



AAWA Forum Activity Up

by Lee Marsh



One of the important features of AAWA is to offer information and support to many different groups of people. Initially, we started a secret group on Facebook but quickly realized we needed a different format if we wanted to meet the needs of everyone.

We needed a safe place for people to discuss issues and to get information that was easy to find. As a result, AAWA opened its first discussion forum on July 1. Over the summer we have been slowly moving away from the Facebook group and into the forum, which is on a secure site.

The forum is broadly divided into two sections. The first is an open group that addresses issues such as mind control, the long term effects of living in a cult, disfellowshipping/dissociation and shunning, parenting in the ex-JW world, custody issues, abuse (emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual and domestic violence), blood, and the ban on education, sexuality and sexual orientation. We also have a resource section that includes helpful websites, books and individual files that address the needs of many ex-Witnesses.

The second group is private. It includes some of the above groups but with a particular focus on teens/minor children, Gay/Lesbian/Bi-sexual and Transgender (GLBT), abuse issues that may need to be discussed privately, a

section for active Witnesses who just want to ask questions but are too scared to ask other Witnesses, and active Witnesses who want to leave and need a secure place to discuss their problems and fears about leaving.

At present we have a support team of over 40 people. The support team can refer people from the Facebook groups to the forum and assist people who are there, offering information, directing them to the resource section and offer emotional support to those who need it.

In only 2 months we have had 14,506 views of the forum. So far we have had almost 200 people register on the AAWA website.

To register for the forum you can go to the AAWA web site and scroll down until you see "Login or Register" on the right-hand side. Click and register, log in, and choose the FORUM tab from the top bar. If privacy is an issue for you, feel free to use an alias. We would love to see you there.

When all is said and done, and when life finally draws near its close, it would seem that the one who can say, "At least I stood for something," must feel greater satisfaction than the one who rarely stood for anything.

-- Raymond Franz
Crisis of Conscience

If you would like to check out past issues of the AAWake! newsletter, visit the AAWA web site's [newsletter archive](#).



You can also follow AAWA on Twitter at: @AAWAtweets.

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What is Family

by Jeni Lundblom-Valdez



Most people hear the word "family" and immediately think of people related by blood or marriage. Your parents, your siblings, your children: that's your family. In most instances, this definition fits. However, oftentimes to an ex-Witness, family is anything but a blood relationship.

When I was growing up, I had parents and a sister. Although they are still living, I have had almost no contact with them for nearly 12 years. Due to rigid Watchtower doctrine, I have been shunned by those who, under the usual circumstances, would support me most.

My leaving the Watchtower was a very painful and public experience. All the reasons and events leading to it are better left for another time. Instead, I'd like to acknowledge the unique opportunity this situation has given me--I've been able to build my own surrogate family.

When I left the JWs I didn't have any blood relatives active in my life, but I truly feel I've never been without family. After exiting, I was supported by many different people--most of these were former classmates and coworkers that I'd kept at arm's length. They were viewed as "bad association" simply because they weren't Witnesses. It was these people, (who I'd assumed viewed me as little more than an acquaintance) that offered me places to stay, rides to work and other basics when I first left. More importantly, these same people gave me love. The kind of love a family gives. They didn't care where I'd come from. They were happy to be there for me, expecting nothing in return. They saw something in me worth loving. This love is the greatest gift I've ever received.

In the years that have passed, I've formed relationships with non-Witness family members that I'd grown up not

knowing. I've married and have a beautiful daughter. Through all of it, I've continued to have the support of my volunteer family. On my wedding day, I didn't grieve for the father who wasn't there to walk me down the aisle. I was honored to be escorted by a dear friend who answered the "Who gives this woman" question by replying, "Everyone who loves and cares for her."

Standing there that day, my heart smiled because I knew there were people who really do care for me. I can't help but be thankful for the wonderful people that became a part of my life simply because I chose to follow my heart and leave the Watchtower. This family means more to me than I could ever express, and it continues to grow.

