

ASCA News • July 2001

P.O. Box 14477

San Francisco, CA 94114

web: <http://www.ascasupport.org>



From the Desk of George J. Bilotta, Ph.D.

With the end of our financial year that closed as of June 30th, I have been reviewing the events of the past year. I do this in part to prepare for filing our annual reports for the state and federal governments. This is a requirement to maintain our nonprofit corporation status. This past year, there have been four highlights for me concerning THE MORRIS CENTER and ASCA.

First, working with our Board of Directors has been enjoyable and challenging. The Board has been reviewing and analyzing our history and strategizing how we might approach the future. Our Board is composed of dedicated people who are determined to support the ongoing success of ASCA. In the coming months the Board will be discussing guidelines to incorporate additional Board members. If you have something special to offer as a Board member, or know of someone with special skills, let us know. We might want to consider you or your referral as a potential Board member. I also want to thank Jessy Keiser, our Board President, for her many hours of work and for her leadership with the Board.

Second, through the efforts of Board member, Bob Roberts, and volunteer, Ramona Mastin, we have enjoyed an extraordinary web page. Not only is it exceptional in depth and breath of content, in artistic design and user-friendliness, but unlike many web pages on the Internet, Bob keeps our web page up-to-date. In part I think our web page represents the quality THE MORRIS CENTER strives to achieve in everything we do.

Third, I have relished the challenge of expanding the *ASCA News*. Over the past ten years, various survivor newsletters have come and gone. This past year we have witnessed the last edition of *The Healing Woman* newsletter, which I considered the premier survivor newsletter. I wonder if the *ASCA News* could evolve into the premier survivor newsletter?

Fourth, it was with immense joy and satisfaction that we experienced ASCA meetings beginning in South Africa. Part of the excitement derives from the fact that a group was able to establish ASCA by downloading the material from our web page. We have tried to make ASCA user friendly and available to anyone willing to put the time and energy into developing and promoting an ASCA program. With the success of meetings in South Africa, I have a sense of accomplishment that we have designed our ASCA support program in such a manner that just about anyone could start ASCA anywhere.

Our success this past year is a testament to the many people who strive to maintain THE MORRIS CENTER and our primary program ASCA. THE MORRIS CENTER and ASCA continue to exist in part through the generosity and backing of Norma Morris. Norma continues to financially support our efforts. I do not think there is anyone who has been more generous and more financially dedicated to survivors of childhood abuse than Norma Morris. We thank you, Norma, for your

caring, commitment and generosity.

To conclude, I want to make three requests. First, we are looking for volunteers with editing skills to help prepare the *ASCA News* for publication. If you are interested, please contact me for details. Second, we are also looking for people who have expertise and time to promote our web page within the Internet, and/or to have our web page address inserted into any publication that will accept it for free. Finally, as we begin a new financial year, your tax-deductible donation is always appreciated. If you want to make a donation, please write your check payable to *The Morris Center*. Every dollar counts. No donation is too small. Thank you.



Reflective Moment for July **Recovery: Integrating and Thriving**

by George J. Bilotta, Ph.D.

In the May edition I discussed the first part of the Board of Directors definition of recovery from childhood abuse. Through this issue of the *ASCA News* I want to follow-up with the last aspects of the definition, points 8-10. The Board's definition states:

<i>Recovery from child abuse is a process that includes</i>	point 1
<i>the ongoing telling of one's story and experience about</i>	point 2
<i>the abuse</i>	point 3
<i>the effects of the abuse on one's life,</i>	point 4
<i>the ongoing efforts at recovery,</i>	point 5
<i>along with receiving support, acceptance and feedback</i>	point 6
<i>from the community of survivors and others</i>	point 7
<i>for the purpose of integrating unresolved childhood events</i>	point 8
<i>through the process of remembering, mourning and healing</i>	point 9
<i>to become a thriver in all aspects of life.</i>	point 10

Point 8: *the purpose of integrating unresolved childhood events*

To integrate *unresolved childhood events* in part means to make whole. To integrate is to bring together into a unifying and seamless whole every aspect of self that constitutes who we are as human beings. Integration is a process of rectifying, re-balancing and unifying that, which was hurt, torn and divided. We do this with the purpose of living as a thrivers.

Childhood abuse usually affects every aspect of a child's being. This specifically includes the body and physical functioning; relationships, family, social functioning; emotional, psychological functioning; intellectual, educational, life skill functioning; spiritual, heart functioning.

