

Beyond Belief Agnostics and Freethinkers



*Fifty Chosen Articles:
Number Thirty-Five.
Originally posted in March 2017.*

In January of 2017 secular AA groups booted out by the Greater Toronto Area Intergroup were invited back in by the Intergroup.

*This candid history of one of the booted out groups, written by one of its founders, Joe C, was published in the very next Intergroup Newsletter, **Better Times**.*

By Joe C

Thursday, September 24th, 2009 at 6:30 PM, the first meeting of Beyond Belief Agnostics and Freethinkers Group took place at the University of Toronto. There are now 14 GTA meetings “without a prayer”. I’m a regular around the AA History Lovers clan and periodically, I write and speak about our collective history. Eddy G from Toronto archives was excited to show me a late 1990s meeting list with a We Agnostics Group on Danforth, in District 22. So, if any East-enders remember We Agnostics, I’d love to hear from you.

At the turn of the century, I found an active group of AA atheists / agnostics form around the world, online. I found an international website of agnostic / atheists AA groups that included New York City. “Great,” I decided, “Next New York trip, I’m going.” I told some of my homegroup

friends. I got to a couple of New York agnostic groups and I couldn't wait to help start a Toronto group with my fellow AAs.

Many agnostic groups had web pages with meeting scripts and readings. Living Sober is a popular reading. We adopted this popular opening:

AA agnostic meetings endeavour to maintain a tradition of free expression, and conduct a meeting where alcoholics feel free to express any doubts or disbelief they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their search for it, or their rejection of it. In keeping with AA tradition, we do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to ensure suffering alcoholics that they can find sobriety in AA without having to accept anyone else's beliefs, or having to deny their own.

There was no praying; some groups recited the Responsibility Declaration or "Live and Let Live" and some just close with "Our next meeting is ___ ; who's going for coffee?"

A lot of the early Toronto members came from Midtown, Stepping Stones and other groups in the Annex. Alcoholics from Ajax to Mississauga joined us. A lot of long-timers talk about AA recovery, not fitting their beliefs into G.O.D. acronyms or start every share with, "I don't mean to offend anyone but..."

There are those newcomers who tried faking it and repeatedly not made it but have now found sobriety in our gathering of mostly nonbelievers. Some AAs never have the experience of a prayer-answering, sobriety-granting higher power. At Beyond Belief, we just share from our heart, unabashedly.

There are 400 secular AA meetings around the world. From 2009 to 2017, we went from zero to over 24 Canadian meetings for atheists / agnostics.

The International Conference of Secular AA is coming to downtown Toronto, in 2018. Many of us are busy with our first local gathering called SOAAR (Secular Ontario AA Roundup) September 16, 2017.

AA History isn't something that happened "way back when". AA evolves before our eyes. It's an exciting time to be sober in Toronto AA.

Joe C was one of the founders of the Toronto group and meeting, Beyond Belief Agnostic and Freethinkers Group, Canada's longest running secular AA meeting. He is also the creator and manager of a secular AA website, [Rebellion Dogs Publishing](#).

Joe is the author the ever-popular book [Beyond Belief: Agnostic Musings for 12 Step Life](#). This is a book of daily reflections that is often read at the beginning of secular AA meetings.



He has written a total of 22 articles published on AA Agnostica:

- [Pathways to Recovery and Desistance](#) (January 17, 2021)
- [The Growth Rate of Secular AA](#) (May 29, 2019)
- [Recovery Capital Conference of Canada](#) (September (September 30, 2018)
- [International Conference of Secular AA – Toronto](#) (June 24, 2018)
- [Daily Reprieve: A.A. for Atheists & Agnostics – Review](#) (January 25, 2018)
- [Each Breath A Gift](#) (June 21, 2017)
- [Beyond Belief Agnostics and Freethinkers](#) (March 09, 2017)
- [No God? No Problem: Atheism in AA as a Human Right – Jesse Beach](#) (March 02, 2017)
- [AA Membership: Growth or Decline](#) (September 06, 2015)
- [A Changing Landscape](#) (May 13, 2015)
- [Living with Lillian](#) (February 11, 2015)
- [Letting Go of God](#) (October 26, 2014)
- [Together We Can](#) (August 31, 2014)
- [A Reverend at the Agnostic AA Convention](#) (April 13, 2014)
- [Is listability the new AA?](#) (January 19, 2014)
- [Six Shades of Nonbelievers](#) (August 11, 2013)
- [Pharisees and Recalcitrants](#) (August 26, 2012)
- [Quadrants of Knowledge](#) (June 24, 2012)
- [Never Fear Needed Change](#) (June 3, 2012)
- [The Silver Tongued Devil and I](#) (February 25, 2012)
- [Let the Wood Burn](#) (December 13, 2011)
- [AA Public Information: “Let it Begin With Me”](#) (July 24, 2011)

For the record, Joe's first article was the fourth ever posted on AA Agnostica.
