

# ASCA NEWS -- FEBRUARY 2003

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THE MORRIS CENTER FOR HEALING FROM CHILD ABUSE

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APPEARING BI-MONTHLY, THE ASCA NEWS IS EDITED BY JONO SCHNEIDER

SEND SUBMISSIONS, REQUESTS, QUESTIONS TO [OPENEDEND@AOL.COM](mailto:OPENEDEND@AOL.COM). THANKS!

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: "THE INNER CHILD"

What is this "inner child" that people speak of? And how does it apply to "me"? One of the problems of being abused as a child is that one's own emotional growth is stunted even as one moves out of childhood and into adulthood. Thus, even when we act as adults in an adult world, we may feel like we are still children – and we may actually act towards the world as if we are still children (the abused children that we were). The child we were (and still, in a sense, *are*) is the child within us that needs to speak, that needs to voice now what it never could say then, when we were being abused. Please send commentaries, experiences, questions, etc. on the topic of the inner child to [openedend@aol.com](mailto:openedend@aol.com) for publication in an upcoming issue of the ASCA News!

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## IN THIS ISSUE...

An interview with Rana, who facilitates several ASCA Meetings in South Africa; Rana also co-directs a non-profit organization, Wo+men Against Child Abuse, that takes aim at Child Abuse as a social condition. Rana talks about both the personal and the political aspects of recovery, and the personal challenges survivors face as they try to reconcile their present lives with their past causes.

Poetry and an essay by Laurie Frye. Laurie shares her poems and analyses them, using the knowledge she has gained from working on her own abuse issues as a member of ASCA. A particularly insightful critique of identifying with one's abuser to protect oneself, Laurie provides us with a crucial understanding of how this phenomenon works.

## INTERVIEW WITH RANA

**Jono:** You are one of 3 directors the Director of a non-profit organization, Wo+men Against Child Abuse. What is the mission of the organization? Can you tell me how you came to doing this kind of work, and, subsequently, how you linked up with ASCA?

**Rana:** Our Mission Statement is to fight child abuse by striving to stop emotional, violent and sexual exploitation of children; and to advocate change in law and social policy and create public awareness. (See our website for more in-depth information on our projects and initiatives - [www.wmaca.org](http://www.wmaca.org))

My co-founding Wo+men Against Child Abuse was purely "selfish" and twofold. Firstly, I wanted to make not only a career change but also a life change. Being actively involved in the Corporate Retail environment under the Senior Management umbrella, I was appalled at the lack of integrity regarding basic human dignity. As part of the senior management team, I was expected to follow the behavioral guidelines, which top management deemed appropriate and which were in total contrast to my own beliefs and attitude. So after climbing the corporate ladder and gaining unprecedented heights, I realized that my own integrity far outweighed the desire to remain within that 'abusive' environment.

The second reason for my co-founding Wo+men Against Child Abuse is a personal one. As a survivor of child abuse myself, I wanted to make a difference and possibly make the 'process' easier for others. To help the healing process, I wanted to use my own understanding of the pain, shame, guilt and the hundreds of other psychological issues that adult survivors of abuse face on a daily basis.

South Africa is only beginning to understand and acknowledge the carnage that child abuse leaves in its wake. It was for this reason that I had to look elsewhere for help pertaining to adult survivors. I searched the internet and found ASCA. What impressed me most about ASCA

was that the information was freely available for me to download and subsequently use immediately - I did not have to re-invent the wheel – and the information was clear and concise and made so much sense.

**Jono:** How many ASCA meetings has your organization started? And how do you go about populating the meetings?

**Rana:** I originally started the first-ever ASCA group in March 2000 which ran for one and a half years. My second group started in June 2002 and will continue well into 2003. I also "managed" an ASCA group in Durban - this group started in January 2001 and ended mid 2002. (I have chosen not to "re-start" this group because I simply do not have the manpower at the moment) I also ran a "closed" ASCA for medical professionals (doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers etc.) - this group also started in January 2001 and ended mid 2002. So, all in all, I have run 4 ASCA groups.

