



# The Utah Humanist

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**H**umanists of Utah is a Chapter of the *American Humanist Association*.

We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



**Humanism** is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,

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## Got Polio?

*This piece was published in the Salt Lake Tribune Letters to the Editor section on December 3, 2020.*

On May 8, 1980, the World Health Assembly officially declared that smallpox had been eradicated! This was arguably one of the greatest scientific achievements of humankind. Since then a significant number of other infectious diseases are disappearing; think polio, measles, mumps, chicken pox, several flavors of hepatitis, meningitis, pertussis, tetanus, etc. have been eliminated in modern countries. Public Health constraints and Vaccinations are the two most effectively used weapons to defeat scourges of microbial mayhem.

It appears likely that several COVID-19 vaccines will become available soon. One thing that has not been widely discussed yet is the fact that immunity does not happen the instant you roll up your sleeve after receiving your jab. In fact, immunity does not happen for several weeks and includes a booster shot three to four weeks after the original jab. This means we will all be under Pandemic Procedures for several months once the new vaccines are approved for distribution.

Bottom line: buckle (er, mask) up, get in line for your immunizations as soon as your demographic is eligible, maintain social distancing, and follow good public health hygiene practices until further notice. Party Time will come, we just need to be diligent and patient for a few more months.

—*Wayne Wilson*

**Please note: There was NOT a November issue of this newsletter published**

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# An Experiment in Gratitude

Awareness of gratitude will allow you to savor and, above all, appreciate your life with renewed grace.

Sometimes we forget to take the time to recognize the richness that defines our lives. This may be because many of the messages we encounter as we go about our affairs prompt us to think about what we do not have rather than all the abundance we do enjoy. Consequently, our gratitude exists in perpetual conflict with our desire for more, whether we crave time, convenience, wealth, or enlightenment. Yet understanding and genuinely appreciating our blessings can be as simple as walking a mile in another's shoes for a short period of time. Because many of us lead comparatively insular lives, we may not comprehend the full scope of our prosperity that is relative to our sisters and brothers in humanity.

If you find taking an inventory of your life's blessings difficult, consider the ease with which you nourish your body and mind, feed your family, move from place to place, and attend to tasks at hand. For a large number of people, activities you may take for granted, such as attaining an education, buying healthy food, commuting to work, or keeping a clean house, represent great challenges. To experience firsthand the complex tests others face as a matter of course in their daily lives, try living without the amenities you most often take for granted. This can be a great experiment to undertake with your entire family or a classroom. Understanding working poverty can be as easy as endeavoring to buy nutritious foods with a budget of \$100 for the week. If you own a car, relying on public transportation for even just a day can help you see the true value of the comfort and conveniences others do without. As you explore a life without things you may normally take for granted, ask yourself for how long you could endure.

The compassionate gratitude that floods your heart when you come to fully realize your abundance may awaken pangs of guilt in your heart. Be aware, however, that the purpose of such an experiment is to open your heart

further in gratitude and compassion. This awareness can help you attain a deeper level of gratitude that will allow you to savor and, above all, appreciate your life with renewed grace.

Have a blessed day.

Kindest regards,

—Melanie White-Curtis

## Ending the Year From Hell on a Good Note

***No one will dispute that 2020 has been rough. Let us end this year on a positive note.***

I send you love, kindness and hope for your holiday season and a solemn wish for safety and renewal going into a new year.

We are ending a rough year, trying to breathe during a pandemic that is running rampant on this planet and especially in our country and facing a new year with hope and many possibilities. We are all having to face our belief systems, our courage and how each of us fit into this human condition and how to help.

We are social creatures by nature. With the holidays upon us, please be mindful of wearing your masks, social distancing but more specifically staying safe for yourself and others—even if this means paring down your celebrations this year so that we can get a grip on this virus as a community so that we all will be able to enjoy many years to come.

2021 is going to be a new year of change, of hope, of a new leadership in our country and of renewal. The Humanists of Utah Board have been working diligently to move to a safe online environment until it is safe to meet in person again, and we will be much more visible in the new year. This year has been a year of adjustment, reflection, and flexibility.

Have a beautiful holiday season and stay safe!

With Much love,

—Melanie White-Curtis



# Seeing Good In All

There is a perceptible energetic shift that takes place when we choose to see the good in all.

Our perception shapes the lives we lead because the universe adjusts itself almost instantly to our expectations. When we look for negativity, we are bound to come across it in abundance. Conversely, we create positive energy when we endeavor to see the goodness around us. As easy as it is to criticize the people and situations that frustrate or hurt us, we do ourselves a disservice in the process. It is important to see the good in all as there are blessings hiding in every aspect of our outer-world reality, and the potential for grace exists in all human beings. When our lives are flooded with challenges, grief, and pain, we may be tempted to believe that some individuals or incidents are simply bad. But if we look for the good in all, good reveals itself to us, easing our doubts and reminding us that the universe is a place of balance.

There is a perceptible energetic shift that takes place when we choose to see the good in all. The unnecessary tension that came into being when we dwelled on negativity fades away and is replaced by sympathetic tolerance. We can forgive those that have wronged us because we recognize in them traits we admire, and we may even discover that we can bring out the good in one another. Though loss still grieves us, we recognize the beginning of a new phase of existence that abounds with fresh opportunities. Each new challenge becomes another chance to prove ourselves, and we learn to show great patience in the face of difficulty. There are few pleasures greater

than gazing outward and seeing beauty, wisdom, and harmony. These are the attributes of the universe that help us to cope when we encounter their opposing forces.

