

Meet a 'Trekkie' Member

Name: Brenda Germain.

Where I live: Rural North Carolina, just west of Fort Bragg. It's in the middle of nowhere, which is nice and quiet when Fort Bragg isn't shooting off artillery.

Where and when I was born: Syracuse, N.Y., in December 1958. I grew up in a couple of small towns south of there, Lafayette and Tully.

Family: Paul, my husband, and Butterscotch, our 17-year-old cat. I am childless by choice and am a proud feminist in the central New York tradition.

Education: Tully High School graduate in 1977. I graduated in 1989 from Sandhills Community College with an associate's degree in science degree. A year later, I went on to attend Western Carolina University, where I earned a B.S. in clinical laboratory science. After 10 years, I returned to Sandhills and earned another applied science degree, this time in Internet technologies.

Occupation: I spent 10 years working in a hospital laboratory and then 10 years as a Web programmer designing and developing interactive PHP sites. I've been disabled by lupus since 2010.

How I got where I am today: Hard work and the help of my husband, who made my going to college possible.

Where I'm headed: Where we all are, being a part of the circle of life replenishing the soil.

Person in history I admire and why: There are so many who stood up for



what they believed despite the blowback, but three stand out for me. Giordano Bruno for not backing down, Margaret Sanger for advocating for women to control their own biology, and Christopher Hitchens for facing death with dignity and honesty.

A quotation I like: My favorites:

- "We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing, all-powerful God, who creates faulty humans and then blames them for his own mistakes." (Gene Roddenberry)
- "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"

(Epicurus)

- "Atheism is an attitude, a frame of mind that looks at the world objectively, fearlessly, always trying to understand all things as a part of nature." (Carl Sagan)

These are a few of my favorite things: All things science, "Star Trek" (Trekkie since 1966), "Jeopardy!", lifelong learning, advocating for acceptance of atheists, documentaries, bouncy music, honesty and reality.

I'm keeping alive the hope illustrated in "Star Trek" that we may someday grow up as a species to value and embrace diversity while being kind to each other.

These are not: Those who are purposely ignorant and proud of it, dishonesty, evangelicals showing up at my house, government promotion and entanglement with religion, indoctrination rather than education, and people who tell me to have "a blessed day."

My doubts about religion started: The first time I heard the stories at about age 8. Our family didn't go to church, though my parents were vaguely religious. A neighbor asked to take us to their church. A couple of visits listening to the improbable stories and realizing these people thought they were true rather than myths ended that activity. I've been an atheist ever since, though until 1991 I remained silent so I could be employable in the small southern community where I live. When the first President Bush said he didn't consider atheists to be patriots or good citizens, I got mad and then vocal.

Why I'm a freethinker: I seem to have been born that way. To me, to be

anything other than a freethinker is to be a slave to someone else's agenda. I was always the "why?" child. If the answers to my questions were not logical, I deemed the answers nonsense and looked for rational answers elsewhere.

Ways I promote freethought: I'm the current president of the Military Atheists and Freethinkers at Fort Bragg. We help other atheists know they are not alone by helping build what I like to call an interNOfaith community of atheists, freethinkers, skeptics, secular humanists and agnostics in our area, consisting of soldiers, veterans and civilians.

I know from experience the isolation many atheists feel due to their nonbelief, especially in rural areas like ours. We shouldn't have to live this one precious life we have feeling alone and disenfranchised just because we think rationally. The more of us who are open about our freethinking, the greater the likelihood that we will eventually be accepted.

What areas of life without religion need more attention? I'd like to see our community do more advocacy for elderly atheists to help them push back against society's religious presumptions. When my agnostic grandmother died, the funeral home sent a representative and a preacher. I told them a preacher was neither needed nor welcome.

It made me think about our atheists in nursing homes who may have to endure religion when they are least able to decline and may have no one to speak up for them or fear repercussions.

Meet a 'Pesky Progressive' Member

Name: Elli K. Work.

Where I live: Santa Fe, N.M.

Where and when I was born: Glendale, Calif., July 9, 1960.

Family: Kathleen Rocco, partner of 20 years; and stepsons, Adam and Schuyler, 31 and 28, respectively.

Education: B.S. in social science, Portland State University, Oregon. My informal education included reading the works of my heroes. I figured if Molly Ivins could say *that* and Michael Moore could do *that*, then so could I.

Sam Harris makes me cheer, Julia Sweeney makes me laugh, and Barbara Ehrenreich makes me want to stay in the ring and keep up the good fight. These wonderful and amazing people continue to inspire me.

Occupation: Writer, activist.

Military service: 20 years, three in the regular Army and 17 in the Army National Guard. I retired as a logistics officer.

How I got where I am today: A strict German mother and a great public school education.

Where I'm headed: All roads lead back to Oregon. We've been in New



Elli Work

Mexico for the past five years and have enjoyed the Land of Enchantment, especially the fact that [the TV series] "Breaking Bad" was filmed here. But Oregon, with her mosses and snails, her Birkenstocks and organic everything, beckons.

I hope to write my next book there. Or maybe a screenplay. Or maybe a CliffsNotes recipe for beef bourguignon. OMG! FOS (Figure of Speech)! Maybe all three!

Person in history I admire: The Holy (Texan) Trinity: former Gov. Ann Richards (1933-2006); Molly Ivins (1944-2007), author, political commentator and humorist; and Jim Hightower, former agriculture commissioner, author, syndicated columnist and political activist. These unabashed liberals live on in my heart. Jim, by the way, is still very much alive and kicking ass!

Before I die I want: To see Texas turn into a blue state. Stop laughing. And for Joan Jett to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. *Jesus, people, c'mon!*

A quotation I like: "If Jesus was Jewish, how come he has a Mexican name?" (anonymous). I put that one in my book. Cracks me up every time!

A few of my favorite things: My 12-string guitar, marriage equality, FFRE, coming out as an atheist, serving in the military, running for public office, "Die Chipper" (a story in my book — think of the chipper in "Fargo"), and my book, *A Piece of Work*, available at Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

Actually, all of these are stories in my book.

Pet peeve: Women Republicans. That will *never* make any sense to me. OK, wait. Hmmm. Nope, never.

My doubts about religion started: When I was about 6, I asked my dad, "Daddy, why were all the apostles men?" In the matter-of-fact way that was my father, he said, "Because Jesus was a man of his times." I was immediately suspicious, but didn't identify as an atheist until my late 20s. I just couldn't buy it anymore.

That's why, when a woman screams at a camera — hurricane damage in the background — "Praise the Lord, he saved us!" I say, "And screwed your neighbor? Really? Think about it."

And maybe someday she will. Everyone deserves the chance to evolve.

Why I'm a freethinker: The insanity that rages on in the name of God, by any name, continues to have dire consequences. Among the most egregious, it has stymied a thousand years of scientific advancement, oppressed women and wasted incalculable resources. Like my favorite lapel button reads: "I'm just another soulless atheist in search of world peace and harmony." We may never get there without God, but we definitely won't with one.

Ways I promote freethought: I mark out "God" on paper money. I say "gesundheit" when someone sneezes. I don't spend my money at any business that displays a fish. I had "Above us only sky" printed on bumper stickers

(I saw that on a banner in Freethought Today). I am an out, *unabashed* atheist, and I write about my nonbelief.



Lt. Elli Work in 1995 in Cairo, Egypt.