

ASCA News • May 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

In the April issue of the ASCA News, we mentioned that THE MORRIS CENTER's Board of Directors developed a working definition of recovery from childhood abuse. The purpose of the working definition is to assist the Board in their planning efforts. I thought that it might be a helpful exercise to explore in this issue various aspects inherent within the concept of recovery. Though our perception of recovery is subjective, i.e., we each read into recovery a specific set of meanings depending upon our personal situation, there are many general and inclusive ideas overlapping the concept of recovery from childhood abuse.

Such an exploratory discussion might be of some service concerning how we view our recovery and what recovery from childhood abuse is all about for us. In addition such a review might add to the concrete process of our ongoing recovery, of how we enter into and continue the project of recovery. In a variety of ways this discussion dovetails easily into aspects of Steps 3, 18 and 19.

Step 3 states I have made a commitment to recovery from my childhood abuse.

Step 18 states I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me.

Step 19 states I hold my own meaning about the abuse that releases me from the legacy of the past.

In my Reflective Moment piece I will take-up recovery as a process. I will elaborate on the first part of the Board's working definition of recovery as it relates to some of the ASCA Steps. I will follow-up in the June issue with additional discussion on the working definition of recovery. In this way I will try to layout recovery's bigger picture. Within my standard Topic article, I will explore and raise questions to ponder concerning what have been our individual lived experiences of recovery. The usual Ongoing Education Moment will review how our web page, www.ascasupport.org, might be a useful tool in our ongoing recovery process. I have also included a brief summary from the results of the survey that was conducted last October - December through the ASCA meetings.

In addition, I am inaugurating a new monthly series. The series will consist of taking each of the 21-Steps and offering adjunct material to what is already contained in our Survivor to Thrive manual. I will not be writing about each of the 21-Steps sequentially. Rather I will endeavor to discuss one of the steps that might relate more or less to the general theme(s) that may be highlighted in the ASCA News during that particular month. In this issue I will initiate the monthly series by exploring Step 18, I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me.

In an effort to include other perspectives and to widen our experience of the various Steps, you are invited to submit your perspective to be included in future

ASCA News editions. You may submit an article about the previous Step discussed. For example you might want to write something for the June issue about Step 18 that is being covered in this issue. Or you might want to write something for the June issue on Step 19 that will be explored in the upcoming June issue. You might focus on a Step by relating what the Step means for you and how you have been working the Step to further your recovery. In the June issue I will announce the forthcoming Steps that will be covered in the July, August and September issues. Any reflections you have to offer will be welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the 15th of every month for the upcoming issue of the ASCA News. Article length should be 1-page or less. You can forward your submission to me at my address: 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583, or you can e-mail your submission within your e-mail (not as an attachment) to georgebilotta@cs.com.



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 May

Recovery: A Process

by George Bilotta

What is recovery from childhood abuse all about? A wide variety of views exist concerning the concept of recovery. But recovery itself seems to contain several primary elements that can be initially extracted from Steps 3, 18 and 19. Step 3 implies that recovery involves a process. Step 18 suggests that recovery has something to do with resolving the abuse according to an individual's preferences. Step 19 infers that recovery is subjective. It also indicates that recovery's purpose has something to do with being freed from that which was handed down from the past.

In addition the Board has proposed a working definition of recovery from childhood abuse

stating: Recovery from child abuse is a process that includes the ongoing telling of one's story and experience about the abuse, the effects of the abuse on one's life, the ongoing efforts at recovery, along with receiving support, acceptance and feedback from the community of survivors and others for the purpose of integrating unresolved childhood events through the process of remembering, mourning and healing to become a thriver in all aspects of life.

Based on the above, there seems to be agreement that recovery is a process. A process unfolds over a period of time. A process includes a series of actions and/or changes that bring about a desired result. Implied within this process is growth and change. One grows and changes usually by entering into and working through the

particular aspects of a process. Often, the novice entering into the process of recovery from childhood abuse will ask something like, how long will the process of recovery take?

When people ask this type of question they do not seem to be concerned so much with a specific time frame. Rather they are more interested in when they might expect to experience some substantive results. How long will it be until they sense some growth and change, until they experience a reduction in pain and anxiety? How long until they begin to feel some relief from their depression, and/or until they start to experience enough growth and change so that they can have some quality of life? The process, as a time frame, can last a brief period for some survivors, but for most survivors the process will probably last for many years. In part, it depends upon how one responds to Steps 18: I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me. And Step 19: I hold my own meaning about the abuse that releases me from the legacy of the past.

A process can also imply a methodology. The Board describes the ASCA process methodology as an ongoing telling of one's story. Within the story telling process one relates the experiences about the abuse, the effects of the abuse, and one's ongoing efforts at recovery. We use the term story since every life unfolds a unique story. Within the story telling process, the survivor relating h/her story, remains in control of what is disclosed. ASCA's story telling process honors a person's pace, discretion and privacy. The story telling process is one way to maintain an awareness of what happened, the abuse's influences on our early, later and present lives, and what one is doing to resolve the residue from the abuse.

In many ways one of ASCA's most effective elements is its structure that supports the story telling process. Through the Steps and through the ASCA meeting format people share their story of abuse, especially within stage one of Remembering. Whether within meetings, the e-meeting or with outside receptive listeners, the ASCA framework guides, supports and encourages survivors to tell, retell and tell some more, from as many different perspectives as possible, their story of abuse, the effects of the abuse on their lives and their ongoing efforts at recovery. In time the story takes twists and turns flowing out of new insights, positive changes and growth in one's life, and an emerging new sense of self (Step 20).

