

ASCA News • October 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

Our October edition resonates with a strong voice from an **ASCA** meeting in **South Africa**. Their meeting started earlier this year and has flourished.

Through anonymous letters, six ASCA participants express their appreciation for ASCA and thank some of the people associated with the program. They describe how they have been growing. In addition, Rana Eschur offers some of her thoughts on Step 7. I want to thank them for taking the time to share their heart-felt thoughts and experiences with us.

You will find a wonderful poem, *reflex-tions*, by Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán in this issue. In the section, *Rotation C Topic: Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for October*, I discuss how to find additional topics in our *ASCA Format & Meeting Support Materials* manual found on our web page: www.ascasupport.org. In the *Ongoing Education Moment* piece, I discuss the difficult topic of dis-inviting and prohibiting a member from participating in ASCA.

The next time you visit our web page at www.ascasupport.org, you will notice that our home page has a link to Amazon.com. We have become part of the *Amazon.com Associates Program*. Through this program, we receive a referral commission on any item that a person purchases at Amazon.com when the person goes to Amazon.com through our web page. So the next time that you decide to buy a book, CD, etc from Amazon.com please remember to go to Amazon.com through our web page first, thus generating for us a small commission. You might also let your family, friends and co-workers know that one way to help financially support **THE MORRIS CENTER** and **ASCA** is by going through our web page when purchasing items at Amazon.com. We will be building a bibliography on our web page within the Amazon.com Associates section. If you have suggestions of book, tapes, video, etc. that you have found helpful for your recovery process, please forward to me the author, title, publisher and copyright date for possible inclusion. Thanks.

Remember if you would like to be interviewed for the December issue of the ASCA News, you need to contact me by **October 7th** to initiate the process. Please refer to the September issue of the ASCA News for details concerning the new ASCA News format coming on December 1st. We will be using the month of November as a transition month. Therefore we will not publish the ASCA News in November.

As a friendly reminder during the United Way's annual appeal, I am asking you to consider giving a donation to **THE MORRIS CENTER** and our **ASCA** program through the **United Way**. All you need to do is request on the United Way form that your United Way contribution be directed to: The Norma J. Morris Center for Healing

from Child Abuse, PO Box 14477, San Francisco, CA 94114. If you do not contribute to the United Way, we encourage you to think about forwarding a donation directly to **THE MORRIS CENTER**. Please make your check payable to: THE MORRIS CENTER. Mail your contribution to: THE MORRIS CENTER, PO Box 14477 San Francisco, CA 94114. Thank you for your consideration. No donation is ever too small.

David Vandevent, MFT, one of THE MORRIS CENTER's Board members, will be hosting a **Co-Secretary training** on Sunday, October 28th, in Berkeley. If you are interested in participating please contact David at his office phone: 510.524.5946 or his e-mail: davmft@aol.com.



ASCA Members from South Africa Speak!

Anonymous One

It has been a year since I have started dealing with the incest which stopped when I fell pregnant with my father's child. It was at that time that I thought I was going crazy. I was desperately looking for help so I started phoning around looking for help. When I phoned WMACA and spoke to Rana, she was a great deal of support which I could not find any where else at the time. She then said WMACA would be starting a group for adult survivors of child abuse which I think happened about four month's ago.

I must say if I look back, it has been one of the hardest yet most liberating experiences of my life. It has been hard in that I am forced to deal with what happened (the steps take you back to when the abuse was taking place). Memories and emotions have come back that I thought were long gone, but it has been made easier due to the fact that I am not alone. There are people who are around me who will love, understand and support me through all of this.

When I talk about this being a liberating process, it has given me the opportunity to get to know the real me, not the person who was wounded by my father's disease. I have also found healthier ways to be in the world and for that I will always be eternally grateful.

I hope that gives you some idea what the group has done for me.

Anonymous Two

Deeper awareness about the consequences and repercussions of being abused as a child - abuse in myself and other people affected has filled me with compassion for these people.

Anonymous Three

I am impressed with the group content. I believe this information is backed by thorough research. It is written in an easy manner and is therefore not onerous to read or study.

