

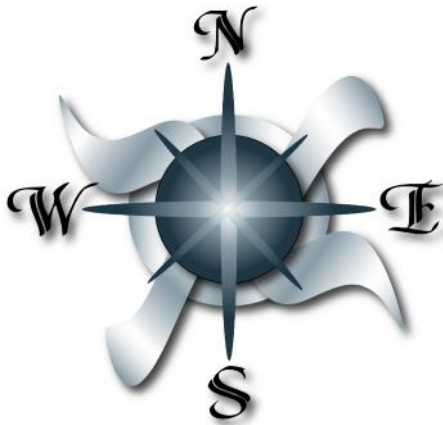


AAWAs Road to Success

by Richard Kelly

Traveling uncharted waters over the last four months...

Being an advocate for the awareness of Watchtower abuses has been an unforgettable experience for me. While much has been accomplished, the highlight of my journey has been the many people I have met and worked with. They are all smart, passionate and tenacious. AAWA will have to rely upon them if it's going to successfully report to the world community about the inhumanity of several Watchtower policies.

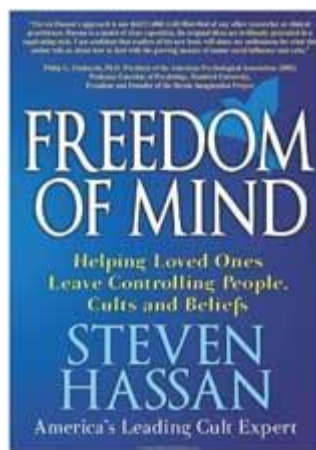


Two of those special people are Daniel and Sheridan Ward. At an AAWA Focus Group in May, Daniel shared parts of their story about being abused by the Watchtower, a story that should have shamed any religious group with a conscience. Knowing that complaining as a response would accomplish nothing, Daniel and Sheridan produced an AAWA video in July that showed the world what it is like to grow up as a JW teenager. Their video has received critical acclaim and an appreciative response from a representative of Paris Jackson.

The next group of remarkable people is William Enoch, Rowland Nelkin and Towanda Curie. In April, Rowland suggested that AAWA send a press release to all news sources in the vicinity of a major JW assembly. In

June, Cedars and I drafted a press release titled, "Jehovah's Witness Convention, Cash Cow or Cause for Concern." Towanda created a media data base for North America. In July, William started sending the media the other side of the JW story, and in so doing he has earned my respect as a tenacious AAWA warrior.

Although Penny Carnathan is not an AAWA volunteer, she is the senior writer for AAWA's Public Relations Firm, EMSI. Penny helped me write a 700-word op-ed story titled "It's Time to Outlaw Extreme Shunning in Modern Society." When it is published, it will be any eye-opener to the world community. Because news about Jehovah's Witnesses goes under the radar for mainstream media, our op-ed piece was turned down by the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and the Los Angeles Times. But I have not given up hope. Each of the editors for those papers told me that timing is essential because readers want to read about issues that dominate the news. They suggested that we link the issue to a celebrity currently in the news whenever possible. So I will keep tweaking that story to make it work.



A leading expert in the field of mind-control religions, Steven Hassan, has taken a real interest in what AAWA is doing. In July, Paul Grundy, Danmera and I talked with him for an hour and a half about how we could collaborate in the future. Steven Hassan's books are available on Amazon.com. You can

In this Issue

- Annual BBQ fun
- AAWA biz plan
- Helping teens deal with the stress of life as a JW
- A little apostata-fun
- Ask the Board
- Katrina's story of perseverance
- New AAWA forum

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AAWAs Road to Success, continued from page 1...

find his website at <http://freedomofmind.com>. Hassan's **BITE** model has become a major tool for identifying cults of all stripes. It's no secret that AAWA needs allies like Mr. Hassan if we hope to get our message out: The Watchtower enforces cultish policies that do serious harm to people - and is getting away with it.

I could write much more about other AAWA volunteers and supporters who are acting in extraordinary ways to help the world understand the dangers of mind-control cults and religions like the Watchtower Society. Yes, there are five Watchtower policies that negatively impact thousands of lives and suck up millions of dollars from society in general. The Watchtower Society is not currently being held accountable for the many lives it messes up.

It is time for me to close. Before I do, I'd like to refresh your memory and remind you that **AAWA's Mission is to inform the world community about five harmful Watchtower policies** - policies that promote

child abuse, domestic violence, shunning of family members, the banning of certain blood treatments and stigmatizing higher education. AAWA also wants to provide a safe community and a listening ear for those people who decide that they no longer want to be Jehovah's Witnesses.

AAWA cannot do it without you!



