



# Lumens

Mensa Canada's Western  
Region Newsletter

Islands Mensa, Mountain Mensa, Vancouver Mensa & Yukon Mensa

Oct / Nov 2008 Vol 11, Issue 5

## Regional Rep Rap

by Dave Stubbs



Recently, I received a couple of emails from local members inquiring as to why there are no Mensa activities out here in the Fraser Valley. Unfortunately, the only thing I could tell them is that the reason most of the activities in the Lower Mainland happen in Vancouver is because it's Vancouver members who have decided they would like to see a particular activity take place and have stepped forward to make it happen. In many cases, the person organizing the event has done so because the activity is something they enjoy doing. So, if, for example, you would enjoy getting together with fellow Mensans for coffee at a local coffee shop, or bowling, or a hike, or whatever, choose a time and location, and let Don Graham know, so it can be included in the calendar. It's really as simple as that.

When I first became involved with Mensa some 25 years ago, one of the major local Mensa activities was the Social, where individual members would host Mensa parties at their residence, usually on a Friday or Saturday night. These were very popular with the membership and proved to be an excellent way for new Mensans to 'introduce' themselves to the local group. To help offset the host's expenses for food and soft drinks, a small admission charge was generally requested from each attendee, while those wishing alcoholic refreshments were invited to BYOB. These parties were always a lot of fun, and, as far as I know, none was ever closed down by the police.

At the end of August, the total national membership stood at 1827, and the regional membership at 223. These numbers are both up slightly from the end of June. ☺

## Leo's Lot

by Leo Jung



Please join me for Speaker's Group on the last Wednesday of the month from 730 pm - 830 pm. We meet in the office building at 288 W 8th, 2 blocks east of Cambie & 8th. There are 16 parking slots behind the building and plenty on the street.:



### Inside This Issue

Regional Rep Rap.....	1
Editor's Letter.....	2
Stan 'n' Ollie.....	2
Letters to the Editor .....	3
A Dozen Tips .....	4
Be Very Afraid.....	5
Synthesis .....	6
More Letters to the Editor.....	7

### Leo's Speakers Group

October: Speaker 'Rotary Club & its Function' guest host M Lucia Scrugham-LaRose

November: Forensic entomologist Dr. Gail Anderson, SFU 'Murder & Maggots'

January: Speaker TBA, guest host odd months M Holly Pyhtila, CBC Radio

## Editor's Letter

by Lisa Le Blanc



Welcome to Autumn. A time of change. School begins. Hibernation looms. Darkness descends. As leaves flutter to the ground, my thoughts are with those lucky ones living on our gulf islands.

I was fortunate enough to spend the last week of summer on Salt Spring Island. Heard Valdy sing outdoors at the Treehouse Cafe. Roasted s'mores, dodged deer and chased fireflies.

In the moonlight, we leaned over the dock to peer into inky blackness, mesmerized by phosphorescent fish. Just below the surface, three squid hovered. Tentacles wavered behind.

"Why are there only three?" I wondered aloud.

As if on cue, the stillness of the sea erupted, spewing a flap of flippers and splashes of seawater. A whiskery snout thrust one of the three into the air, snapped shut on its prey, and dragged it to murky depths as the sea swallowed the blubbery hulk of the seal.

In a second, stillness settled back into the inky blackness.

And then there were two.

Lest we forget our men and women overseas. As we near November 11, whether atheist, or not, let's bow our heads for a moment and beg the powers that be for their safe return.

Please forward submissions to [editor@lumens.ca](mailto:editor@lumens.ca) or write to *Lumens* with any brainstorm or ideas.

*Looking forward to hearing from you,  
Lisa*



*Valdy, by Lisa Le Blanc*

## Here's another fine mess you've gotten me into...

by Nicky Kew



I have worked as a medical transcriptionist for over 20 years. I automatically edited out dictation infelicities when they occurred and thought nothing of them. Then at the 1998 AG in Vancouver I met the humourist and language lover, Richard Lederer, whose work I had not previously known. I realized then that I should be keeping these little treasures. I have amassed many of them since that time, and I was even proud to recognize a few of them in one of Richard Lederer's later collections, which he probably obtained from the BC Lumens newsletter where some were featured a few years ago. All of these "medical bloopers" are genuine ones that I have encountered in my work.

