

AVP CALIFORNIA NEWS

Spring 2019



AVP IN MY LIFE

By Joyful Jacob Mata

On October 13, 1996, I committed the horrific crime of attempted murder on another human being. I was 18 years old and never thought of the consequences of my actions. The judge sentenced me to 15 years to life, plus 6 years. I was too immature and selfish to comprehend the magnitude of my actions and my ignorance kept me spiraling out of control in a lifestyle of addiction to criminality, drugs, and gangs.

In prison, I continued the same pattern of behavior with no thought of anything or anyone. This changed in 2011 when I got back-to-back 115 write-ups for a dirty drug test and fighting. Who would have thought that would be my introduction to friends named Jason Guinn, David Amaya, and Bobby Garcia who invited me to a Basic AVP workshop and to another group called CGA!

That was the beginning of my transformation from who I used to be to who I am now. The community I was introduced to was amazing. I learned tools of effective communication, conflict resolution, transforming powers, and empathy. I truly began to have remorse for what I did. I was able to work on my relationship with God, and rebuild relationships with my family. AVP gave me the tools to heal and refocus my life and to realize the impact I had on others. This began my journey of "positive grind", my truth, and the desire to be free, to get out and to stay out.

I'll tell you, there are so many people in prison that will tell you "you're never going home, it's

impossible." Whatever you do, don't believe that, it's a lie. No matter which prison or Yard you are in, the decision is yours to be your own man or woman, or continue to be ignorant.

I walked into my first AVP workshop a boy, a coward, angry, selfish and not knowing who I was. Think

who were all serving life and now we are all out and free, with a few more to come like my friend David Morales.

I've got to be part of something bigger than me and watch it grow and impact other men in a positive way. When wives, moms, dads and others in the family see the



about that for a moment, "Who are you?" Are you hiding behind a mask/moniker? Are you portraying someone you really are not? In the past, that was *me*. Go to AVP and begin the journey of self-discovery. Allow yourself to heal so that your victims will see you grow and mature and our community inside and outside of prison can be safer.

I'm free now, out of prison. I was paroled January 29th, 2018 by the grace of God. After 21 years, my life still continues through my living amends. I've got real live friends

transformation during a visit, then at home it's priceless. God is good and good is within all of us. Even on 4 Yard, the Hole, the SHU, or wherever you are.

The Freedom within you will allow you to mature and gain insight beyond simple prison language. This is about building a better community within prison and outside of prison. To everyone I know in AVP, thank you to all of you. Namaste, love to you all.

2019 National Gathering in Oakland

by *Take-A-Breath Toby Laverty*

It is exciting for AVP California to host the National Gathering for the third time. It is an honor for me to lead a great team of organizers for the event. I am especially happy to work again with Alice Waco from Santa Rosa. We were co-coordinators for the 2011 National Gathering in Belmont, CA. Alice was a facilitator in one of my first workshops in 1998 when I was incarcerated at San Quentin and we have become family ever since. Other impressive organizers this year include Rabia Khawar, Orange County; Tondria Hall, Stockton; Nancy Vimla, San Luis Obispo; and Nathan Kleban, San Jose. I live near our host city in Alameda. I deeply appreciate this group and the dozen other people who will be welcoming travelers to Oakland over the Memorial Day weekend in May.

The theme for this year's gathering is: "Embracing Each Other: Transformation into Wholeness". Nathan wrote a great article on this theme which appears in this issue of the *AVP CA Newsletter*. We have two amazing guest speakers: Paul Chappell is an advocate for a peaceful revolution! As a West Point graduate, Iraq War veteran, and former army Captain, Chappell argues that people need to be as well trained to wage peace as soldiers are to wage war. Chappell is the Peace Literacy Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the author of six books, most recently *Soldiers of Peace*. Lecturing across the country and internationally, he also teaches college courses and workshops on peace literacy and leadership and leads a peace literacy curriculum development team for K-12 and higher education. He looks forward to being with us as much as we look forward to his wisdom and experience in this vital field.

