

# AVP CALIFORNIA NEWS

Autumn 2020



## An Interview with the Outgoing Newsletter Editor

by Radiant Rabia

**O**ur AVP/CA Newsletter editor, Smiling Steve Gelb, will be stepping down after almost five years of dedicated service and commitment to the Newsletter. Steve was inspired to start a newsletter for California and under his editorial leadership and direction, the newsletter has flourished. We want to acknowledge his initiative and all the effort and work he has put in over the years to create something that has helped the AVP/CA community connect and share our stories. We are facing some challenging times and a sense of connectedness to the AVP CA family is one thing that can help us. Thank you, Steve, for your contributions, your enthusiasm and your ability to just get things done! We wish you the best in all your future endeavors.



We thought our readers may enjoy learning a little more about the Newsletter and the person behind the idea and have an interview with Steve Gelb to share with you all.

**RR:** Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you first became involved with AVP?

**SG:** In 2012 I was involved in Peace Education. AVP Team Coordinator John Stevenson showed up at one event I'd organized and invited me, and others, to an AVP workshop. My community Basic was facilitated by Alan McAfee, Earth Clemons, and Carrol Boone, and was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I was

intrigued. I went on to do an Advanced and T4F as an outside participant at RJ Donovan prison. Since then, as a facilitator, I've been to Calipatria, Centinela, CIM, CIW, Corcoran, Chuckawalla, Donovan, and Wasco prisons.

**RR:** How did the AVP/CA newsletter begin? What are the origins?

**SG:** In my first term on the Steering Committee (2016) I suggested that we start an AVP/CA Newsletter. I'd noticed that other states had them, so why not us? The Steering Committee told me to go for it.

**RR:** How do you think the AVP/CA newsletter serves the community?

**SG:** I hope that in addition to informing people about AVP/CA news it might inspire people to remember and use our AVP tools with ourselves and everyone else in our lives.

**RR:** What have you enjoyed about being the editor?

**SG:** I've enjoyed receiving and editing articles from insiders because these pieces are heartfelt and sincere. I've enjoyed seeing the beautiful way that Peggy of Four Winds Graphics puts the Newsletters together after I send her text and images. When I put together the first Newsletter I tried to do the graphics myself. Luckily Stephen Matchett suggested that we have Peggy do it. That was a good suggestion because my effort was primitive in comparison with hers.

**RR:** What has been a memorable article/story AVP/CA that stood out for you?

**SG:** The articles about the passing of Bob Barns and Stephen Matchett stand out the most for me. Bob and Stephen were incredible people and their deaths affected

*(continued on page 2)*

## Online AVP Basic Workshops

**E**lizabeth Sanchez and Milena Tyler von Wrangel, Los Angeles-based facilitators and researchers at California State Long Beach and Alliant International University, are seeking assistance in recruiting participants for a research study on AVP.

They are organizing three online Basic workshops in December and January that will take in a series of 8 mini-sessions (2.5 hours each). Participants will be asked to complete two questionnaires on measures of social connectedness and emotional intelligence at

the beginning and end of their experience. There will be an optional opportunity to join a focus group interview after the workshop. The workshops are free. For more information go to: [AVP Basic Online Workshops](#)

## Sparrow in the Razor Wire

by Quan Huynh

In our previous (Summer) Newsletter, we published, with permission, the beginning of Quality Quan's remarkable memoir of his journey from being a "lost soul", consumed by hatred and violence, to freedom and redemption within prison walls. Readers will recall his graphic account of the car chase that ended with him murdering a rival gang member. At the conclusion of that section Quan wrote that he felt strange and empty and decided to go to church for the first time in a while. His story continues:

That Sunday, I stepped into Mass and looked up at the crucifix hanging up near the rafters of the church. The organ music was playing and people were singing. I hoped to experience something when Mass started but only felt the same emptiness inside. There is no such thing as God. It was something I suspected more than ten years ago when my father died. Yet, I never had the courage to admit it to myself. The parishioners began to line up to receive communion, and I walked out in disgust. Why would these people pray to a god that did not exist?

They were all pathetic.

Meanwhile, Los Angeles County Sheriff's detectives and Orange County gang detectives discovered that our gang was responsible for the shooting. Several months after the murder, I was taken into custody under a gang sweep, and one of my homeboys turned state's evidence and snitched on me. I was first tried for the death penalty, then the state decided my case would be tried for life without the possibility of parole. My homeboy ended up getting on the stand to testify against me and was the state's only evidence. Everyone else on the case pled the Fifth and refused to cooperate with the police. My attorney and I decided the only way to refute his testimony was for me to get on the stand myself. I lied on the stand and said I was only in the backseat of the car and blamed the snitch for doing the shooting. I was ultimately found guilty of second-degree murder under the felony murder rule. The jury believed I was not the shooter. All other enhancements, including gun charges, were found to be not true. I was pissed because I almost got away with it all. I was sentenced to



Quan Huynh

fifteen years to life.

At the time, a life sentence in the state of California was the same as a death sentence because nobody was ever paroled, whether it was a five-to-life or fifty-to-life sentence. I was sent off to one of the prison reception centers in Delano to do an intake interview with the correctional counselors.

