



Cheers to a New Year

by Steph Le Gardener

What an amazing year it's been in the exJW community. We've seen a tremendous flood of people waking up from their Watchtower delusions, as evidenced by all of the growing exJW groups on social media. We continue to have people signing up to volunteer with AAWA to help educate the non-JW world about its harmful policies and practices.

Our team has participated in conferences, written op-ed pieces, shared handouts for people to use in their communities, created informative videos, and shared posts through our new Facebook page.

In an effort to better organize our efforts, a strategic planning committee was created with talented AAWA volunteers in order to come up with creative ideas to get the message out. Along with this, two new advisory board members have been added: Marc Latham and Steph Le Gardener. Both have a passion for their activist work. You can read their profiles at <http://aawa.co/about-aawa/>.

We look forward to the coming year as we partner with volunteers and like-minded groups to educate others about issues within the Watchtower organization related to pedophilia, domestic abuse, stigmatization of education, child abuse, and prohibition of blood transfusions.



As we look at the new year, we are looking for still more volunteers, especially those with particular skill sets. If you are interested in becoming an AAWA volunteer, please sign up at <http://aawa.co/about-aawa/how-you-can-help/>.

Here's our current skills wish list:

- Writers for guest blog posts, editorials, op-ed pieces, YouTube video scripts, newsletter features, and flyers.
- Desktop publishers for handouts and newsletter.
- Social media gurus and power users who use platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, etc.
- YouTubers who can create quality short videos
- Folks who can do quality voiceovers for videos
- Public speakers
- Researchers
- Helpers to contact local media outlets such as newspapers, radio and TV stations, and other news organizations
- Photographers, caricature art or cartooning

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2014
HAPPY NEW YEAR

Blood Donation – For Some, a Leap Forward in Their Recovery

by Isabella Botticelli



The religion of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) creates an unnatural fear of many things; God's displeasure, fear that they cannot live up to required doctrine, fear of the world in general. To the typical JW, facing the blood issue is an additional nightmare none want to confront.

Although it was a "conscience" matter between 1951-60, the Watchtower (WT) powers made accepting blood transfusions in any form a disfellowshipping offense in 1961. In 2006, the WT reaffirmed their stance on blood products, "Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept transfusions of whole blood or the four primary components of blood namely, red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. They also do not donate or store their own blood for transfusion" (Kingdom Ministry Nov 2006 p.3). So, if a JW were to accept blood, even in a life or death emergency, they would, because of the ever changing, draconian rules thought up by the governing body, not only supposedly lose God's love and any respect or status they possessed within the congregation, but critically, all association with family and friends and, in the end, life eternal in paradise. Thousands¹ of JW, men, women and children² have died as a direct result of the WT command to abstain from blood transfusions.

However, in the midst of this irrational insistence against blood products, in 2000, WT slyly amended the rules with two major changes – major shifts that are diametrically opposed to the 2006 mandate. In the June 15, 2000 Watchtower magazine, page 31, it says, "... when it comes to fractions of any of the primary components, each Christian, after careful and prayerful meditation, must conscientiously decide for himself." Later that same year the use of Hemopure, a protein found in red blood cells made from cow's blood, was also apparently rubber-stamped by the WT as an acceptable blood substitute³.

This change had a profound effect on many of JW causing them to ask: what about all the people,

especially the children that died as a result of their earlier mandates? Why insist on refusing the four primary components of blood, but allow fractions of these same components? And why is it a sin to give blood, but now ok to accept these fractions from those who donate? While many didn't even blink at the major implications of the change, other JW saw the clear hypocrisy as WT again tried to weasel their way out of any personal responsibility for deaths which clearly occurred as a direct result of the flawed blood policy – a policy imposed on members in such a way that not to obey it would seem worse than death to many devout, or even just trapped JW. For many, this change contributed to their decision to leave the organization.

During their journey to "normalcy" and deprogramming from a high-control religion, many exJW have weighed the risks and benefits of blood transfusions, and have not only decided to accept blood products if deemed medically necessary, but have resolved to donate blood as a part of their recovery process. Marc and Cora Latham spent decades as JW in the United Kingdom, but observing and experiencing major hypocrisy within the religion, made their exit in 2011. Marc explains the reason that he and Cora wanted to donate blood:

"The decision to give blood was another breakthrough for both Cora and myself. We realized that to give blood was indirectly not only helping the public but also helping JWs get the fractions that they need for their medical treatments. We also wanted to prove a point to the WT that it is blatantly wrong to allow their members to take fractions yet not donate them. Very selfish and non-Christian! Giving blood felt so right, and so good. This was a final barrier we had overcome in our own recovery."

