

THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization
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The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue

by Jeff Jones / photos by Vic Farrow

On November 2, 2002, thousands of atheists, freethinkers, and secular humanists descended en masse upon our nation's capitol to gather in support of a secular, religiously neutral government. American Atheists, under the leadership of Ellen Johnson, organized and ran a remarkable coming out party for secular Americans and thousands of us joined in. The Godless Americans March on Washington brought thousands to stand in the shadow of the Capitol and announce that we were no longer willing to be treated as second class citizens in our own nation.

Washington D.C. has been the site of countless political and social demonstrations throughout the history of our country. Blacks, gays, women, and even the "Promise Keepers" have come to Washington to march and rally in support of their rights and causes. The march on Washington has become a symbol of a community that will no longer allow itself to be marginalized and ignored. It was our turn and to everyone in attendance on that beautiful, sunny day it was an afternoon we shall never forget.

We gathered in Washington to send notice to the religious majorities that we would no longer sit quietly by while those who would impose a religious shroud over government ran roughshod over the constitutional wall separating church and state. We came from all over the country and from every walk of life to celebrate and protect the freedoms that our founding fathers, in their great wisdom, wove into the very fabric of our nation within the Constitution of the United States. We came from many different races, from many different professions and a variety of backgrounds. We ranged in age from infants held by proud parents to 83 year-olds still young at heart and in spirit. We were what we have always known ourselves to be, a snapshot of America.

Seven members of members of the Atheist Community of Austin traveled to this historic event. Jeff Dee, Vic Farrow, Kyle and Charlotte Lawson, Laura Sargent, Mary Sue Osborne, Surrena Schreiber, and myself, Jeff



The ACA delegation at the march

Jones, all made the trip to Washington. It was a very good representation of our group considering the length of the trip and the costs involved. We brought along our banner, business cards, brochures and a few of Ashley Perrien's CDs to network with other groups from around the country.

Jeff Dee, Vic, and myself flew to Washington on Friday, November 1, 2002 on the inaugural flight of Midwest Express Airlines' brand new Austin service. When we got to our gate we were surprised to find a celebration going on complete with a live band, refreshments, balloons and even Mayor Gus Garcia. As nice as it would have been to be seen off by such pageantry because the justness of our cause had been recognized, we, being rational sorts, surmised this must be for the new airline. Still, we got cookies and coffee out of the deal so it turned out to be a good thing. We did have to listen through half an hour of speeches from the airport and the mayor saying how happy they all were for Midwest to be there and from the CEO of Midwest saying that they were so very happy to be in Austin. The fact that this put us well past our departure time did not seem

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Opinions expressed in *The Atheist* are those of
the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect
the views of the Atheist Community of Austin.

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The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue

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to concern anyone but us.

We finally got on the plane and in the air. By the way, I highly recommend Midwest Express, as the planes are very comfortable with the seats being the type normally found only in first class sections. They also feed you on most flights and on every flight they bake chocolate chip cookies while in flight.

We arrived in Washington D.C. early in the evening and took the Metro, the Washington area subway, to a stop a few blocks from our hotel. I think I speak for the three of us when I say that we were very impressed with the mass transit system in place in Washington. It was clean, cheap, quick, and extremely easy to use. It appears that you can get virtually anywhere in Washington proper in around 15 minutes on the Metro. We Austinites could only imagine with envy a rush hour commute that short. Our hotel was a good hotel in a not-so-great neighborhood but even with the walk in the dark to the hotel from the Metro station I never felt anything but safe.

After we settled into our room our thoughts turned to food and we headed downstairs to plan dinner. It was there that we had the first of what was to become a common experience throughout the weekend. We ran into a whole bunch of atheists. Milling about in the hotel lobby was around 12-15 other folks also planning a dinner outing. These were members of the New Jersey Secular Humanists along with a few folks from New York. They had chartered a bus and driven down to attend the march and were also looking for a place to eat. A quick side note: the hotel and bus for the New Jersey Secular Humanists were arranged by American Atheist staff member Joe Zamecki, a former member of the Atheist Community of Austin. We joined forces and decided on a seafood place on the banks of the Potomac River, a quick cab ride away.