In the reception centers, we were locked in our cells twenty-three hours a day. One hour was for recreational yard and shower. I usually stood at my cell door and looked out over the dayroom

*(continued on page 3)*

### ...continued from Page 1, Interview

many of us deeply. It was a privilege to be able to use words and images to mourn their loss and celebrate their lives.

**RR:** I know that you are active in your local community and working in areas of social justice. Can you share some of the other things you are involved in?

**SG:** I'm a member of the Social Justice Executive team at San Diego's First Unitarian Universalist Church and this year we're focusing on working for racial justice. I volunteer in the food pantry that the church runs in Chula Vista. I'm also on the transportation committee of San Diego 350, an organization working to mitigate the climate crisis. My area of interest is in the promotion of active transportation—bicycles and walking—instead of autos, when possible. We have to change the way we get around and now is a

perfect moment. The urgency of the climate crisis, the pandemic, and the electric bicycle revolution, make this our time for reorganizing our communities around people rather than cars.

**RR:** How have you been keeping your AVP spirit throughout COVID?

**SG:** The best tonic for my spirits is spending time with my two grandchildren, one year old and four years old.

Also, Quality Quan's amazing book helped me remember the deep humility and radical honesty that is the foundation of our AVP work. Quan first taught me that through his example as Team Coordinator in a community T4F that I participated in as a facilitator. It's an essential lesson that I need to come back to over and over.

...continued from Page 2, Sparrow...

to observe what was going on because of boredom, doing sets of push-ups in between. Men would be called out for ducats, prison lingo for passes, to go see medical staff or meet their counselors for intake interviews. Typically, intake interviews with counselors were done in closed offices. For some reason, my correctional counselor decided to do our intake interview in the dayroom with other prisoners watching. She smelled of stale cigarettes, looked disinterested in her work, and repeatedly pronounced my last name wrong after I had corrected her several times. She was going through my case factors to determine what prison I would be housed at and my security level.

In the California prisons, the higher the points, the higher the security level. My probation report stated I was a gang member, and the counselor asked me to sign a document admitting to it. Admitting to being a gang member would give me additional points. Of course, I refused, and she became upset. She then proceeded to add points to my case factors because she said she had no record of a high school diploma or employment in my file. It did not make sense because the same probation report stated I was in college and had a job. It was obvious she was picking and choosing what she wanted from the probation report to give me as many points as possible. She then tried to slide the gang documentation paper to me again.

I looked at her and said, "Let me ask you something. You keep referencing my probation report to give me points for being a gang member, and if you are going to use that, then you should also give me credit for employment and a high school diploma. I shouldn't be penalized for not having that when it clearly states in my probation report I was working and in college

at the time."

She rolled her eyes and looked right past me. This infuriated me further. I lost it and said, "Are you sure that you even got a high school diploma yourself when you applied for this job?" The other prisoners in the dayroom started giggling, and the counselor glared at me and closed the file folder. "We're done here," she stated and shuffled out of the dayroom.

Within a few days, I received notice that I was going to Pelican Bay, a notorious prison home to the most violent and high-profile gang members. For me at the time, getting sent to the Bay, as it was known, was another badge of honor. The other prisoners in reception told me I was sent there because I had told off the correctional counselor during the intake interview. I did not care.

Pelican Bay is situated on the northern tip of California, several miles from the Oregon border. The bus ride took over two days, as we had to lay over at a couple of prisons to drop off and pick up other prisoners. Each of us were in waist and leg shackles. We were instructed to not talk, but of course, since we all had life sentences, the men did not care. One man in particular refused to listen to the correctional officers after repeated warnings, until they stopped the bus, dragged him out, and beat him with their batons. It angered me that they were in positions of authority, yet inflicted violence on helpless individuals. I justified that at least the people I harmed could fight back. These correctional officers were cowards in my eyes.

After that, the whole bus ride was completely silent. We drove through the most beautiful redwood forests and along the edge of the California coast. On the second night, we pulled up to the Bay, and

there was a sergeant waiting for us with several other correctional officers standing around. They ordered us off and lined us up in front of the bus. He looked at us and then said, "On behalf of my family, I want to thank each and every one of you. I don't care what you did; I only care that you are here now." He smiled and continued looking at each of us. "You will all be here for the rest of your lives, and you have provided a way for me and my men here to take care of our families. For that, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart." I was hungry and tired, but this insult upset me further. I wished I could shoot him in the face. They all snickered and shuffled us into the prison for intake. None of us said anything, and we became the newest prisoners at Pelican Bay.

The prison was on a modified lockdown, as some of the prisoners had plotted an attack on the correctional officers, and we only came out of our cells to go eat in the chow hall. Inside the chow hall, there was an officer right above us holding a Mini-14 rifle on a catwalk. A large sign on the wall read, "No Warning Shots." Each time I went to eat, I shoveled food into my mouth while continuing to look all around me. If a fight broke out, I wanted to be able to protect myself from both the assailant and the officer up above who would be shooting down at us. I hated the chow hall; the food was overcooked and I felt defenseless. But hunger, and a fear of what other people would think of me if I did not show up, drove me to go each day.

