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**00:16 John S:** Hello, and welcome to AA Beyond Belief Podcast. I'm your host, John . Today I'm speaking with Erica K in Kansas City. When I met Erica in March of 2015, she was not at home in AA. The God talk was driving her away. No more, today Erica has learned to exist in AA while remaining true to her belief system. Erica, fitting in with traditional AA. Well hello Erica, how you doing?

**00:42 Erica K:** Hello, I'm doing good.

**00:44 John:** Thank you for stopping by and this is a nice podcast because this time, I'm actually sitting with somebody actually in my house rather than over Skype. So that's kinda nice. Plus, I'm talking to somebody from my home group.

**00:57 Erica:** Yes, it's very nice to be here.

**01:00 John:** Okay. I wanted to have you here Erica 'cause I remember when you first came into our group. I think it was when we were pretty early on, I think you probably came in... Was it in January, February of '15?

**01:12 Erica:** About March of '15.

**01:14 John:** Okay, March of '15. Okay, and we got started in November of 2014... No, no, August of 2014. So yeah. So you came pretty early on. Our group was pretty small at the time.

**01:22 Erica:** Yes.

**01:22 John:** And I remember that you talked about having a really hard time in AA meetings because of the religious language. And I know that you kinda grew up in a home that I think that was, pretty religiously conservative. Anyway, you had a problem with it but now you don't so much anymore and that kinda fascinated me and it's been fun watching you grow in your recovery. So I thought that it'd be great to have you on here to share your story. And usually, what I do to start, I just ask people just to kinda give us a little bit of their AA story. What was it like? What happened? What is it like now? And we'll just kinda take it from there.

**02:00 Erica:** Okay, sure. I started drinking a little later than probably a lot of other people do. I was in my mid-20s before I really started drinking, alcoholically. But it didn't take long before I realized that my life was unmanageable and I had a problem. And I first discovered AA back in 1997 when I lived in Florida and I knew about AA because I had heard about it in school. And so I went and I checked it out and I connected right away and I felt really at home. I got sober and I stayed sober for eight years, and then I moved to Kansas and... When I lived in Florida I was working the program, I had a sponsor, I was going to meetings and working with Steps and everything. And then I moved to Kansas, on a job opportunity and I basically quit work in the program. I did not get a sponsor here and I stayed sober for another four years but I was very miserable and I eventually relapsed.

**03:16 Erica:** I relapsed six years ago and I had a really hard time getting back. I went through a lot of treatment centers, and detoxes. And I had a lot of periods of sobriety, here and there. But I decided again to come back last February of 2015. And that's when I just decided my life had

become really miserable and alcohol was creating a lot of problems for me. I was feeling... I just didn't wanna live anymore. I was just merely existing, I had no quality of life. I just basically wanted to die and so I just reached the point of hopelessness and I decided that enough was enough. I kinda got sick and tired of getting sick and tired. And that's when I came back to the program again.

**04:08 John:** Did you come straight to our group?

**04:10 Erica:** No, I did not. I actually didn't even know there was agnostic AA. Initially, I started going to some other traditional groups around the area and I was really frustrated because when I was in the program during the time I was sober for 12 years, if you would've asked me I would've affiliated myself as a Christian, and said that I believe in God. But, I don't know that my heart was ever really in it. I think I was just kinda going through with motions because that's what I thought you had to do. So when I came back, I was really in a quandary, because during the six years I actually, de-converted from Christianity and became an atheist. And because of all my prior experience in AA, I really didn't know how I was gonna work this program as an atheist because I had always heard, you have to believe in God or a higher power of some sort.

**05:14 John:** And Erica, didn't you grow up in a family that was very religious, or fundamentalist type religious?

**05:21 Erica:** I did. I grew up in an extremely strict, sheltered fundamentalist Christian home, where I was basically bombarded with a lot of ideas from the bible such as "You're gonna go to hell for this and that." I had to go to church all the time. I really couldn't do anything. I was very, very sheltered and everything was considered evil, and of the devil, and was... It was basically forced down my throat. And the fire and brimstone, sort of thing was forced down my throat and I started kind of rebelling against that a little bit in my teens. But not entirely. I also became at one point kind of just to piss off my mother, I became a Catholic. Because she always told me that Catholics were gonna go to hell. Part of this rebellion thing in me, it's like I wanted to show her, do something, to rebel against her so I became Catholic. At first I was very drawn to it though, because it seemed very different than my upbringing of the fire and brimstone.