The second speaker is a man I became friends with while we were both incarcerated in San Quentin State Prison in the 90's. The darkness of the environment was brightened when Watani Stiner entered the space. His welcoming spirit helped people feel comfortable and appreciated. He was a true political prisoner in

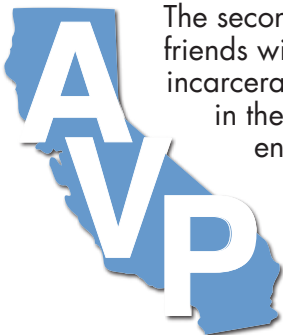
our mass incarceration system and has a remarkable story. Watani went to prison in 1969 after two Black Panthers were shot and killed at UCLA by a member of another revolutionary Black Power group of which Watani was a part. Watani and his brother were sentenced to life in prison although neither of them had taken part in the killings. Five years later, he escaped from San Quentin and fled to South America, where he lived in exile for twenty years and raised a family. In 1994, concerned for the safety and welfare of his children, Watani walked into the U.S. Embassy in Surinam and negotiated his surrender. In 1998 Watani took his first AVP workshop at San Quentin. After 21 more years behind bars, he was finally released in 2015. He advocates for restorative justice and



Jack London Square in Oakland

shares his story of reconciliation. In spoken word and poetry Watani and his son address the effects of mass incarceration on families.

Please be our guest at this great Gathering. Come with an open heart and learning spirit and our local community will welcome you in the same manner. If you are one of our "inside" facilitators - we welcome you in spirit and hope that you will feel the positive energy that we send you. You really are the backbone of AVP. AVP wouldn't exist if it weren't for the thousands of facilitators who are wearing blue. For information and registration, please go to: [AVP USA 2019 Oakland Conference](http://AVPUSA.org)



Why Did I Join the AVP CA Steering Committee?

by Lively Lydia McCloskey

Good question!

I am an older soul. I have worked since I was 13 years old. I have studied many topics, held many unrelated jobs and had at least four dissimilar careers. I am a mother, a grandmother, a great-great aunt, and a widow. I have earned the right to rest and do what I want. One of the things that I want to do is serve as a facilitator in AVP. It had not occurred to me to want to serve on the AVPCA Steering Committee.

Why did I say "yes"? AVP has given me a lot. I have improved my communication and increased my patience. I have learned life lessons from incarcerated men and women and have deepened my gratitude and the scope of my understanding. I have put aside judgments and opinions and opened my mind and heart. I have worked on facilitation teams with caring, thoughtful people. I have made new friends.

I have been around long enough to know that good organizations don't just happen. Behind the scenes are people doing basic tasks essential to survival and growth. Some plan annual gatherings, some work with prison coordinators and CDCR; some take care of fundraising and the accounts; some coordinate communications and recordkeeping; some design and offer training. All have to be problem solvers, idea generators, generous team participants, and consider future ideas, dreams, and improvements. Rather than grimace and say, "it's my turn in the barrel," I have learned to understand that I am fortunate to serve in a dynamic community with loving people.

The structure of the Steering Committee is task oriented, and we say we are not a hierarchical organization

but a starfish organization. I can attest that we are not hierarchical, but we have a long way to go to reach our starfish arms out to include you in areas where you would like to contribute. Would you like to generate more facilitators, younger facilitators, retired facilitators, or serve unique needs?

How can we better incorporate returning citizens? How can we build a stronger and larger organization with the strengths of ethnic and age diversity? How can we enter the communities in which we live in new, more effective ways? Would you like to improve databases? Do you have creative ideas about communication? Who is telling our story to a wider audience? Would you like to bring AVP into community organizations? Offer shorter, non-certificated workshops? Expansion is possible and change is essential, yet it can only happen through a collaborative group process. We welcome you to share your ideas and work beside us on projects. Together we can look at our accomplishments with pride and look forward with ingenuity.

The Steering Committee's challenges parallel those we each face in our own lives: How do we focus on and accomplish the everyday tasks? How do we identify and solve problems that arise? How do we plan for future health? That's why I joined the steering committee!

[Editor: Communicate with the AVP California Steering Committee by sending a message to [Steering Committee](#).]



An Interpretation of “Embracing Each Other: Transformation into Wholeness” as Power and Human Wholeness

by Nova Nathan Kleban

The planning committee for the upcoming Oakland National Gathering brainstormed about a theme for the Gathering. Some wanted to address power dynamics in AVP—such as tension between younger and elder AVPers, between those who have been incarcerated and those who have not—in an affirming, bridge-building manner. We also discussed the influence that age, race, class, and gender have in AVP. In the end we asked, “What kind of transformation will allow us to see one another as whole, valuable human beings and less through the lens of differences?”

