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From the Desk of George Bilotta

Many people have e-mailed me condolences, encouragement and stories of similar experiences concerning my accident in early September. I want to thank everyone for your kind and supportive words. I continue on the mend without any medical complications. Mother Nature takes her own time in these matters. There are limits to what one can do to heal and to mend a leg, arm and wrist. My leg brace was removed the beginning of October. I actively pursue physical therapy along with my home exercises. A couple weeks ago I transitioned from needing two crutches to using only one crutch. Just the other day I moved from using a crutch to a cane. If all continues well, by the time you read the December issue of the ASCA News I should be as good as new.

If you have participated in the recent ASCA Survey I want to thank you for your thoughts and feedback. I plan to incorporate some of the results from the survey into the December ASCA News. The Board of Directors for THE MORRIS CENTER will be gathering on Sunday, November 19, 2000 for a day of reflection and assessment. We will be reviewing how we function as an organization and how we can do more with greater efficiency and outreach. The survey results will be a helpful aid in our discussions. Our Board assumed their responsibilities this past May. They bring a wide range of talent, energy and experience. As giving people who care deeply, they desire to improve all aspects of our organization. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Board for their commitment, time and creative approaches to leading us into the new millenium.

The following brief article is a continuation of our monthly series focused on pondering some of life's basic questions.



A Reflective Moment

Not Taking Daily Life for Granted

by George Bilotta

As I write this article, (second week of October) it has been 6-7 weeks since my accident. What has unfolded for me? What life mystery has been disclosed during the past several weeks? A deepened and enriched sense of not taking daily life for granted has evolved and filled my consciousness. A broken leg, arm and wrist, all on the left side, has limited many of my usual activities. This situation turned the simplest of activities into a creative and patience-enhancing challenge. There is simply no rushing about. Hurrying, quickness, speed and moving quickly do not exist in my present life. Simple movements like taking a plate from the kitchen counter to the table, getting myself a cup of coffee and moving to a chair, walking around the yard all remain Herculean tasks stretching the limits of mobility.

Naturally, we need to take much of daily life for granted in order to function. We need to take for granted that hot and cold water will flow from the faucet, that our car will start in the morning, and that the food we buy at the grocery store remains free of contamination, etc. Unreflectively taking life for granted however, sets us up to lose perspective. We tend to mix-up and confuse the difference between what is important, from what is trivial. We become stuck and overwhelmed. We lose our way. When we unreflectively take life for granted we narrow our vision, we miss the big picture. We forget what life is ultimately all about. We move toward activities that fill temporarily and leave us hungering for substance and meaning. We tend to decrease our sensitivity and attentiveness. We lose our eyes to see, our ears to hear and our hearts to feel.

Taking life for granted is eating a sandwich while watching the evening news focus on people starving due to famine, civil war, or natural disasters. We tend to turn ourselves off in such an activity. Taking life for granted is failing to appreciate the many conveniences and blessings our society enjoys. We forget that we are part of a privileged society. Taking life for granted is going about our daily life without thinking and remembering that most people in the world have very little compared to our freedoms, our possessions, our education, our medical system, etc.

Taking life for granted is focusing on what we don't have, rather than rejoicing and enjoying what we do have. This may apply to material possessions, to relationships with family and friends, to the way we go about interacting with people, events and things of the world. Taking life for granted is not making voting a priority, not saying thank you many more times a day, not acknowledging that no matter what my present situation, that I still have it better than most people in the world.

What does a deepening and an enriching sense of not taking daily life for granted do for us? Fundamentally, I think that when we live our days not taking daily life for granted we increase our ability to reflect. This reflection opens our eyes to see, our ears to hear and our hearts to feel. This reflection leads to openness and receptivity. In opening and being receptive to the ordinary people, events and things that compose our day, such openness and receptivity leads to appreciation. It leads to an appreciative perspective on the world and our life within the world. We see the bigger picture of life. We enhance our understanding of life's meaning. We grow in wonder, patience, endurance, compassion, and integrity.

What does reflectively appreciating ordinary everyday life, not taking daily life for granted look like? For me, given my present situation, reflectively appreciating ordinary everyday life looks something like saying to myself the other day - "Wow, I'm able to wipe in between my toes" on my left foot after bathing. Not taking daily life for granted is saying to my partner everyday something to the fact of how much I appreciate his caring for me in a loving and empathic way the past 7 weeks. How he has assumed all the responsibilities of our house and home and has made my life comfortable and as mobile as possible during these challenging weeks. Appreciating ordinary everyday life is feeling how fortunate I am to have excellent medical service, and that I have a comfortable and pleasant home within which to recuperate. Not taking life for granted looks like a constant reminder to take proper physical care of myself as I age concerning diet, exercise and rest. I am having an experience of being physically limited requiring the assistance of others. I have a new perspective on the ability to physically move about freely. I have a greatly increased empathy and appreciation for what people with a handicap experience

and endure every day.

What would appreciating ordinary everyday life, not taking daily life for granted, look like for you? Does not taking life for granted have any influence on your recovery process?

In my December article, I will continue with additional reflections on this surprisingly unexpected accident. If you have any questions or thoughts about this article please share them with me through my e-mail: georgebilotta@cs.com.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for November

What Does It Mean to Have a Sense of Self?

We attend a gathering with many people with which we are unfamiliar. We introduce ourselves. We ask the standard and polite icebreaking type questions. Behind the statements that my name is ____, I work at ____, my family consists of ____, and my favorite hobbies are ____, etc., who are we really? Fundamentally, who are we as human beings? At our core, in our heart of hearts, what is our sense of who we are as individual human beings? What is your sense of your self?

