

ASCA News • October 2000

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

In mid-September we added a new section to our web site: **the ASCA Meeting Guidebook**. This section will grow as co-secretaries and ASCA participants raise questions about ASCA meetings and its format. Check it out! You might find it helpful as a way to increase your knowledge and participation in ASCA and thus your recovery.

Some of you may have already heard about my accident on Labor Day. I will be using this situation as material for my Reflective Moment articles. I am on the mend. The doctors reassure me that I will heal without any complications and without any lasting aftereffects. Hopefully, by late October I will be walking and restoring some of the muscle mass in my leg that I have lost due to its temporary immobility. It has been a unique experience with life lessons yet to unfold.

Again, I want to remind you that an easy and practical way of supporting THE MORRIS CENTER and our ASCA program is by donating through the United Way. The United Way's annual appeal is presently underway. Your employer may even provide matching contributions to the pledges made by their employees. We are registered with the United Way. Simply specify that your donation should be forwarded to "The Norma J. Morris Center for Healing from Child Abuse" which is our legal name. Our Federal EIN# is: 94-3138762. "THE MORRIS CENTER" is our DBA (Doing Business As) and ASCA is a program of THE MORRIS CENTER.

Remember that any contribution made directly to THE MORRIS CENTER at any time of the year is always tax deductible, since we are a nonprofit organization. Simply make your check payable to "THE MORRIS CENTER" and forward to - THE MORRIS CENTER, c/o George Bilotta, 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583. Thank you in advance for thinking about supporting us through a donation either via the United Way or directly to us.

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



A Reflective Moment

Reflecting on the Surprisingly Unexpected

What meaning and purpose unfolds from an accident?

by George Bilotta

Aargh! A gut wrenching feeling, clenching teeth, streaming expletives, darting pain up and down my leg and arm. Thus begins the Bilotta clan's Labor Day family picnic. It was the bottom of the first inning of a simple softball game with my young nieces and nephews, along with a few of the adults. Having hit the ball, I was running toward first base. Suddenly, without warning, totally unexpected -- I

stumble. Twistingly hitting the ground, I laid in pain, aware that my body was going into shock. Two hours later the emergency room doctor confirmed that I had a broken left leg and left arm.

Over the next several months I would like to unfold and to share with you various reflections concerning this unfortunate experience. Why did this accident happen and what is its meaning? For me, there is no rhyme or reason for the occurrence of the accident. I simply stumbled with the consequence of breaking my leg and arm. It was no one's fault. It was a fluke, a freak and a random event that had a cause and effect. No one is at fault. There is no one to blame, to accuse or even to be angry with. The accident simply revealed one of the resulting possibilities when a 50-year-old man chooses to play softball, even though it was only an easy going game with children. I am not angry or disappointed in myself. Until the accident, I exercised regularly. I considered myself to be in good physical shape at 50 years old.

A few people have suggested that meaning and purpose must exist for why this has happened to me. Others have stated that God or the Universe is trying to teach me something. In all honesty, such suggestions and statements amuse me. I do not believe that God or the Universe interject, meddle or manipulate life in this manner. Many occurrences in life have no meaning and no purpose. They just happen. What meaning does rape or child abuse reveal? What meaning and purpose do we bestow on the common situation whereby a person under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol plows into another car killing a parent and child? No meaning or purpose exists for these victims. Unpleasant, negative, evil and traumatic things happen to people every day.

Trying to make sense out of something or to instill it with meaning when in reality the event does not make sense or possess any inherent meaning because of its randomness only hinders us from accepting reality. We call this experience denial. In some situations and for some people denial can last for a few moments or for others persist for a lifetime. Attributing meaning to random occurrences and to unpleasant and negative things that happen to us and to others plays into an aspect of the blaming game, i.e., someone or something must be at fault, be responsible, be at blame.

This aspect of the blaming game suggests that we do not need to assume full responsibility for moving forward. "I was not a fault for what happened to me!" "I resent that I have to in order to rectify the situation for myself." Consequently, in such situations we dedicate much of our energy and focus finding fault, blaming, accusing, battling other(s), event(s) and thing(s), like a Don Quixote. Perspective becomes narrow and blurred. Because we have no direction, we tend to feel confused, angry, agitated, anxious, dejected, powerless, inadequate, etc.

What I believe about the unpleasant, negative, evil and traumatic events that unfold in our lives is the following. The process of my recovery from this accident, (physically, psychologically and spiritually), like the process of recovery from any unpleasant, negative, evil and/or traumatic experience possesses potent and compelling life teachings, learnings, insights and wisdom. Reflecting on and lingering with the experience rather than just getting through it is essential.

We need to spend time with the stuff of life to let it unfold and reveal its mystery to

us. It is like spending time with a compass and map to reorient and point one's self in the right direction in order to grow into a better human being. A few months from now, if the only thing I receive out of this experience is a well functioning leg and arm, then I will have lost an opportunity to grow into a better human being.