I have an extensive marketing and media background, so I use the media to "populate" the meetings. I send out press releases at the beginning of a "new" meeting and depending on the response re-send a couple of months later. (see press release attached at the end of the article.)

**Jono:** Are the meetings a natural extension of the work you do at Wo+men Against Child Abuse?

**Rana:** Absolutely. It would be irresponsible of us, as an organisation, not to offer help to adult survivors knowing what the adult repercussions are. A statistic that motivates us (me) to work with adults is that 89% of children who are sexually abused will abuse themselves, their partners and/or their children as adults. This holistic understanding compels us to work with adult survivors who were not fortunate enough to receive early psychological intervention.

**Jono:** In a recent e-mail to the ASCA Board, you brought up a concern about how survivors practically take what they are learning and understanding about themselves in ASCA into the "real" world. If I understand you correctly (and maybe you could give me some context here), your concern is in the application of ASCA outside of ASCA -- how does going to the meetings and sharing these difficult experiences from childhood allow us to live better lives? Could you talk a little bit about the importance of this application, and where you see specific challenges arise in the ASCA groups that you attend and facilitate?

**Rana:** My question to Jessy (*Jessy Keiser, the President of the ASCA Board – ed.*) was a little more specific. Here are some examples:

- In ASCA, survivors are "taught" how to give and receive supportive feedback. Unfortunately what we receive in terms of feedback or simple communication in the outside world does not fall within a nurturing, supportive, affirming context. There seems to be a conflict between what and how they communicate within the "safe" environment of the group and how differently they communicate and are communicated to outside the group.

2) Survivors are empowering themselves and taking responsibility for their healing in a very safe, supportive and compassionate environment - they are able to share and express their feelings without judgement, they are able to share their ambitions, hopes and dreams with encouragement, they are able to drop their masks and be authentic etc. But there is a struggle, a paradox if you will, in that they are not necessarily unconditionally supported or encouraged, or understood, or unconditionally accepted in the world outside ASCA. I suppose what I am saying is that it is very difficult to have the sweet taste of unconditional acceptance, non judgement, compassion, understanding because this can easily turn bitter outside of ASCA.

**Jono:** On the Wo+men Against Child Abuse website ([www.wmaca.org](http://www.wmaca.org)), in the press releases section, there are a number of wonderful articles on the subject of child abuse and its social, psychological

and political effects on the individual (readers, take note!). One of the articles, "Adult Survivor of Child Abuse Repercussions", does a wonderful job of showing how being abused as children makes life difficult for adults later in life. Can you talk a bit about this particular phenomenon, and how, in your experience, resolving childhood issues makes adult life more livable for survivors?

**Rana:** Wow - what a complex question!!!! I am going to attempt to answer it from a personal perspective as opposed to a theoretical one.

I carried a heavily laden red wagon of beliefs and feelings into adulthood that I needed to literally unload in order to become a functioning adult. My red wagon was piled high with inappropriate beliefs and feelings of guilt, shame, responsibility/blame, rage, pain, betrayal, aloneness, disgust, desperation, sinfulness, fear, worthlessness, and depression, etc. My red wagon was extremely heavy, but I willingly chose to have it ever present because it validated and confirmed how I felt about myself. My red wagon was overflowing with feelings and beliefs that reflected/mirrored my inappropriate sense of self. My abused sense of self.

It was only when I started therapy 6 years ago, with an amazing clinical psychologist, that I gingerly began to unload my red wagon. What drove me to therapy was an innate knowing that there was something "better". My process began before I co-founded Wo+men Against Child Abuse and it was because of therapy that I was/am strong enough to do the work I do. My process began with removing one inappropriate belief, or unexpressed feeling, at a time from my red wagon – such as “I believed I was responsible for being abused”. This was/is a blatantly inappropriate belief in childhood and an equally dysfunctional and debilitating belief to take into adulthood. This belief in adulthood covered me under a blanket of shame that keep me feeling worthless and undeserving. Removing this belief from my wagon lightened my load considerably and has allowed me to place blame where it appropriately belongs - with my perpetrators. So yes, I honestly believe that dealing with and resolving my childhood issues literally saved my life.