Watchtower Hate Speech Leads To Legal Trouble in Denmark

By Isabella Botticelli



Snakes, contaminated soil, liars, mentally diseased, part of the Antichrist.... These are a few of the words heard at the 2013 Watchtower district conventions.

The frightening hate speech above describes the nature of an "apostate," an example of loaded language used to strike terror into the heart of Jehovah's Witnesses. Peppered throughout the talk entitled, "Beware of Human Apostates," speakers used additional negative labels, and urged their followers to avoid them lest they end up in the dystopian hellscape occupied by apostates. Although the talk outlined three ways to identify a "true apostate," the organization fosters and encourages its followers to include *all* dissenters from their religion as apostates. These include all who have been disfellowshipped (excommunicated) from the religion, even minors (see box on next page).

While Jehovah's Witnesses, in general, are used to hearing their leaders criticize ex-members and people of other religions, with this year's world-wide conventions, the intensity of this hate speech directed towards non-Witnesses is increasing. Unfortunately, there is little to be done about such speech in the United States. Unless directly inciting violence, hateful words are protected by the 1st Amendment. However, some Western European countries, having been victims of horrifying hate

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Legal Trouble in Denmark (continued from page 2)

speech that did incite violence during WWII, have laws to protect citizens against hate speech.

This summer, in the convention cities of Silkeborg and Herlufmagle in Denmark, some ex-members were appalled as they listened to Watchtower leaders describe them as snakes, a deadly virus, and other loathsome analogies. A Danish support group for ex-Jehovah's Witnesses pressed charges against the Watchtower for violating article 266b of the Danish Criminal Code. The Code, in part states,

"(1) Any person who publicly or with the intention of dissemination to a wide circle of people makes a statement or imparts other information threatening, insulting or degrading a group of persons on account of their race, colour, national or ethnic origin, belief or sexual orientation shall be liable to a fine, simple detention or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years."

The head of the Documentation and Advisory Centre on Racial Discrimination, Niels-Erik Hansen, agreed that the Watchtower has exceeded the bounds of Danish free speech laws. As reported in the July 25, 2013, issue of *Kristeligt Dagblad*, Hansen stated, "The speeches are the same type of rhetoric that we heard against the Jews in Europe in the 1930s. This is precisely what the anti-discrimination article was introduced to restrain." Currently, police are reviewing the case; it will likely be several weeks before any action is taken. As a direct result of the complaint filed against Jehovah's Witnesses, the newspaper, *Berlingske Nyhedsbureau*, dated July 30, 2013, reported that several political organizations are now recommending that religious groups be monitored more closely to be sure they are compliant with Danish regulations ("Society is Ready to be Looked [at] on the Cards").

This is not the first time Jehovah's Witnesses have been to court in Denmark. In 2006, the religion was literally blasted out of court for trying to sue the Danish newspaper *Ekstra Bladet* for slander (libel). Three articles revealing the severe pedophile problem within the organization were not appreciated by the Danish Jehovah's Witnesses Branch Office Executive Committee. Watchtower requested over \$62,000 in damages when the paper criticized their child abuse reporting policies, and for revealing over 23,000 cases of child abuse being hidden by the organization's headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. According to *Ekstra Bladet* on December 6, 2006, Watchtower spokesman Erik Jorgensen was forced to admit that they routinely hide pedophiles, while simultaneously expelling member for minor infractions, stating that, "... convicted pedophiles can continue as members of the sect that routinely expels members for far less insignificant matters from both the congregation and their family." Judge Stockholm found all the articles to be newsworthy and an "important public matter as well as a legal criticism of the sect." Watchtower was sentenced to pay almost \$9,000 in legal fees.

