

About Being Here



Introduction

By Roger C.

life-j is the author of a book published 12 days ago on Amazon, *About Being Here*.

And he is my friend. We have known each other since early in 2013. A few months later, on June 30, his first article was published on AA Agnostica, [My Path in AA](#). And in the years since then another 16 of his articles have been posted on the website, the last being on May 19 of this year, [Higher Powers](#).

Even though he lives in Northern California and I live in south-western Ontario, we have had the opportunity to spend some personal time together at several events:

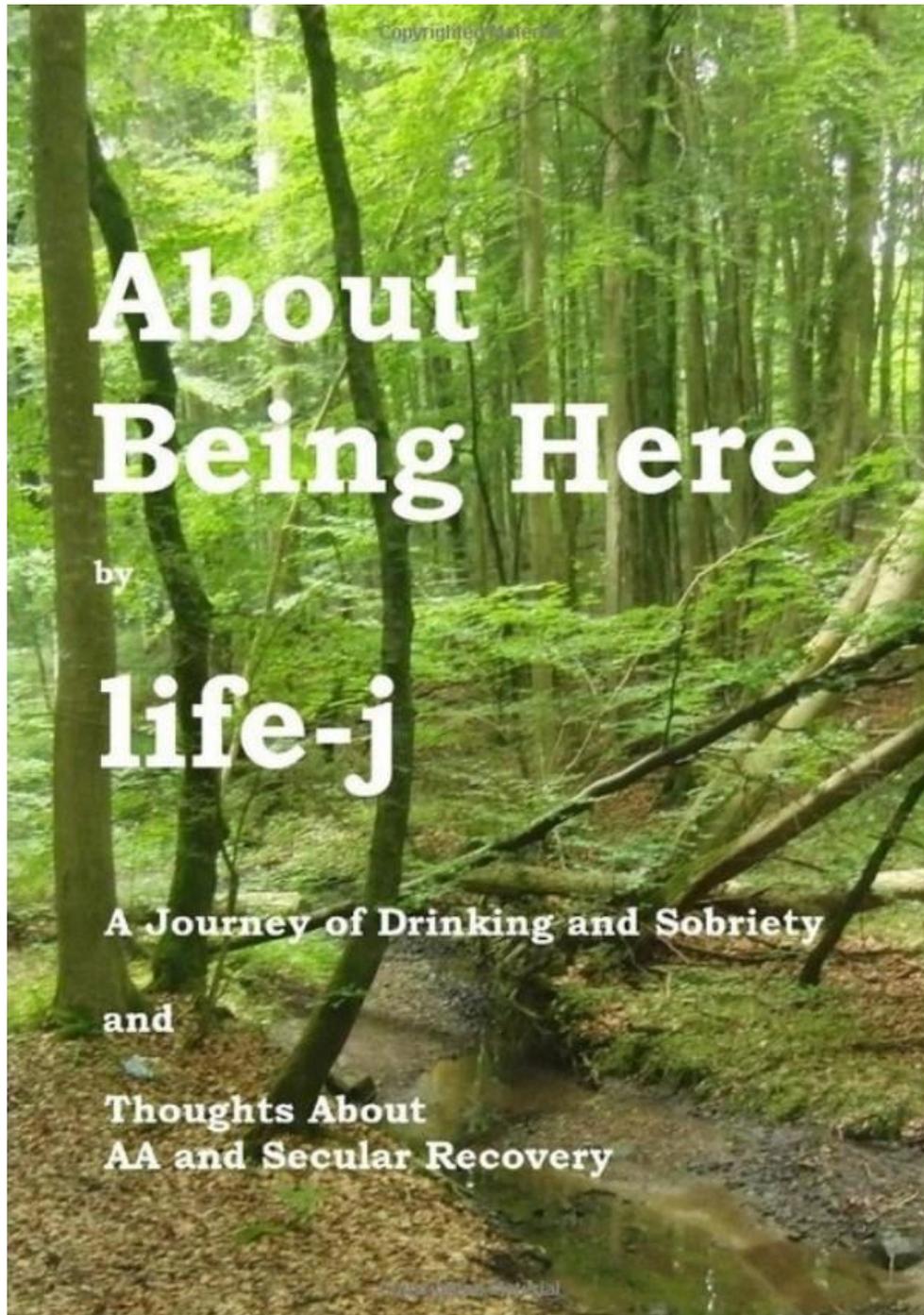
- The secular AA conference, “Widening the Gateway” in Olympia, WA, in January 2016.
- The International Convention in Austin, TX, later that year in November. At my request, life-j wrote an article about it, [The Secular AA 2016 Austin Convention](#).
- The “Live and Let Live” SOAAR gathering in Toronto, ON, in September 2017.
- And, finally, the International Conference of Secular AA (ICSAA), also in Toronto, in August 2018.

Do these events have anything in common? Well yeah! They are all AA. And, in particular, they are secular AA.

