

AVP CALIFORNIA NEWS

Winter 2020



Announcing the AVP California 2020 Fall Retreat November 6 – 8, 2020

The Steering Committee has chosen a new month and locale for the 2020 AVP/CA Gathering. Why change after so many years in Cambria? To be sure, our love and appreciation for beautiful Camp Ocean Pines in Cambria runs deep. We have so many lovely memories of meetings there. Unfortunately, many facilitators were uncomfortable or unwilling to sleep in primitive cabin bunks, and offsite lodging in Cambria was expensive. Our new site offer comforts and amenities that will hopefully increase the number of facilitators who are able to attend the Gatherings.

The 2020 Gathering will be at the beautiful [Wonder Valley Resort](#) in Sanger, about an hour east of Fresno. The Steering Committee did a test run at the site during a recent retreat and the verdict was “thumbs up.”

Instead of bunks we'll sleep in real beds with pillows, sheets and blankets. Shampoo and soap are provided and both single and dorm style rooms are options.

We look forward to sharing more information with you later in the year. In the meantime, please reserve the



Wonder Valley Resort

dates November 6 - 8 2020 and plan to join us for a memorable, inspiring, and educational Gathering.

I Overcame my Resistance to AVP

By Marvelous Mooney

I was introduced to AVP in September, 2014 at Calipatria State Prison. I never imagined myself participating in a self-help group with a lot of people I don't know. At the time I was very immature with a warped belief system. But I knew I had to make some positive changes in my life if I ever wanted to regain my freedom and become a productive citizen.

I signed up for a Basic workshop. When I walked into the room and saw everyone I thought, “What have I gotten myself into?” I wanted to leave but thought better of it and told myself, “Let me give this workshop a chance.”

When we formed a circle and the facilitators spoke about AVP I realized the group was about sharing and opening up. I didn't think I would be able to do it! But as people started sharing their stories I realized we were all going through a lot of the same stuff. That made it easy for me to share my journey.

After I participated in Concentric Circles, a Light and Lively, and some other Exercises, tension lifted and the awkwardness dissipated. By the end of the day I was in love with the program. I couldn't wait to come back. I met a lot of good people that I keep in contact with to this day.

AVP helped me open up and give back to others what I learned. I followed up with the Advanced class and then completed my Training for Facilitator workshop. Today I'm an AVP Team Coordinator.

The program has helped me realize that we all can change for the better. It also made me look to the future with hope. Through thick and thin the AVP family never gave up on me. Hopefully, this program can help someone else as it has done for me.

AVP California Has a New Mailing Address!!

Mail to AVP/CA should now be addressed to a new P.O. box in Stockton. For the time being mail addressed to the P.O. Box in Santa Barbara will be forwarded to Stockton. But facilitators should now arrange to receive updated AVP cards and revise graduation certificates to show the new address. Certificate templates on the AVP/CA website have been updated. The AVP/CA phone number remains the same.

New Address:
AVP California
PO Box 78033
Stockton, CA, 95267-6765

The Steering Committee bows in deep gratitude to JoAnn Bell for her conscientious handling of AVP/CA mail sent to the Santa Barbara PO Box for so many years. And we are in debt to Tondria George who has now taken up the task in Stockton.

Cards with the new address may be ordered from Numinous Nancy Vimla at distribution@avpcalifornia.org. Nancy suggests that you estimate how many cards you need for Basic workshops through the November 2020 Fall Gathering. She can send those to you now in the mail, and then, at the Gathering, hand deliver more cards to you. If you have questions, please be in touch with Nancy.

Nowhere to Run, Nowhere to Hide

By Happy Howard

My name is Howard James, and I'm currently 54 years old and between jobs. But that doesn't even come close to telling the story. I came to prison after developing a horrible set of coping skills. I spent my time trying to prove to my homeys just how heartless I could be. Before I turned 21 I had managed to earn myself a life-without-the-possibility-of-parole sentence for first-degree murder. I had taken another man's life, ruined my life, and proven what my distorted thinking could accomplish.