Watchtower is brazen in going after others to repress their right of free speech, but it is perfectly acceptable for them to use malevolent hate speech to criticize ex-members, other religious organizations, governments, and the world in general. Let's not forget their own hypocritical words in the June 22, 2000, issue of *Awake!*, aptly entitled "Propaganda Can Be Deadly":

"Some people insult those who disagree with them by questioning character or motives instead of focusing on the facts. Name-calling slaps a negative, easy-to-remember label onto a person, a group, or an idea. The name-caller hopes that the label will stick. If people reject the person or the idea on the basis of the negative label instead of weighing the evidence for themselves, the name-caller's strategy has worked."

Evidently, it does not bother Watchtower to do the opposite of what they preach. This hypocrisy has not gone unnoticed by other organizations. Marci Hamilton, author and Chair in Public Law at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University, had this to say:

"The Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization is rightly credited with establishing important free speech precedent in the United States.... It is extraordinarily ironic, then, that the Jehovah's Witnesses have recently, in Denmark, taken the position that speech, including speech by the press, should be punished and suppressed. It appears that when the topic is alleged clergy abuse within the organization, its position on freedom of speech makes a 180-degree turn. Apparently, the Jehovah's Witnesses support free speech for themselves, but not for their critics."

With the Watchtower cruelly labeling ex-members as "apostates," and blackmailing those inside to crush ties by shunning them, it is becoming easier to unmask the damage they are causing by their escalating hate speech and fear mongering. Whatever the outcome in Denmark, AAWA will continue to take an organized lead against exposing the Watchtower for their dangerous practices that harms millions.

What constitutes a disfellowshipping offence? According to Watchtower's website, jw.org, "a baptized Witness [who] makes a practice of breaking the Bible's moral code and does not repent..." Contrary to the claim, disfellowshipping/shunning (of baptized/non-baptized persons) has been recorded for the following reasons, (but not limited to):

- being a victim of rape
- leaving an abusive mate
- revealing the secret life of church leaders (elders)
- associating with a disfellowshipped family member, including minor children
- merely disagreeing with and/or challenging the religion by asking questions
- being a child raised as a Witness who later chooses not to join their parent's religion (baptized or not)

Laughter is the Best Medicine

by Steph Le Gardener



Many who have left the Watchtower organization behind, leave it with a feeling of guilt, despondency, and anger--understandably so, when an organization holds individuals and families emotionally hostage.

Yet even in those hard times of transitioning out, I have seen many find great relief when they can find the humorous side of JW antics. Take, for example, the commonly held notion that garage sales were rife with demons, and that fifty cent vase you purchased was going to ruin your spirituality. And, if indeed those whacky demons were hanging out in that vase just to torment you, all you had to do was scream the name of Jah at the top of your lungs, and all would be well. Or, you could always attempt to set fire to it. The stories that came from those tactics are the stuff of JW urban legends.

One can't help but get a laugh at the silly ways the Watchtower uses common words (further proof of their loaded language). When most folks hear the word pioneer, they think of someone who is innovative in their field of expertise, or someone who crossed the plains in the 1700's to discover a new territory in the American West. It's certainly never been equated with someone who slaves for a publishing company going from door-to-door 60-90 hours per month. What about that is pioneering?

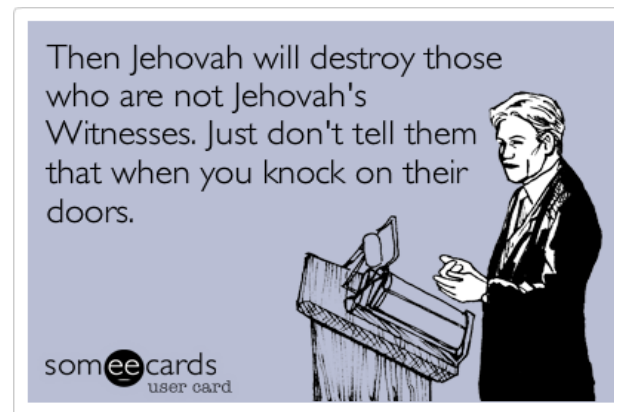
And, then, when we think of the volumes upon volumes of "new light" (which is actually more like "old dark") things really get laughable. How many times can the definition of a generation change? Is it 20 years, 40 years, 100 years, or do they all overlap into one giant timeline that never quite ends?