Volunteers are always welcome at AAWA. If you have time or talents to help AAWA's mission, please visit <http://aawa.co/about-aawa/how-you-can-help/> to volunteer.

Apostates – Do Not Fear

by Steph Le Gardener

"Apostate." A word that strikes fear—no, utter terror—into Jehovah's Witnesses. With their unique skill at loaded language, the Watch Tower Society has redefined the word apostate to mean someone who has turned their back on the Governing Body's authority, voices doctrinal doubts, or otherwise decides they no longer believe the rubbish spewed from the platform at their local Kingdom Hall.

Added to that, they teach that apostates are kissing cousins to Satan himself, the anti-Christ, even referring to these folks as "mentally diseased," and not so subtly hinting that if we were back in ancient times, apostates would be stoned to death (*Watchtower* 2011 Jul 15 p.11). Nothing like a bit of fear mongering, eh? But, what does the word 'apostate' really mean—the word in its undisturbed, non-loaded state? Let's take a peek in the dictionary, shall we?

a·pos·tate (/ pästāt/) Noun: A person who renounces a religious or political belief or principle.

Hmmm, that's not so scary now, is it? It doesn't mention demons or Satan or stoning. If one connects the dots, there is an irony here. Every Jehovah's Witness that converted from another religion is...an apostate! Oh, the horror! No, not really.

Being apostate simply means that someone no longer believes what they once thought was a religious truth, and they renounce it. This does not make you or me a bad or evil person. As a matter of fact, it probably means you're rather enlightened, growing as an individual, and expanding your worldview.

So, the next time someone hurls the label 'apostate' at you, look at it with a source of pride, not shame, because you've figured out something that the other seven million JW's haven't. Let's hope they catch up soon.



Some folks from our ex-JW community have made YouTube videos related to the subject of apostacy. Check them out and share. Let's educate others.

InDiggNayshun: "What is the true meaning of apostate?" <http://youtu.be/Ni2QkocWB5M>

Apostachick: "I'm a human apostate, and so are you!" <http://youtu.be/8DbfC4RcLAY>

Catrina Porter – A story of perseverance

by Isabella Boticelli

For as early as she could remember, Katrina Porter was a literary scholar. Even as a child, books by Emily Bronte, Sylvia Plath and other gems of English literature began to fill her bookcase, and her imagination. As Katrina grew in age, so did her inspiration to follow in the path of these artists to write her own poems, stories and song lyrics.

At ten years old, all of her dreams came to a grinding halt by the conversion of her mother to Jehovah's Witnesses. Like an obedient convert, Katrina's mother was convinced that Armageddon was just over the horizon and what were once normal outlets for children, were now banned to the closet of demons. Katrina watched as her precious dream-inspiring books were methodically replaced by the limiting and repressive compositions of Jehovah's Witnesses. As so often with the children of this religion, they are not asked if they want to join, but it is a parental demand to exit your past life, loves and friends, to be replaced with the world of meetings, assemblies, service, prayers and personal study.

“Why can't I try on different lives, like dresses, to see which fits best and is more becoming?” ~Sylvia Plath

Despite her mother's threats, Katrina's love for writing could not be extinguished. When her stories and poems were discovered, she was met with her mother's wrath and condemnation that her writings were considered “worldly” and should be trashed. Her dreams that one day she would sit across from Oprah Winfrey and explain how it took little to no effort to write her first bestseller, were constantly interrupted by her mother. One of Katrina's favorite quotes by Sylvia Plath read, “Why can't I try on different lives, like dresses, to see which fits best and is more becoming?”

Catrina wanted badly to try out a different life filled with writing and song! But to keep peace with her mother, she continued trying to be a good daughter and Witness, and as she matured she became an auxiliary and regular pioneer, and even presented a part at an assembly. But it was really fear, fear of her mother and fear of dying at Armageddon the kept her locked inside; it was not really in her heart.

By age twenty-seven, Katrina was tired of her mother's threats and her religion, she moved out of her home, and into a new life free from the strangulation of a fanatical lifestyle. As any ex-Jehovah's Witness knows, departure from the religion guarantees their role as an outsider both within the organization and in their family, but she was more than willing to take that risk. Katrina found herself having to quickly learn how to adapt to living in “the world.” But she did it. And at thirty-two, she enrolled in her very first college course: English. Five years later, she graduated with an Associate of Arts in English and another in Humanities. At her graduation, she was also presented with the California State Assembly Award in English. Katrina then transferred to the renowned University of California, Davis, and was selected along with six thousand out of twelve thousand applications! She graduated from UC Davis in 2012, with a Bachelor of Arts in English, and second Bachelor of Arts in Medieval and Early Modern Studies.