It took a while to figure out what I had done. Once I did I had nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and no one else to blame. I had realized it was all me. At that point I wanted to know if what the judge said was true, that I was beyond hope, beyond redemption, past any point of return. That's when I found faith, and shortly after, found AVP.

Prison politics broke me. But AVP gave me tools that allowed me to cope and my faith helped me to believe it would be enough. I worked hard to change and I continued with AVP and became a Team Coordinator.



Thanks to my transformation, after 34 years of in prison, Governor Jerry Brown exercised his authority to grant me a sentence commutation. I don't know how my story would have turned out without AVP. So I say, "thank you" to all the facilitators, on the inside and the outside. This toast is for you.

Help AVP/CA With Food Sales in Prisons

Inmates across the state have been raising money for nonprofit organizations through food sales. It is relatively easy to get AVP/CA on the approved list to receive funds from food sales.

If you are a Prison Coordinator please help support our work by providing your Warden with AVPs tax exempt status as a 503(c)(3) organization and nonprofit tax ID# 20-3299334.



The AVP Steering Committee on Retreat at Wonder Valley Resort



From left to right: Searching Stacy, Radiant Rabia, Luminous Lydia, Take-a-Breath Toby, Tremendous Tondria, Joyful Joyce, Numinous Nancy and Grateful Gauri.

The Steering Committee would love to hear from you.

Send comments and questions to [AVP California Steering Committee](#).

Sad Boy's Prayer

Joyful José

Dear God above so high in the sky
 Please hear my prayer that I pray tonight.
 I sit in this cell and cry out to you
 To please let this sad boy go home soon.
 I know what I do is wrong for me to do,
 Please forgive what I do.
 I pray to you to come in my heart,
 To give me a new life with you to start.
 So as I close this poem with love from me to you
 Please, please, let this sad boy go home soon.

Quality Quan's Prison Memoir Due in May

Quality Quan Huynh is in the process of finishing up his book, *Sparrow in the Razorwire*. The book is written for long and life term prisoners. In it, Quan shares how he found his sense of freedom long before he was paroled from a life sentence. The book will be published by Lioncrest Publishing in May of this year.

Quality Quan started his AVP journey in 2002 when he got his facilitator training at Richard J. Donovan State Prison. However, he did not step up and facilitate for the community until 2010 at Solano State Prison. Thereafter, he became a Team Coordinator, and was paroled in 2015. He helped found the AVP Orange County Council, and was a 2016 Peace Fellow.

An Appreciation

By *Generous Jennifer*

So much of Western valuation has been about indoctrination into conformity and uniformity and yet I find myself repeatedly drawn to the odd, the twisted, and the wild . . . the spotted elephants and birds that swim on the island of "misfit" toys.

In the terrain of those deemed "twisted" and unfit to live in the mainstream culture live the most dimensional, creative and tenaciously courageous souls. These are the beings we get to be alongside in the AVP Program.

Surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire and clothed in bright orange uniformity, the will of the heart finds its way through, reaching across differences, perceived flaws and the various identity labels used to propagate the "other" and to de-humanize.

Sitting in circle alongside one another, these individuals take time to lean in and listen to each other's stories - offering full presence to the elements and forces that



*The twisted tree lives its life, while the straight tree ends up in boards
~ Chinese proverb]*

have twisted their life-trunks and bent their branches. One by one, ring by ring, we witness the scars, neglect, abandonment, violence, shame and pain that exist within the circle. However we also witness the enormity of courage, determination, discernment, creativity, and soul-force that also lives within our internal life rings.

Here in circle our roots extended across differences, seeking the common core that lives within outer appearances. We connect, offer care, support, encourage, and extend our resources to one another. Walls, barbs, and mono-colored uniformity dissolve. What is left is the most powerful, pulsating, force of change . . . the common core . . . the heart . . . the interior soul-force and indomitable spirit.

People often are surprised I volunteer my weekends with incarcerated men and women. I tell them there is no place I'd rather be!



The AVP California Newsletter is edited by [Steve Gelb](#), [Rabia Khawar](#), and [Jason Guinn](#).

We welcome your comments, submissions and suggestions.