For Marc and Cora, though experiencing the heart-breaking and shattering iron fist of the WT, their decision to give blood stemmed from their "love for the brothers and sisters," their friends and loved ones that are still trapped inside the organization. According to the Red Cross, the number one reason people donate blood is because they want to help others; this is the same sentiment coming from other exJWs as well. Considering that more than 41,000⁴ blood donations are needed daily just in the US, the chances that JW will now benefit from the transfused "fractions" given by many exJW, is a strange sort of karmic equalization, and a way to extend genuine love to family, friends and neighbors.

Making the decision to leave JW is never easy, and not without consequences. Each person's recovery process is different and takes a varying amount of time. Making the decision to donate blood, for some, is a healing step in their journey to a life of new discoveries and reconnections to the real world.

For a more extensive discussion of Watchtower's history of changes in regards to blood transfusions, see, www.jwfacts.com/watchtower/blood-transfusions.php#fn1

¹ <http://www.bmj.com/rapid-response/2011/10/28/risk-blood-transfusion-illegal-breach-confidentiality-addendum-reply-furul>

² Youths Who Have Power Beyond What Is Normal", *Awake!*, May 22, 1994, pages 9-15.

³ <http://watchtower-blood.org/basics/hemopure.shtml>. The original dictum that JW "abstain from blood" comes from Acts 15:19-21, a scripture referencing the use of *animal* blood.

⁴ <http://www.redcrossblood.org/learn-about-blood/blood-facts-and-statistics>

Speaking Out: Brenda Lee

by Jeni Lundblom-Valdez



If you are among the ex-Jehovah Witness (JW) community, you have most likely heard of Brenda Lee. Brenda is a very active member on different forums, as well as a counter-cult educator, and the author of *Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult*. I've recently corresponded with her to learn more.

Brenda's involvement with the JWs starts out at age 9. Before that, she describes her childhood as "pure bliss." That all changed when Brenda's mother was recruited by a Witness. Brenda says, "I never made the choice to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses and always considered myself a hostage from Day 1."

Overnight, Brenda lost precious friends, relatives and holidays. At the Kingdom Hall, she was the only child her age. In addition to feeling isolated, Brenda also suffered bullying from cruel classmates and several teachers. Her mother's response was to parrot the lunacy being taught at the Kingdom Hall. "Persecution is good for you. It shows we're in the right religion." This lack of support led Brenda to start having morbid thoughts, even writing a story about murdering her family.

In 1974, during a secret chat with her aunt, Brenda revealed what was happening and that she didn't want to be a Witness. Her aunt assured her she could leave at age 18. From then on, she made it her goal to get away from the Watchtower. At age 18, she did just that. About her escape she says, "Once I left, I ate garbage to survive for several months before I made my way to Colorado."

On coping with the aftermath, she had this to say, "It takes time to heal and quite frankly, you never completely heal...my ongoing mantra in life is: Acceptance of anything outside your control is liberating.... I let go and created a life for myself, free of guilt." To heal more quickly, she recommends talking with other ex-JWs and educating yourself about mind control and how cults work.

Brenda has become well known for her work delivering counter-cult seminars, appearing on national television, and on radio shows. At age 41, she put ink to paper and her memoir, *Out of the Cocoon: A Young Woman's Courageous Flight from the Grip of a Religious Cult* was published by Robert D. Reed Publishers. Through her work, Brenda has helped to educate the world about the Watchtower and its secrets.

When asked about life today, Brenda said, "The most positive aspect of breaking free comes when you wake up one day and suddenly realize that you not only survived, but thrived. Somehow, you came out of your cult cocoon into this marvelous, but imperfect world and learned to LIVE. Truly live. And what a journey it's been!"

You can learn more about Brenda Lee by visiting her website: www.outofthecocoon.net



A wonderful video with Jason Thickpenny's story was recently discovered with the title, "What Does Christmas Feel Like From the Outside." This video captures how many former Witnesses feel during the holiday season.



[Click here to view.](#)

Should Witnesses Wear Neckties? – A Parody

by Keith Walker

The following essay is an example of how the Watchtower can take anything and twist it to become something evil. A great portion of this piece uses Watchtower phrases, terminology, and even some exact quotes. This ridiculous argument is fiction, but someday it might not be.

* * * * *



Jehovah's people have long been known for their demeanor and wholesome appearance. (1 Samuel 16:9) Clean and dignified personal appearance is a reflection of our worship and often attracts attention which shows respect for Jehovah and for his organization. Our personal appearance should always reflect a reverent, honorable attitude because we are Christians and ministers 24 hours a day.—1 Tim. 2:9, 10.