In a sense to successfully integrate is to establish a synergistic chain reaction of well-being. There are various schools of thought concerning how to go about *integrating unresolved childhood events*. In ASCA we approach integration through the three stages of *remembering, mourning and healing*. ASCA permits much leeway as to how a survivor goes about pursuing integration within the three-stage

framework. We recognize and respect the various needs and ways in which survivors pursue their recovery goals.

What do we mean by unresolved? What do *unresolved childhood events* do to us? Unresolved means that the impact from a) the various episodes of childhood abuse, b) how the abuse was initially dealt with, and c) how the past episodes of child abuse continue to be handled, have not yet been resolved, rectified, re-balanced, corrected, etc. Usually the manifestations of unresolved childhood events continue to have a negative influence within our daily functioning. For example, survivors can experience depression, diminished self-worth, lack of trust, relationship difficulties, various disabilities, etc. These can be examples of how unresolved childhood events continue to influence survivors' lives.

I think that there are two basic aspects to *resolve*. *First*, to resolve means to remove, rectify, neutralize, redress the negative impact and influence stemming from the childhood abuse events. Within the ASCA framework we accomplish this by telling our story over and over again. It also includes confronting the abusive episodes. The confrontation can take form in many different ways. Confrontation can consist of confronting the abuser(s) directly, to confronting the episodes through the retelling of the story of our abuse over and over again. We continue to confront until as in Step 18 we reach the level that *I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me*.

Second, to resolve includes developing various capacities that were lost, wounded, hindered, delayed, set back. For example, childhood abuse tends to diminish one's capacity to trust. In this example, to resolve would be to first neutralize the events leading up to and surrounding the lack of trust. Second, resolved would be to develop, promote and work toward redeveloping and regaining the capacity to trust. We do this so that we can trust the world once again, so that we can enter into healthy relationships that build upon trust.

Point 9: *through the process of remembering, mourning and healing*

The Board's definition of recovery notes that we progress through recovery from childhood abuse through a specific framework. This framework consists of the three stages of the ASCA recovery process of *remembering, mourning and healing*. We understand that the basic dynamic of recovery begins with *remembering*.

Remembering includes telling our story about the abuse and its consequences over and over again to a variety of people, in a variety of ways.

It continues with *mourning* the loss of our childhood innocence. Mourning the loss of faithful parent(s), of loyal family. We mourn the pain of betrayal, the hurt of being used by others, the fear of abandonment, the confusion of appearing invisible, of not being seen or heard. We mourn the loss of not being genuinely cared for, loved or valued.

The final stage of recovery is *healing*. *Healing* includes the constructive realignment of our body, mind and spirit. It is a process of learning how to nurture and cultivate all of self that results *in the reunion of my new self and eternal soul* (Step 21).

Point 10: *to become a thriver in all aspects of life*

From the perspective of THE MORRIS CENTER and through our ASCA program the fundamental goal of recovery is to become a thriver in all aspects of life. What

does it mean to be a thriver? Each of us has our own unique ideas, spin and variations. Summing up what it means for me to be a thriver includes the following three areas:

1. *to foster the capacity to freely pursue life*
2. *to live life in a harmonious manner*
3. *to derive meaning and fulfillment from ordinary daily life experiences.*

What is the *capacity to freely pursue life*? It is the capacity to engage in daily life freed and liberated from any residue, unresolved conflicts, negative emotional impact, etc., derived from being abused as a child or teenager. In part, it is what Step 19 refers when stating — *I hold my own meaning about the abuse that releases me from the legacy of the past.* It is the freedom that flows out of a recovery process that has successfully placed the past to rest, into a new perspective, *to the extent that is acceptable to me*, as mentioned in Step 18.

It also includes the successful learning and integrating of life skills. Due to the abuse, we might not have gained or were prevented from learning and integrating necessary life skills. In a sense we have caught up to life. We are now prepared and able to live freely, unencumbered by the past, and having the necessary skills and resources to pursue life.

What does it mean *to live life in a harmonious manner*? To thrive in part requires a level of harmony. We are in tune with our body, mind and spirit. We are in tune with our environments. We are in tune with the people, events and things that comprise our daily lives. This does not mean that we never have difficulties, hassles, conflicts, stresses, etc. Rather *living life in a harmonious manner*, points to a reflective life style that fosters harmony between and among all the various aspects of our lives. It is an approach to life, a stance towards life that is like a gyroscope. We continuously rebalance, rectify, place into perspective, correct, etc., the stuff of our daily lives.