I felt like a bit of a fake when I first joined the group and heard some of the members' stories. As the group has progressed, I've realized how well structured the course is and because of this I have been able to acknowledge that which I've avoided for many years. Yes, I was emotionally abused as a child, and my family was seriously dysfunctional.

I am impressed with the level of facilitation. I have been in quite a few groups over the years. On occasion I have been in groups where I have doubted the ability of the facilitator and have, as a consequence, felt very unsafe. I have always felt supported, secure, and safe in this group.

I am very impressed with Rana. She is articulate, sensitive and has obviously had a sound training in facilitation.

My wish for the future of our group is that it will be a nucleus for many more such groups.

Anonymous Four

At the beginning of the year, I received a phone call from Rana asking me to join her on the radio to speak as an adult survivor. I heard from her about the start of the ASCA support group which I immediately joined, primarily with the idea of becoming a facilitator. Having myself been through a long, difficult and painful process of healing, my wish was to put something back in order to share the gifts that my own healing has brought and with the knowledge of just how difficult a process this is, that through my own healing, I could offer support and inspiration to others.



Personally, I have been able to effect even more of my own healing, finding nuances and subtler aspects that still lurked as a legacy of the childhood sexual abuse I had experienced. Also, being witness in the group to others who share so many of the difficulties, reminded me of my own struggles and brought me an ever stronger affirmation of my recovery. It also enables me to truly appreciate just how daunting the recovery process can be and what a victory it really is to move into Thriver!

I find the ASCA programme to be remarkably positive and effective. I've seen the impact being part of the group has on the members and recall how isolated and alone I felt through much of my healing. It is evident that a group such as this makes a huge difference to the healing process, and from my observation, can actually accelerate the process. It has become a safe haven, a harbour in the storm, a place where we are free to be. Something especially encouraging for me is the focus on the positive aspects of self and a moving away from 'victimhood' (or being stuck in the wound), which could result in going in endless circles for some, and never truly healing. ASCA definitely moves one through the different phases into something

more liberated and whole.

Being a facilitator for the group has also furthered my growth. Facilitating requires objectivity and an ability to hold those in the group in their own truth, with love and acceptance, whatever their truth may be, or however it may differ from my own. This brings an ever-widening perspective to my own views and removes more barriers and restrictions in my life. It has also taught me tolerance and patience beyond what I believed myself capable of. From the experience I have been able to become more 'detached' (i.e. not self-absorbed) and observant, able to be more aware of the state of being of those in the group and how that might affect others. Initially I found it required a large degree of concentration but as I facilitate more meetings, have been able to relax into the role, and is something which I always look forward to doing.

The Facilitator role is a key component of the programme, one which ensures the safety and consistency of the group and helps create the necessary safe space for healing and for me it's an honour to be able to be doing this.

Anonymous Five

Dearest Rana,

This is a letter to say: "Thank You".

I had been EXTREMELY depressed, and the blackness surrounding my heart started surrounding my mind, and I realized that I'm dying inside. My heart and my mind finally came to a standstill.

My mother and I don't have a "communicational" connection, and my husband cannot understand me, help, or support me emotionally. "Stop digging in the past, let bygones be bygones" is his favourite saying.

I NEVER buy the Sarie magazine, but on Monday 7th May 2001, I bought one - at the time, I really didn't know why - NOW I KNOW!

I was paging through the magazine and kept putting it down, then picking it up and turning the pages and putting it down. Eventually on the 6th attempt of emotionless paging through - I got to page 75, and gosh what a moment.

There I was (me of all people) reading news bits on health (of all the things), and it honestly changed my life forever. I phoned you.

Something that really touched me when I phoned was your word at the end of the conversation, (while I was still sobbing).

"Are you going to be OK?" You gave me your cell phone number to call you anytime I felt that I needed you. I could feel the warmth and true concern in your voice, and it really touched me. The sincerity in your voice was something that I've never experienced. The peace and calmness that came over me was incredible.