We arrived at the Phillips Seafood Restaurant and were shown to

a table for 15. The New Jersey/New York folks were very entertaining, especially a gentleman with a heavy eastern European accent who had a box full of tricks, optical illusions, and various gadgets. He kept us, and a few of the waitresses, amused and amazed with jokes (some of them real groaners) and an endless supply of tricks. The food was amazing (if there was a heaven the crab cakes would have been from there) and as it was served all-you-can-eat buffet style, endless. The company was excellent and the conversation exhilarating. A truly good time was had by all.



Dinner with "Yankee Atheists"



A bright future: Camp Quest kids



Our loving Christian brethren

One of the things we talked about with this group was the activity level of our organizations. During this evening's conversations we learned something that would be reinforced many times during next two days. The Atheist Community of Austin is one of the most active and impressive atheist organizations in the country. The fact that we meet every week was met with absolute disbelief as were the many activities we are involved in. The Separation of Church and State Rally, the September 11 Secular Memorial, Godless Gamers, Happy Hour, Movie Nights, and our TV and Internet radio shows were astonishing to so many people that we talked to over the weekend. That we could get so many of our organization interested enough to actually attend was astonishing to so many people that we talked to over the weekend. That we could get so many of our organization motivated to be a part of these things was, we learned, a rare thing and something to be very proud of.

We got up early the next day, dressed warmly, and gathered cameras and the ACA banner. We then headed downstairs to board the bus to the march that the New Jersey bunch was kind enough

to let us share. After a short ride to the staging area we got off the bus virtually at the foot of the Washington Monument. Quite a stirring sight and an appropriate beginning to an historic day.

When we arrived at the staging area I think we were all a bit concerned. It was just one hour before the scheduled start of the march and there were less than a hundred people there. I think

The ACA Files: Member Profile of the Month

Name: Steven Elliott

ACA Member Since: 1999

Activities: Co-producer of "The Atheist Experience" TV show along with Russell Glasser. Also frequents Godless Gamers and bagel shop meetings.

Where From Originally: Born in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Also lived in Atlanta, Georgia. Has been a Texan since 1997.

Occupation: Computer programmer



Member News: Congratulations!

Congratulations to Phil Amador and his wife, Leah, on the birth of their daughter, Maya Grace Amador. Maya is their first child and was born December 8. Mother and daughter are doing well.

Notable Dates/Social Calendar

'Manda has compiled the following list of tentative ACA social events (and other notable dates for freethinkers). As event plans are finalized, they will be announced at the weekly meetings and by e-mail. To view 'Manda's full list for the year, see: <http://www.bga.com/~pixel/debate/calendar2003.htm>.

January: Paine Day: January 29, 2002. Wednesday. (Observed: Sunday, January 26, 2003) Celebrate Literacy, Printing Technology, and Freedom of Speech. (also, January 17 is Benjamin Franklin's Birthday)

Jan. 31 - Feb. 2: Celebrate the "**Lunar**" **New Year** by enjoying Asian cuisine, Austin Taiko Drummers, Dragon Dances, Martial Arts Demonstrations, etc. (various locations).

February: February 12, 2003. Wednesday. (Observed: Sunday, February 9, 2003) Celebrate Evolution and Biodiversity. Tentative trip to New Braunfels **Snake Farm** some time in February.

Regularly Scheduled ACA Events:

- Sundays:** **Bagel Shop Meetings** take place every Sunday except the first Sunday of the month at 10:30 AM at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry, (307 W. 5th Street). **Monthly Lecture Meetings** take place the first Sunday of every month at 11:00 AM, in the Longhorn Room of Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall.
- "The Atheist Experience"** Live Call-in TV Show: 4:30 - 6:00 PM, on Austin Access Channel 10.
- Mondays:** **Godless Gamers** takes place at 7:00 PM at the home of Russell and Ginny Glasser. Contact Russell for directions.
- Tuesdays:** **"The Atheist Experience"** is replayed from 4:30 - 6:00 PM on Austin Access Channel 10.
- Thursdays:** **Atheist Happy Hour** takes place at 7:30 PM at Antonio's Tex-Mex restaurant near the intersection of IH 35 and 183.
- Saturdays:** **"The Non-Prophets"** Internet Radio Show: 2:00-3:30 PM on www.atheistnetwork.com. Archives at www.atheist-community.org
- E-Mail Lists:** See <http://www.atheist-community.org/email.htm>

New committees formed

The last few months of 2002 proved to be an exciting period for the future of the ACA due to the extreme generosity of some of our members. A large donation has allowed us to look toward a very different future. Another donation was made specifically for the purpose of establishing an ACA scholarship program.