When he was diagnosed as a baby there were only 20 others known in the province.

At the moment of impact his foot popped off the brake pedal and rolled across two lanes of traffic and started going up a hill opposite.

He presents as a very bright boy of average intellect.

She has recently been on some medication which she found effective when she was taking it but it stopped working as soon as she stopped taking it.

# Letters to the Editor

## Dear Editor,

A few months ago, the redoubtable and well-discussed Think Tank got together and got involved in an interesting and involved discussion regarding God and religion and spirituality and Intelligent Design and all of the related topics that generally get mashed together when such topics are discussed. As always, an interesting discussion that could've gone on for days. Lisa LeBlanc, Lumens editor, briefly made mention of it here (page 2): [http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens\\_apr\\_08.pdf](http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens_apr_08.pdf)

Her one-liner was simply "We discussed that God must exist, because order does." While that's not inaccurate, there's only so much you can do with one sentence. Sort of like being asked about a 12-hour visit to the Louvre and summarizing it as "It was good".

In response to that one line, Don Graham replied with a letter to the editor (page 6): [http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens\\_June08.pdf](http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens_June08.pdf)

Don asks some questions...

"Does anyone really believe that 'God must exist because order exists'?"

"Without God, we live in an existential vacuum"? And so on.

My reply to that, a lengthier explanation of what was discussed, can be found in the current edition of Lumens (page 3 ): [http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens\\_Aug08.pdf](http://www.lumens.ca/images/Lumens_Aug08.pdf)

Just a brief note re: a number in my letter...where it says 10,500 years... that should be  $10^{500}$  years, ie 1 with 500 zeroes after it... a heck of a lot longer than 10,500 years.

This is always a great topic of discussion because most people have a pretty strong opinion about it and, as polite conversation implies, like with sex and politics, you shouldn't talk about it so people rarely do. But this is an ideal forum for this sort of discussion and if anyone has questions or comments, especially with respect to what I wrote, I'll be happy to respond here.

Horatio Kemeny

## Dear Editor,

I should like to thank Max Durando for his letter and for his honesty in owning up to possession of one and a half motor vehicles, thus making his carbon footprint potentially 50% larger than mine. We need a new term there: sounds like something left by a sweaty chimneysweep. He feels that the militant bike-riders should be allowed to inconvenience 90% of the public (remembering that their silly demonstrations foul up buses too) because riding a bicycle is "the right thing to do". That is a commandment I seem to have missed. And because they do it in Holland, of course. I knew someone would mention Holland. Why offer a small, flat country when Switzerland or Austria are much more like B.C.?

But, it is when Max compares the plight of cyclists to that of wheelchair users that I like him best. That is exactly the attitude that I find so repellent.

Brian Hollington

## That's a good idea, Ollie, tell me that again...

Past history includes puberty and back surgery.

This lady returned to the office today. She was surprised, as you and I were, that her prostate is enlarged on a recent CT scan.

There are no other elements of sleep disturbance and this young man reports that he is waking refreshed from school.

This man was found to have quite a marked hematuria at the time of a drive-in medical exam.

He sleeps relatively well although occasionally he wakes up with a tooth ache in his back.

The neck pain is in her neck.

On examination, the testicles and penises are normal.

Patient says she smells intensely. She is going to see a specialist in Vancouver about this.

She has also had breast implants which appear to be in good shape. ☹



# A Dozen Tips to Help an Older Family Member Get the Most from their Computer

by Geraldine Sombke

We all have parents, aunts, uncles and even grandparents who are either rushing, or being dragged slowly into the computer age. Once they get started, and past the fear of breaking the darn machine, most of them take to it quite enthusiastically.

Most senior centres these days, and care homes and assisted living facilities provide some sort of computer setup for their residents, even if it's just one machine with an internet connection.

My personal opinion is that EVERY senior should learn to use a computer before they become house bound so that they aren't cut off from the world, waiting for someone to come visit.

I've been teaching this group for seven or eight years now, and here are a few things I've learned along the way:

1. If you help them buy a computer, a good sharp monitor and a large hard drive are more important than a fast processor. Seniors aren't as bothered as younger folk about having to wait an extra 20 seconds.

