

ASCA News • December 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

Anticipating the celebration of the end of the year holidays and the beginning of a New Year, many survivors face the holidays welling up with a wide range of feelings. During December it might be helpful to focus on the upcoming holidays by making the holidays the topic for a Rotation C Topic meeting. I have included *Holiday Dynamics* in the Rotation C Topic section of the newsletter. Also, a past and related topic Holidays: *Lost and Found* can be located on our web page in the *ASCA Support Materials* manual listed under the heading topics. Holidays often ring with the dualities of laughter and sadness, welcome and resentment, hope for the future tempered by the pain of the past. The end of the year holidays are truly a mixed bag for us all.

Through this issue and in forthcoming issues, members of the Board of Directors for **THE MORRIS CENTER** will take turns offering their perspective on various aspects of recovery from childhood abuse. They will present their viewpoints in a new column, **As I See It**. Bob Roberts initiates this series in this current issue.

In addition you will encounter several poems, by James Daniels, Kim A. Emerson-Santa and Cynthia Bryant. In the *Ongoing Education Moment*, I focus on the *ASCA Guidebook* and how to use it. Vlado Bradbury interviews Denise resulting in a wonderful interview-article focused on the "inner child". Finally, if you view our web page at www.ascasupport.org, a picture *Personal Journey* from one of the ASCA meetings in South Africa is included in living color. The picture is not included in the hardcopy version of the **ASCA News**.

Holiday Shopping! **THE MORRIS CENTER** is part of the Amazon.com Associates Program. If you plan to purchase merchandise from Amazon.com, please go to Amazon.com through our web page www.ascasupport.org. Just click the Amazon.com link on our home page. When you follow this procedure, we receive a small commission on your purchases at Amazon.com. We do not receive notification of names or purchases from Amazon.com. We only receive a check based on the purchases made that month by consumers going to Amazon.com through our web page. This is one way that you and your friends can continue to support our mission. Thanks for your consideration.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for the coming New Year!



As I See It
Parents as Perpetrators
By: Bob Roberts

Adult survivors who are grappling with childhood trauma were abused and/or abandoned by their parents. Otherwise, they could have shared and resolved their trauma as children with the empathy and love of their parents. I am approaching the issue of resolving the abuse with the perpetrators from the framework of having one's parents as perpetrators.

As children, we are totally dependent on our parents for survival. In many parts of the world, adults remain dependent on family (or clan) relationships-one's well-being and survival depends to a large degree on the relationship with one's birth family. Even in countries where this is no longer true, we are not far removed from the days when being exiled from the clan threatened one's survival. Even though it is now possible to survive-and even thrive-without ties to one's family of origin, our society strongly reinforces the idea that "family values" are primary.

A survivor must confront the conflict between 1) the love and loyalty which each child must feel for their parents, and 2) the feelings-hopelessness, sadness, and fury-resulting from the ways they were abused. This conflict becomes more open as we bring these feelings to consciousness--in the process of remembering and mourning. However, this remains a difficult, time consuming process.

We take our abusive parents within us in order to survive

Our parents shape how we view ourselves. Survivors take their abusive parents within as a harsh inner critic. A survivor may feel shameful, dirty, and bad-responsible and deserving of the abuse-in response to attitude and voice of the internalized parent. In many cases, this is an explicit message, but even without the explicit criticism and shaming, the message is there. The abuse expresses the attitude of the parent. Even with many expressions of "Mommy and Daddy love you," we internalized their real attitude. Abusive parents often isolate the family to keep the abuse hidden, reinforcing their impact in shaping our inner world.

Accepting this negative self-image is actually a creative way of surviving our childhood. Had we not accepted their message that we were shameful and deserving of the treatment they gave us, we would have had to see that our situation was hopeless and would not change. This hopelessness would have been far worse than the shame that we accepted.

At stake in this job of confronting our inner parent(s) is our clarity in raising our own children in a loving and compassionate way. When we meet in our children the expressions of emotion-such as anger, frustration and fury-we face a choice. The embedded response is to validate our parents' emotional attitude toward us as children by responding to our children in a similar way. The alternative is to reject that response and meet our child with empathy and compassion. Stated like this, the choice seems simple, but in practice, there is pressure to validate our parents and "finally understand how difficult it was for them."

What is the best we could hope from our family and the worst...