**06:43 John:** It is, yeah.

**06:45 Erica:** Yeah. So I kind of went back and forth between Protestant, Catholic for many years. And...

**06:52 John:** So before you even got into AA you kind of had this struggle then, with de-converting as you put it. De-converting from Christianity to...

**07:02 Erica:** I did.

**07:03 John:** Being an atheist. And did you get a lot of pushback from your family? Was that a difficult thing with your family, or?

**07:10 Erica:** Well no, because my father was deceased at that time and my mother was in a Nursing Home. She lived in Oregon and she wasn't really a huge part of my life at the time. What ended up happening was, I went back to college in my mid-thirties, and when I went to college, I started to learn to think more critically because I had always been told, "This is what we believe."

And I just never questioned it, because when you grow up in that kind of faith even to question it is considered a sin. So I never really questioned it. I just kind of went along with it because that's what I had always been told. But when I went back to college and they taught me to learn to think more critically, to examine evidence, and to do research and don't just believe what someone tells you. Look for the validity and reliability of sources and things like that. And that got me to start questioning and thinking and challenging those beliefs that I had been raised with. And when I really put them under tight scrutiny they just didn't make sense to me anymore, and I just couldn't continue to follow something that didn't make sense to me.

**08:25 John:** All right. So here it is now we're like you said February of 2015?

**08:29 Erica:** Mm-hmm.

**08:29 John:** And you started going to these groups here in the Kansas City area, the traditional AA groups. What kind of problems were you having there?

**08:39 Erica:** Well, initially a lot of frustration because hearing you have to believe in God. You have to believe in a higher power. That's the only way that you can stay sober. And I just didn't believe that and I couldn't make myself believe it no matter how hard I tried. And I was very scared because I wondered, "How am I going to stay sober?". I also encountered a lot of feelings of anger.

**09:08 John:** Towards you or that you had?

**09:10 Erica:** No, anger that I had toward the people, because it was such a trigger for me because it just brought me back to my childhood. And so hearing people sharing meetings about the dogmatic beliefs, that I had been raised with, similar type of beliefs that you couldn't challenge really triggered a lot of anger in me. And it was very hard initially for me to even sit through meetings where God was even mentioned. I remember many meetings where I just had to walk out because I was just so angry, that I couldn't deal with it. And...

**09:49 John:** So this is pretty frustrating, 'cause you're wanting to get sober and you knew that AA worked for you before.

**09:53 Erica:** Exactly.

**09:54 John:** Now the first time you went to AA, I think you already told me, you were just kind of going with the flow so you kind of... You don't know... You believed or didn't believe, you just kind of went with the religious stuff?

**10:04 Erica :** I did. I sort of did the 'fake it till you make it' thing [chuckle]

**10:08 John:** Right, okay. I think I was doing that for, like 25 years.

**10:12 Erica:** 'Fake it till you make it'. And I just felt like no matter how much to get in touch with this higher power, it always seemed to elude me. I never felt that connection that other people talked about.

**10:24 John:** Okay. But this time you come back and you just weren't able to do that? You didn't want to do that.

**10:28 Erica:** I just didn't want to do it.

**10:29 John:** 'Cause you were comfortable with your belief system?

**10:31 Erica:** I was very comfortable with my new belief system. And it didn't feel true to me and I had to remain true to myself and what I believed.

**10:42 John:** See that's what I ran into as well. I didn't grow up in a Christian home or in a religion at all. AA was my religion. I came in fairly young, and I didn't have any kind of religious background but I bought the program, hook line and sinker. But when I finally realized that for me that I am an atheist, and I didn't believe in the supernatural stuff then I had to reinterpret AA. And it was difficult to do in the traditional meetings for my anyway. And it still is. It's why one reason I admire you so much 'cause you are going to traditional meetings today and I still can't do that. But, yeah anyway, I can relate to that. So what I did I went off and started an agnostic Group. You started coming to our group. Why did you start coming to our group, how did you find out about it?