Early one morning, less than a year later, I turned on the TV in my cell to watch the news and saw a building on fire at the World Trade Center in New York City. My cellmate was still sleeping, and nobody on the

*(continued on page 4)*

## Fall Gathering is around the corner...

There is still time to register for the AVP CA Fall Gathering on November Saturday 7th & Sunday 8th. This is an event for AVP CA Facilitators and we will be gathering virtually via on Zoom. There will be council updates, breakout sessions, Light & Liveliess, and an online auction (with a partial live element) to help raise funds for AVP CA .

Please sign up ahead of time using [this link](#). All registered participants will receive a zoom link to attend the virtual CA Fall Gathering for Saturday and Sunday.

Share this with your fellow facilitators, and especially returned citizen facilitators, who might not receive this message!

## Support AVP In Fund Raising- Invite family and friends

As our Gathering is online this year, we decided to try an auction where we are inviting everyone to bid for items online. All of the Auction items are donated by volunteers and friends at no cost so all funds collected will go directly to our programming.

This is our first time trying something like this and we hope that with your help, it will be successful. You can view and bid for items at the link below:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ijf9wW\\_r2aOe0t6sTq1pRzrb9ZA8Mkt9QREbBnnTEyJw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ijf9wW_r2aOe0t6sTq1pRzrb9ZA8Mkt9QREbBnnTEyJw/edit?usp=sharing)

We would encourage you to share the link with your family and friends.

Starting now until November 7th, the auction will be online and you will be able to make bids and raise bids at the minimum levels noted on each item. On the 7th we will have a live zoom auction and you are welcome to join us ... to secure your bid and watch the fun. Not all items will be further auctioned here

but some will. You do not have to attend the zoom call... but between 6pm and 7pm you will want to watch your bid sheet to see if you continue to have the highest bid.

[Click for the Auction Zoom Link](#)

**Password is: AUCTION**

All bids will end at 7pm and you will be notified and given a link to pay for that item. Final payments will be made via Pay Pal on AVP California website or by mailing a check to: PO Box 78033 Stockton CA 95267-1333 Once the item is paid for we will work on getting the item sent to you or give additional information to obtain your item.

If you have any questions ... feel free to email Rabia at [rabia\\_cali@yahoo.com](mailto:rabia_cali@yahoo.com) or Toby Laverty at [tlaverty@gmail.com](mailto:tlaverty@gmail.com) . You can also text 510-866-1224 between 6pm and 7pm.

...continued from Page 3, Sparrow...

news knew what was going on. As I watched, I saw a second plane crash into the other tower, followed by a large explosion.

We were in a place that seemed eternally frozen in time, yet the actions of the 9/11 terrorists affected even the prisoners of Pelican Bay. The prison locked us all down for what they called safety and security reasons. The usual banter among the prisoners behind their locked cell doors was unusually quiet, and as I lay in bed, restless and bored, I realized this is what my life might be like until the day I died.

Quan is donating copies of his books to prisons. To learn more about his journey and purchase a copy of the book see his website:

[https://quanxhuynh.com/?\\_ke=eyJrbF9lbWFpbCI6ICJrb25zaGluLmdlbgJAZ21haWwuY29tliwglmtsX2NvbXBhbnlfaWQiOiAiVFZWVdRln0%3D](https://quanxhuynh.com/?_ke=eyJrbF9lbWFpbCI6ICJrb25zaGluLmdlbgJAZ21haWwuY29tliwglmtsX2NvbXBhbnlfaWQiOiAiVFZWVdRln0%3D)



## Stay Connected with AVP California

Hello AVP'ers! One of the most important things you can do help AVP/CA stay strong is to help us keep in touch with the AVP family out there - especially as we develop and strengthen online workshops (which really do work, and are needed), and have fewer opportunities to meet in person and connect with returning citizens. We need your help in two ways:

1. Go to the website ([avpcalifornia.org](http://avpcalifornia.org)) and sign up for our communications via the link on the right side of the page. This will ensure that you receive all of our messages.

2. If have access to the QEWR database, please information about facilitators and supporters in your Council. This is especially important for folks who

have come home from prison. In QEWR you can add an email address, change status status from inside to outside, and note Council affiliation.

3. If you are organizing an online workshop and are looking for participants (or would like to participate) remember to use the AVP/CA Facebook page and the AVP/CA website.

Keeping records current helps us create more opportunities to facilitate, participate in workshops, support AVP/CA, and just stay connected - and connection is a great thing these days.

Please contact us at [info@avpcalifornia.org](mailto:info@avpcalifornia.org) if you have any questions.

## AVP California Needs Your Help

*by Radiant Rabia*

We invite budding writers or anyone with editorial experience or interest to join in the production of the quarterly AVP/CA Newsletter. It's a rewarding opportunity to be involved in building our AVP/CA community. If you'd like to join, or simply have questions, please be in touch with me at: [rabia\\_cali@yahoo.com](mailto:rabia_cali@yahoo.com)



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

We welcome your submissions and comments.