Since you create your own reality, you make your world a better place each time you acknowledge the good in your circumstances and in the people you encounter. As you draw attention to the positive aspects of the world around you, your understanding of the affirmative nature of all existence will grow. There are few lessons you will learn in this life that will prove as instrumental to your happiness and satisfaction. In appreciating the all-pervasive goodness that exists in the universe, you internalize it, making it a lasting part of your life.

—Melanie White-Curtis





# It Is Hard

I began this article in late October, just before the election. Now that it is over, I am thankful that Joe Biden was elected. I find that his asking for 100 days of mask wearing and the announcement that vaccines will soon be launched is cause for hope that things are changing for the better. We need to remember that there is still a long, hard road ahead. I hope that these changes will allow us to get together in the coming year to enjoy each other's company—something I think we have all missed.

As of this writing, the pandemic is at its worst since it began, and the inept and incompetent government response continues.

I would like to share something I have been doing as part of my “mindfulness exercises.” Carl Sagan is one of the most influential people in my life, along with the late Dr. Donald R. Currey of the University of Utah Geography Department. Professor Currey's teachings helped me gain a deeply satisfying knowledge of the planet Earth. To this day, I take pleasure when viewing the landscape and understanding how it got that way. Studying with Professor Currey while he was mapping the shorelines of Lake Bonneville and while doing my own studies of Alpine and Periglacial geomorphology has left me with knowledge I cherish to this day.

While I never met Carl Sagan, he made the cosmos come alive for me, and his statement in his series ‘Cosmos’ “we are a way for the cosmos to know itself” was inspiring for me. It made me think that it was cool to think of myself as a piece of the consciousness of the cosmos—we make it self-aware. It also gave me a feeling of awe that I exist at all in the cosmos, let alone exist at a time on Earth when we can understand and observe a great deal of the

universe.

Several years ago, I was fortunate enough to meet Ann Druyan, Carl's widow, at a Center for Inquiry Humanist Conference in Amhurst, New York. During an open house for the Center's new building, I had the delightful experience of “rubbing elbows” with Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss, astronomer Jean-Claude Pecker, and Sam Harris. During a moment with Ann, I apologized for being one of those who must ask her about Carl a lot and told her that many people probably do not know of her own accomplished life. She laughed, thanked me, and said that she was happy continuing Carl's efforts to popularize science. She also said that if he were still around, he would have been there at the conference; that we were “his kind of people.” I savor that moment to this day.

It has been awhile since I have opened any of Carl's books, but I am starting to now. They are a great way to take my mind off of stressful goings on. His book, *The Demon-Haunted World* ([clickable link to book review on our website](#)), while published in 1996, is still spot on about the dangers of anti-science and pseudoscience. It is worth reading or re-reading.

In closing, the recent news that the *Salt Lake Tribune* is ending its daily printed edition really bummed me out. I have always enjoyed the morning paper with a cup of coffee. Checking out the editorial page, smiling over the funnies, and doing the puzzles with a pencil has been a nice morning routine. Going to have to get used to seeing it on a screen, I guess. Hope to see you as soon as we can be safe.

—Bob Lane



**H**umanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

**D**isclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.



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>> Put Your Name Here <<  
 >> Write an Article! <<

# Solstice

*Originally published in January 1996*

Imagine our ancestors sometime between 30,000 and 200,000 years ago gazing at the sky considering the solstice. Then, as now, there must have been two basic approaches to nature: fear and wonder. Unfortunately, fear is the stronger emotion. Its legacies include myth, superstition, religion, and authoritarian governments and rulers.

Those who stood in wonder were able, through empirical observations, to explain the natural phenomenon of the solstice. The progeny of wonder are the arts, the sciences, and the humanities.

It is unlikely that most people approach the unknown exclusively with either fear or wonder. We all have a different mixture of these two basic emotions. Our challenge is to try to suppress the fears, and then experience and explain the wonders.

—Wayne Wilson

## Membership/Renewal Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- \$50 Regular Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$90 Regular 2-year Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$35 Regular Annual Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
  - \$65 Regular 2-year Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
  - \$20 *Student* Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$20 Annual subscription to the Utah Humanist (I do not want to be listed as a member of **Humanists of Utah**)
  - Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$\_\_\_\_\_ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.  
 ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.  
 ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

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## Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

## Charitable Giving While You Shop

### Amazon.com



Sign up for Amazon Smile and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to HoU:

- Log into amazon.com and open your personal account settings.
- Select “Your Amazon Smile.”
- Search for “Humanists of Utah.”  
This will find “American Humanist Association” in West Jordan because we use the AHA as our umbrella for sales tax exemption.
- Click the “Select” button.

If you have a bookmark for Amazon please modify it to go to smile.amazon.com—you always want to use the “smile” option.

### Smith's Grocery Stores

Humanists of Utah is enrolled in Smith's Inspiring Donations program. If you have a Smith's Fresh Value card, you can register it to benefit Humanists of Utah. Simply visit [www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire](http://www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire) , create an account, associate it with your Fresh Values card number, and then enter NPO Number: KQ330 within your “account summary.” All future purchases will now benefit HoU.



All Public Meetings are  
**CANCELLED** until further notice  
Due to the Pandemic



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