**11:27 Erica:** Well, initially in my very early sobriety, within the first, probably 60 days, I was trying out a lot of different groups in the area 'cause I was trying to find a good fit. And so one day I just happened to be scrolling on the website and I saw this We Agnostics Group and it was like my ears perked up and I'm like, "Hmm, what is this? This sounds interesting", and I thought, "I'm gonna check this out, because I don't know what this is, but it sounds interesting if it has We Agnostics."

**11:58 John:** Yeah.

**12:00 Erica:** That's what brought me to your group.

**12:03 John:** So, you saw it on the AA website? The Kansas City AA website?

**12:06 Erica:** Yes, on the inter-group or website. Yes.

**12:08 John:** Okay. All right. So you weren't quite sure what it was but thought it sound interesting so you came to check it out.

**12:13 Erica:** I did.

**12:14 John:** Okay. And then, what happened? What did you think? What happened?

**12:17 Erica:** It was like coming home. I felt, it was such a different experience to me and it was like a big weight off my shoulders, because for the first couple of months, I really struggled with trying to come up with some version of a higher power that was gonna be acceptable to me.

**12:37 John:** Right. I remember. Right [chuckle]

**12:41 Erica:** At one point, I was using the ocean. At one point, I was using, the spirit of the universe. And all of that to me is just such hocus pocus. I'm a very factual, logical, analytical, type of a person and so I need something that is logical and functional for me in order that that's gonna work for me and all of those tolerable higher powers, they just were not working for me. I just did

not know really, what to do. But when I found the Agnostic group, I was like, "Wow, this is really cool. There are people who have stayed sober for many, many years and they don't believe in God." I thought that was very refreshing and it gave me some hope that things could be different for me, that I could stay sober in this program without that belief.

**13:46 John:** What's nice about it, too, is even if someone did believe in God, it's still okay.

**13:50 Erica:** Exactly.

**13:51 John:** Everybody is allowed to do their own thing.

**13:52 Erica:** That's another thing that I really have liked about the agnostic is they're very inclusive. We don't exclude anybody. It doesn't matter what...

**14:01 John:** No one tells what you must believe. No one tells you you must find a higher power.

**14:04 Erica:** Exactly.

**14:05 John:** [laughter] That's a big difference.

**14:08 Erica:** Right. They tell you that basically, it's whatever works for you. If a higher power... If God works for you, then that's fine. If it doesn't, that's fine, too.

**14:20 John:** Yeah. And we always had step meetings, and I remember that you really latched on to Marya Hornbacher's book, *Waiting: A Nonbeliever's Higher Power*.

**14:32 Erica:** Yes.

**14:34 John:** Did that book mean a lot to you, and make a difference in how you thought about the program?

**14:38 Erica:** It did, because I was also really struggling with the steps because the steps, as they're written, are very focused and centered on God and there again, they seem like a lot of hocus focus to me. I really liked her book a lot because she was able to put them in much more of a workable situation for me, more functional, and to where I felt like I could them more from that standpoint. So yes, I really tried to...

**15:19 John:** Yeah. I love her book and I remember during those Step meetings, we read from her book. It seemed like all the time. Everybody was reading from her book a lot.

**15:26 Erica:** You did?

**15:26 John:** Yeah. So, was it right after you got introduced to that book that you actually wrote your own version of the Steps.

**15:33 Erica:** Yeah, it was very shortly after that. And I kinda took from her book as well as a few other secular books, 12-Step books, things I found online in other books and I used them all to come up with a version that is functional for me. Because that's another thing that I really struggled with was, how to work those steps with all the God language in them and I really complicated it.

Like, with step three, I can't even tell you how long I've spent...

**16:15 John:** I remember you talking about that.

**16:17 Erica:** Trying to figure out how to do step three. I just really way over-complicated them. And when I was able to put them in my own format, functional but still kept the essence of the step, it makes all the difference in the world.