The family of origin feels like a source for our need fulfillment as adults. In much of the world, this is not true, but it often feels that way. In fact, a survivor's family of origin

may offer many things that seem important: 1) a circle of friends and social support 2) a source of support in case of emergency (health, financial, etc.) 3) a familiar place to spend holiday gatherings (even if actual memories of these gatherings are miserable), 4) relationships with nieces and nephews, 5) help with a down payment for a home, and, 6) an inheritance (this may seem especially important if your adaptation to the abuse was to underachieve and sabotage your own personal success).

Parents confronted by their children have an opportunity. They can strive to make themselves worthy of the love that their child has always felt toward them. They can initiate their own process of self-discovery and recovery. They can spend as much time as needed listening to their child's story and finally empathizing with them.

This would be a very painful process. The pain would include seeing and taking responsibility for the pain they inflicted on their children. But, I think the larger pain would be facing their own inner pain from their childhood. This is what they were trying to keep buried as they repeated and normalized the cycle with their children. They could take a loving position toward their children and help end this recurring cycle in this generation.

In my experience very few will do this. While they may make shifts in their behavior, they will not want to take the work of recovery seriously-not simply your recovery, but their own. They will not want to feel the pain of their own childhood. They will remain more loyal to their own parents than to their children.

The birth family will act as though the adult child in recovery is **rejecting them**. They will express the attitude that discussing the abuse at family gatherings is a hurtful and retaliatory act, especially when it "goes on for months and years." Most survivors feel a pressure to avoid discussing their abuse and asking for support with their recovery. The family members just do not want to hear it. After listening (sometimes sympathetically) to the telling of the story, they will shift toward an attitude that indicates the limits of their support and their open hostility. Statements like: "let the past be in the past" "haven't you gotten past that?" "he/she (the perpetrator) had a miserable life too" "you need to become strong enough that it doesn't bother you to be with them."

In recovery, we find ourselves enriching our lives with loving friends and partners, and having our own children. We resolve the pain we faced as children, wanting the loving mother, father and family that we never had-the pain of knowing that it was hopeless, and that we can never have **that** family. This brings into sharp relief the joy we can have as adults building a rich life with others, learning to share love and intimacy.

We find friends who want to listen to us, take us seriously, and share their own recovery. We should use these same standards when making decisions about relationships with our birth family members.

Does it make sense to forgive parents?

Forgiveness is a part of the process of repairing a reciprocal relationship. One person might rupture a friendship by their misdeeds. Both feel a loss with the rupture. If the guilty party were motivated to mend the rupture and reestablish the relationship, they would seek to make restitution and seek forgiveness. Forgiveness, in this case, would be the acknowledgement by the offended party that their friend, acquaintance, or business partner is sincere in valuing their relationship, has taken appropriate steps to

make reparations. In forgiving, one feels confident in extending their trust and resuming their relationship and reciprocal exchange.

I believe that forgiveness is a concept that makes no sense when applied to children and their parents. The relationship between parents and children is not reciprocal. The gap between what survivors received as children and what they had every right to expect is immense. Even as we spend time with children and approach parenting our own children, it seems difficult to recognize that we deserved every bit of the love and attention that we offer the children in our own lives. The sense of loss and grief for our own lost childhood and as well as the anger felt for the way we were treated surfaces as we dwell on this.

Even if they sincerely desired it, parents cannot undo the emotional damage suffered by their children. The adult survivor must do the work of recovery.

Parents view themselves as having made sacrifices for their children. Implicitly and or explicitly, parents (and society) expect children to bear a burden of debt to their parents. I disagree with this. To be a parent is a privilege. But, it is within the social attitude of children being indebted, that forgiveness makes sense. It would be acknowledging the feeling of gratitude for the burdens that the parents endured. In addition, in the days when the family was necessary for survival, it would make sense in order to maintain the needed family unit.

The feelings of longing

Will the feelings of longing for the birth family ever recede? I believe they will. The longing is not really from the present. The longing is a memory of the way we felt as children. The longing today might best be visualized as the child, which we were, crying for someone to take care of them. And today, the only person who can listen to and comfort that child is the loving adult that we have become.



You can offer feedback concerning the preceding and following articles by sending an e-mail either to THE MORRIS CENTER's Board at tmc_asca@dnai.com. Mailing addresses are included either in the beginning masthead or in the contact information at the conclusion of the newsletter. Your comments will be gratefully received.