One of the most-off shared humorous antics is when JWs are afraid to say a word, like "luck," and would replace it with something less (cough) Satanic. For instance, one would never want to go to a pot luck, so it was made into the safe JW version—a pot happy. What? And, never make deviled eggs—they must be angel eggs.

The moral to the story is that laughing at Watchtower-based silliness is a great way to gain a fresh perspective. How can you possibly take serious anyone who thinks that Smurfs can come to life and run screaming down the aisle of a Kingdom Hall?

*Loaded language is when "words are given new meanings -- the outside world does not use the words or phrases in the same way -- it becomes a "group" word or phrase."~Dr. Robert J. Lifton's criteria for thought reform. *Thought Reform: The Psychology of Totalism*.

Meme of the Month



Speaking Out: CS the Apostate

by Jeni Lundblom-Valdez

In the world of ex-Witnesses, there are many who are known for speaking out. One such individual is Phineas Treptow. You may know him better by his YouTube channel handle: CS the Apostate.

Phineas, or Phin as he is more often called, was a born-in Witness whose family moved around a lot when he was young. Finally, during his early teens, they settled in North Carolina. Phin was a gifted reader and was often selected to read the Watchtower during the Sunday meetings. Regarding his teen years he says, "There had always been a part of me that figured I would move out and leave the JW's when I turned 18. I figured I would probably come back, but I wanted to know what was out there."

Then, tragedy struck--Phin's father suffered a heart attack and passed away. After this event, Phin poured himself into the Watchtower's teachings. About this he says, "...when my dad died I desperately clung to the idea that if I just became a really good JW I would see him again."

Phin became a pioneer at age 18. During this time, he started dating a fellow Witness, and within a

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Speaking Out: CS The Apostate (Continued from page 4)

year, the two were married. Soon, unhappiness set in. "I was miserable again, wishing I had left when I was 18 like I had always secretly planned. I felt it was too late. On top of that I was miserable in my marriage." Although Phin has nothing bad to say of his now ex-wife, he adds, "The bottom line is we just were not compatible."

He knew he needed to make a change. For a long time Phin had known there were many teachings that he simply did not support. Much of the doctrine wasn't sitting well with him. When asked for a specific example he said "Watchtower taught Jehovah would destroy babies eternally at Armageddon." He describes feeling "a deep sense of unhappiness and longing for something different." Even with the knowledge that he would be shunned by his friends and family, Phin finally decided to leave.

His journey has been anything but easy, but he is very happy with the decision. When asked what advice he has for others Phin says, "Don't try to do it alone. I didn't really feel whole until I talked about it. Talking to other ex-JWs, knowing that I hadn't been alone in my doubts and misery, was like healing a wound that had been festering for years." He recommends reading *Combating Cult Mind Control* by Steven Hassan and *Crisis of Conscience* by Raymond Franz. He admits that it is extremely hard at first and it will take time to adjust. To combat the loneliness, he adds "Get out and explore the world. There is a lot outside of the Watchtower's little bubble to explore and experience. Make some mistakes... just try not get arrested."

About his decision to start making YouTube videos, Phin admits, "The truth is, for a while, my speaking out was motivated by anger and the need to vent. Eventually, the anger passed. I continued to speak out because I felt it was an issue worth speaking on. And, I had received many messages from people saying that my videos helped. I liked that. It made me feel good. So I kept doing it." Phin has used his channel to tackle a number of Watchtower related topics. With over 1,500 subscribers and more than 485,000 individual views to date, he has made a huge impact on the ex-Witness community. He says he has one more big YouTube project in the works, but after that, he plans to stop. "My focus has transitioned to my three kids and becoming a published author. But as far as I'm concerned, the videos will stay up until YouTube goes bankrupt and the website shuts down. I hope they continue to help people."

