

ASCA News • February 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilott

I am thrilled to announce that we have an updated and newly formatted web site at www.ascasupport.org. This exceptional web site results from the many, many hours of loving dedication and technical skills of Ramona Mastin and Bob Roberts. Bob is one of our Board of Directors. As a Board member his primary responsibility is to maintain and supervise our web site. Ramona is a volunteer with exceptional skills and artistic taste. We continue to be a successful organization and increase our ability to reach out to other survivors of childhood abuse because of volunteers like Ramona. Not only is the new web site a work of art but it is most user friendly. I encourage you to checkout the new site. We are all grateful to Ramona and Bob for their work and for bringing our web site into the twenty-first century. Thank you!

A successful Co-Secretary training was conducted on Sunday, January 7, 2001, in San Francisco. Nine ASCA members participated along with 3 trainers under the direction of Board member David Vandever, MFT. I want to thank David and his team for their time, energy and skill. I also want to thank those who participated in the training. ASCA meetings simply cannot exist without qualified and competent Co-Secretaries. Thanks for coming onboard.

On a sad note, it is with regret that I have been informed by The Healing Woman Foundation that they have painfully decided to shutdown their organization. They could not raise sufficient funds and subscriptions to make their organization viable. The Healing Woman newsletter has been a powerful recovery tool for many people over the past 10 years. The organization and the newsletter will be missed. So many survivor organizations have closed over the past 5 years. It is such a quandary why this continues to happen since the need is so great.

The following brief article continues our monthly series focused on pondering some of life's basic questions as we slowly move into a new millennium.



A Reflective Moment for February

Respect: Recovery's Soothing Salve

by George Bilotta

Eroding a person's sense of respect for self, others and things of the world remains one of the insidious and complicating aspects of child abuse. With every incident of abuse our concept of respect was distorted, our feeling for respect was emptied. Our abuser(s) did not respect us. We felt conflicted about respecting them, since most of the time we were familiar with our abuser(s). They were our fathers, mothers, guardians, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, religious pastors, etc. On one hand, we were told and we felt in some way that we needed to respect

these people, yet on the other hand, we did not feel respected by them.

Respect is a feeling or a state of appreciation, deferential regard and esteem. In a sense respect is a fundamental way through which we look at the world - at ourselves, others, things and events of our daily lives. Do we view others and ourselves in an appreciative light, with courteous and goodwill regard, and with valued and prized esteem? When we have diminished respect it is like interacting and viewing the world through eyeglasses fitted with the wrong prescription lenses. Everything is distorted. Reality becomes blurred. Our interpretation of what is happening around us and within us lacks clarity and truth.

Increasing our capacity to be respectful toward the world and ourselves is a lifelong daily process. My experiences suggests that building a respectful approach to life has more to do with cultivating a heart full of appreciation, courteous and goodwill regard and with valued and prized esteem. Respect is a representation of the way we try to live our daily lives. If we try to promote appreciation, goodwill and hold in esteem the value inherent in ourselves, others and things of the world, then our lenses through which we view the world will sharpen. We will experience true focus. This trying is what being respectful, having respect, and demonstrating respect is all about.

In a lighthearted way, the comedian, Rodney Dangerfield, often states that "I get no respect." We might say that we do not give, receive, nor earn respect. Rather, respect comes about by trying to live appreciatively, trying to extend goodwill, and trying to prize the inherent value found within all of life. When we try to live our daily lives in this manner, respect is present and thrives in our lives. This respect reduces the insidious and complicating effect of our childhood abuse. Trying to live a respectful life today has little to do with our past childhood abuse. It has everything to do with the way we specifically, intentionally and purposefully try to live life today. Respect is one of the cornerstones on which a healthy, fulfilling and meaningful life is built. Trying to live respectfully is recovery's soothing salve.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for February

Shame: The Clinging Residue of Abuse

Shame adheres to most of us. No matter how much resolution we seem to achieve in our recovery from childhood abuse, shame seems to cling to us just like gluey sap from a pine tree. Pine sap like our shame sticks to our fingers, to our spirit, even after repeated washing, even after intensive recovery work. There is less sap but we can still feel its leftover stickiness on our fingertips. There is less shame but we sense that it lurks right around the corner ready to gum up and disrupt our lives.

Healthy shame occurs when we do something wrong, like betraying a friend, behaving cowardly, promoting harm, etc. Remorse accompanies healthy shame. We acknowledge that we have done wrong. We feel guilty and try to make amends to rectify the wrong and to reconnect with the person(s) offended. On the other hand, unhealthy shame occurs when we have not done anything wrong, yet we blame ourselves. We are totally innocent, yet we perceive in a distorted and false manner that we are co-conspirators. We assume some of the responsibility from

the person(s) who did the wrong. Unhealthy shame tampers with the truth and blurs reality.

When we experience shame from our past child abuse experiences, it seems to arise in part from a sense of guilt, humiliation and/or embarrassment.

