs being a recent event and are described in stories as dragons and are afraid of what someone you know might think after hearing it? The Flintstones were confusing enough. There really are dragon stories all over the world. Does this mean there actually were dragons all over the world?

No, there weren't. A basic problem with these whole situation is that there are prominent reptiles in most cultures and we chose to call them dragons. They really aren't all that similar. We are most familiar with the European dragon, a large ugly thing who breathed fire, flew, and perhaps talked. The Aztec dragon, Quetzacoatl, was a feathered serpent who had different functions to different tribes. It could even take the shape of a man. It did some godly things like help make man and hold up the earth. The belief in its ability to take the form of a man led to the end of the Aztec civilization because it was initially believed that Hernan Cortes was Quetzacoatl. so he was initially welcomed, or so goes some stories. The Chinese dragon didn't fly, was of various sizes including smaller than a drop of water, and offered useful advice to the Chinese. It was also a reptile. The African dragon of which there were only one or two, was a reptile with zero to four legs and was enormous. It was so large that its droppings formed mountains and was more of a beast of the past (and the future when it will destroy the world) than something that might active these days.

The only thing these stories had in common was that the "dragon" was usually a reptile or serpent and then, not necessarily all of the time. None of these three types had much more in common. I suppose it was easier to call Quetzacoatl a dragon instead of trying to teach people to spell Quetzacoatl. I also suppose that the dragons you see in parades on Chinese New Year looked more fearsome than their stories and could possible be seen as European dragons, but that's it. Calling them a dragon was a convenience. Even the Komodo dragon, a real animal, is only called a dragon by because it is a good sized lizard but it doesn't breathe fire, it breathes *water vapor*. This is another example of choosing a convenient name to name something new. There's something intrinsically spooky about snakes and reptiles so you can see why they were so popular in many cultures "campfire stories" (see the last issue). Also as we discussed in the last issue, large fossils come to the surface every once and a while and people try to explain them somehow.

Remember that even though there are dinosaur fossils, none of the dragon varieties are really close to any of these fossils and none give any indication of having occurred since the advent of humans. This is easily verified by direct dating methods or identifying the age of the layer of ground in which they are found. Even if there are some problems with a particular use of dating methods, the error is relatively small. Even if an error was as large as a million years, that is less than 2% of the 65 million years since the large dinosaurs died out. Also, how the heck is something supposed to breathe fire?

Yeti and sea serpents are also found around the world. Sea serpents are even found in lakes and locks that are too small to support the biomass the serpent would need to eat to keep alive. Never mind that the biomass would be too small for a breeding pair which would be necessary to keep the species alive throughout eons. There's supposed to be one in Lake Champlain in Vermont which is really small for a Great Lake.

The real problem, though, is how to address the situation that occurs when your loved one or friend with Intellectual disabilities believes stories that dragons existed and that they were really dinosaurs who lived alongside humans. As with other situations we have discussed, it is important to remember that the people that are spreading these stories mean well even if they are a bit misdirected. It is also useful to be preemptive in these situations, that is, to have discussed this before it becomes a problem.

The closest we are going to get to dinosaurs (other than that animatronic traveling show of life-sized dinosaurs which looks really interesting) is a local museum. That in itself would probably be a fun trip for someone with a fascination for dinosaurs (and who doesn't have one?) I suggest you take some dragon pictures with you if you go and start trying to find the dragon among the skeletons and dioramas there. Unless someone has a very creative imagination, they won't find the dragon. Then you can talk about how dragons are just a story and how dinosaurs lived millions of years before there were any people. I suppose if they asked, you could mention the Yucatan asteroid collision 65 million years ago if you are asked about what happened to the dinosaurs but it might be just as useful to say something like, "Nothing lasts forever". That's my suggestion: do you have one? Do you have comments on mine? Please send them to me at [webmaster@aaidd-humanists.org](mailto:webmaster@aaidd-humanists.org) and we can share it.

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