**16:36 John:** So, how did you come around on step three? What did you finally figure out for yourself?

**16:40 Erica:** Basically, I just looked at step three as making a decision to accept help in the program of AA.

**16:50 John:** Right. That's how I see it. It's funny that we focus on the decision. A lot of people focus on the God.

**16:56 Erica:** Exactly.

**16:57 John:** Made the decision to turn our lives over to the care of God. I guess if you believe in God, that might be the most important part because he'll take care of the rest [laughter]

**17:05 Erica:** Exactly.

**17:06 John:** But we're looking further down the road. We have to make a decision to do the things that follow, right? The steps four and five and all the rest of them.

**17:13 Erica:** Yes.

**17:14 John:** And I think that's really what they meant. It is a decision. It is a decision step. It's about, "Okay, we have a problem. Now, what are we gonna do about it?" If anything.

**17:25 Erica:** Basically, after realizing I had a problem, I had to come to accept that I need an outside resource as I've always prided myself on being an independent person, and I can handle my own stuff, but my alcohol problem was one thing I could never handle. And so, in step two, I was able to come to believe that I needed some resources outside of myself.

**17:51 John:** Exactly. It seems pretty simple, doesn't it?

**17:54 Erica:** Yeah. Once you're able to simplify it makes all the difference world for you [chuckle]

**18:01 John:** Yeah, it really does and what's funny to me too Erica, is what you're doing is the very same thing that the believer is doing.

**18:08 Erica:** Exactly.

**18:10 John:** Totally the same thing. It's just that I guess, that the power that they get to do the steps is coming from their faith in a God. Whereas, the power, or encouragement, or whatever you might call it, that we're getting, is coming from each other, or from what other source that we got.

**18:25 Erica:** Exactly. Yeah, basically those who have struggled with the same problem that I have, I draw strength from them.

**18:34 John:** Well, I remember when you came in with those Steps and I was so happy. I had the same experience. I wrote the Steps out in my own language too, and it made a tremendous difference for me. It made the Steps really come to life. 'Cause when you look at them in that 1930s language, that was written by some people all that time ago, who were really coming from a religious background... Everyone has to interpret them, anyway, but when we actually stop and think about it ourselves, and actually write it down, it makes it more real, I think. In that sense, I think that us agnostics have a little advantage because we really do have to internalize these Steps a lot, and ask ourselves, "What do they mean to me?" More importantly than... That's been the most important thing: "What do they mean to us, as individual people?" Not, "What do they mean to Bob, and Bill?" [chuckle]

**19:26 Erica:** Right. Yeah. Exactly.

**19:28 John:** And do they mean the exact same thing to us as Bob and Bill? [chuckle] Actually, I think Bob and Bill both felt differently about it too.

**19:37 Erica:** Probably, yes.

**19:39 John:** So you came to our group exclusively for awhile, didn't you?

**19:43 Erica:** I did, initially I just was so angry and fed up with traditional AA, after struggling so much, that I just couldn't even deal with regular AA anymore. And I just came exclusively to agnostic meetings for about two months I would say, about two months.

**20:03 John:** Yeah. You came pretty much to every single one of your meetings.

**20:05 Erica:** Just about every one, yes. And I was wishing at the time that they had agnostic meetings, like, every day. Because initially, I kind of needed more meetings, than just the...

**20:15 John:** That's right. I remember.

**20:18 Erica:** We only had, like, three a week, and I needed one every day. And so, it was really, really frustrating. And then, it was funny because then by the time we had got all the meetings up to a meeting every day, I was comfortable once again in traditional AA.

**20:34 John:** Now tell me about, because that's really interesting to me. Because I remember you very, very well, when you started coming to our group. And you were very uncomfortable with regular AA. It was almost like you were traumatized by it. It seemed like to me, that you were traumatized by religion, and you felt like they were trying to cram this down your throat again. Then next thing I know, you're going to this group, and you're giving somebody rides to meetings, and you're kinda getting comfortable. You wanna talk about how that transition happened?

**21:03 Erica:** Sure. Yeah, I think it was really like a process. It was just a process of, kinda forcing myself to go to the regular AA meetings and... It's kinda hard to explain. I was full of a lot of anger. But I felt like the only way that I was gonna be able to move forward and get over that anger, was

for me to kinda face it, in a way. An it was like, part of the healing process I believe, was that I was able to go and listen to the people in traditional AA talk about God. And just over time, I just learned to accept that... Have more of a live and let live attitude, where I can listen to them, and I can be okay with what they believe, but I can still remain true to my beliefs. And in my home group it took... I kept quiet about my lack of belief for quite awhile, until I hit about one year of sobriety. I was not even open about my lack of belief. I kinda sat back. I was fearing judgment, and I was fearing that I wasn't gonna be accepted. And so, I kinda kept quiet, and sort of went along with the group. And then, eventually, I opened up and I shared my beliefs with them. But it's something that...