What does seeing one another fully look like? In AVP workshops, as in other encounters, even intimate relationships, we sometimes only show up with our bodies. Our minds may be elsewhere thinking of something else. At other times our minds may be present and our hearts constricted. Then we may be restrained, feel disconnected, and have difficulty in sharing ourselves authentically. Politeness, or caution borne of fear, pushes away empathy. What leads to such disengagement? When we hide parts of ourselves we can’t be fully present.

And yet there are moments when we experience a great sense of aliveness. Our bodies, minds, and hearts are fully engaged. We may receive difficult feedback in a workshop and yet know that we are held and loved. We may share challenging observations and trust that others will assume the best in us. That experience of community based on honesty, respect, and

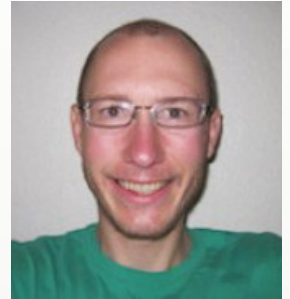
caring is what keeps me coming back. When people thank me for “giving up my time” to facilitate a workshop, I know it is only a sacrifice in the sense that the time is made sacred for me.

I see aliveness awaken in new facilitators when they step into new roles. At such moments, I see aspects of them that I hadn’t seen before and gifts that hadn’t yet emerged. Is the increase in power and responsibility a factor in helping a person’s gifts blossom? Are there other paths that could support this transition? How much more could we develop our skills and talents if we are trusted and given appropriate support to take on meaningful new responsibilities?

People appreciate the lack of hierarchy in AVP and its collaborative decision-making process. While this is worth celebrating, it’s important to acknowledge the informal ways that power shows up in AVP. We see power dynamics and hierarchy in who speaks and who is silent, who stays with AVP and who leaves, who has the time and means to regularly leave home to facilitate prison workshops and who doesn’t. The gifts we have to offer and the degree to which we are affected by decisions should influence how we negotiate around and share power. We all have differences and that is to be celebrated. The way to work with differences effectively is not to hide them, but to bring them into the light.

When we join an organization the message we often receive is to “get with the program.” What might it

be like if, in AVP, we are asked what our gifts are and what support we need to fully share them? While we do this to some degree, we can and should explore additional ways to realize this for every person.



Nathan Kleban

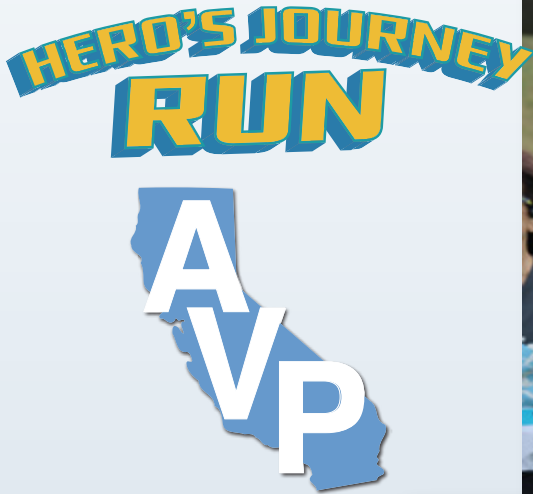
I have mostly asked questions to invite us to dig deeper together. We aspire towards a way of being together as a family, a community, an organization, a country, and a world that does not exist yet. The questions we ask aim to call a better world into being. I hope that the theme of the Oakland Gathering will be more than words. Rather, it is an invitation to authentic dialogue on how we are called to change and transform, to fully meet that which is in front of us—to see one another as whole human beings.

The AVP California Newsletter appears four times a year and is edited by [Steve Gelb](#), [Rabia Khawar](#), and [Jason Guinn](#). We welcome your comments, submissions and suggestions.



Second Annual Hero's Journey 5K Benefit for AVP California A Huge Success

The race begins



Batman showed up and participated.



Finishers celebrate. Race organizer Elizabeth Sanchez is third from the left.