Now, ten years after leaving her mother's home, Katrina is anxiously awaiting this fall to begin her masters in English. It is her goal to become both an English professor and English high school teacher. Although it is painful to leave family behind, she is so happy that she finally found the courage to live out her dreams, and to “try on different lives” to see which fits her best.



Living her dream, Katrina graduated from UC Davis in 2012, with a Bachelor of Arts in English, and second Bachelor of Arts in Medieval and Early Modern Studies.

AAWA Publishes Business Plan

by Steph Le Gardener

With all of the action taking place at AAWA, it's hard to believe that this group was formed just over four months ago. In that time, we have seen volunteer numbers go up, and with that, several critical informational pieces have been developed, including videos, press releases, and brochures.

Keeping an all-volunteer team working collaboratively and with constancy of purpose (our mission) the Board quickly realized there was a strong need to make the business plan for AAWA transparent, easily accessible, and provide AAWA Nation with an avenue for input. Since it is the volunteers providing the effort and personal insights into driving the mission, it was only logical that they have a say in the direction AAWA takes to achieve its mission.

If you haven't had a chance to read over the business plan posted by Richard Kelly on June 29, be sure to check it out. Read the plan here: <http://bit.ly/18uxCgB>

OUR READERS ASK . . .

In each future issue we will answer a question that comes into our mailbag. If you would like to submit a question to the AAWA team, send it to:

Newsletter@AAWA.co
Put "Readers Ask" in the subject line.

We will do our very best to answer your question, whether or not it is the one chosen to be published in the newsletter. Now...what's on your mind?

AAWA Support Forum

by Lee Marsh

As of July 1st AAWA opened its own [discussion forum](#) to provide information and support to ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, people who are involved with active or lapsed Witnesses, active Witnesses who have questions or doubts and need to find answers in a safe environment, and those who have left or are in the process of leaving as well as interested parties.

Over the last month we have added one or two new people per day - not including the large support team we have. The topics cover a wide range of subjects from the long-term effects of living or growing up as a Witness, how we define a cult and its impact on a person, resources including books, websites and movies or videos, and developing coping skills to use in the real world.

We include the five main topics in AAWA's Mission Statement (shunning, sexual abuse of children, domestic violence, blood and education). We also see a need to address certain groups: people who are dating or married to an active Witness, sexual orientation, and teens or minors.

Like the rest of AAWA this is a religiously neutral site. While we cannot avoid the topic of religion, we don't debate it here.

Safety, Confidentiality and Respect

WE hope this group becomes a safe place for Jehovah's Witnesses and ex-Witnesses who are struggling with issues like shunning, any kind of abuse, education or the blood issue.

We will protect your identity by never sharing it or your story with people who are outside the group.

We will respect your beliefs and feelings and your need to follow your own path. We are not here to make you change your mind.

WE offer support to those who have left the Witnesses or are in the process of leaving. You have sacrificed a lot for that choice and may have lost family, friends and even your beliefs.

We will respect and support you where ever you are in your journey as you move forward.

WE offer support to those who have never been a Witness but are overwhelmed with the rules and time spent apart as your spouse/partner/friend and the disrespect you may have experienced at the hands of Witnesses and as you see the effects of the Watchtower Society on the person **you are with**.

Visit the new forum at

<http://aawa.co/aawa-discussion-forum/>

Celebrating My Independence with Eclectic Apostates

by Richard Kelly

A major summer highlight for me was celebrating my independence from the Watchtower with a hundred ex-JWs on July 4 at the Jim Moon Barbeque in eastern Pennsylvania. It was there that my wife Helen and I enjoyed the company of some of the best people in the world. They were like a unique blend of concentration camp survivors just happy to be free from a mind-controlling religion - and not one of them "mentally diseased."

We arrived at the BBQ shortly before noon and were warmly greeted by our hosts for the day, Jim "Sparlock" Moon and his partner, Allan Halle. An hour later, thirty picnickers were busily preparing food, sharing stories and organizing for the "great crowd" that would soon arrive. Then I noticed a long stream of cars, almost like a funeral procession heading for the final resting place of the recently departed Watchtower Society (oh, how I wish that could have been true), working its way to the grassy parking area behind Jim's house.

Leading the large contingent of new arrivals was Ruben, Emily and Sagan Ortiz - and their dog. As Ruben moved through the crowd, he did what he does so well: make people feel good to be alive and let them know that they are important. He is also a hugger and a kind, caring person *who ex-JWs like to hang out with*.

Nine hours later, Ruben, Jim Moon, and Gregorio Smith told the thirty die-hard partiers who were still going strong that it was time to go home. As I wistfully walked to my car, I decided to ask other attendees how they felt about celebrating their independence earlier that day with such a wide variety of eclectic apostates.