**22:47 John:** You did do that, Erica... Was it a speaker meeting that you did that at? Were you speaking to celebrate your anniversary? Is that where you did that?

**22:54 Erica:** No, it wasn't at my anniversary. It was something that sort of started coming out. It evolved. I started opening the doorway. I would mention maybe a little bit at one meeting, and then at each meeting, I would get a little bit more bold in what I would say. And it was something that kind of evolved over time. I didn't just come right back, because I didn't wanna be that girl that everybody was saying, "Oh, she's just this troublemaker girl, coming in here with these, contrary beliefs."

**23:28 Erica:** So I think it was kind of important that I sort of let that evolve naturally over time, rather than trying to force it, and just...

**23:39 John:** It gave you a chance to get comfortable with it, but also gave other people a chance to kind of get used to... Yeah.

**23:44 Erica:** Exactly. And it's hard to explain how, but in going to traditional AA, I have been able to come to more of an acceptance. And also, I've been able to see that not everybody who believes in God has the interpretation that I was raised with or my mother's version. So I've been able to become much more of a tolerant and understanding person, and I've been able to have friends in the program, who have opposite beliefs than me, and we are able to have a friendship, even though we don't agree. And that's something that I wouldn't have believed a year ago, that I would have ever been able to be friends with somebody that had such opposite beliefs.

**24:43 John:** Yeah, okay. So the groups that you are going to and were going to, are those... 'Cause most groups right here close with the Lord's prayer, not all of them do, but most them do. Do these do the Lord's prayer, while holding hands at the end of the meeting?

**24:56 Erica:** Yeah, two of the groups that I go to now, they do the Lord's Prayer holding hands at the end of the meeting. And for the longest time, I would hold hands out of respect for the group, but I would not say the Lord's prayer.

**25:11 John:** Right. [chuckle] Okay.

**25:14 Erica:** Then, I finally got to a point where I was willing to say the Lords prayer, only because I just wanted to show respect for other people's beliefs, even though it doesn't mean anything to me, but I wanted to show that I have respect for your process, if that's your process.

**25:36 John:** And you care about the people, that's what I find when I... The only time I ever do the



Lord's Prayer and I don't say it, but I do hold hands with them, is when I go to the Area Assembly. I might go to around three or four different committee meetings and then each one lasts for about an hour, and at the end of every [chuckle] committee meeting they hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer. So I will say the Lord's Prayer about four or five times during the day. [chuckle] It's kinda crazy.

**26:07 Erica:** Now I won't say that I'm not somewhat uncomfortable with it, but I have definitely become a little bit more comfortable with it. When I chair a meeting though, the prayer that is said at the end is left up to the leader of the group, and so if I lead the meeting I will close with the Serenity Prayer.

**26:25 John:** Well that's nice.

**26:28 Erica:** If that's my choice.

**26:30 John:** Would they let you close with a Responsibility Pledge? [laughter]

**26:35 Erica:** I don't know, I suppose maybe it would be a very novel idea, but...

**26:41 John:** But like you were saying though... 'Cause when I would do that at the Area Assembly and at the district committee meetings. I did it because I like the people, I care about the people, and I respect their belief and I didn't wanna stand outside and set myself apart from them. That's more difficult I think. But after my last experience at the Area Assembly, I don't think I'm ever going to do it again. [laughter] I still love the people and everything, but for me now, if I go to the Area Assembly it's more kind of a place where I think I need to make a statement, that "I don't think that the Lord's Prayer belongs in AA."

**27:27 Erica:** I totally agree. I don't think that it does either, because basically it's a religious prayer.

**27:35 John:** But groups are autonomous and a group can do it. So if I went to a group for a meeting, I might be more likely to at least hold hands with them and stand silently, I have no problem doing that. But at the Area Assembly where they really are there to represent... What we do there is, we send a delegate to the General Service Conference, to represent all our groups in Western Missouri.