Poetry, Poetry and more Wonderful Poetry

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY

by James Daniel, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: c/o ASCA

From Christmas Eve to New
Year's Day
The old year kindly passed
away.
Some joy from visiting relatives
Drinking, yelling, nonstop eating
A kitchen full of loud Italians
With starchy hair and gold
medallions
Spaghetti with clams dug up
from the beach
Cheap wine with ginger ale
within my reach.

Strains of albinism staining the
tablecloth
Card games my grandfather
always would win
Gaudy lights, five-and-dime
decorations
Cousin Dan laughing heartily
pouring libations
I'd imagine life with my
godparents
I'd imagine my parents driving
over a bridge
I'd imagine this laughter all year-
round
As I put the leftovers into the
fridge.

Christmas Day. Just clothes for
presents
Clothes I think my mother should
wear
For my own aesthetic taste she
didn't care
A green fiberglass tree, with
green lights and green
ornaments
In a turquoise home, what a
strange color scheme
My mother never varied much

from her theme
No books, no homework, a rare
reprieve for me
Too bad Christmas had to come
down before the next eve.

New Year's Eve. Waiting for
snow
Waiting on my neighbor, Tony
Migliaccio
We'd set off firecrackers at
passing cars
We'd stalk the neighborhood
under the stars.
I'd write in my journal about the
year past
Wishing this last week would not
go so fast
For the new year ahead, a
prayer for redemption
From desires for Tony too scary
to mention.

New Year's Day. The Rose
Parade
Grandma baking lasagna
Telling me what she considers a
sin
I in denial of school the next day
Looking through plastic candles
in windows
Searching the sky for signs of
snow
Falling asleep with these eight
days of magic
And visions of Tony Migliaccio.

Stolen Daughters

by Kim A. Emerson-Santa, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: c/o ASCA

Anger seethes under the thread
of their existence!
Youth lost in violence and
hatred.
Youth abandoned in
helplessness.
No solace for a stolen daughter.

A mother lost to madness.
Unable to stop the loss of her
children's innocence.
Unable to teach them about love
and beauty in the world.
Only violence, molestation, and
hatred reign.
From a man allowed to enter
their lives.
A man brought up in violence
and hatred.
A man brought up in ignorance
and fear.

Anger seethes under the thread
of their existence!
Time and memories, cruelty and
frailty.
Hearts broken, minds bended.
Lives tormented.

Why?
Why?
Why?

Stolen daughters.
Stolen in ignorance.
Stolen in depravity.
Stolen in injustice.
Stolen in sin.

Stolen daughters.
Released from their internment
in a living hell.
Released from the beast that
tried to control their souls and
existence.
Released to once again fly free
in the world.
Released to the light.
Released to the beauty.
Released to find their way back
to their family.
To love, to acceptance, to
encouragement, to life.

Anger seethes under the thread
of their existence.
For loss of dignity and self-worth
in their youth.
For loss of the truth.

For loss of hope.
For loss of their mother.
For loss of their father.
For loss of their family.
For loss of their soul.

The Perfect House

by Cynthia L. Bryant, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: c/o ASCA

As we wander that old street
see row upon row
of identical houses
our eyes fall on a house
not quite like all the others
Welcome to the home of my
childhood

Best house on the block
freshly paint pale green
shutters and trim in emerald
Gaily bordered by purple
pansies
Clean borders drawn by intricate
iron fence

In the front yard
sways a gentle weeping willow
surrounded by lush manicured
grass
Heavily scented yellow roses
Line either side, the unfettered
pathway
that leads up to polished oak
door

Now-go around to the back
open the door slowly
this fine day on the sly
Slink your way in
don't start to cry
Crying is not allowed

Watch in silence
while mother's lessons are
taught—

S M A C K

"I'll give you something to cry
about!"

The family slogan driven home
hard

"Children are to be seen, not
heard"

Tinker Toys, teacups, Tiny Tears
alike

left too long on their own
snatched up, tossed out with the
trash

Toddlers thrown against walls
with a thud

for beds unmade or pajamas on
the floor

crimes worthy of corporal
punishment

Lapses of bladder control
reprimand

unrestrained flow stench of urine
cascading payback over guilty
child

Bare bottoms beaten crimson
with whatever is handy
angry welts on the rise

Rebellion washed out with soap
From grimacing mouths gagging
bubbles of sickening slime

Tiny arms tracked by weeping
blisters

Small perfect circles seared into
flesh

for minor breaches

Late at night

if your already queasy stomach
allows

hide in some corner

Watch as Daddy sneaks in
taking

all the innocence he can hold
then tippy-toes back to his room

snoring his way through
untroubled dreams

While his clean well-fed children
beg God for Heaven's sake
to keep their souls

if they should die before they
wake

Cynthia has just finished self-publishing her 5th chapbook of poetry titled ***Dark Mother Living on the Borderline***. It is a book filled with the unreality of being brought up by a borderline personality mother and incestuous father. *The Perfect House* is one of the poems. If you are interested in ordering this chapbook you can do so by sending \$9.00 and your mailing address to: Cynthia L. Bryant, 1322 Santa Rita Road, Pleasanton, CA 94566. Please allow 3 weeks for shipment. Any questions or comments can be sent to the same address or email me at cynthiabryant@attbi.com.