Finally, for me to thrive *includes deriving meaning and fulfillment from ordinary daily life experiences.* Life is lived one day at a time, one moment at a time. For me life is worth living, life is important when I experience meaning and fulfillment through the ordinary stuff of my life $\frac{3}{4}$ the people, events and things around me. For me to thrive is to constantly see, hear and feel the meaning and fulfillment in doing the stuff of my daily ordinary life. It is the opposite of taking my *new self* for granted.

In pursuing recovery from childhood abuse it might be helpful to struggle through and articulate your particular definition of recovery. You might also want to share with us through the ASCA News what your definition of recovery looks like.

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 or directly to George at georgebilotta@cs.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

Mother

I forgive you, though you never asked.
You hide instead behind a mask
Denying broken childhood dreams,
Deaf to your daughter's echoing screams,
And memories of pain.

I forgive your lack of gentle touch.
You never thought it mattered much.
Though torn in heart and self-esteem,
My shattered spirit starved unseen,
And memories remain.

I forgive you, though in much travail.
For kindness must at last prevail.
Yet distance gives protection from,
The things I fear I might become.
And memories will fade.

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Rotation C Topic: Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for July

Integrating Unresolved Childhood Events

For this month's Rotation C Topic, your meeting might consider following-up on the Board's definition of recovery from childhood abuse. Specifically, you might consider sharing on the topic of point 8 of the Board's definition, for the purpose of integrating unresolved childhood events. How have you gone about the task of integrating unresolved childhood events?

Some questions that might be helpful:

1. Describe the difficulties, challenges and obstacles for you concerning integrating unresolved childhood events?
2. In what ways have you been successful in integrating unresolved childhood events?
3. Who have been the people in your life that have been helpful/unhelpful in your pursuit to integrate unresolved childhood events?

Past topics for Rotation C meetings can be located in the *Meeting Format and Support Materials* manual available on our web page: www.ascasupport.org
[Suggested Topics for Rotation C Meetings](#).



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment:

Purpose of Periodic Business Meetings

In the directives to Co-Secretaries found in the *ASCA Meeting Format and Support Materials* on page 16, it notes that ASCA meetings profit from having a monthly business meeting to discuss issues and to make local meeting based decisions. Some ASCA meetings hold business meetings regularly. Others rarely if ever have a business meeting. For community based ASCA meetings business meetings are a way for the Co-Secretaries to share the responsibilities associated with managing the ongoing success of a local ASCA meeting. It is an opportunity for the Co-Secretaries to bring to the attention of the meeting membership areas of concern or decisions that need to be made concerning undercurrents within the meeting, paying meeting bills, need for new Co-Secretaries to take a turn at running the meeting, etc. The most important function of holding ongoing business meeting is to function as a check and balance, raising concerns and needs that need to be addressed and taken care of for the continued success and healthiness of the meeting. When was the last time your meeting held a business meeting?



Step Elaboration

We continue the monthly Step series by George J. Bilotta, Ph.D.

Step Elaboration augments the material provided within our Survivor to Thrive manual.

[Step 8](#)

[I have made an inventory of the problem areas in my adult life.](#)

In the introduction to Stage Two Mourning on page 89 of our *Survivor to Thrive* manual, it states — *the cornerstone of Stage Two is taking an honest inventory of your current life problems and then dedicating yourself to changing the behaviors that are making your life unsatisfactory.* The purpose of Step 8 as expressed on page 90 of our *Survivor to Thrive* manual states the following. Step 8 — *involves taking a full and honest inventory of the problem areas in your life, because you first have to identify what you want to change before you can begin to change it.*

If you have worked through Chapter Two of our *Survivor to Thrive* manual, you have accomplished some preliminary work on Step 8. In addition, you may have already dwelt somewhat with Stage One Remembering and the various first 7 Steps of ASCA. Consequently, your present situation may be somewhat different. What was problematic 6 or 12 months ago may be less problematic today. Alternatively, other areas of concern may be surfacing as past problems, difficulties, stresses, etc., slowly become resolved. As we progress through recovery, we evolve, grow, stretch and change. Step by step, we move steadily toward Step 21 — *I am resolved in the reunion of my new self and eternal soul.*

Balancing Step 8

Step 8 evolves out of traditional self-help models and specifically the Alcoholic Anonymous approach to assessing one's life. When addressing Step 8 two basic

questions seem to arise.