How we enter into the recovery process, how our heart-spirit accepts or rejects the reality of what has transpired depends in part upon the perspective and the interpretation we give to the event(s). For example, on the way to the hospital sensing that it was more than a sprain, I assumed that substantial damage had occurred to my leg. Yet as I looked around the emergency waiting room, I began feeling appreciative. I was appreciative that it was probably only a broken leg, a dislocated knee or something. The man next to me seemed to have a mangled arm and hand. I overheard another person stating that her father had a stroke. I noticed several other people in the corner crying.

For me, everything is perspective, perspective, perspective. Perspective does not diminish the pain, nor erase the unpleasant and negative that has happened. Rather perspective embraces through appreciation what one has. Appreciatively, I placed into perspective what I loss. I had a broken leg. It could have been a broken neck, a stroke or a freak stumble resulting in permanent paralysis. In addition, I was aware and appreciative that I was in a clean, efficient and modern emergency room. The hospital staff was skilled and caring. Though in physical discomfort, I felt relaxed, attended to and grateful.

I believe that another helpful aspect of interpreting this unpleasant and negative situation through an appreciative perspective transformed any displaced feelings of anger, resentment or ill will. Looking at the bigger picture from an appreciative perspective cut short any of the common circular unanswerable questions: why me, why now, what did I do to deserve this? This is not fair.

To summarize my initial reflections -- I am grateful and appreciative. I have said to my partner numerous times over the past few weeks, something to the effect of the following. Though I have many temporary limitations and numerous daily challenges due to both a broken leg and arm, I have everything I need to recover -- to heal physically, to grow emotionally, to mature spiritually. I am capable of enjoying my life given the recent limitations and restrictions due to the accident.

I no not deny that I have moments during the average day that I feel momentarily frustrated, discouraged, uncomfortable, annoyed, agitated, impatient, etc. These feelings however, are usually fleeting. They dissolve quickly as I laugh at myself and refocus my perspective. I believe that by cultivating an appreciative perspective over the years, this appreciative perspective has specifically permitted me to cope graciously with the results of my accident.

In my November 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 October

Criticism versus Praiseworthiness

Some of us tend to be quick to criticize others and even quicker to criticize ourselves. We can be harsh, severe and disapproving. Our abusers and collaborators were often heavy-handed with their criticism, their faultfinding and their unfairness. Their oppressive style kept us fearful, off balance, subservient and vigilant. Being a part of a family that overflowed with criticism, we quickly developed an inclination to find, to call attention and to exaggerate our errors and faults. We learned to humiliate ourselves, to doubt our capacities, to minimize our accomplishments.

Though some of us can be critical and sharpened tongued with others, this pales in comparison to our keen ability to self-impale and to stick sharp tongued daggers into our own heart. Many of us experience much distress, suffering and discouragement due to our preponderance toward our self-criticalness. As a habit, criticizing feels so usual. It just seems so natural to pick, pick, and pick some more at ourselves. Criticism and lack of appreciation often set us up for the one-two punch of low self-esteem.

Most survivors find it difficult, nearly impossible to ease off of the self-criticism. It happens so quickly. In a sense our heart is like a pincushion. We take the prickly pins of daily life and with no alternatives available we pin them to our hearts. We criticize, judge and find continual fault with ourselves. Criticalness is the opposite of praiseworthiness. As comfortable as we are with criticizing ourselves, many of us find it equally if not more difficult to think about ourselves in a praiseworthy manner.

One possible way to experiment with rebalancing criticism with praiseworthiness might be to just dwell in general on the theme of praiseworthiness. As often as possible throughout the day, let us try to think about the general praiseworthiness of people, events and things that we see and encounter. This exercise might assist us in gradually becoming comfortable with the general stuff of praiseworthiness.

For example, we might express approval for a garden we pass, we might express admiration for some gesture of hope and civility we read about in the newspaper or hear on the evening news. We might applaud some action or accomplishment of a friend or family member. The idea is just to begin thinking and dwelling with the theme of praiseworthiness. As we increase the weight of praiseworthiness in general concerning the people, events and things in our lives, we might as a consequence begin to incorporate into ourselves a bit of praiseworthiness. If we increase praiseworthiness in and around our lives, there is simply less room for criticism.

Questions:

1. What has been your experience of self-criticism?
2. What has been your experience of praiseworthiness?
3. What have you tried in the past to diminish criticism and increase praiseworthiness?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: The Heart of the ASCA Meeting Guidelines

Our ASCA meeting format contains eight basic meeting guidelines along with additional guidelines for sharing, feedback, closure comments, etc. Years ago we intentionally chose the word - guidelines. We accepted the inevitable reality that most of life, including ASCA meetings, are experienced in the gray area. Life and ASCA meetings rarely appear clear-cut and without some ambiguity. During an ASCA meeting situations sometimes arise that require gentle unfolding and subjective interpretation within the confines of our agreed upon and time tested guidelines. Our guidelines propose to provide guidance and safety. They are not meant to be like harsh blocks of cement to impede, to humiliate or to hurt.