**27:58 Erica:** Oh, wow.

**28:00 John:** And I think if you are a part of something that's representing multiple groups within Alcoholics Anonymous then we should respect all groups, and you can't get the group conscious of all the groups. But anyway, that's just kind of my feeling on that. So I don't say it with them anymore. I'm not gonna ask that they not say it, but I'm not gonna say it anymore.

**28:19 Erica:** Exactly.

**28:20 John:** So you... Did anybody give you a hard time when you were coming out as an atheist?

**28:26 Erica:** Not as much as I would have expected. I have noticed that there are... Actually there's a lot of people that were like me. They're like me, they didn't even know there was an agnostic AA group and they're quite fascinated by the idea. And they seem somewhat open and receptive to the

idea. I don't know that I've really encountered... I've never really encountered anybody that directly confronted me, but I have encountered people in meetings who will still, if I share something, they'll still read something from the Big Book, that quotes God, and how it's mandatory that you believe in God or else you won't be able to stay sober. And I've just learned to let them be and let them say what they wanna say and be tolerant and respectful of what they say. But it doesn't deter me and my beliefs and how I feel and my healing process.

**29:31 John:** You're setting a good example too. We need to do that. We need more of us out there, regular meetings. The group in Orlando... There's a guy, you might meet him in Austin, his name is Mikey, Mikey J, and he helped start the Orlando group, our mostly agnostic group of drunks, and they've been meeting for a long time I think. But anyway, they have something that, I can't remember what they call it but what they do is that once a week, everybody from the group goes out together and they go to the traditional meeting because they think it's important that we are comfortable in traditional meetings because you never know when the time might come. You did it because we didn't have that many meetings. You needed more meetings. You needed to be comfortable in traditional meetings. And Mikey says, "Well, the same thing applies. You might be traveling out of town or something. What if I'm out of town somewhere and I need a meeting and there's not an Agnostic meeting? I should be comfortable or learn how to be comfortable in a traditional AA meeting." Yeah. I think there's some importance to that. Plus it shows that other people in the room, too, who might not be believers that, "Hey, it's okay. You can be yourself."

**30:42 Erica:** And also, I guess another reason, another really, major reason why I still go to traditional AA is because I think that there's probably a lot more people that are like me out there than maybe I'm aware of, that are just silently sitting there, going along with it, but it's not really what they believe but they're too scared to speak up.

**31:05 John:** I think so, too. I think so, too.

**31:07 Erica:** And by me being there and being the example that, "Hey, you can do this as an agnostic or an atheist." You don't have to believe in God to get sober and be sober. And you can have a happy, joyous, and free life, sober, without that belief and I want to be that example for other people that might be struggling. It's something I feel really passionate about, because my sobriety is a matter of life-and-death to me and if I hadn't found a way to work this program as an atheist, I'm not sure I would have stayed sober and I'm not sure I would have lived very much longer. And so, it's something that I feel really passionate about. I sometimes wonder how many atheists, and agnostics out there come to traditional AA, hear all the God stuff and leave and never get sober.

**32:03 John:** Right. I think there's a lot of them. And there's a lot of people that just don't necessarily even identify as a atheist or agnostic. They're just not particularly religious and they just think it's bizarre when they see it. But I have a theory that most people in AA, and I could be wrong in this, this is just from my observation from going to that one group I went to for 25 years, most of the people in that group were not churchgoers. The only exception would be some of the Catholics where it was more of a traditional thing for them to do, to be part of the ceremony or whatever, the ritual and stuff like that. But, most people were not particularly religious as far as having deeply-held fundamentalist Christian-type beliefs. Yet, they were religious about AA itself.

**32:54 Erica:** Yes.

**32:54 John:** But I don't think they had ever really recognized that or said anything about it. But I

think what happens is like, with me, I just fell into it. I said, "Okay. I don't know anything about... Okay whatever, I'll pray. I'm sure I'll get some kind of psychological benefit from it." And then, you learn to say whatever people are saying, that people approve of, and I think people fall into that. So maybe, some of these people you are talking to are like that. Maybe, they're not atheists or whatever. They don't know. They're just not particularly religious and they think, "Well that's kind of a novel idea." [laughter] We could just do this without the praying and everything.