Because of the possibilities these kind donations allow us to consider, three new committees have been formed. If you have been looking for a way to get involved in the ACA please consider joining one of these committees and use your talents to help shape the future of our group.

The Financial Planning Committee will explore how best to manage and grow the finances of the ACA. Don Lawrence is chairing this very important committee and he is looking for members, especially those with financial and/or investment experience. You can email Don at: lawdon99@hotmail.com

The Building Committee has been formed to consider feasibility of acquiring office space or a permanent building to house the ACA. There are a wide variety of issues that come with this so this committee will be time and resources intensive but any help will be appreciated. Jeff Jones is chairing this committee and he can be reached at: jeffj@austin.rr.com

The Scholarship Committee has been formed to create the criteria and mechanism for a yearly scholarship or scholarships to be awarded by the ACA. Anyone who is interested in helping plan and promote this worthy endeavor is welcomed to join. Jeff Jones is also chairing this committee and can be reached at: jeffj@austin.rr.com.

The Atheist Community of Austin is a member of Atheist Alliance, Inc., an organization of independent religion-free groups and individuals in the United States and around the world. AAI provides us with periodic articles for publication to our membership. To find out more about Atheist Alliance, Inc., visit www.atheistalliance.org.

AAI Founding Member of New Political Coalition

by *Bobbie Kirkhart*

The Atheist Alliance International is proud to be a founding member of the Secular Coalition for America, a new political partnership of national freethought groups. Founding organizations with AAI are the Institute for Humanist Studies, the Internet Infidels and the Secular Student Alliance.

The group's website (<http://www.secular.org/>) brags of refreshingly bold freethought activism and offers links to sites which locate your congressional representatives or the media of a given area. The site publishes a position statement, which says, in part, "Informed by experience and inspired by compassion, we encourage the pursuit of knowledge, meaning, and responsible ethical codes without reference to supernatural forces. We affirm the secular form of government as a necessary condition for the interdependent rights of religious freedom and religious dissent."

In order to move beyond the lobbying restrictions placed on educational non-profits, the SCA has incorporated as a 501(c)(4) organization. This tax status will enable the Coalition to engage in organized political activism to an extent previously unknown in the nontheistic community.

Unfortunately, this status and the fact that it does grass-roots lobbying also restricts the amount of money tax-exempt organizations, such as the AAI and most of your local groups, can give to support it to five percent of your annual expenditures. The Coalition hopes to buy a very effective online lobbying service, which will cost about \$10,000 for the first year, but to do that it will need the support of local groups and individuals. Soon the web site will be set up to take contributions. Until then, checks made out to the Secular Coalition for America can be mailed to its treasurer, Larry Jones: Secular Coalition for America, c/o the Humanist Institute, 18 Corporate Woods Blvd., Albany, NY, 12211.