My "adoption" process began. A genuine, loving, truly understanding, and warm-hearted family of friends have adopted me. People, who can TRULY relate to who I

am, REALLY understand why I am the way I am, and with TRUE FEELINGS empathize and acknowledge my pain, confusion, shame, anger, and feelings of failure, blame and worthlessness.

I get my strength and willpower to face the world for the next week, in my group. I feel supported, loved, accepted and most of all WORTHY and alive.

This is the most difficult road to walk, the sexual, emotional and physical abuse has been part of my life for almost 20 years, I cannot expect to wake-up one morning and be "cured" of my pain, confusion, shame, anger and feelings of failure, blame and worthlessness.

My journey to become a THRIVER is a rough and bumpy road, sometimes an uphill battle, sometimes a downhill slide, but so much easier, calmer and made possible because of the love and care I feel in my group.

I've been to three different psychologists over the years, but medical aid only covers a specific amount of sessions. I cannot afford to pay for a therapist myself, but the group allows me to be a member unconditionally, so in my way I contribute with small things to say "Thank You" for the availability of this group.

From the bottom of my heart, "Thank You for MY opportunity to be a member of a group like ASCA". With a precious thank you from me.

Anonymous Six

**To Everyone That Has Made ASCA Possible...
A huge THANK YOU.**

I joined the group in April 2001 and since then I have grown so much. I now know that I am not crazy and that all my current circumstances / behaviours / feelings can be traced to the childhood abuse.

I started to live a fuller life. I have more confidence & more feelings. I find that I am more present in my body & consequently in my life.

Of the major gifts that I have been given through attending the ASCA group is

- Complete acceptance for who & what I am.
- Safety & security within the group - this aspect of my life I have managed to extend to my workplace, home, & relationships.
- The power to change bad things for good. I have learned that I do not have to accept bad circumstances; I can make decisions to have the circumstances become good.
- Self-love & the ability to extend love to people around me, without jeopardizing myself.
- The knowledge that I do not have to self-sabotage myself, I can self-soothe rather.
- AND most important of all - the knowledge that I am a survivor & will become a thriver - I AM NOT A VICTIM.

About the group environment...

I have found that there is a lot of love, acceptance, safety, security, encouragement, & courage shared in the group. For me, by being involved in the group, I not only learned about these things, I have also learned how to extend this firstly to myself & then to the people in my life.

Thank you to the facilitators & everyone that made this program possible - thank you for giving me back to me.

A grateful member of the group.



Poetry

reflex-tions

by Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: c/o ASCA

daddy i know u never touched me
(at least not like that)

but u don't need ta touch someone
in order ta make them feel uncomfortable
in their own home

daddy those times when we used ta lay together
in yr bed in our underwears
(like spoons one cuppin another)

they still with me

those nights u'd come home alcohol on yr breath
how yr elastic watchband would catch the hairs on my head
n pull them out

one
by
one

even as u tried

ta pull away

(how u'd always apologize for bein so clumsy)

it's why i still flinch whenever yr hand comes near
why i stopped drinkin three years ago

(well that n the rape
n the fact that i started sayin i "needed" a

drink

instead of sayin i "wanted" one)

it's why i always sober now
n why i want ta know exactly what's
goin on
at all times
wherever i am
whoever i'm with
daddy i want ta come ta u with open arms
but these fists r cramped
they won't uncurl

You can contribute to the **Poetry** section by either sending your poems directly to the Poetry Editor, James Daniel or to THE MORRIS CENTER's Board at tmc_asca@dnai.com.



Possible Rotation C Topic: Revisiting Topics from Our Web Page

Are you aware that there are over 35 different topics listed and elaborated upon in our web page for your meeting's use in Rotation C Topic ASCA meetings? These topics and accompanying narratives can be found in the *ASCA Meeting Format and Support Materials* manual.

To locate these suggested topics on our web page click the hyperlink *ASCA Meeting Format & Support Materials* from our home page or *Materials* on the bottom index bar of most pages. Either hyperlink will take you to the *ASCA Meeting Format and Support Materials* manual's *Table of Contents*. The last listing in the *Table of Contents* is *Topics for Rotation C Meetings*. Click this hyperlink. It will bring you directly to the *Suggested Topics for Rotation C Meetings* page.



