

## Meet a Profoundly Hilarious Member



Photo: Mike Maxwell

threw on a pair of sweats, ran across the street, burst into the church and yelled, “SHUT THE F\*C\* UP!”

That’s when I realized I had some unresolved anger issues I better deal with — simply yelling at Christians wasn’t helping me and it sure wasn’t going to help the world. Making people laugh is *way* more fun.

**Where I’m headed:** Right now I’m touring my solo comedy show, “Jesus Loves You! (But Hates Me): One Woman’s Journey from Believer to Blasphemer.” It’s an irreverent ride through my religious childhood and Christianity in America today. There are skits and songs! Spoof films! And even game shows!

Whenever I perform, I’m struck by how many people want to tell me their stories afterward. Many of us ex-Christians feel angry, hurt and isolated. This breaks my heart.

Religious indoctrination is not something you simply “get over” by deciding you no longer believe it. The brain is much more complex than that. While I no longer believe in hell, my brain’s limbic system still reacts as if it’s a real threat.

Sometimes I catch myself whispering, “Please God, please forgive me” when I make a mistake. This upsets me. I don’t even believe in God! Does this make me weak? No, just conditioned.

I’d like to help recovering Christians rewire their brains. We are worthy of love, and until we believe that for ourselves we cannot experience it fully.

**Person I admire:** Eve Ensler, creator of “The Vagina Monologues.” She started a global movement with a one-woman show and reminds me that theater can change the world.

**A quotation I like:** I must have read and reread Dan Barker’s quote (below) a hundred times while writing my show. I was scared, and his words helped me believe in myself. Thanks Dan!

“You are an intelligent human being. Your life is valuable for its own sake. You are not second-class in the universe, deriving meaning and purpose from some other mind. You are not inherently evil — you are inherently human, possessing the positive rational potential to help make this a world of morality, peace and joy. Trust yourself.”

**These are a few of my favorite things:** Camping in the Utah desert with Mike and our dogs, sipping wine on the terrace of my favorite local winery, sharing a meal with friends, performing improv and sketch comedy, frantically changing costumes backstage while one of my spoof videos plays and hearing someone in the audience laugh so hard they snort.

**These are not:**

- The strange cultural assumption that the bible is a book of wisdom upon which to base your life, and that if you do you are somehow more fit to run this country than an atheist.
- Pro-lifers acting as if they care about women.
- Virginity pledges and Purity Balls.
- Bleeding heart New Age liberals who righteously promote “tolerance” because they’re too afraid to take a stand.
- Dogmatic atheists who categorically demonize all Christians.
- Dualism. Life just isn’t black and



Photo: David Shinn

Thea Deley as Not-Very-Virgin Mary in her solo comedy show.

white.

- Telling children that God is going to punish them if they are bad little girls and boys.

- Hypocrisy. In religious people, yes, but most especially in myself. My ethical challenge is holding Christianity accountable for its abuses while striving to see the humanity of its followers.

**My doubts about religion started:** Leaving Christianity was a process that took me about a decade. Highlights along the way:

- (Age 8) Learning in Sunday school that my favorite toothpaste was made by devil worshipers, and if I continued to brush with Crest I too would go to hell.

- (Age 14) Sitting in my living room while our pastor explained I couldn’t become a minister because I was a girl.

- (Age 18) Dry humping my college boyfriend when the hair dryer in the other room inexplicably turned itself on. My boyfriend tossed me off the bed and fell to his knees, saying, “It’s a message from God! We’re not supposed to

have sex!” That was the last straw.

**Before I die:** I’d like to perform my show at a national secular conference and have Julia Sweeney come up to me afterward and say, “Wow, I really loved your show!” Or at the very least, “Wow, I really loved your ‘virginity restoration’ squirt gun!”

**Ways I promote freethought:** Performing my show, collaborating with progressive secular and religious groups around our shared values, officiating nonreligious wedding ceremonies, and blogging, vlogging and creating other online content.

**I wish you’d have asked me:** How did being an FFRF member help you create your show?

I used Freethought Today’s Black Collar Crime Blotter as inspiration for a video and creepy character in one of my scenes (Pastor Irv). I also created a game show based on FFRF’s online bible quiz. I call it “Bible Feud” and pit two teams of people from the audience against each other. It’s lots of fun and ends in a public stoning!

## It Pays to Complain

A California FFRF member was successful in getting a state Department of Public Health official in Sacramento to remove a religious statement from her email signature. After the employee’s information such as title, address and phone number, her official emails ended with: “What you have made a matter of Prayer, should cease to be a matter of care!!!”

Pamela Koslyn, a Life Member, wrote the employee: “As I’m sure you know, not everyone believes in prayer, and as I’d expect you to know, the CDPH cannot endorse prayer. I think this is an inappropriate use of state resources, since your email speaks for the state, and by my reading of the California Constitution’s ‘No Preference,’ ‘No Establishment’ and ‘No Aid’ clauses, you’re forbidden from doing any

act that proselytizes for and prefers any particular sect without a secular purpose. Since there’s no secular purpose to prayer, I believe it also forbids proselytizing for prayer. You’re of course free to include whatever you’d like on your private emails and in your private conversations.”

Koslyn followed up the next day with another email that asked the employee to “Please respond promptly in writing about what steps you are taking to respect the Establishment Clause and remedy this constitutional violation.”

That same day, Dec. 24, Koslyn received an email from the employee’s direct manager: “I would like to let you know that your e-mail was brought to my attention by [the employee]. The language on her e-mail account has been removed.”

Thea Deley as Thea Deley.

**Name:** Thea Deley.

**Where I live:** Paonia, Colo.

**Where and when I was born:** I was born in 1966 while my dad was stationed at the Pueblo Army Depot in Colorado.

**Family:** Mike Maxwell (partner of 22 years) and two dogs (Kali and Jenna).

**Education:** Social sciences degree with a minor in philosophy from Colorado State University; master’s in public relations from the University of Denver. Also studied improv comedy at Second City in Hollywood.

**Occupation:** Religious satirist, writer, performer and founding minister of the Church of Personal Responsibility. I help ex-Christians heal by giving them opportunities to laugh at their religious backgrounds. (When you get some distance, it really *is* hilarious!)

**Military service:** I’m a proud military brat (my father served in the Army for 20-plus years). Most people don’t think about the families, but we “serve” the country alongside our military parents/spouses.

Whenever Dad got his transfer orders, we started packing. By the time I graduated from high school, I had lived in 11 cities, seven states and three countries, including pre-“Fall of the Wall” Germany.

**How I got where I am today:** I was raised in a conservative Protestant family. Ironically, my military upbringing influenced my evolution away from both Christianity and conservatism. Being exposed to so many different cultures forced me to question what other American kids might take for granted. You took a school field trip to SeaWorld? We went to the Rothenburg Museum of Torture. Seeing a medieval chastity belt the day you get your first period really affects a girl!

I developed critical thinking in high school debate and speech tournaments and honed them further in college with philosophy and news-writing classes. Eastern religion courses opened my mind to other spiritual paths. To this day my disgruntled mother says, “We never should have let you go to college!”

I admit my life would have been much simpler — less existential angst, perhaps — had I stuck to the Christian conditioning, but I wouldn’t trade freethought for the world.

Years after I left my faith, I lived by an evangelical church. Early one Sunday morning, their worship band woke me up at 6:30, and I just snapped. I