Some of the guidelines are concrete like #1 arriving on time, #2 meetings are exclusively for survivors, #3 only first names are used, #4 what you hear is told in confidence, or #5 don't use alcohol or drugs before a meeting. However, guidelines #6, #7 and #8 along with the sharing and feedback guidelines reside more within the gray area. Tending to point us in a direction, rather than being concrete, these guidelines require a generous scoop of goodwill and some common sense on the part of all participants. Gentle compassion, thoughtful understanding, and an empathetic heart are usually the more important elements when interpreting a guideline.

Good will is assuming, taking the position, placing our heart in a mode of receptive willingness. Often the person we perceive as breaking the guideline is doing the best s/he can. The person might be ignorant or confused about the guideline. The participant might be overwhelmed at the moment. It does not help to get all bent out of shape over a violation or a perceived violation of a guideline. Graciously accepting the co-secretary's flow with the situation or the co-secretary's decision concerning the situation tends to be more helpful and in the spirit of our ASCA guidelines than being rigid, reactive or blowing a situation out of proportion or out of perspective.

Sometimes something will happen within an ASCA meeting which results in a person(s) feeling uncomfortable or anxious. When something happens during a meeting with which you disagree or with which you find unsettling, it would be helpful to you and to the meeting to discuss the situation with the Co-Secretaries following the conclusion of the meeting. Often this kind of follow-through can clarify and rectify a situation. There is a greater probability of leaving the meeting satisfied and peaceful when you discuss difficult situations with the Co-Secretaries than if you simply leave the meeting upset and in a huff. Part of recovery is learning how to gently but firmly confront situations that seem askew.

To summarize, the heart of our ASCA guidelines serves to promote helpfulness

and safety. We interact and optimize our guidelines when we participate with a receptive heart and a generous scoop of goodwill.



Poetry

ABUSE

by -BoK

The terrible wanton has found me,
A fragile vase shattering in my chest.

I sleep, I cannot sleep.
I cry, I cannot cry.

This slithering discomfort
Travels my body head to toe
When I died, my sister died with me.
When my mother cried, we cried with her.

There is no escape from this plague,
No flight to lift our bodies from the earth,
From the endless wearing of our youth.

It plagues us all.
It treats the heart a feast of
Wilted flowers and tempting thorns,
It glorifies the mind-for every
Inch of fear, an inch of rope to pull
Us out of this fire.

It shakes the soul to find me,
To find where our beauty has gone-
Where is our love?

There is a reminder in each image
I seek of myself:
In all the mirrors and reflections
And values and sense,
Where is our right to live without you?

I place this stake in the ground
As if to capture the heart of evil,
To deaden the pain surfacing in our own hearts.
Past this point, nothing will survive!

I hope this is the last I will write to you
Because each word is like the constant memory,
The memory of our lives being torn.

I cannot escape you.
Though you are all the reason
For me not to be,
You are but another image of who I am.

Please take my heart.
Please take all that is left of me,
Because I can no longer fit this life,
I can no longer breathe air into these lungs.

Tomorrow? Tomorrow is new
Only if we let our worn selves float behind.

My dear old friend has left me;
A ghost back into the womb,
The womb beneath the roots of a tree.

I stand here frightened-
Still in great love.
Every way I turn,
I turn completely.

And like some things
Keeping our attention for
an extended amount of time,
I make several turns after another-
Turning a wind
That cools the fire,
That sips the haunting shadows out.

I will not make a place at
The table for you,
Because you have sat eating
For quite a while.

Because you have stuffed yourself,
Because you have taken a part
Of what we needed to live.

Because you have emptied our stomachs,
Have stolen our blood,
Have raped our children!

Women and Men
Mothers and Fathers
Sons and Daughters
Nephews and Nieces
Aunts and Uncles
Cousins and Friends

You have no home with me!
If you knock, I will not let you in.
If you sing, I will not dance.

If you cry, I will not feel remorse.

Today, I am with great love,
And love has closed the door on you



Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the **ASCA NEWS**. Currently, we forward a hardcopy of the ASCA News to all the meetings. A Co-Secretary or some designated person from the meeting should be duplicating and distributing the ASCA News to the meeting membership.

1. 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.
 2. Reminder! David Vandeventer is preparing to facilitate a Co-Secretary Training. If you are interested in participating please contact David at 510.524.5946 or at his e-mail: dvandeventer@aol.com. Contact David as soon as possible so arrangements can be organized based upon interest.
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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.