2. Take a little time to customize the mouse pointer as Windows Black Extra Large and set the Mouse properties to show the location of the pointer when the Ctrl key is pressed.

3. Show them how to enlarge the screen font for the browser and the View Zoom tab for any other programs.

4. Most seniors think of their browser home page, whatever it may be, as "The internet", so don't change their home page in the interests of tidying up their computer or giving them a more useful portal.

5. They rely on their Auto-Complete and History to help them find web pages they used before. If you erase it all for privacy reasons, they won't be able to find anything. In a word processor program they use the history list of recent documents.

6. Many older computer users also are heavily dependent on their Bookmarks or Favourites folder to go back to links. Show them how to find it again if it gets turned off.

7. Be very cautious about clearing out their cache and deleting all their cookies and doing a thorough cleanup. They may have bookmarked favourite links and told the browser to remember log-in passwords. Odds are they now have no idea what those passwords are.

8. Since photo editing, word

processors, spreadsheets, and downloads default to the last location used to save a file, it is helpful for you to set up logical file locations and explain them using the analogy of a paper filing cabinet.

9. Where you can, set the default save location as My Documents, then create sub-folders or directories.

10. It is not only possible but a good idea to tell Firefox where to save Downloads so it doesn't always keep putting them on the Desktop.

11. Show them where their camera downloads pictures and how to turn on Thumbnail view. Explain how to view an attachment and how to attach a picture to an email.

12. All documents from a word processing program will end up getting dumped into My Documents unless set up otherwise. Help them brainstorm categories and explain how to create folders.

If you need help on how to do any of these tasks, send an email to [teacher@brightwebs.com](mailto:teacher@brightwebs.com)

Here is a letter from a Mensan in Germany:

My son and I are members of Mensa Germany. He is now 13 but will soon be 14. He would like to go to Canada next year, maybe to Vancouver for some month to stay with a family there and to learn the language. Is there any possibility of finding a mensa member his age, with whom he could stay?

Best regards from Germany  
Wolfgang Pretzsch-Eckhard  
Uferstr.28, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany  
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# Be Very, Very Afraid

by Brian Hollington



Local governments are getting keen on “encouraging” more of us to recycle and on making fewer garbage pickups. In Toronto this has led to residents being issued new garbage cans so large that they cannot fit between the houses, and so must sit in the front yard. Smaller bins are available, sort of. You go down to City Hall, fill in a form, and wait. The small bins should be along any month now. At least Torontonians have bins. The council in Wear Valley, County Durham ordered 15,000 bins for their taxpayers. Then a local election left a hung, bickering council who could not agree on their distribution. So far they have spent more than a half million dollars on the bins, and another hundred thousand renting a field in which to stack them.

All this is terribly British. 73-year-old Norwich resident, Barry Freezer, was rebuked by Norwich City Council for the heinous crime of putting cabbage stalks in with his garden rubbish when everyone knows that they are kitchen waste. Another Norwich inhabitant had his garbage refused (rather a good word) by council because he had put a ketchup bottle in the wrong bin. Lenny Woodward is 95 and partially-sighted. But they were lucky not to commit their crimes in Bolton. Zoe Watmough put her bins out twelve hours earlier than Bolton Council liked and got a \$150 dollar ticket. When she did not pay it, she was hauled into court and fined over \$500, including a \$30 “victim surcharge”. This could not happen in B.C., right?

We now have a wonderful law to have all tobacco products hidden away from the curious eyes of children, so that they will not be tempted. Hey, the principle works with sex, so why not tobacco? Rick Arora owns the Old

Morris Tobacconist store in Victoria. Can't have that. One little problem: the store is a heritage building. Rick is not allowed to change a thing under penalty of law. But he must. But he can't. After several weeks the two administrative branches worked out a compromise. In the meantime, each had threatened prosecution and evisceration for the unfortunate voter caught in the middle of their silly turf war.

I have no problem with either bureaucrats or refuse collectors. An efficient bureaucracy is the mark of any good civilisation. As Vancouver residents found out last year, refuse collectors perform an important service. But neither should be put in the position of making decisions which have been shirked at a higher level. The temptations when “drest in a little brief authority” are just too enticing, particularly when backed by the knowledge that one is improving the environment. As a townhouse resident, I have certain advantages here. Because the city sticks us with the job of getting rid of our own garbage, we employ our own collectors. Those companies may well be subject to the latest loony laws. However they also appreciate that unreasonable enforcement practices can cost them a lucrative contract.