Since I have known him, life-j’s goals have been to encourage traditional AA to become inclusive and to support the growth of secular AA. To that end he has also written an article for the AA Grapevine and posted eight articles and shared two podcasts on [AA Beyond Belief](#). And why? Well, it’s all about connection, folks. Connection with others in recovery is crucial for those of us who share that goal. That’s the essential - the “fellowship - part of AA. And while it is not quite impossible, it is nevertheless very difficult for an agnostic or atheist to make these connections in traditional AA.

Alright, let me conclude. My connection with life-j has always been precious. Sure, we have disagreed from time to time. What human beings don't? But we obviously connected in 2013 and to this day I consider life-j a unique and special friend.

And I am honored today to share his book with you...



To access the book on Amazon, click here: <https://amzn.to/2LNaUsG>

Review

By Dr Ray Baker

When I was asked to review life-j's, *About Being Here*, my plan was to read a chapter, skim the rest and fire off a quick review. But he hooked and reeled me in, compelling me to read every word.

Thirty-one years sober in Alcoholics Anonymous, a lifelong atheist, someone who identifies with the "downtrodden", a survivor of childhood abuse, life-j is eminently qualified to write this book.

Approaching his imminent death from metastatic liver cancer he has no empires to build or scores to settle. Instead, he comes across as someone finally comfortable with himself, filled with gratitude for the program that saved and enriched his life but with grave concerns about changes within AA. First noted by AA's founder 60 years ago, life-j describes the growing ossification, dogmatic religiosity and intolerance towards diversity he is seeing amongst the "big book thumpers". This is a cry from within the program directed at members and governance – oops, I meant "trusted servants" – and a call to action. This book is a must read for anyone genuinely interested in identifying the therapeutically effective components of the Alcoholics Anonymous program (connecting with supportive people, getting abstinent, helping others, doing some work on self), what is not entirely essential (endorsement of a (Christian) deity, unquestioning literal interpretation of a 1939 text written by an untreated alcoholic at 3 years abstinence, insistence upon a single recovery pathway).

The most important message in this wise and thoughtful but bluntly written work is its dire warning to the fellowship. AA's rapid growth from 1935 to 1990 was unprecedented but then it slowed and stopped. This stagnation coincides with AA's internal retrograde cultural changes. Just when western culture is becoming more secular and more tolerant to diversity AA is becoming more rigid, intolerant and dogmatic. As an active member of AA's most rapidly growing subculture, Secular AA (atheist, agnostic, freethinkers), life-j is offering more than complaint and criticism. He makes solid and achievable recommendations for change before it's too late. The alternative, although not yet irreversible, is already evident: this once remarkably successful recovery phenomenon will continue its slide downwards into insignificant irrelevance.

Dr. Ray Baker MD, FCFP, FASAM, ABAM
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Review

By Joe C

One Merriam-Webster definition of "sober" is "showing no excessive or extreme qualities of fancy, emotion, or prejudice".

About Being Here is "sober". In the same way skepticism isn't cynicism, the critical eye of life-j's essays about AA isn't disloyalty. Life's commentary about AA is an inventory that, if good for the alcoholic, is good for the fellowship of alcoholics. From logical fallacies in *Alcoholics Anonymous* to the history and impact of fundamentalism within AA, life-j speaks with the same devotion and appreciation of AA as the "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," tribe.

I have learned a lot about living and living well from AA friends, like life-j. I'm getting to an age whereby I'm learning about death and dying well, from AA members, too. Some run or hide in magical thinking; life-j faces fate with candor and, to borrow from Merriam-Webster, again, "showing no excessive or extreme qualities of fancy, emotion or prejudice". *About Being Here* is a memoir and more. This is life-j's legacy but it's also dutifully researched and tempered commentary, in the hopes of looking to a better, health future, instead of gazing into the rear-view mirror on the *road of life*.

What comes through every page of *About Being Here* is life's gratitude for being here. The wealth of experience, strength and hope is his gift to us afforded by his being here. This book is a treasure chest of love and service.

Joe C is author of *Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life* and host of *Rebellion Dogs Radio*.

About the Author

life-j was born in Denmark in 1951. He lost any faith in religion which he may have had around the age of eight. He moved to Berkeley at 26, and settled in Oakland for much of his working life and his worst drinking years. He got sober there in 1988. He moved to a small coastal mountain valley village in Northern California in 2002 and helped wake up the sleepy AA fellowship there. He's been involved in service work of every kind all along, but now thinks the most important work is to help atheists, agnostics and freethinkers feel safe and welcome in AA, and hopefully do a small part in helping AA change with the times and remain alive and well in the 21st century.

He's spent part of his life as a building contractor, part as a technical translator, and has dabbled a bit in art work and writing. Now mostly retired he lives with his sweetie, dogs, chickens and gardens on a small homestead. He has a daughter of 23 who lives in Italy, and who has never had to see him drink. He has cancer and is not expected to live a whole lot longer, but who knows, you may be stuck with this troublemaker for a little while yet.

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