

ASCA News • March 2000

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From the Desk of Executive Director

George Bilotta

Winter's severity seems to be receding. Looking out my window, the intensity of cold and snow is steadily and reassuringly melting away revealing patches of snowless landscape. Each passing day thaws winter's dormancy and prepares the earth for the first signs of spring. Catalogues containing every conceivable plant, shrub and flower arrive in the mail as an encouraging sign that spring is close at hand.

Employing the image of winter subsiding, suggests an image concerning our past abuse and movement into initial recovery. Winter, like child abuse, froze and numbed us. It constricted our growth. It paralyzed our ability to move-on with our lives as children, teenagers and adults. It stunted us from evolving and developing in the usual and normal way.

Like late winter, the intensity of the big freeze dwindles, giving way to initial thawing. Trees and shrubs begin to energize themselves. The tapping of sugar maple trees announce that the sap, the life blood of the maple tree is flowing once again. Similarly, each of us in the initial stages of our recovery move from the deep freeze of abuse to the slow thawing that gives way to recognizing and moving into recovery. Literally, we begin to thaw and tentatively start feeling.

Many survivors sense that they are not growing, moving, getting on with their lives, that they remain in the deep freeze of winter. Yet there are initial signs of new life, renewed energy, regenerated ways of seeing, hearing, feeling. These are small signs of hope. To some extent this is what Step Two: I have determined that I was physically, sexually or emotionally abused as a child is describing. For various reasons we begin to thaw, moving out of the deep freeze and into the initial stages of recovery. We acknowledge that we were abused and in Step Three announce that I have made a commitment to recovery from my childhood abuse.

Looking for the signs of hope that appear in our early stages of recovery, can encourage and energize us. When we acknowledge that there is some movement, we note that we are capable of growing, of renewing our lives. It all takes time, patience and courage. We might reflect and ask ourselves: what are the encouraging signs that reveal and point to our growth in initial recovery?

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



A Reflective Moment

Life is a daily struggle or part of the meaning of life is to struggle

by George Bilotta

As we introduced in January and again last month, I think it is worthwhile to spend some of our time reflecting on some of life's most fundamental questions and issues as we slowly move into a new millennium. Last month we discussed "What is life asking of us?" This month we raise another basic issue - life is a struggle.

We often hear people mention that life is a struggle for them. They interpret and experience life as a burden, as difficult, as a grind, full of stress, full of effort and exertion. As a survivor of child abuse, we might say "what do you expect?" Many people have a perception that life should be without burden, easy, stress free, effortless. Many people think that the ideal life would be easy, full of comfort, without conflict, without labor or exertion. We hear some people say "if only I had a better job, if only I had more money, if only I had a better home, if only I had a better family, if only I had not been raped as a child, humiliated as a child, beaten as a child."

Part of the meaning of life is to struggle, is to accept life as a daily ongoing struggle. Many people interpret struggle as a negative, that they should not have to struggle, or at least not have to struggle as much as they do. When we struggle with life's daily demands, we use our energy to accomplish something. In trying to accomplish we grow, mature, move toward that which we desire.

To struggle is also to confront difficulties and do something to overcome them. We use our energy in a positive manner to deal with the many hassles, difficulties, conflicts, troubles and stresses of a usual day. To struggle is to experience our aliveness. If we can frame our everyday struggles in a positive rather than a negative manner, and to balance the energy we exercise in our daily struggles with self-nurturing, then to struggle with life might lead to increased engagement, excitement and commitment.

Perhaps one way to wrap ourselves around the issue of life as a struggle is to ask ourselves are we struggling *against* or struggling *toward*? A frame of mind that is struggling *against* seems defensive, hunkered down, guarded and closed. Those with a frame that represents struggling *toward* seem open, receptive, creative and energized. How do you frame that life is a struggle?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Telephone Support Sign-Up

Many, but not all, ASCA meetings pass around the Telephone Support Sign-Up sheet at the beginning and end of the meeting. The sign-up sheet states:

Signing this list is totally voluntary. If you want to volunteer as a telephone support person during the week, please print your name and telephone number. During the last part of our meeting, the phone list will be passed around again. At that time members can copy down numbers of individuals that they want to stay in contact with for this week. At the end of the meeting, the list will be destroyed. Your name will be active only for the time between meetings.

What is a support person? A support person is a member of the ASCA meeting who volunteers to be available by phone to receive calls from another member of the ASCA meeting who may need support during the week, between meetings. The volunteer generously gives of his/her time to be supportive of another ASCA member in need for that week only.

However, even though a person has volunteered, if his/her circumstances change during the week, he/she has no obligation to continue to be a support person. If this should happen and someone calls, the volunteer might simply say something like, "I'm sorry but my situation has changed and I am not in a position to function as a support person this week. You might want to call The Morris Center for more immediate support."

The Telephone Support Sign-Up procedure operates on the honor system. Names and telephone numbers taken from the list should only be used to request support via the telephone. They should never be used for personal gain like soliciting a date. This is not a social listing but a list for support. Trust is a basic concern for all survivors. Misuse of the list erodes trust and hinders our recovery.



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 tore 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.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for March

Courage: Recovery's Adhesive

Courage is usually defined as a quality of spirit or mind that permits a person to confront fear and/or danger with confidence and bravery. Many books and articles which elaborate on recovery from child abuse mention the need for courage in order to pursue recovery. Courage does not eliminate nor diminish the feelings of fear, apprehension, anxiety, uneasiness, dread, etc. Courage does not remove nor lessen the dangers that we face throughout recovery, the possibility of rejection, the denial of others, the betrayal of family, the general minimization by society, etc. Rather courage is that type of spirit-filled energy, that focused and determination of mind, that helps us to stand our ground, to speak the truth, to re-experience the world with new eyes and ears, with an open heart and an open mind.

As a quality of spirit or mind, courage is something that requires cultivation. We cultivate courage by spending time during the week dwelling and reflecting on the various aspects of courage. We imagine what it feels like to be full of courage. We review past situations in which we acted courageously. We anticipate upcoming encounters that will require mustering up our courage. We practice by roll playing scenarios either in our minds or with others that involve us being courageous.

Questions:

1. What is your experience of courage?
 2. What do you sense is the role of courage in your recovery efforts?
 3. On a practical level, what can you do to foster courage in your daily life?
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Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the ASCA NEWS. In addition, Co-Secretaries or some designated person from the meeting should be downloading the ASCA NEWS. It is then duplicated and distributed to the meeting membership.

If you have a question or a situation that needs discussion, you can always reach George Bilotta, by e-mailing him or telephoning him directly in Massachusetts 508.835.6054. Never hesitate to e-mail or call.



Announcement!

"The Third Annual Ritual Abuse, Secretive Organizations and Mind Control Conference" will be held on August 5 and 6, 2000 at the DoubleTree Hotel at Bradley International Airport (between Hartford, CT and Springfield, MA). The purpose of the conference will be to help survivors of ritual abuse and to help stop future occurrences of ritual abuse and mind control. The conference will be for survivors, co-survivors, helping professionals and others interested in the above topic.

For more information write S.M.A.R.T., PO Box 1295, Easthampton, MA 01027-1295 USA E-mail: smartnews@aol.com, Current conference information is also available at: <http://members.aol.com/smartnews/smart-2000-conference.htm>



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.