**33:30 Erica:** Right. It never dawned on them. I view the AA program... I think you've mentioned it, too. That I view it more of it more of a program, and they even say it's a program of action. It's not a program of belief and I believe that I stay sober through my actions and through the support of the fellowship of AA. It always baffles me when I hear people say, "I go to meetings. I talk to my sponsor. I work with Steps. I do service work. I made the... And God keeps me sober." It's like, "Hmm. Okay." [laughter] If you say so. Maybe, that works for them but it doesn't work for me. I know I have to take the action and that's what's worked.

**34:21 John:** Yeah. Yeah. I agree. That's exactly how it is for me. I think the belief part is the least important part. I guess having faith or belief that there's a solution for your problem, that's important, because without that, what motivates us to even do anything. So, we've got to have some hope that there's hope for us. But once we have that, it's all up to us to take whatever action. Even if we believed in God... They even say, "Faith without works is dead." So, you can have all faith you want but God isn't gonna do anything for you if you don't do the work too, right? [laughter]

**35:03 Erica:** That's right.

**35:04 John:** God wants you to work. [chuckle] So obviously, He must be also thinking that... Whatever. I don't know. What am I saying? I shouldn't make fun of the... Anyway. So now, you're very comfortable at your groups and you still come to our groups though too. How do you feel about AA overall right now and agnostic AA?

**35:25 Erica:** Overall, I think AA is an awesome program, whether it's traditional or agnostic. I know personally, I feel more comfortable and I feel a better sense of belonging in the agnostic meetings. But I also feel really satisfied and happy that I've been able to make some peace with traditional AA, and I found a way to still go there. I think there's so much about the AA program that is really helpful and beneficial. And they say, "Take what you like and leave the rest." And that's pretty much what I do.

**36:11 John:** So are you gonna go to Austin?

**36:13 Erica:** I'm thinking about it. I haven't fully decided yet. But I think it would be a great experience. I would love to...

**36:19 John:** Yeah, yeah. It would be pretty cool. I hope you can go. I was at Santa Monica in 2014, and it was really the most amazing AA experience I ever had. To meet so many people from really the world over that were like us. And then we stayed in touch after that, after that convention. Since that time... Oh gosh, I think there's been like more than 200 meetings start since November 2014.

**36:50 Erica:** That's really remarkable, that it's grown that fast.

**36:54 John:** And so now, when we get together in Austin, I'm figuring there's gonna be a lot more

people than what we had in Santa Monica. We had like 300 people in Santa Monica. I don't know, maybe we'll have like 500 or 600, I don't know. But it seems to me, when I think about our particular situation here... When I went, in 2014, I was the only person from Kansas City.

**37:18 Erica:** Oh wow.

**37:19 John:** And it's possible we could have about seven people from Kansas City go down there this time, if you go. And then there's some people from Lawrence sort of thinking about coming. So we're looking maybe, ten or more people from this area, from Kansas and Missouri.

**37:32 Erica:** Wow, that's great.

**37:33 John:** Yeah. And so if you take that, and you look at other cities, they might be having the same experience, where maybe one or nobody ever showed up. And now you can have several people. So yeah, it'll be pretty cool.

**37:45 Erica:** Yeah, I'm kind of excited.

**37:47 John:** Okay. Well thank you very much. This has been a great conversation. I think that this is important for people to know that, yeah we can coexist with traditional AA. And I think that getting out there in the groups, and educating people like you are... 'Cause they're getting to know about agnostic AA through you. You're the example for them and that's important. We have far more in common than we have that makes us different.

[music]

**38:19 Erica:** Exactly.

**38:20 John:** Alright.

**38:20 Erica:** Thank you.

**38:21 John:** Thank you, Erica. I appreciate it.

**38:22 Erica:** Thanks for chatting with me.

**38:24 John:** Well, that's it for another episode of AA Beyond Belief the podcast. We'll be back next week speaking with Pat N, one of the founders of the secular AA convention, in Olympia Washington, and a featured speaker at WAAFT IAAC 2016, in Austin, Texas this November. I think you'll enjoy that program. Until then, you all take care, and be well.

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