



AAWAs Latest Endeavors

by Steph le Gardener

In the past couple of months, AAWA has been busy behind the scenes working on some projects that will bring more exposure to the antiquated and harmful policies of the Watch Tower Society. One of those projects has been the introduction of a series of petitions addressed to the United Nations, United States Government, and other official agencies to recommend change in laws that will protect the human rights of former and current members.

The first petition highlights the Watchtower's shunning policy and its damaging effect on individuals by way of separating and creating divisions in families. Psychologists have proven the damaging effects of shunning; the harm done is incalculable. Familial relationships should be a personal issue, without undue unethical influence from a religious corporation.

The second petition's focus is titled "Mandate Child Molestation Reporting In All Religious Faiths." Instead of allowing the current legal loopholes that allow the Watchtower to squirm through without reporting allegations of child molestation, we are encouraging laws be passed to make reporting mandatory, letting the professionals sort it out.

Links to both petitions will be shown below, and we encourage everyone to not only sign these, but to share them. We want to send a message loud and clear that change is necessary.

- [Using Coercion to Force Members to Stay](#)
- [Mandate Clergy Reporting of Child Molestation](#)

We recently shared with you the new AAWA Facebook page. Our followers there have tripled since that announcement, and we'd love to have you "like" our page, as well. Be sure to check it out at <https://www.facebook.com/AAWA.Official.Page> Events, news articles, and hot topics are posted regularly.

Our main AAWA site has been far more active as well. You may have noticed that we've added a lot of new voices to the blog area. It is our goal to post new content every few days to keep it fresh and engaging. There have been some powerful personal stories shared recently that are definitely worth a read. Understanding the impact the Watch Tower Society has had on the lives of members is a good reminder for WHY we're doing this work. We want the public to know what's going on behind the curtain, and how they are impacting lives. When the public begins to care, change is far more likely to happen.



Working on yet another area near and dear to AAWA, we are now partnering with Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB) to re-develop their website with the most current information as it relates to Jehovah's Witnesses and their blood policies.

This group began with the sole mission of educating Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the many inconsistencies in the Watchtower's blood policy so that they could truly make an informed choice about their medical treatment and that goal has never changed."

The plan is to have updated information, pages, links, etc., completed by May 15. The site can be accessed at awjrb.org.

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Speaking Out: Mike & Kim

by Jeni Lundblom-Valdez



Anyone who follows the Ex-JW movement has no doubt noticed the recent explosion of Mike & Kim Brooks. In less than 6 months, they have uploaded over 100 videos and amassed over 650 subscribers on their YouTube channel. Their videos offer encouragement, information, and points-of-view that resonate with a wide variety of people. I recently had the chance to correspond with this dynamic duo and learn a little more about what makes them tick.

Both Mike & Kim were introduced to the Watchtower as children. They met, fell in love, and were married in 1979--when Kim was just 16 years old. Their Romeo & Juliet romance sparked gossip that Kim was expecting. Although it was false, this was first of many rumors that would eventually surround the couple. Throughout their tenure as Witnesses, the two always considered themselves misfits. Many a visit was made to the back room to discuss what the couple considered to be hypocrisy within the organization.

In 1983, the two became parents to a daughter, Shyla. They did their best to set a good example for her. Mike was appointed as a Ministerial Servant and together with Shyla even pioneered for a time. In order to allow this, Kim took on the role of breadwinner in the house. Instead of lauding her efforts, the elders counseled Mike on Kim's "lack of joy" and low service time. This "shepherding" created friction and resulted in Mike being removed from his position and his eventual retirement from pioneering.

Over time, health problems prohibited the two from attending meetings regularly. Though they were still Witnesses, the other JW's, including family, stopped associating with them. Eventually, they moved away, reconnected with an old friend and learned "the truth about the truth." Shyla and her husband James followed along.

After being officially disfellowshipped, the pair decided it was time to speak up. They joined the ranks of YouTube apostates and started making videos. The response has been a positive one. "We receive hundreds and hundreds of encouraging emails every week," says Kim. This feedback is what gives them the strength to keep going.

For those looking to leave the Watchtower, the couple recommends researching, getting involved and getting support from other ex-JW's. They encourage you to take a look at what's available. There are a variety of groups with members who all have different viewpoints. If one group or contributor isn't right for you, keep looking.

While losing family and friends is still hard to cope with, in the end they don't regret their decision to leave the Watchtower. "We're all happy, living life without the horrible guilt... because we can no longer go to meetings or service. People aren't so bad out there in the world. The Ex-JW community has become our new family and we love them all no matter what."

To find out more about Mike & Kim, please visit their YouTube channel at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/kimmymbrooks>



Non-Religious Meet-Up Groups for Ex-JW's

You are not alone, though the shunning policies of the Watchtower can sometimes make us feel that way. Why not get together with other former JW's in a religion-neutral social setting and take the sting out? To that end, AAWA would like to promote social meet-up groups around the world.

We know there are already a few meet-up groups in place, but we'd like to see them all over, accessible by the thousands of ex-JW's out there. To start us off, we wanted to let you know about a new meet-up group in Northern Utah, USA organized by Michu Gracey. This group is both religiously and politically neutral. Here's the link: <http://www.meetup.com/Ex-Jehovahs-Witnesses-in-Utah/>

If you have a successful meet-up group in place, please let us know. We'd love to share the info with others. You can send your meet-up group info and link to:

editor@aawa.co. Check out the gallery of photos on the next page from recent meetups in New York, Utah, Toronto, and Washington—lots of smiling faces.