A "Spring Break" AAI Convention

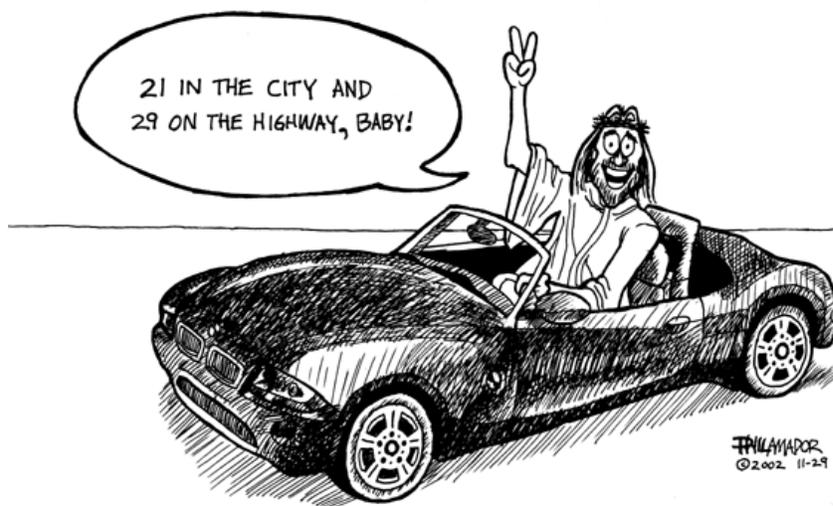
by *Mynga Futrell*

Florida sunshine and the beaches close by. Busch Gardens in full bloom. Balmy breezes. A museum of science and industry at hand. And, best of all—a dynamic freethought gathering with a diverse program. Might Tampa in April be just the lift in life you need? Plan now to attend the 2003 Atheist Alliance convention to be held **April 18-20**. This convention takes place at the **Tampa Hilton Westshore** (close to the airport and less than fifteen minutes from downtown metro center).

This year's premier Alliance event is hosted by Atheists of Florida, which has obtained for us the excellent hotel rate of **\$69 per night!** (You will find no better in the Tampa area during spring break.) Bring friends along to enjoy together the scenic area and its many delights in addition to the first-rate presentations and workshops planned for the weekend. Or, if you have youngsters, then why not treat the entire family to a fun vacation? (Epcot Center and other Orlando ventures are proximate.) For a peek at the hotel accommodations, go to <http://www.hilton.com/> and type in Tampa, FL, making sure to select the "Airport Westshore" Hotel (2225 Lois Ave.). The web site also links you to many of the areas' sights and conveniences. You will find there many reasons to mark your calendar and get started on your planning!

What Would Jesus Drive?

By *Phil Amador*



Daddy Knows Best?

By Mike Emmert

mikeemmert11@hotmail.com

Does religion cause ignorance? Maybe ignorance caused religion! That might be true if ignorant people tried to do science and didn't have any basis for it. Imagine long, long ago in a cave far away. Nobody knew how to read or write, and so nobody learned anything. The kids ask dad, "Daddy, where did we come from?"

Daddy, after explaining the birds and the bees, is asked where Grandma and Grandpa came from. And the kids just keep going back and back and back. Pretty soon daddy is stumped. There has to be a daddy of all daddies, right? So that would be God. Daddy has to come up with an explanation.

Of course, to do that right, he has to dig through the rocks. Which rocks? Where? And how does he explain what he is looking at? How does he explain that the tiny thing which can't even be seen without an electron microscope is the daddy of us all?

So, of course, he makes it all up.

Daddy tells the kids how it all came about. And if anyone disagrees, he gets the snot kicked out of him, because Daddy is Right.

Fast forward to the ancient Egyptians. They finally had writing. But it was a clumsy system and only the very rich could afford the time to learn it. So the talent pool is extremely small. The priest class has learned that the stories they tell give them power, so they set the stories up to give them more power. And they still don't have the time, manpower, or inclination to go out and find the right rocks to dig into.

The Greeks invented writing that anybody could learn. Now the talent pool was larger, and indeed, great strides were made in mathematics and other fields. But they were total beginners. The other sciences needed mathematics, and the Greeks had neglected to invent the zero. So had the Romans.

It's pretty difficult to invent science without a zero. You have to quantify things. There might be nothing there to count. How do you explain nothing without a zero? Pretty hard. Finally, the Arabs invented zero. Unfortunately, they also invented a religion that was too conservative to accept

a new way of thinking. They still had to rely on God, because they didn't have enough of a knowledge base to invent science.

The practical printing press was invented in the mid-15th century. Now learning could be mass-produced. So if anybody came up with a bad theory, there was a huge talent pool that could see the errors. Now there were questions being asked.

And what was the first product of the practical printing press? Why, the Bible, of course. This document, written down by hand and passed down from father to son and mother to daughter, had never been subjected to criticism from a broad talent pool. Daddy could easily take off his belt if the kiddies questioned what he had written down in his own hand.

Because of the widespread dissemination of knowledge, other inventions and discoveries followed quickly: the New World (discovered many times before but never published); the telescope (the means was now at hand to actually check astronomical theories); and the clock (essential to doing physics right). Now the search for the truth could begin in earnest.