Removing those false and often inappropriate beliefs from my wagon has made me a functional adult who still has a way to go - but one who has come a long way.

**Jono:** What is it about the ASCA program itself that you believe allows people to face their abused pasts? Are there particular aspects of safety in ASCA's structure that give people the strength to disclose their hidden experiences?

**Rana:** There are a few elements that facilitate healing in the ASCA process. For me, the 8 guidelines create an environment that, by their sheer design, allow survivors to deal with their abused past. Any consistently created environment that also instils a very real sense of safety will certainly make the healing process easier - feeling physically and emotionally safe is the first step in letting go of the past.

Safety plays an enormous role in allowing survivors to disclose and liberate themselves from their past. But I think the acceptance, the non-judgement, the understanding, the nurturing, and the knowing of fellow survivors in the group is also extremely supportive of disclosure. Knowing that others have gone through what you have gone through, knowing that others understand and acknowledge where you are at without reprimand, without dismissal, is amazingly empowering and equally encouraging.

**Jono:** As the co-secretary of the meeting, how do you see your role with respect to creating a place for survivors to share?

**Rana:** I take creating a safe environment for survivors to share very seriously. I have, unfortunately, experienced tremendous pain in an un-safe and un-supported environment and that is probably why I take creating a safe environment so seriously. I understand the tremendous damage an un-safe environment can cause and I think that is why I was so drawn to the ASCA process - it not

only immediately establishes safety in group but also teaches and allows survivors to take responsibility for creating their own safety.

**Jono**: And how do you carry your own recovery in relation to your role as co-secretary?

**Rana**: This was a tough one for me in the beginning. For the first 4 or 5 months I distanced myself as a "survivor" and only saw myself as the facilitator (we use the term "facilitator" instead of "co-secretary"). I very conveniently excluded myself from the potential healing of the group - once again my "unworthy" belief reared its ugly head and I sincerely believed that the benefits of ASCA were meant for others, other survivors - not me.

I was resistant to this "truth" because it took me back in subtle ways to my childhood feelings of worthlessness, but the more I processed it the more I came to acknowledge and accept that this was the case. I was compelled to share this "truth" with the group, and I must admit, I received very affirming and supportive feedback - and I have not looked back since. So now, I both share and participate as a survivor and also facilitate as a co-secretary.

**Jono**: How many people, on average, attend the groups you run? Is the attendance consistent? If so, what do you think allows this to be so? If not, what are your theories as to why it is difficult for people to stay with the program and continue to fight their early abuse?

**Rana**: The first group (2000 - 2001) I ran started with 35 survivors - but dwindled down and averaged out to about 12. The current group (2001 - 2002) started with 27 survivors - and has averaged out to about 22.

I believe the reason that "we" lose survivors is because of the hard and often painful work that has to be done. I think the tremendous potential to heal is an equal component for the "drop-

out" rate. I believe it takes a tremendous amount of courage to join a support group - this courage is always acknowledged but not always heard.

Some survivors are really committed; I have survivors from the first group in my second group. Others struggle with the perceived overwhelming pain that being in ASCA can release. It can be very scary for people to look at and acknowledge the "damage" of their childhood. It can be equally scary to acknowledge that they can now choose to move from victim to survivor to thriver. I also believe that many survivors have an expectation of a quick fix that is often unreasonable. I have found that survivors start to "drop out" from Step 4 .... I find this is where their commitment to their healing process is severely tested.