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Dis-Inviting an ASCA Participant

Under certain extreme conditions the co-secretaries in conjunction with the meeting membership have the option, authority and responsibility to dis-invite and prohibit a survivor from participating in ASCA meetings. This has happened only three times since 1993. It is a strong and decisive action taken by the co-secretaries and the meeting membership to guarantee the ongoing safety of the group.

There are two basic conditions that trigger the process of dis-inviting someone from participating in ASCA meetings. First, the individual refuses to observe the meeting guidelines. In the past this has focused on a survivor who also happens to be a perpetrator. The person has a need to discuss issues and personal dynamics connected with perpetrating abuse on others. Usually, the person is seeking help.

However, ASCA is a program for survivors of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse or neglect. ASCA is not a program to assist people with their perpetration issues and behavior. Such a person needs assistance that ASCA is not designed to offer. This person needs to be referred to another appropriate program where he/she can receive the necessary help that they seek. If a person is presently perpetrating or in the recent past perpetrated abuse on a child or teenager, he/she is not an appropriate candidate for ASCA.

The **second condition** that triggers the process of dis-inviting is more difficult to articulate. It pertains to an ASCA participant, who in the big picture is perpetrating some type of abuse, or taking advantage of the meeting, or taking advantage of some of its members. It might be a situation whereby the person consistently shares in a manner that is offensive and/or antagonistic to other members. Usually the share is highly sexualized in nature. To many people within the group, the shares appear more in the service of titillating and harassing rather than to deal and focus with past abuse. The confirmation of this dynamic is that many if not most people have the same negative reaction over a period of time to these repeated types of shares.

Another situation involves a participant harassing a member(s) of the group, maybe for dating purposes. The person's boundaries are poor. The person may be taking advantage of the vulnerability of a group member(s). The person may try to ingratiate him/herself to a member of the group and then try to take advantage of the person.

When a difficult situation like any of the above occurs in the meeting, the co-secretaries should check out and discuss the situation between themselves and with other senior members of the ASCA meeting. To help clarify, gain perspective and strategize options and possible interventions, the co-secretaries might consider contacting George Bilotta to discuss the situation. Dr. Bilotta can be a wonderful resource and helpful ally in such situations.

Co-secretaries always have the authority to ask a participant to leave a meeting at any time. To enact the process of dis-inviting and prohibiting the person from future ASCA meetings, the co-secretaries should take the meeting membership into counsel through a business meeting. When a person is officially dis-invited from attending ASCA meetings he/she should be given other local resources that might be useful. The dis-invited person should also be told that if he/she should try to attend an ASCA meeting in the future, that the co-secretaries will immediately and automatically call the police to have the person removed. It is the standard procedure, no if, ands or buts.

The process of dis-inviting is a rare occurrence. Since most ASCA meetings are open to the general public, at times a person who is not an appropriate candidate for ASCA may appear in a meeting. Though the process of dis-inviting may raise anxiety, fears, and other distressing feelings, it is an opportune occasion to practice assertiveness, firmness, compassion and courage. It is an opportunity to practice teamwork and collaboration. It is an invitation to stretch ourselves and grow.



Step Elaboration

by Rana Eschur

*Step Elaboration augments the material provided within our **Survivor to Thriver** manual*

Step 7: I can sense my inner child whose efforts to survive now can be appreciated.

It is so inconceivable for me to acknowledge that at the very depths of my pain is a wounded child. Being a child you see was too painful, there was too much violation, too much anger, too much blame, too much shame, too much guilt, too much hate, too much conflict, too much control, too much shouting, too much emotional turmoil - there was simply too much of everything! "Grow up!!! You are not a child anymore" is branded on to my psyche - it's tattooed on my mind.

So, maybe my total resistance and inability to call this part of myself, my inner child, is knowing that there is an absolute denial of me as a child!!

Have I forsaken my inner child? - maybe - let's see what happens!