Phin is currently in happy relationship with his partner, Jackie. Between the two of them they have three daughters: Isabella 5, Claire 4, and Celeste 8 months. He enjoys working as a CNA at a large hospital, but aspires to a writing career. When asked if leaving the



Phin, Isabella, Jackie, and Claire

Watchtower was truly worth it, Phin says, "For me, being a JW was like slowly suffocating to death. You know you're not getting enough air and you can feel death closing in on you slowly and agonizingly. Leaving was like finally getting fresh air. And with each passing year the air became sweeter."

You can learn more about Phin by visiting his YouTube channel at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/CSTheApostate?feature=watch>

The Clear & Present Danger of Mind-Control Religions

By Richard Kelly

In most civilized countries, laws protect consumers from fraud and unethical business practices. But to date, there are no laws which recognize that *mind control* exists, much less prohibits its use.

Steven Hassan, in his book, *Combating Cult Mind Control*, asserts that it is a person's fantasy of an ideal world which lures them into mind-control religions like Jehovah's Witnesses. The volume of sincere committed members they initially meet is far more attractive and convincing than any of the doctrines.

The recruitment just didn't happen. It is a *process*, Steven says, imposed on people by other people. During the orientation process—for Jehovah's Witnesses a six-month Bible Study—irrational phobias (negative images) are placed in the potential member's unconscious mind—the big one being how harmful it would be to leave the group, that no one can be happy and successful outside of *the truth*.

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Clear and Present Danger (Continued from page 5)

The mind, despite all of its strengths and ability, has weaknesses, too. It is dependent on a stream of coherent information for it to function properly. Put a person into an orientation process where the senses are overloaded with incoherent information and the mind goes numb to protect itself. Confused and overwhelmed, critical faculties don't work well and the mind becomes very suggestible to others.

Everyone, like it or not, is vulnerable to mind control. Everyone is looking for something better in life: more wisdom, more meaning and more security. These basic human needs are what recruiters prey upon. People don't join; they are recruited, and more often than not during a vulnerable time of stress in their lives.

Then, when they become members, life is more about sacrifice and living in a fantasy world created by the group. While that may be a good thing for people who need lots of structure, children raised in mind-control religions typically receive an inferior education and are taught the world is an evil place and forced to rely on Watchtower leaders to understand reality.

Mind-control clichés, or loaded language, like *we alone have the truth* are continually introduced and reinforced, which puts up an invisible wall between believers and outsiders. The language helps to make members feel special and separates them from nonbelievers. And members are told that information which is critical of the group originates from the Devil.

Behavior control, information control, thought control and emotional control, per Steven Hassan, have great power and influence on the human mind.

Together, these control mechanisms form a totalistic web, which can manipulate even the strongest-minded people. And, if this is not enough, members are assigned proselytizing duty as soon as possible, as research in social psychology shows that nothing firms up one's beliefs faster than trying to sell those beliefs to other people. Hassan sums up his case, saying, "Given freedom of choice, people will choose what they believe is best for themselves. However, the critical criteria for determining what is 'best' should be one's own, not someone else's. In a mind-control environment, freedom of choice is the first thing that one loses. The reason is that in a destructive mind-control religion the member is no longer operating as herself. She has a new identity structure which includes new beliefs and language; the church leader's dictates now become the master "map" for her reality.

The activities of mind-control groups like Scientologists, Moonies and Jehovah's Witnesses, if unchecked, will continue to wreak untold psychological and physical damage on millions of people who have no idea of what constitutes unethical mind control. Unless action is taken to make cults accountable to society for their violations of the basic civil rights of their members, they will continue to deceive the general public into believing they are a harmless group of people, doing nothing out of the ordinary at all."