**Jono**: Lastly, what are your future plans to continue to promote both ASCA as well as your own organization?

**Rana**: There is an enormous need for ASCA in our rural areas, and I have 5 (five) university students currently working on researching how to get ASCA into those areas. They have until February 2003 to come up with an implementation plan for expanding ASCA into those far reaching areas. They have also been tasked with translating ASCA into our 7 African languages in order for the implementation to work in the rural areas. As far as Wo+men Against Child Abuse is concerned - we will continue to fight for the rights of children (and adult survivors) who suffer tremendous injustices at the hands of their perpetrators.



**BELOW IS A PRESS RELEASE FROM RANA. SHE SENDS THESE OUT WHEN STARTING UP A NEW ASCA MEETING:**

***HELP AND HEALING @ HAND***

*Wo+men Against Child Abuse, in association with The Morris Center in San Francisco, will be facilitating the first ever Adult Survivor Of Child Abuse (ASCA) Support Group in this country.*

*The ASCA support group is specifically designed for survivors of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. The ASCA dynamic was devised by Psychologists and Care Professionals who specialize in the **adult** ramifications and repercussions of being abused as a child. Both an individual component and a group component comprise the support groups structure.*

*The Wo+men Against Child Abuse ASCA Support Group's main aim is offer assistance to survivors of child abuse to move on with their lives, gently encouraging them to transform their self-identities from victims, to survivors, to thrivers.*

***The ASCA Support Group provides survivors with:***

- *A Survivor To Thriver Manual*
- *A confidential forum*
- *A non-judgmental environment*
- *Freedom to draw on the groups strength and experiences ("been there")*
- *Offers hope and encouragement*
- *Respectful, nurtured and cared for atmosphere*
- *Resource Library*

***The group will convene every Wednesday evening.***

***Starting 19<sup>th</sup> June 2002.***

***VENUE: Wo+men Against Child Abuse***

***6 June Avenue***

***Bordeaux***

***Randburg***

***TIME: 19h00 to 20h30pm.***

***First time survivors need to attend their first meeting at 6pm...***

***Contact: Rana (011) 789-8815 or 082 826 1189 or [rana@wmaca.org](mailto:rana@wmaca.org)***

**IDENTIFICATION WITH THE ABUSER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES REGARDING  
AUTHENTIC SEXUAL SELF EXPRESSION AS EXPLORED THROUGH COMPARING TONE,  
CONTENT AND THEMES OF MY EROTIC POETRY BEFORE AND DURING CHILD ABUSE  
RECOVERY**

BY LAURIE LACY FRYE

Before you read my contribution, I'd like to give you a bit of background on myself. I only came to ASCA last summer, but I had been in various other 12 step programs and support groups for most of my adult life. For the last few years my family of origin has been dying off at an astounding rate (the crushing forces of sexual and emotional abuse take their toll in one way or another). I literally stumbled into my current meeting (Thursday nights in Berkeley, California) after being triggered by seeing a movie. I was looking for any kind of meeting, but, lo and behold! I ended up exactly where I needed to be. I am working my program hard and starting to get some memories of events that have been the hardest for me to face: my father's sexual abuse of me -- which is the core theme of my poetry analysis.

***SANDY SHEETS***

*Salty seas from beyond our knees exist ebbing and  
flowing in the early morning when you are gone.*

*Knowing that when it is finally light*

*I can bury my head, breathing deep and hear the*

*Seagull's flight*

*Wheeling and soaring as it was set free by us lovers*

*Sweating and cumming under the covers*

*and swimming in each other's lagoons.*

*The power of the hours radiates and reflects in the*

*Night's tide pools—clear little tubs where the “I love*

*you” rests, waiting for the rise of the next blue moon.*

*Faintly smelling of tossed up seaweeds,  
The pleads and needs do not leave until you join me  
Back under these blankets  
When I plan to sweep you away gently pulling and  
towing, until with passion growing a wave rushes  
With the force of midnight  
Breaking upon your beach which reeks and speaks  
That oceans of emotions do abide in this bed  
Now and tomorrow, for as long as we are together and  
the white dawns keep rolling in.*

### ***CAN I EVEN?***

*Can I even, can I even, can I even cum?  
The once powerful rhythm for my orgasm  
Has become the antagonist in a great phantasm  
  
The confidant lover pumping out the heat under the cover  
Of another's pop... is gone.  
  