As for the rest of you: be afraid. Be very, very afraid. ☹



## Shoot!

by Brian Hollington

Whenever I walk a Vancouver Street,

I'm ever so careful to watch my feet.

‘Cos there's hundreds of dogs

who use them as bogs,

And your Nikes are not

going to smell so sweet

If you don't watch

where you put your feet.

Now some of the bigger dogs

try to pretend

That they squat on the corner

to wait for a friend.

But only the fools, devoid of wit

Believe such talk or put trust in it.

And if you think

that this irks me a bit,

I tell you quite frankly:

I don't give a damn.

# Synthesis

by Don Graham

Before I get into this, quick comments on responses to my earlier article on God. Gordon Feil seems to have misunderstood so completely that I have to wonder if the article he read was the same one I wrote. I do, however, need to reiterate that it isn't merely plausible that order arises spontaneously; it is *known* that it does – many mechanisms being understood in detail. And nowhere did I say, suggest, or imply that I was an atheist because it made me feel better; I thought I had made it clear that it was because years of careful thought had led me to that position. If I believed in things because they made me feel better, I would believe in life after death, but that would be wishful thinking in the absence of any evidence. His last paragraph is an assortment of second-hand ideas and vague notions that he clearly hasn't thought through, and in which he fails to distinguish fact from opinion, cause from effect, and premises from conclusions.

Horatio Kemeny, on the other hand, wrote a letter that I wish I had written, and did so far more articulately than I ever could. I take issue with a few small points, but none that significantly impacts what I wrote. Just one minor factual error, which doesn't affect the substance of his remarks: the age of the universe has been pinpointed at  $13.71 \pm 0.12$  billion years, not 15 to 20 billion. And I suspect that the time period "10,500 years" was a typo, and should have been  $10^{500}$  (meaning 10500) years. What follows should not be construed as a response to these writers, since I wrote most of it long before having read their comments.

In my article I explained how, when I was five years old, my atheism was seeded by my mother's inability to explain how God came to be.

The process went through many stages, but the final screw in God's coffin came when I was in what turned out to be the last church service I ever attended, except for weddings and funerals. The minister

was ranting about how disbelievers often missed the point by asking him to "define" God. He said that it was impossible to define God, because God is infinite, meaning "that which has no limits." Since to "define" means to "state the limits of," the infinite, and therefore God, cannot be defined. He went on in this vein, but I was no longer listening, since he was apparently completely oblivious to the fact that he had just undermined his own argument. Besides, if you refuse to define your terms, how can you possibly have any kind of meaningful discussion?

Most people, after having been introduced as children to the concept of God as an old man in the sky, when they grow up either reject it as obvious nonsense or become a bit more sophisticated and think of God as some kind of universal consciousness. But God can be a meaningful symbol for the deepest part of our psyche that is the very essence of our being. Alan Watts said that when someone has an epiphany and announces, "I am God!", the Western world regards it as a sign of either insanity or truly monstrous hubris, but in India they understand what it really means, and say, "Congratulations! You finally got the point."

I am a synthesist at heart, and when someone expresses opinions that seem diametrically opposed to mine, I can sometimes find common ground at a deeper level, but only if both sets of views have been carefully thought through, not merely adopted uncritically. It is my experience that disagreements can usually be resolved, *provided* all parties involved are of good will. The resolution usually lies either in different fundamental beliefs or values, or the same basic idea expressed through different metaphors. Thus I can, for example, reconcile theism, in the sense of believing in discoverable organizing principles, with atheism, in the sense of rejecting a universal conscious entity.

Pantheism doesn't enter into it,

because that is a definition, not a faith, and therefore neither true nor false. Nor does agnosticism, which is simply acknowledgement of the obvious fact that there is no actual evidence for or against belief in gods, so that such beliefs are articles of faith, not knowledge. Faith is what you use when knowledge needed to order your life is not available. The deepest article of faith I am aware of possessing is Occam's Razor: the best explanations are usually those involving the smallest number of arbitrary assumptions. Atheism, as usually understood, follows from that.