For more information on Steven Hassan, please visit his website: <http://freedomofmind.com/>

AAWA and SNAP Collaboration: Learning from the Real Pioneers

By Don Kennedy Albert



Many of us in the ex-JW community have heard about the recent collaboration between AAWA and SNAP, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (snapnetwork.org). I had the pleasure of speaking with AAWA's own Danmera Dinglebum about her trip to the SNAP conference in Washington D.C. earlier this month. If you haven't seen the video she posted about it, you will want to do so. This is big.

dka: Well, Danmera, it seems that we have gained a new partner in our effort to increase awareness of the Watchtower's policies on child abuse, and a very impressive partner at that. How did all of this come about?

DD: Kathleen Conti was instrumental in setting it up. I got the call from Richard [Kelly], and I was able to go and attend the convention.

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AAWA/SNAP Collaboration (Cont. from page 6)

dka: What did you know about SNAP before you got that call?

DD: Not very much! But I took a look at their website and read what I could. I was a little nervous to realize that I had been invited to participate in the "Leaders' Group," but these were really just regular people who had set up and led local groups of abuse survivors.

dka: Okay, so how large a role did SNAP play in exposing the child abuse scandal in the Catholic Church?

DD: They were responsible for about 90% of it. They were THE reason the movement has been so successful. Twenty-five years ago, SNAP formed as a support group for victims. These regular people took on the Catholic Church ~ the mega of megas. What they have accomplished was almost unthinkable back then.

dka: These guys were pioneers in the true sense of the word. How was the convention?

DD: It was great! There were talks by survivors, many of whom had become support group leaders; some child psychologists were invited to speak; there were discussions about how the group is doing in terms of recent successes and failures, the ongoing work with regard to statute of limitations laws, etc. As an indicator of the success of their efforts to put pressure on the church, they were happy to recount that a Vatican spokesman had mentioned them by name on CNN, saying, "It is not up to SNAP to decide who comes to the conclave and who is chosen." That's the ex-JW equivalent of hearing the Governing Body say publicly that AAWA doesn't get to decide the next Watchtower president. They put that much public pressure on the Catholic Church. It's incredible when you think about it.

dka: What was their reaction to AAWA?

DD: Relief, actually. They were extremely happy to know that we exist, and that we are addressing the issue among Jehovah's Witnesses. They were impressed that we were already international. Everyone was very positive. They want to be helpful in any way they can.



Advocates for Awareness of Watchtower Abuses

dka: So what is this "collaboration" between SNAP and AAWA going to mean?

DD: Mostly comparing notes for now. Sharing information, strategies, etc. And from there we will see!

dka: That's huge, actually. They've been successful at what we're trying to do, and with a bigger Goliath. How did meeting with SNAP affect your confidence in AAWA's mission and our chances of success?


DD: It was VERY encouraging.

dka: Let me say that watching your video post about it was very encouraging, too. Here's a link for anyone who hasn't seen it:

<http://youtu.be/SsxQ2GUEI-s>

Thank you for sharing this with us, and for everything you've done to inspire so many of us to get active in this movement.

DD: Thank you!



OUR READERS ASK ...

We've had several requests about what materials AAWA has available for distribution. Recently a new one-page flyer was published, which describes AAWA's mission, and how others can get involved. It is available in both 8-1/2 x 11 (US) and A4 (European) sizes, and is designed to be printed on a home printer or professionally. This flyer will also be translated into other languages for use globally.

Other flyers related to the five main Watchtower policies addressed by AAWA will be added to the collection soon. Check back often:
<http://aawa.co/publications/flyers-and-handouts/>.

In addition to the publications being developed, YouTube videos are available to be shared through social media channels. These videos can be viewed at [AAWA.co](http://aawa.co) as they are published, or you can subscribe to [AAWA2013](http://aawa2013) to view and share all of them.

Watch for new additions!

If you have a question you'd like AAWAke! to address, please submit it to:
Newsletter@AAWA.co