Do we define ourselves by what we do, how we perform, what we produce, what we accomplish, what we achieve, what goals we pursue, and by the label(s) that others or we apply to ourselves (e.g., mom, dad, doctor, teacher, white-collar, blue-collar, laborer, manager, survivor, etc)? Or do we gather a sense of who we are by investigating and cultivating the matters of our heart (that we intentionally and persistently strive to be a compassionate, reflective, kind, appreciative, receptive, etc., person)?

The performance definition focuses on the functional nature of life. These functional aspects of life possess rules, judgments and yardsticks by which we measure. However, we often measure incorrectly and judge ourselves harshly. The heart definition of self reveals a self that seeks and tries to live life through virtues like compassion, kindness, patience, etc. From one perspective having a sense of self can derive and be dependent on what we do. From another perspective having a sense of self can be based within our heart, how we try to live our lives in a virtuous manner.

Is a sense of self, a psychological and/or a spiritual understanding and undertaking? We often speak of self-esteem in psychological jargon. But self-esteem seems more an aspect of the outer shell of our personal sense of self. When we speak of our self-esteem we often invoke our feelings. I feel good about myself? I feel energized and excited about life. Or we might say, I feel depressed and I feel inadequate. I feel anxious and I feel limited. For many people, self-esteem and their sense of self is often dictated and overshadowed by their feelings. Though being aware of our feelings and expressing our feelings are important, feelings can also distort and slant reality when they are not truthfully and genuinely exposed and tested against concrete reality. For example, we might say to ourselves - "I feel inadequate. I am not a successful person." But in all reality when we truthfully and genuinely examine our lives we discover that indeed we are

good, caring, generous person who try their best. We are successful in living life.

Having a sense of self may be more like the flavors and spices that we use in daily life. In daily life we try to add the flavors of compassion, appreciation, patience, reflection, courage, kindness, etc. So when we perform a task, we try to perform it in a respectful manner. When we move toward accomplishing a goal, we try to accomplish the goal in a reflective manner. When we pursue an activity, we try to pursue with a sense of appreciation. Having a sense of self seems to have more to do with the manner and the way by which we try to go about living our lives rather than with the concrete performance and achievements. When we focus on the way, the manner by which we live, by which we try to proceed through our daily life, we always win, we always come out ahead because we have a sense of who we are.

Questions:

1. What has been your experience of your sense of self?
2. How do you differentiate between your sense of self and your self-esteem?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Sharing that Connects, Sharing that Disconnects

Do you ever wonder why we sometimes connect and listen intently to one person's share and why we sometimes disconnect, withdraw or stop listening to another person's share?

Why are we drawn to connect? Often we are drawn because the person speaks from the heart, relating events and experiences with a depth of feeling. Feeling language tends to open us up. We present ourselves to other ASCA participants without façade. We demonstrate vulnerability and trust. In turn, ASCA members tend to embrace and to hold these shares gently, respectfully and supportively.

Why do we withdraw? Sometimes our withdrawal has nothing to do with the person sharing but rather how their issues being addressed affect our own unresolved issues. For example, if a sharer describes a painful experience that is similar to my personal situation, I might withdraw and dissociate. What is being discussed might be just too difficult and painful for me to hear at this time.

Sometimes I might withdraw because the presenter is rambling and it takes too much energy to follow. At other times I might withdraw because the sharer is devoid of feelings and I feel like I am listening to a robot instead of a human being. Sometimes I might withdraw because the sharer is shouting or is expressing h/her anger in a way that I feel pushed away rather than drawn to empathize. Sometimes I withdraw because the person speaking continues to basically repeat the same share week after week.

What manner of sharing tends to draw you in? What manner of sharing tends to push you away? What manner of sharing tends to leave you feeling connected and/or disconnected?



Poetry

CROOKED

by James Daniel, Copyright 1999

There was a crooked man
Who grew from crooked stock
Who never could recover
From his post-traumatic shock.
When he was very young
Ma beat him with her gun.
Pop torn him all apart
'Til he had to close his heart.

He grew up asymmetric'ly
Circuits closed electric'ly
Stiff with pained anxiety
Betrayed by his own piety.

No one wanted him
With their eyes
They just saw
Damaged merchandise.

And when he tried to fantasize
'Twas always just the same reprise
Of crooked cries and crooked tears
To straighten a bit
The crooked years.



Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the ASCA NEWS.

1. If there are changes in co-secretary assignments, please let me know. Also if co-secretaries have a change in address or telephone number, please send me these changes. Finally, if as a co-secretary you have e-mail, would you please e-mail me at georgebilotta@cs.com so I can verify and have your e-mail. You can also contact me at 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, 508.835.6054.
 2. Just a reminder that the ASCA Survey is due. We hope to report on the survey in the December issue of the ASCA News.
 3. If you want to order the *Survivor to Thrive* manual simply forward a check for \$23 payable to THE MORRIS CENTER and forward to: THE MORRIS CENTER, c/o George Bilotta, 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583.
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Observations, Questions, Comments!

If you have any observations, questions and/or comments that you want to share concerning ASCA and THE MORRIS CENTER, George Bilotta, welcomes your inquiries, phone: 508.835.6054, e-mail: georgebilotta@cs.com. If you would like to contribute a poem, story, article, etc. to our ASCA News please contact us.