People talk *about* theistic "explanations" for order, but nobody has ever been able to show me one. Not surprising, since it would have to be *infinitely* more complex than those developed *and confirmed* by science decades ago. Naturalistic explanations, although complex in the sense of having many interrelated parts, are simple in the only sense that matters: that is, they are based on sound scientific principles requiring no arbitrary assumptions whatsoever.

A theistic "explanation," to work at all, would require *verifiable* detailed descriptions of (a) the origin, and (b) the nature, of a purely hypothetical creator, as well as of (c) the design process, and (d) how the design was implemented, each key detail of which would involve a new arbitrary assumption – all in the complete absence of anything remotely resembling evidence.

But it gets worse. Once you insist that anything as complex as order requires a creator, you have to concede that the creator must have required a higher-order creator, and so *ad infinitum*...

So what's the point of adding all this extra complication, since (relatively) simple *verified* explanations that meet all the criteria for legitimacy are freely accessible?

## More Letters to the Editor (cont)

### *Dear Editor,*

Horatio Kemeny's article on the existence of a divinity was a bit hard to follow, but he asked for input from a "real atheist", so I will do my best to provide some. Horatio starts off rather confusingly by denying any links between religion, spirituality and divinity. He asks if it is possible to believe in God without being religious, or to be spiritual and/or religious without believing in God.

It is hard to understand what Horatio means by "God". How can he imagine that divinity can be separated from religion or spirituality? Horatio says that "Intelligent Design" has been "hijacked by the religious movement", but it was religion that invented the whole metaphysical concept of Creation, in order to explain divinity and spirituality. Horatio states: "the God argument that emerges is that for there to be a self-organizing component to a bigger, self-unorganizing infrastructure, maybe there's some sort of bigger-picture thought that went into it." Does Horatio want God to be some sort of Wizard of Oz behind three layers of curtains?

Horatio wants to hear from a "real atheist" what it would take to prove the existence of a divinity (some entity that came before everything that came before that, and formed it into what it is now). As a real atheist, I can assure him that I have no desire for any proof

that some metaphysical super-intelligence created the universe. I am quite happy with the universe as it is, thank you. I have better things to do in one lifetime on this planet than speculate on whether some ultra-intelligent butterfly wing flapped several billion years ago so that primordial slime started to form. I suspect that it is Horatio himself who desperately needs this proof of a divinity, from which I infer that he is an agnostic, not a believer.

Why is it that believers think that atheists are moping around, feeling spiritually bereft in their unbelief, and waiting for someone to prove the existence of a divinity to them, so that they can then become happy believers? "Real atheists" are not closet agnostics. We are quite satisfied with not being burdened with metaphysical reasons for our daily behaviour. We have our own moral codes (or lack of them), good or bad, and we adhere to them on our own initiative, unburdened by threats of divine vengeance if we don't do what we are told by someone's "revealed" scriptures. And we really are not interested in metaphysical dialogue on the origins of the universe.

I can agree with Horatio that contemporary organized religions have perverted the concepts of divinity and spirituality, but it is impossible, philosophically or theologically, to separate

these three things. In rejecting religion, I reject divinity and spirituality. In rejecting divinity, I reject religion and spirituality. I stand alone in this world and I am at peace with that. I do not go through life feeling that I am incomplete by not having irrefutable proof of a metaphysical creator. Christians have accused me of being afraid of being confronted with some irrefutable proof of the existence of their deity. They seem to think that my unbelief is some kind of polarity to their faith and is an entity of faith in itself. This is not so. It is purely an absence of any belief, faith, spirituality or superstition, with which I am very comfortable. Irrefutable proof of the existence of any deity will probably be warmly welcomed by the believers themselves, but atheists will continue to remain unimpressed. They know for sure that there can never be proof of something that doesn't exist and never existed. Horatio's wish for "an answer to satisfy everyone" is the usual biased wish of believers that atheists would come round to their way of thinking by being presented with proof of a deity. They will not consider the suggestion that an "answer to satisfy everyone" could possibly work the other way round and disprove the existence of their deity.

Oh, that wouldn't be satisfying at all, would it?  
Nicky Kew

*Salt Spring Sailboat, by Lisa le Blanc*



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*Lumens*

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## Mensa and Editorial Policy

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