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



**Possible Rotation C Topic for December:
Holiday Dynamics**

Even in the best of times the holiday season can be a challenge to one's emotional life and sense of balance. The holiday experience can encompass hecticness and confusion, wonder and joy, sadness and resentment, lost perspective and lost opportunities. For many survivors of childhood abuse, the holiday season registers memories of pain, betrayal, abandonment, manipulation, etc. Many people feel depressed, lonely, overwhelmed, and just look forward to the holidays being over.

Questions:

1. What do the upcoming holidays rouse in you and mean for you?
2. What have been successful strategies in the past for you in dealing with holidays?
3. What do you need to do for yourself to manage the upcoming holidays?



**ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment:
What is the *ASCA Meeting Guidebook* on Our Web Page?**

The *ASCA Meeting Guidebook* is located on our web page at www.ascasupport.org. It provides discussion and guidance on various components that comprise the ASCA meeting format. Presently, there are 24 topics discussed. As a resource it can be particularly helpful for co-secretaries. It can also be informative for ASCA participants especially when confusion and/or

disagreement surface concerning a particular dynamic of an ASCA meeting.

We update and add to the material within the *Guidebook* as members ask questions and request additional clarification on specific aspects of the ASCA meeting and on areas of the ASCA program in general.

If you are unfamiliar with the *ASCA Meeting Guidebook* it might be worth your time and energy to review its contents. As you read through the material if you have a question, contact George at georgebilotta@cs.com for clarification. Your question may lead to additional material being placed within the *Guidebook*. If you have a question, often other ASCA participants will have the same question.



Interview with Denise
by Vlado Bradbury

Interview, Vlado talking with Denise about the relationship with the “inner child”.

The “inner child” is an idea that is promoted by many therapists, particularly John Bradshaw. Our minds are filled with memories of childhood, often traumatic. These memories can be triggered at any moment by present events and flood overwhelmingly into consciousness. These memories may include intense physical or emotional pain, or whole ways of being in the world or relating to people. We might feel just like a powerless terrified child. If we can recognize that these intense feelings have their origins in our childhoods we have the opportunity to bring some adult wisdom, compassion and critical thinking to these unresolved memories and effect some soothing and resolution.

This vast store of memories from childhood (which I suggest is the “inner child”) can be a source of great joy as well as pain. Many adults get a youthful pleasure from childhood activities such as, running, swimming, biking, going to movies, ice-cream, drawing, being at the beach. Bradshaw would encourage us to cultivate a relationship with our inner child or children. To understand the fears, and desires we find there. To know and understand the inner child is to know ones history. This enables us to act in an integrated manner on our own best behalf. This frees us from repeatedly, recreating and re-experiencing the sufferings of our childhood.

V. The way that you relate to your inner child has long impressed me. Red streaks in your hair, bright toenails, the youthful clothes that you wear, all these things tell me that she is present. You also hold down a serious job, isn't she inconvenient or embarrassing at times?

D. Oh yes, but at work I'm a teacher in a Montessori school, and they encourage creativity and self-expression so that works out O.K.

V. What does your inner child do when you the adult is at work?

D. Because I teach little children, she is often present. When I'm working with a student she may do the work too, draw or write. Also when I am relating to my students in a respectful manner she sees that and is comforted. She also gets angry if she thinks I'm treating students unfairly. Today I had to separate two friends because they were making so much noise. She said that this was very unfair and I had to explain that I know it's hard for young kids to be separated but they were being too disruptive and for a while they were going to have to sit apart from each other till they

settle down. In staff meetings she gets to write in the margins of my pad, and she will tell me if anything or anyone is triggering her. I hear her and explain that as soon when the meeting is over she can tell me all about it in the car but for now I need to attend the meeting. She knows that I will do what I say, she trusts me so this is usually enough and she calms down. We talk later in the car.