First, what does a *full and honest inventory of the problem areas* involve? Though Chapter Two of our Survivor to Thriver manual may have prepared you somewhat for Step 8, I have included a variety of questions to ponder to assist in compiling an inventory. I also discuss two different approaches that may be useful to process Step 8.

Second, along with an inventory of problem areas, would it also be beneficial within Step 8 to include an additional inventory? This alternative inventory, Step 8b, would acknowledge and detail successes, strengths, personal attributes and/or interactions that bring about joy, fulfillment, meaning, wholeness, well-being? From my perspective, Step 8b would function as a counterweight to the *inventory of the problem areas*.

First, what does a full and honest inventory of the problem areas involve?

Before proceeding to compile an honest inventory it might be helpful to remind ourselves that many of us tend to be hypercritical. We tend to be harsh, severe in judgment and quick to find fault with ourselves. Many of us were raised within family and social environments that administered daily doses of negativity, putdown comments, sarcastic and biting remarks, unhelpful criticism, hurtful and wounding statements, etc. As children and teenagers we inhaled these noxious comments that often produced distortions within our sense of self, self-esteem and self-worth. Many survivors seldom received supportive remarks of affirmation, unconditional comments of love, statements of approval, helpful guidance, etc. Balance, fairness and justice often seemed unavailable during childhood.

Step 8 is an invitation to reflect gently and record thoroughly the stuff of our current lives that remain problematic. Compiling an inventory could become an overwhelming task. If the process becomes overwhelming, it will not be helpful. If we feel overwhelmed, we might truncate, skim over or abandon this step.

One possible approach to anticipate and possibly prevent becoming overwhelmed might be to note only one, two or three responses at most to each of the questions listed below. Limiting your responses within a given time period might also help. For example, you might structure Step 8 by allotting yourself 30 minutes twice a week to spontaneously list 1 - 3 responses to each of the questions. Naturally, you might want to include other questions that may reflect your specific situation.

Another approach might be to ponder each question one-day at a time. By making a single question the focus of mini-reflections throughout the day, you might gain broader and deeper insights. It might take several weeks to thoroughly explore all the questions. By chewing on and digesting each question one-day at a time however, you might be able to compile your inventory in a thoughtful, gentle and leisurely manner.

Questions to think about might include the following.

- Describe what is not working in your life.
- Describe what is painful.
- Describe where and how you are stuck.

Describe your struggles.
Describe your stresses.
Describe the people, events and things
- that hurt,
- that are unsatisfactory,
- that are not producing what is required to live productively and
meaningfully.
Describe your frustrations.
Describe the obstacles you encounter.
Describe your disappointments.

You might ponder the preceding questions through the primary filters of:

family functioning
relationships, social functioning
physical, bodily functioning
emotional, psychological functioning
intellectual, educational, life skill functioning
spiritual, heart functioning.

Maintaining a journal or jotting down in a notebook your responses to the various questions is a technique that many survivors find helpful. Our thoughts and feeling seem to become clearer and more concrete whenever we write them down on paper. Furthermore, they may reveal additional insights when you review your notes weeks or months later.

Step 8b Inventory of Successes, Strengths

Along with an inventory of problem areas, would it also be beneficial within Step 8 to include an additional inventory? This Step 8b inventory would acknowledge and detail our successes, strengths, personal attributes and/or interactions that bring about joy, fulfillment, meaning, wholeness, well-being.

I wonder if there would be advantages to the recovery process by dividing Step 8 into Step 8a Inventory of Problems and Step 8b Inventory of Successes, Strengths? This question flows out of my sense and need for balance. Nowhere within the 21-Steps is there a specific directive to ponder and articulate our successes, strengths, talents, etc., to balance off our difficulties, weaknesses and stressful life experiences. Where is the balance when we are ultimately trying to form and integrate as stated in Step-21 *a new self and eternal soul*?

We focus resources, time and energy into changing, growing, stretching and remolding parts of ourselves within the process of recovery. I think that it would be supportive, helpful and encouraging to compose a full and honest inventory that acknowledges and appreciates successes, strengths, personal attributes and/or interactions that bring about joy, fulfillment, meaning, wholeness, well-being. Similar to the inventory of problems, an inventory of successes and strengths I think would be comforting, balancing and inspiring. By placing life into a broader perspective, Step 8b inventory would emerge as a sounding board to checkout reality especially when we feel discouraged, depressed, doubtful, frustrated, etc.