There were really no good arguments against Genesis until Darwin. In retrospect it seems easy. After all, there were breeding programs for animals and plants and plenty of fossils. But they weren't the right fossils. And they weren't from the right place.

And now we come to today. There is no longer any excuse to accept some story that somebody made up and never had peer-reviewed. But these stories stay in circulation. Why? Because Daddy is still Right and still has his belt to enforce that.

I think we have come to a crossroads in the history of man. We now have global mass communication and 2,000 competing bibles. Pretty soon, we will have to come to a consensus. We are witnessing the embarrassment and destruction of the ancient, uncritical philosophies. People will have to start demonstrating the historical and scientific validity of their ideas.

Anybody coming up with bone-boxes or other hoaxes will be confronted with critical examination. Soon, we will have the truth. Maybe then will we be free of the chains of religion. What an exciting time in history!

The atheists go to Washington: a travelogue

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we all had a fear that we would be marching down the mall with only a few dozen people and this appeared to be taking place. But we soon found that our fears were groundless. Godless Americans begin to arrive by the ones and twos and in groups of varying numbers. As the staging area filled with more and more people, many carrying signs and banners of organizations all over the USA, it soon became apparent that there weren't going to be dozens or even hundreds but rather thousands of us. The staging area kept getting more and more crowded until we could hardly move. We were, of course, elated and we spent this time moving around, taking pictures and talking to everyone we could. We spoke to folks from Michigan who listened to The Non-Prophets every week and, in fact, had decided to come to the march because of something we said on that program. We spoke to ex-ACA members who lived in other parts of the country. We spoke to Metroplex Atheists and college students from James Madison University. And all the while more and more atheists poured into the staging area.

The march finally got underway about thirty minutes late. The seven of us got behind the ACA banner and began to walk down the mall toward the U.S. Capitol building. When in the middle of a mass of people moving in one direction it is very difficult to get an accurate idea of how many people are involved. C-SPAN later said that we stretched more than a mile along the mall. A mile of atheists was a very heartening thing to be a part of so we happily marched along.

About halfway to the rally area we saw our first theist protesters. As we all know there are a variety of theistic attitudes towards the godless. Some go the loving god and savior route and some simply exalt in telling us what exactly awaits us when we die. The protesters who lined the route to the mall were mostly of the latter variety. These guys were well financed by someone as well. The signs they carried were made of high-quality materials and were obviously professionally produced. They varied in content but virtually every sign either threatened us with eternal torment or called us fools. Maybe it was just this group but it seems to me that fundamentalist Christians are a pretty un-

imaginative lot as the same themes were seen in sign after sign.

Most of the marchers ignored the protesters but some engaged them in good-natured banter when we could get a word in edgewise what with all the yelling about hell and damnation. I myself approached one fellow who seemed a bit upset about our very existence. He was a large, heavily bearded man who was wearing a bright orange hunting vest. This worried me a bit because where I come from there is only one reason to wear a bright orange hunting vest and it always involves guns. This gentle soul was also screaming at the top of his lungs into a bullhorn, which I found a bit redundant, but perhaps he had a