V. How do you soothe her?

D. Talking mostly, today that happened about five times, I spoke gently to her and reassured her. Then there is writing in my journal, sometimes pages and pages of how a certain incident felt, the same words repeated again and again. At the end of the day I check in with her see how the day went for her, what was good, what was not? Last night she told me that we scheduled too many things. We didn't have any quiet time alone. Often when we're having a hard time a nap is all we need, then I realize "no wonder I'm having a hard time we did 12 stressful things today". I also do the things that my mother did for me, to soothe me from the consequences of the rapes. That is when I'm in crisis. I will bundle up in bed with hot tea. I do this when I know memories are surfacing. This can be painful as well as soothing. My child thinks that this means my mother was good. Then I have to break it to her that if my mother didn't stand by while her husband was raping me I would not need to be soothed. If my mother had protected me there wouldn't be this anxiety

V. When you cry who is it that is crying?

D. If there is screaming, sobbing or terror then it is the child. If it's a quiet tear that rolls down my cheek and there is mourning, grieving, amazement or gratitude then it's adult.

V. Do you have a hard time believing your child?

D. At times I could not believe the incredible, unspeakable things that she said happened. Then my life would be hell, I would be filled with pain, intense anxiety and confusion. I would become paranoid, believing that people around me today hated me or were out to get me. Believing her became a very practical and pragmatic thing because when I said to her "I believe you, tell me what happened" then all the pain would go away. The confusion would go away. I would be left with the memory that might leave me incredulous but the pain would be gone. That was all the proof I needed.

V. What happens if you don't parent your child?

D. That can happen really easily if I'm tired. She will start to tantrum and if I don't parent her then I will look for a parent outside of myself. I will look to my partner or friends. I will imagine they are either my awful parents and I will pull for a fight or I will imagine that they are my fantasized good parents and that they will take care of me. When they can't or won't look after me then I hate them. Finally I will get a handle on it and realize this is just too intense, this cannot be about the present and I begin to parent myself. Sometimes I check with the person, "did you shut the kitchen door because you're trying to shut me out?" "No, I thought you might want to sleep some more," replies my partner. Sometimes I have to apologize.

V. What does your child want in her life?

D. She wants to be listened to and heard, and not just when there is a crisis but everyday, she wants me to tell her that I can't be pushed away, that I love her. She wants me to never listen to the "mother Maureen" that is inside my head, the

perfectionistic, terrifying hypochondriac.

V. What do you the adult want?

D. I want peace. I want to live in the present with my partner, to have a good relationship with my partner. I want to go to the movies sometimes. I want to have a family. I don't need "excitement"; I had enough "excitement" in my childhood to last ten lifetimes. I want some peace.

V. Your inner child did not ask for things, she asked that you love her. Are the things that your inner child does ask for, hairstyles, a bicycle, or certain clothes, really just vehicles for her to see that you love her, that you are listening to her?

D. Objects and things are some of the ways that the love and respect are shown. In Montessori it is believed that the only way you can raise a child is to get down on their level. You have to go to them. Bradshaw says that if you do that, they will grow up. The good parents that I see in my work, they make time to spend with their kids, they are attentive. Often it is about making space for later. It is actually nowhere near as hard as my mother would have me believe.

V. Thank you for doing this interview.

D. I really enjoyed it, my inner child too, can she tell you something? She wants you to write down three books that she found the absolutely most useful, "**The courage to heal**" by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis which is for everyone it's about how to be human, "**the Obsidian Mirror**" by Louise, M. Wisechild and "**Homecoming, reclaiming your inner child**" by John Bradshaw, thank you.

Your feedback concerning the preceding article is encouraged and welcomed.

Personal Journeys: a picture from one of the ASCA meetings in South Africa





Announcements

If you have expertise and time to promote our web page within the Internet, please contact George at georgebilotta@charter.net for details.

If there are changes in Co-Secretary assignments, please let George know so that he can forward a hard copy or an 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: telephone: 508.835.6054, email: georgebilotta@cs.net, mailing address: 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020.

If you would like to be interviewed for the upcoming February 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 December 15th for the February 1st edition. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is February 15th for the April 1st edition. Remember that if you want to submit an article for the February 1st issue of the *ASCA News*, our deadline is January 4th for written articles.

If your meeting is not receiving the *ASCA News* please contact George Bilotta.

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 Thrive*, 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, U.S.A. Manuals are sent priority mail usually within a few days.

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



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.