Education on a Budget

by Steph Le Gardener

Higher education, one of the top ten Watchtower no-no's, is something most former JW's were denied. So, what do we do when we find ourselves in a situation where we are an adult on a shoestring budget but could really use some extra education and training to give us a leg up in the job market? Or, perhaps we simply want to keep improving our critical thinking skills and expanding our worldview.

There are many who have taken the leap into higher education as adult learners, but we know that learning usually comes with a pretty hefty price tag. While you're sorting out your finances, why not take advantage of FREE learning?

Some of the teaching facilities noted below even offer certificates, a definite help when looking for employment. Some of the classes are great tools for transitioning into higher learning. From personal experience, I'll share something: you will likely have far better study habits than your classmates ☺

750 Free Online Courses from Top Universities:

<http://www.openculture.com/freeonlinecourses>

Coursera Free Online Courses:

<http://www.coursera.org/>

Online Courses: www.OnlineCourses.com (a sampling of areas of interest here)

<http://www.onlinecourses.com/accounting/>

<http://www.onlinecourses.com/information-technology/>

<http://www.onlinecourses.com/writing/>

EdX: <https://www.edx.org/how-it-works>

Education Portal: <http://education-portal.com/academy/get-credit.html>

Stanford School of Engineering:

<http://see.stanford.edu/>

Khan Academy: <http://www.khanacademy.org/>

Happy Faces From Recent Ex-JW Meetups



More photos from the Brooklyn meetup can be found in the gallery at [Karama Sadaka Photography](http://KaramaSadakaPhotography.com).

How the Internet is Helping AAWA Educate the World

by John Hoyle

When I began to write this article, I realized that it was exactly one year ago that AAWA's website went live online. As I look back, it seems far longer than just a year because so much has happened. The good news is that most of our experiences have been pleasant.

A well-produced video announced AAWA's inauguration in March 2013. It was a compilation of snippets by former Jehovah's Witnesses who are known to be activists and critics of the Watchtower's destructive policies. That video was widely praised at the time of its release and remains a classic.

Our first website posts included a greeting and description of AAWA's mission and objectives by then Board President John Cedars. Other articles included news about the Candace Conti Court Appeal, a personal account about Jehovah's Witness funerals, and a scathing (and somewhat humorous) critique of the "real" door-to-door preaching work by Jehovah's Witnesses.

The euphoria of that first week soon turned to a state of panic. Critics immediately attacked the names of both our group and website, branding them as being "too negative" and "too aggressive." When we opened our new Facebook page to everyone, certain individuals who claimed to be our "friends" decided to "refer" all of their Facebook friends without warning them in advance. At first we were ecstatic about the huge number of new members that had joined in barely three days (over 1000). Unfortunately, we soon realized that some of those new members did not know they had been "automatically" signed up by someone else. A few (who were still trying to hide their connections to ex-JWs) discovered they were "outed" before they were willing to take that step for themselves.

At the end of our first week, I realized that a totally unaffiliated Facebook account had copied our header and AAWA logo - and then posted them as their own. When our identity appeared on the other Facebook page, it immediately created confusion for those looking for our Facebook account. It took a few days and a couple of phone calls, but we soon got everything sorted out. It took creating new names for both our group and our website - and setting higher levels of online security (for Facebook and our website) to finally solve the problems.

We had not foreseen the stumbling blocks we would encounter that first month. We survived the critics and our resolve grew stronger. By mid-May, we were well on our way to achieving our goals. Many critics continued to forecast AAWA's quick demise (and several actively pushed for it.)

We are pleased to announce that a new and completely redesigned AAWA.co website is planned to go live about June 1, 2014. It will have a new look, lots of new features and will provide portals to other groups and websites that we feel will enhance our message. Watch for the official announcement on AAWA.co sometime in May.

In many ways, the very fact that we had to suffer through that horrible first month made us stronger and a great deal smarter. As a result, we continue to have broad support from other JW discussion websites and a steady stream of new volunteers looking for ways to help us succeed. At the same time as our critics fade into the shadows, secular media is beginning to take notice of us in more meaningful ways.

Being AAWA.co's webmaster I am beginning to understand what works and what doesn't. For example, our best day ever was November 4, 2013. We had 15,612 unique visitors to AAWA.co, over 11,000 referred to our site by Facebook alone. That week we saw over 28,000 unique visitors (until that date our average weekly "unique visitor" rate was about 5,000). Why the sudden jump?



One article that week ("Shameful Shunning in a Thousand Words") showed a simple photo of a man eating his breakfast in his kitchen with his back turned to the camera. In any other context, this photo would have never been published. The simple point that photo so eloquently made brought tears to thousands of our readers. It eloquently exposed the real effects of the Watchtower's shunning policy in a way unlike anything I'd ever seen before.

Many other articles brought new viewers to AAWA.co in droves ("Watchtower and Teenagers" with the "Paris Jackson" video). Lee Marsh's Support Forum also brought a steady stream of regular and new visitors. Since our website went online we've had almost a quarter million visitors (and, I'm sad - and glad - to say, well over a 100,000 spammers, hackers and other trouble makers who were blocked from the site).

We live in a wonderful time. While television and radio are still viable technologies, there isn't any other media strategy that could begin to have that kind of reach to the world's population that the Internet has. It is a fact that AAWA.co became truly global in its reach within just a few months - and it is all due to the Internet.

You can actually see for yourself all the places in the world that we have reached over just the past ten days. Just click on "Map of Vistors" in the "Who's Online" widget in AAWA.co's lower right sidebar to see dots representing locations of just 2000 of our most recent visitors.