What I do acknowledge is that there is a highly neglected, deeply hurting, murderously angry, brutally betrayed, viciously self-loathing and completely abandoned part of myself that I negate, that I continuously disregard . . . but calling this part of me, my inner child, is simply too painful - this for me is inconceivable. My inner child is dead - I aborted her a long time ago and the hysterectomy that followed has left behind in its wake only a hallowed out ugly scar!

Is this denial extreme and irrevocable? - maybe - let's see what happens!

I don't remember there being a specific day in which I took my inner child's life.

I poisoned her mind with hate and anger.

I butchered her heart when I refused to give her the love she craved and that had been denied her so long.

I suffocated her when I could not cast out her demons.

I murdered her innocence by denying her childhood.

I destroyed her hopes and dreams by negating them.

I exterminated her fairy tale world with a belief in no happy endings.

I massacred her self-esteem with the scorch from my blames bonfire.

I extinguished the wonder in her eyes and broke her smile.

I have a sense of her salted tears that kept falling like rain while I became weary of

feeling her pain.

She tried desperately to make me love her until I hated her instead.

I killed her . . . and now she is living her death!

This forsaken part of myself hides within the dark recesses that devourer my mind and I surprisingly crave the blackness in which it lives. This "inner child" will continue to remain reviled until I can acknowledge how her pain is my own, and to do that is to risk the very ground I stand on! So who is this "child" that hides in darkness, peeking fearfully from behind the black vale of me?

I hear her violently shriek with anger - "Who would I have been had you let me live"?

My inability to answer her question fills me with unfathomable sadness - I have no sense of who she might have been! - I have no comprehension of who I might have been had I not killed her!

How could I when I have no recollection of the girl that used to be me!

So in profound pain I answer: "Do you see me retching and trembling in the shame of my all"?

"I is broken?" she responds

"I know . . .

I am a gurgling infant . . . with big blue eyes.

I am an inquisitive toddler ...with questioning blue eyes.

I am a sad and lonely, severed from hope, abused and abandoned young child . . .

with pain filled blue eyes.

I am a full of rage, despair, self-loathing, seeker of solace teenager . . .

with deadening blue eyes.

And now I am an adult . . . with hope filled blue eyes!



Announcements

How to order the **Survivor to Thrive** manual? First, the manual can be downloaded from our web page for free. Second, to purchase a copy of the manual, send a check or money order payable to **The Morris Center** for

\$24.00 (add \$5.00 for orders outside of US, i.e., \$29.00). Mail to George Bilotta, **Survivor to Thriver**, 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, U.S.A. Manuals are sent priority mail usually within a few days.

If you have editing skills and want to volunteer to assist with preparing the **ASCA News** for publication, or if you enjoy writing and would like to write a story for the **ASCA News**, or if you have expertise and time to promote our web page within the Internet, please contact George Bilotta for details.

If there are changes in Co-Secretary assignments, please let us know so we can forward a hard copy or a email with an attached file of the **ASCA News** to the correct person. Also if Co-Secretaries have a change in address, telephone number or email, please send these changes to: email: georgebilotta@charter.net, telephone: 508.835.6054, mailing address: 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020.

If you would like to be interviewed for the upcoming December 1st issue, please email me at georgebilotta@charter.net or call me at 508.835.6054. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is **October 7th** for the **December 1st** edition. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is **December 7th** for the **February 1st** edition. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is **February 7th** for the **April 1st** edition.

Remember that if you want to submit an article for the **December** issue of the ASCA News, our deadline is **October 7th** for interviews, **November 1st** for written articles. If your meeting is not receiving the **ASCA News** contact George Bilotta.



Observations, Questions, Comments!

If you have any observations, questions and/or comments that you want to share concerning ASCA and THE MORRIS CENTER, consultant, George Bilotta, PhD, welcomes your inquiries, phone: Dr. Bilotta in Massachusetts at 508.835.6054 or e-mail him at: georgebilotta@charter.net. Never hesitate to call or e-mail. If you would like to contribute a poem, picture/art, article, etc. to our **ASCA News** please contact us.