Step 8b inventory could remind and challenge us to see and think of ourselves in a more balanced manner. It could evolve into a personal testament that would forthrightly affirm and attest to the fact that though we have identifiable problems to rectify, we are also substantive and substantial people with numerous successes, strengths, many desirable attributes and personal resources. This type of process has the potential to increase and stir our hopes, dreams and aspirations. A balanced inventory process would be similar to acknowledging feelings of pain, betrayal, anger, frustration, disappointment, etc., as well as noting feelings of happiness, contentment, joy, satisfaction, self-approval, fulfillment, etc.

Some directives follow that may be helpful in compiling an inventory of successes, strengths, personal attributes and/or interactions that bring about joy, fulfillment, meaning, wholeness, well-being.

Describe some of your successes this past year.

Describe areas of your life within which you have demonstrated strength this past year.

Describe some of your favorite personal attributes.

Describe what you delight in about yourself.

Describe what pleases you about yourself.

Describe the positive characteristics that others have told you that you possess.

Describe what others have told you that they admire and like about you.

Describe the positive feedback that have you received from friends, employers

and/or volunteer situations.

Describe the ways that you have experienced joy this past year.

Describe what has been fulfilling for you this past year.

Describe what has provided and added meaning to your life this past year.

Describe under what types of situations and interactions you experience wholeness.

Describe what you have done this past year to nurture a sense of well-being.

Again, you might ponder the preceding statements through the primary filters of: family functioning:

relationships, social functioning

physical, bodily functioning

emotional, psychological functioning

intellectual, educational, life skill functioning

spiritual, heart functioning.

In the approach to the problematic areas of Step 8a, I made a comment about becoming overwhelmed. Though this could happen with the inventory of successes and strengths, the more probable obstacle to compiling a full and honest inventory dwells more with amorphous uncomfortable feelings and situations. If I am burdened with diminished self-esteem, I might tend to minimize my successes. I

might not feel successful though I may be factually and objectively successful in many areas. I might shade the truth and not give myself a full and objective accounting of my strengths. At times I might feel weak or inadequate and thus judge myself harshly or compare myself to others. I may then see and experience myself as lacking and not being good enough.

If I have tunnel vision that views the world as either/or, good or bad, right or wrong, I might feel constrained, inhibited or invisible. I might not give myself honest credit for personal attributes that are still evolving, still in the process of maturing, still not quite ready to manifest themselves in my everyday life. The previous were examples of amorphous uncomfortable feelings and situations that might make it difficult to compile a full and honest inventory of successes, strengths, etc.

Again similar to the approach to the problematic inventory, to prevent feeling overwhelmed in the creative exercise of exploring our successes and strengths you might try the following. Note only one, two or three at most responses to each of the preceding descriptive statements. Another approach might be to ponder each question one-day at a time.

What do you think about adding Step 8b? I raise this question because I think it would be a beneficial counterbalance to the inventory of problematic areas. Childhood abuse has a way of throwing us off balance, pushing us off our center, disturbing our equilibrium. I think compiling a Step 8b inventory could become a helpful corrective and re-balancing measure.

We need to identify our problem areas first before we can strategize about how to grow and change. We need as well to identify our successes and strengths, as a means to support our recovery efforts, to encourage our hopes and dreams concerning *what our future can be*.

As the final sentence in our ASCA meeting Closing Statement states:

*We close our meeting now with renewed faith in our power,
armed with self-knowledge, fed by our strength drawn from
survival,
empowered by the challenge of change, and graced with a sense
of hope
for what our future can be.*

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 or directly to George at georgebilotta@cs.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.



Announcements

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the *ASCA News*. Currently, we forward a hardcopy or e-mail a file 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. How to order the *Survivor to Thrive* manual? First, the manual can be downloaded from our web site 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) and 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.
2. If you have **editing skills and want to volunteer** to assist with preparing the *ASCA News* for publication, please contact George Bilotta for details.
3. If there are **changes in Co-Secretary** assignments, please let us know so we can forward a hard copy or e-mail a file of the *ASCA News* to the correct person. Also if Co-Secretaries have a change in address, telephone number or e-mail, please send these change to George Bilotta at: *e-mail:* georgebilotta@cs.com, *telephone:* 508.835.6054, *mailing address:* 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020.
4. If your meeting is not receiving the *ASCA News* at the beginning of every month contact George Bilotta.
5. If you want to submit an article for the next month's issue of the *ASCA News*, our submission **deadline is the 15th of every month.**



We Welcome Your 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.