First, shame, as a painful emotion, intensifies when we feel guilty, that we in some way caused the abuse to happen. When we take responsibility for the abuse, even a little bit of the responsibility, rather than holding our abuser(s) responsible, we feel guilty. The guilt intensifies our shame. Part of shame's remedy calls us to hold our abuser(s) firmly responsible for their vile behaviors. In addition, we need to renounce repeatedly that we were responsible in anyway whatsoever for the abuse. When we hold our abuser(s) totally and wholeheartedly responsible, it is like using paint thinner to cut through the sap of shame.

Second, shame also infects us since the physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse we experienced as children humiliated us. Through repeated abusive behaviors we were reduced from the status of a unique human being to a common ordinary thing. This ongoing experience of humiliation oozed with shame and dripping with dishonor, disgrace and degradation. A child or teenager is not capable of coping with such humiliation and humiliation's discrediting ways. To cope, many abuse victims assumed the rank of the insignificant, unworthy, inadequate, unimportant nobody. The restorative for humiliation seems to rest in trying to live a respectful life. When we appreciate, extend goodwill and value to others and ourselves, then we reverse the downward spiral of humiliation. We restore our sense of respect, value and esteem.

A third aspect of shame that can be even more difficult and insidious is the shame brought on through embarrassment. Many of us feel embarrassed that we come from dysfunctional and/or abusive families. We feel embarrassed that our fathers, mothers, siblings, relatives, close family associates used our innocence, trust and goodwill for their twisted pleasure, for the target of their displaced rage, for their emotional underdevelopment. We feel embarrassed that we have been or continue to be in some manner associated with these people. Through no fault of our own we may have ended up with abusive parent(s), hurtful siblings, evil relatives, despicable people who referred to themselves as friends of the family. We feel embarrassed by this association which increases our shame.

We are probably embarrassed because we care about, we are invested in some manner, and we are concerned about how other people think about us and about the family from which we come. We want too much for people to think well of us. We are often afraid and concerned that if they knew our background that they would think ill of us, that they would not like us, nor want to socialize with us. Because I might care more about what others think rather than what I think, I unfortunately distort my pride. When we build our lives on the foundation of false pride, we will often contort our thoughts, feelings and behaviors to fit the mold that someone else designed. In many ways the relief and solution from this type of embarrassment-based-shame is detachment from our pride. (The concept of pride and detachment will be a future discussion.)

Questions:

1. How would you describe your experience of shame? How do you experience unhealthy shame?
2. Do you experience unhealthy shame by taking responsibility for the abuse you experienced as a child or teen?
3. What is your experience of shame through humiliation?
4. What is your experience of shame through embarrassment?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Preparing for an ASCA Meeting

There are many different thoughts concerning whether to or how to prepare to participate in an ASCA meeting. One thought goes that one should just be spontaneous in the meeting. Sometimes another person's share will spark something within us. Often we find it helpful for our recovery to share this spark during the meeting. Another thought notes that it can be overwhelming at times to dwell on the past, especially during the initial phase of recovery from childhood abuse. This stance points to the wisdom that a safe and supportive time and place to let memories and feelings surface would be during an ASCA meeting. Just being present and listening to other shares can be an emotionally healing massage.

For participants who feel comfortable and have the time and energy, thinking about what one wants to share might assist in reaping more from the meeting. There are many benefits to reflecting on material that one might want to share in a meeting. One benefit is that it can keep us in touch with our feelings. Another benefit is that it permits us to review and recall the past in a safe and focused manner. When we dwell with what we want to talk about at the next ASCA meeting all kinds of thoughts, memories and feelings seem to connect with each other. We seem to gain some insight and a little emotional resolution by ruminating with material for a possible share.

When the next ASCA meeting is Rotation B: Step, or Rotation C: Topic, the Step or Topic can assist in focusing our reflections. Some members find it helpful to read over the Step or Topic everyday or every other day just to keep it fresh and focused in their consciousness. This repeated refocusing often unearths a recovery treasure of thoughts and feelings adding one more piece toward resolution and healing.

There might be some benefits to members exchanging different ways that they use to prepare for an ASCA meeting. The meeting might spend a little time discussing various strategies for preparing for an ASCA meeting. Often our strategies depend upon our time and energy levels. There is no single answer for preparing. Preparation in part depends upon where we are in our recovery.



Poetry

REMEDY FOR DEPRESSION by James Daniel, Copyright 1999

I have no childhood
For which I need to sacrifice.
I have no emotion left
That hasn't broken through the ice
No more empty screams inside

No more want to run and hide
Now no longer in the vice
No more cutting up my heart and asking who would like a slice
No more past tagging along,
No more wondering where I belong.

Can this be I'm finally free?
Can this here be the "finally me"?
Where's the anger, where's the fear?
Where's the dread no longer near?
All I suffered, all that pained

Long lost innocence now regained?
How'd this happen, how'd this change?
How'd I get to rearrange?
When'd the war end, battle won?
When'd I start to have some fun?

One roll of the dice may not suffice
Pick 'em up and roll 'em twice
If that won't work, then roll 'em thrice
Remember all the hurt you feel
May fade fast in the final reel.

Don't give up, don't just quit
Throw a tantrum, have a fit
No more Miss or Mr. Nice.
Ask for help to pay the price
You can buy back self-esteem.

Sell off all the blame and shame
Persevere until the end
That's the way you win the game!
Love yourself, live your life
And by the way will fall the strife.



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 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.



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.