Today the necktie is considered by many to be an important part of a person's appearance. In many lands the necktie is considered an essential part of business or formal dress. Some have said that for this reason many Christian men should wear neckties when engaging in formal aspects of their ministry. The belief is that a piece of cloth around a man's neck can add dignity and make him look respectable.

While this may appear to have soundness of mind from a worldly perspective, this is never a sensible reason for conscientious ones to follow a course in a world system operated on dishonest principles and selfishness. The wisdom that stems from God is distinctly different from worldly wisdom, which is foolishness from Jehovah's standpoint and also harmful in that it leaves God out of account. How might we appreciate Jehovah's council on such matters? For what scripturally permissible reasons might a Christian wear a necktie?

Neckties were not the custom thousands of years ago, so we cannot expect to find legislation in the Bible. Yet, this does not mean that we have no indication of God's view of such matters. The Christian Greek Scriptures mention the word "neck" six times. Two times it is in reference to a person "falling upon the neck" of a loved one (Luke 15:20, Acts 20:37). The other four times are in the context of something being hung, put around or suspended from the neck (Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2 and Acts 15:10). These four accounts are similar in that they represent the burden of a millstone or the yoke of the old law covenant. Consider also the intimate acquaintance of Jesus,

Judas Iscariot. Apparently the rope on which Judas hanged himself, broke, "and pitching head foremost he noisily burst in his midst and all his intestines were poured out" (Acts 1:18). Is it not reasonable to suggest that the rope broke in a strategic location to resemble the appearance of a necktie? No wonder many men feel uncomfortable wearing one. They dislike the pressure on their throat!

Articles in previous Watchtower publications have rightly noted that wearing of the modern necktie originates with French military uniforms in the late 17th century (See *AWAKE!* 5/8/96 p. 31, Who Invented the Necktie?). Experts on the history of neckties point out that centuries earlier, warriors for the Chinese emperor Cheng (Shih Huang Ti) wore a scarf-like cloth folded around the neck, indicating their rank.

This fine article also remarks that during the French Revolution (1789-99), a man would indicate his political inclination by the color of the "croat," or scarf, around his neck. In the 19th century, elegant European society "discovered" this form of attire. It was then that the cravat was elevated from the military and political arena and entered the wardrobe of the male population at large. Today the necktie is accepted in many societies worldwide; in certain settings, it is even mandatory.

Jehovah's Witnesses show genuine Christian love for their neighbors, but they do not share in the politics or the wars of any nation. Consider this scenario: Imagine a soldier in full uniform comes into the local Kingdom Hall to give a public discourse. How inappropriate! Surely our Bible-trained conscience would be pricked! Would the scenario be any better if the soldier wore only part of his uniform? Absolutely not! Why would we even want to associate with a so-called Christian who wore part of a military uniform?

Give thought not only to your conduct but also to your dress. Ask yourself: "What impression do my clothes give? Is my appearance provocative?" Christians are termed "aliens" and "temporary residents" in the sense that they are no part of this world. (John 15:19; 1 Peter 1:1) They are aliens in that they do not conform to the practices of the world hostile to God (1 Peter 2:11).

Regarding the wearing of neckties, one brother wrote: "As a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses, I have worn a necktie in 90-degree heat while engaging in the door-to-door preaching work. I have often theorized that the necktie must have been invented by some cruel 13th-century inquisitor who in order to wring a confession from a heretic threatened him with either the rack, thumbscrews, being boiled in oil, or wearing a necktie on a summer afternoon." Many brothers have suffered similar hardships.

Yes, by adhering to Jehovah's righteous principles, his people are made to stand out as different from the world. Because these exhibit Jehovah's righteousness, honest-hearted ones are drawn to the Christian congregation. It is natural to be attracted to something clean and pure. For example, a stranger

Continued on following page...

Should Witnesses Wear Neckties, continued from previous page ...

once came to a meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ropesville, Texas, and said that he wanted to become a member of the congregation. He explained that he no longer wanted to give into the peer pressure to wear a necktie. He explained that his grand-father had been hung as a cattle rustler even though he was innocent of the crime.

If your grandfather was executed on false charges, would you make an image of the instrument of execution (say a hangman's noose or an electric chair) and then wear it around your neck as a decoration? That would be unthinkable. So, too, with the adoration of the necktie. The fact that the necktie is of military and political origin only makes the matter worse. Rather than imitate the world, how much better to allow the fine example of spiritually mature men in the Christian congregation to influence your dress and grooming! Young men who hope to be public speakers someday can observe the attire of those who already qualify to give public talks. All can learn from the example set by individuals who have loyally shared for many years in the public ministry.—1 Timothy. 4:12; 1 Peter. 5:2, 3.