It turns out that I was so into his ejaculation,  
I quietly slid into negation of my pleasure.  
That is the rub of this bum, bum bummer of a summer  
  
So now what guys, gals, whomever?  
Who will brave the fallen one's heaven?  
Try the frail reality of my imperfect normality?*

*I am trying and crying my way through this stew  
Who knows, perhaps it will be you, who  
Can be kind and not feed my loop, shoot the rapid of my tears  
Calm away my fears  
And help the tide rise for real from this passionate soul so scared  
And concealed from a true way to love*

The first poem, *Sandy Sheets*, is a typical example of my 1980s work. I had been having tons of sex for about a decade in an unconscious effort to normalize my abuse and seek some good feelings. The over-all tone of the poem is one of calm, thoughtful, contemplation, and observation. Note the attention paid to alliteration, meter, etc. I want to be taken seriously; I want the reader to think, “Hey, this is a *good* poem”...even though the poem is totally about my obsession with sex and how it must equal love.

The content of this poem is delivered as a summary of the cognitive structures that I use to create the fantasy bond to the (love) object. I manipulate smell associations with sweat, old semen, and soiled bedding into becoming sea-weed, the beach, etc; then I use selective memory to only replay positive parts of the experience as demonstrated by the lack of anything negative (when I know damn well that there was often physical discomfort involved); and finally I project into the future in order to mentally prepare myself for the continuation of the experience. In fact, I’ve brought a lot of intellectual resources to creating what is basically an affidavit of my sensuality. (Q: And why would I need to do that? A: So that I can keep holding myself culpable in an intense sexual situation: I’m just “so-o-o-o into it” that the other person is completely absolved of any role what so ever. This is deep.)

Now to explore the themes. This is where the identification with the abuser and how I assume his perspective becomes more obvious. What at first glance looked like clever metaphors about the smell of sex being the refreshing ocean breeze, now reveals an abundance of domination as reflected in the words, “bury”, “under the covers”, “power”, “needs”, “force”, “breaking”, “now and tomorrow”, etc. So, the

natural consequence of this subliminal message is that the voice of opposition must also speak. I hear my little girls voice piping in with words like “finally light”, “I love you”, “little tubs”, “pleads”, “reeks”, etc.

So, with two different non-contemporary (to the 80’s) voices expressing themselves in these ways, I believe that as much as I wanted this poem to be hip, and “really me”, I was not coming from a place of authentic sexual self-expression. Consider even the title: *Sandy Sheets?! How comfortable does that sound? Why would I think that was a desirable place to spend my time? Oh , well...*

This next poem *Can I Even?* is significantly less concerned with the pretense of propriety as demonstrated by the much more risky tones of questioning, dissatisfaction (being pissed off), and ultimately, vulnerability. Even though there is still strong metering and rhythm the content reflects a current voice deconstructing the fantasy bond through the cognitive functions of analysis, integration, and finally, examination of the results. I now have control over my themes by choosing the words, “cum”, “antagonist”, “pumping”, and “pop”...to expose the perpetrator inside me; and similarly reveal the exposed core “Me” with words like “brave”, “frail”, “imperfect”, “trying”, “crying”, “scared”, etc. I feel this is an authentic, if somewhat tattered, sexual self-expression.

In closing, I am compelled to note that I still have the tendency to look for an outside source to come along and help with the whole loving thing, but at least I am no longer confusing that love with an internalized acceptance of abuse.

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### **IN THE NEXT ISSUE...**

- Artwork and commentary by John Nolette.
- Poetry by Bob Roberts.