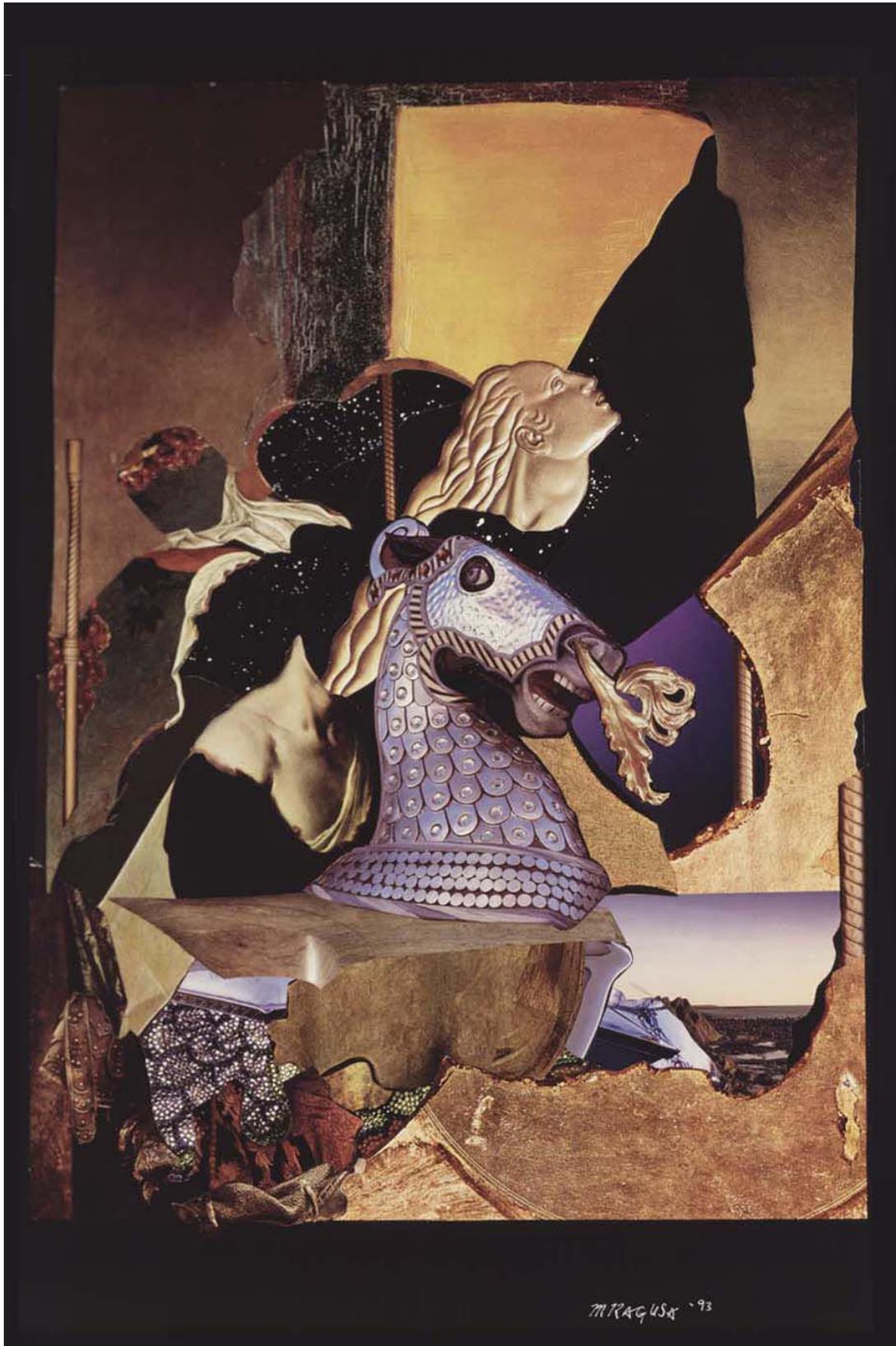


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reason. I simply wanted to ask him exactly what he thought he was going to accomplish out here yelling at people who had heard it all before, thought long and hard about it, and rejected it based on rational and logical reasons. I never got the chance. As soon as I started talking to Grizzly Adams his flunky, who was holding a ten-foot high sign (complete with stylized flames of hell), screamed at me to "not talk to him when he's preaching". I found this a bit odd but I thought I would give them the benefit of the doubt. By this time I was quite close to the "preacher" and noticed something that set me a bit aback. He was foaming at the mouth. I'm not talking about spitting or even drooling but this guy looked like Old Yeller just before Travis puts a bullet into his brain. It was more than a little unsettling seeing this fellow so intent on

damning us all to hell that he literally didn't even know I was there, all the while foaming like a ten year-old with a case of Pop Rocks. I decided then that perhaps the orange vest might have actually been ordered by the Health Department to warn folks away from the spray zone. I asked his flunky why they were there and he told me to save souls. I told him that we had heard all this before and had considered it and rejected it so it was really pretty pointless. He then changed his mind and told me that they were there to reach the folks who were observing the march. I looked around and saw us and them and a few cops who were keeping the peace. I asked him to point out these observers and he turned his back on me and walked away. Perhaps it was time to give the preacher his kibble.

To be continued. Part Two will include the rally, a bar full of atheists, and one of the most remarkable nine year-olds I have ever met.



“Equus”
by Mike Ragusa
Paper Collage (19.75” x 14.5”)
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