Here again, the lover of Jehovah sees in this an opportunity, not to do whatever he pleases, but to do what will make his heavenly Father rejoice. As we have already seen, the fact that Jehovah has not given specific regulations in a matter does not mean that he does not care what his people do.

With a view to your eternal salvation, it is vital that you, too, regardless of the worship that you may have practiced up until now, listen to what the Creator of man says on this matter. Conform your worship to his requirements. Live your life in harmony with his inspired Word. Put your faith in his kingdom. Only in this way will your worship lead to the kingdom of God. As loyal followers of Jehovah's thinking on this matter, we can rejoice in the fact that in the new system, Jehovah God, will reward us eternally for "our work and the love we show" for his "Faithful and Discreet slave." (Hebrews. 6:10-12, Matthew 24:45-47). Surely the results will be happyfying!

Let us be wary of ties and Watchtower reasoning.

Editors note: Keith is a first time contributor to the AAWA newsletter. You may be familiar with his website [Evidence Ministries](#) and his many YouTube videos where he takes JW policies and logic to task, using his keen sense of humor and wit along the way.

AAWA's Financial Status As of December 31, 2013

Total Financial Contributions for 2013 were \$3,775.35

Total Expenditures for 2013 were \$1,005.37

- \$375.00 for Legal Fees
- \$500.00 for July SNAP Conference
- \$130.37 for November Child Friendly Faith Conference

Total Cash on Hand at 12-31-13 is \$2,769.98

**[Looking for Support?](#)
[Visit AAWA's Discussion Forum](#)**



Advocates for Awareness of Watchtower Abuses

We have many talented volunteers and supporters in our community, and we would like to showcase some of their creative work from time to time. This month, we share poignant poetry by Toledo Squad.

To Captive Hearts and Minds

by Toledo Squad

To all my friends of yesterday,
Who view me now as dead,
I think of you when I wake up,
And when I go to bed.
For forty years our captors ruled,
That only friends within,
The prison where they held our hearts,
Were viewed as next of kin.

Where strangers were our brothers true,
The reason? Shared belief,
But now 'the truth' I can't accept,
There's none. Just deathly grief.
For you I've left to chant and pray,
I watch you in that Tower,
Your captive minds have failed to see,
Manipulating power.

For you, I understand escape,
Is not what you desire,
Your place of safety, well from harm,
And everlasting fire.
The food you eat to build your souls,
You take without a doubt,
Sustaining all your faith that you,
Will never go without.

But please, I beg, don't view me as,
A man without good cause,
Don't see me as a renegade,
'gainst your protective laws.
It's not the freedom I desired,
I never felt imprisoned,
But... leave my friends and family there?
It's not what I envisioned.

But now I'm out, I look around,
I see that I was blind,
The jailers of our minds and hearts,
Did not want us to find,
That there was love and good and heart,
Outside the Tower gates,
That educating one's own mind,
Would lead to selfish traits.

If only you would pause for thought,
And ponder on how mad,
That playing with a plastic toy,
Could ever make god sad.
How shunning me and those who can't,
Proclaim that god knows all,
That from the start he let the pain,
Still knowing we would fall.

Why can't you see that this makes you,
Accessory to the crime,
I can't condone a god who cares,
Who says: "It's not my time."
It's evil, wicked, heinous, vile,
To let a baby die,
And worse to know right from the start,
And have your reasons why.

So don't look down from high above,
Your Tower window seat,
And judge me for the stand I take,
Or preach the end I'll meet.
Don't feel for me, don't patronize,
My exit from your cult,
When you won't even test your faith,
To see what might result.

For no one ever should declare,
Their 'truth' is pure and real,
Without first testing from all sides,
Or a making strong appeal,
To reason, logic, balanced thought,
And see if it withstands,
The scrutiny and tough review,
Before we raise our hands.

I know you THINK you've done just that,
I know you THINK you're free,
It only takes a moment's thought,
To see what I can see.
The risk is great to shun your friends,
To cut your family ties,
When evidence for all your trust,
Is all but laboured lies.

If pain you feel at loyal deeds,
Are making you feel sad,
Then fear not questions, fear not doubt,
There's learning to be had.
This leadership must prove itself,
By independent trial,
Resist its hold on human hearts,
Please stop to see it's guile.

And when you understand that I,
Have questions they can't crack,
You'll start to see why I can say,
I'm never going back.
The Tower's tall, the leaders' high,
They rule you as a slave,
Don't let them fool you with their hope,
Unto that lonely grave.