Renee Seisler told me, "I didn't want the day to end. I was with my second family even though I had never met anyone there until today. The happiness and unconditional love that we all felt for each other will be a special day for me to always cherish and remember. I truly cannot wait till the next picnic."

Mickey "Danmera" Hudson said, "It's like meeting old friends I just hadn't met yet - like a family reunion. There's lots of laughter, a lot of shared experiences, a lot of inside joking; a very special place where we celebrate individuality."



Jim Moon and Ruben Ortiz in a playful moment.



Ruben Ortiz and Gregorio Smith at a private showing of *Truth Be Told*.

Chuck Doherty's eyes twinkled when he said, "The picnic experience is like the British film series 'Seven Up', which revisits the same group of people every seven years of their lives to see where life is taking them. With the folks at Jim's, it's almost as though leaving the WBTS is their birth into a real life, the direction that life goes is in their own hands for a change. Seeing the same folks every year allows you to plot that trajectory and reset your own course at the same time."

Luis Padilla said, "To see so many ex-JWs smiling and having fun is a testament to the fact that there is life and success outside of the organization."

Allan Santiago's response was, "Words can't describe what I feel. Being with so many ex-JWs makes me know that I'll never be alone and that I'm OKAY!"

Maria Albert said with a big smile, "Jim said it first, but it still works. 'You walk into a yard full of strangers and leave with a heart full of friends.'"

Jim Moon himself, said "Rather than becoming self-fulfilling prophecies by 'weeping and gnashing our teeth' after we leave the Organization, the 'great crowd' of people we have at our July 4th picnic each year proves there is life—a very happy life—outside of the walls of the Watchtower."

Ruben said, "I've been going to Jim's BBQ since 2008. This is my sixth year. I was one of five people who attended that year. To be a part of its growth and to see so many benefit by finding a new family is a tremendous privilege. We're on a mission to change lives and make it known that when you leave the Witnesses YOU ARE NOT ALONE. The BBQ is one of the best ways we demonstrate this."

Elizabeth Wright stated, "It's wonderful being around people who 'get it.' Last year I met many Internet friends who had been supportive when we struggled after newly leaving. We also met new people who became Internet friends. Most ex-JWs are amazing people. I see what they have accomplished, regardless of the difficulty, loss and struggle—all of these happy faces, good spirits and sense of humor intact—and I'm encouraged that our lives will continue to get even better."

Celebrating my Independence, continued from page 5...

Those of us willing to stay late were treated with a personal showing of "Truth Be Told," by filmmaker Gregorio Smith. About Jim's BBQ, he said, "It was fascinating to meet so many people who, despite an unfortunate kinship, possess genuine warmth, emotional intelligence and social fluency. It's something many people think to be unattainable for folks raised in an isolationist and dogmatic religion. In fact, it's just the opposite of JW propaganda which predicts that those who leave 'the flock' will be angry, rudderless, irredeemable, fire-breathing apostates."



Picnic goers posing for the annual pic, used as the banner for the [exJW Recovery Group](#) on Facebook.

Teens who self-harm

by Amanda Haworth Van Quakebeke

Teenage angst, peer pressure, being bullied, abuse at home - these are all issues teens face every day. Sometimes the anxiety makes teens feel like they're no longer in control of their lives. In recent years, the number of teens that self-harm is on the rise. In the U.S. alone, one in every 200 girls between the ages of 13 and 19 self harm.

Pressure put on Jehovah's Witness teens can range from normal teenage issues, but are compounded with feelings of helplessness of failing to meet the expectations of family and other Witnesses. Many feel they're not worthy to survive the Armageddon scenario promoted regularly within the pages of the Watchtower publications and talks, adding even more and more pressure. They reach a breaking point and try to reach out.

In a recent Awake article on teens who self harm, they are encouraged to "pray to Jehovah," leaving the advice to seek professional help as simply a footnote. (Awake, 8/13). One 19 year old AAWA supporter, Alicia, recently stated "I used to self harm after living with my dad and going to meetings. That's when the pulling of eyelashes and other things started. I cut a few times, too. I didn't pray." Instead, Alicia got help for her self-harming. When she feels the urge to self-harm, she talks to "someone who cares and they talk me through it."

If you're a teen that's under these pressures and need help, AAWA is here to talk to you and provide confidential support. *You are not alone.* Check out the newly released video regarding this topic at: <http://aawa.co/blog/watchtower-and-teenagers/>

Source: <http://www.teenhelp.com/teen-health/cutting-stats-treatment.html>

In a related story, *JW Survey* recently shared a breakdown of the recent Awake article referenced in Amanda Haworth's feature on teen self-harm. You can read Cedars' article here: <http://bit.ly/17eVkf6>.



Advocates for Awareness of Watchtower Abuses