The big sweeping brush stroke of recovery seems to be to understand recovery as a process, a process with a particular methodology, and containing many variables depending upon past events and the individuality of each survivor. In a sense, recovery could be described as exchanging or moving from painting our daily life interactions with people, events and things with a palate consisting of a few colors and switching to a palate consisting of many colors. So how long does one's recovery period last? It may all depend upon how many colors that you want on your life's palate.



Rotation C Topic:
Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for May
Our Experience of Recovery

The lived experience of recovery from childhood abuse seems as varied and diverse as the uniqueness of each survivor. Yet within recovery's uniqueness a commonness, usualness, sameness, a prevalence of experience seems to appear as different people describe and list their experiences of recovery from childhood abuse. Dwelling with our experiences of recovery has many advantages.

On one level it is heartening to describe and to list our experiences within recovery. It is in part our story of how far along in the journey, in the process we have already come, even if a beginner. On another level, reflecting back upon our experiences of recovery thus far provides hope, encourages our steadfastness, instills energy, acknowledges our growth, and offers a glimmer of the new emerging self (Step 20). Still on another level recounting our experiences might also provide additional self-guidance concerning how one should continue to proceed, what might be our current priorities, what might be the upcoming obstacles to our recovery efforts, etc.

You might find it helpful to respond to the requested descriptions and questions that follow.

Describe your experiences with helpful people who have accompanied you thus far in your process of recovery from child abuse. What has this experience with these helpful people done to you and for you?

Describe your experiences with unhelpful people who seem to have obstructed, complicated, burdened, confused your process of recovery thus far. What have been the outcomes from these experiences with unhelpful people for you and your recovery process?

Describe your struggle, ambivalence, pain and fear surrounding your recovery process up to this point in time. What have you learned about yourself through your struggle, ambivalence, pain and fear?

Describe your basic movements, any areas of growth or change, any rewards or joys that have transpired since you have been working on your recovery from childhood abuse. How have these movements, areas of growth or change, rewards or joys enhanced your life thus far?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Selecting Helpful Topics and Accompanying Handout Materials for Rotation C ASCA Meetings?

User Friendly Help Is on Our Web Page
www.ascasupport.org
Making Life a Little Easier
for Co-Secretaries and Meeting Participants?

We are constantly on the outlook for resources that can add value to our recovery process. One resource that may be somewhat underused is our web page. Our web page contains a substantial amount of user friendly information and tools to assist any survivor on any level of recovery with their ongoing process of recovery from childhood abuse. Our present web page has a new look and feel. It was totally redesigned and placed into service late last fall 2000. Without a doubt it is an extraordinary web page.

How can our web page assist with your ongoing recovery process? First, our Survivor to Thriver manual is available to review, to download a chapter or to download the entire manual. Second, past issues of the ASCA News are also available to read. There are many survivor topics that are addressed in the ASCA News. If you are new to ASCA or have not been reading the ASCA News on a regular basis, you might find some of the past articles beneficial. Third, we have an ASCA e-Meeting online. Some great sharing has been done through the e-Meetings. E-Meetings might be helpful if you want to lookup past shares on particular Steps or topics. E-Meetings can also be useful if you have not been able to attend your regular ASCA meeting.

Particularly for Co-Secretaries, the ASCA Meeting Format & Support Materials manual is online. There is also the ASCA Meeting Guidebook for anyone to read within which various procedures and protocols concerning ASCA meetings are discussed. Finally there is our Resource section that contains a detail discussion concerning how to go about finding resources in your area that may be useful to your recovery. It also lists a few of the better web pages available for survivors. Finally, just becoming familiar with our web page may provide you with assistance sometime in the future when you have a question. You might remember that you found the question discussed somewhere within our web page. If you ever have a suggestion for our web page let us know your ideas.



Poetry

THE PAIN WITHIN

Why can't they see..,
the pain they cause me
by being sexually abused.

The anger i feel..,
that comes from resentment
of being an innocent child.
Looking for love, only to find
abuse in a hostile environment.

No where to run, no where to hide
the only way out, was wanting to die.
Wanting to die, the only way out
of the pain and confusion i feel.

God help me...what will be my fate,
someone please help me before its too late.
God help me ...it's already too late,
they have sealed my fate
by being sexually abused.

My Grandfather is violent, my Father is sick,
and my Mother is no where around.
Sorry to say ...there is no one to hear
the screams, and to see the pain on my face.
No one to help me in any way,
just my abuser and me.

It's that time again, time to go,
time to tune things out.
Gotta go, too painful now,
see ya when things become normal again.

See ya around sometime soon in my memories,
when you begin the search to find,
The Pain Within

Love me.



Step Elaboration

Step 18

I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me.

This article inaugurates a new monthly series by George Bilotta, Ph.D., that elaborates and augments the existing material describing the various ASCA Steps found in our Survivor to Thriver manual.

In Step 18 a survivor is called upon to unfold the meaning of two terms: resolved and acceptable. I have resolved the abuse to the extent that is acceptable to me. How we unfold the meaning of resolved and acceptable will influence significantly our ongoing process of recovery from childhood abuse.

To resolve implies that one has made a decision, reached a decision, has gone through a process of arriving at a decision or making a determination about a matter. It is a decision or determination that contains a solution, an acceptable outcome, a satisfying or even successful result. To resolve further suggests that one has moved from dissonance to consonance, from discord to harmony, from conflict to peace. In the big picture of recovery from childhood abuse, to resolve the abuse indicates that one has reached a significant fork in the road, a turning point, a transformative moment in the recovery process.

From a more experiential perspective to resolve something may be experienced as relief, an easing, a quieting, a disengaging, a letting go and a release of tension. It may be experienced as restorative, healing, freeing, detaching, disconnecting, loosening, unshackling, separating and distancing. It may be experienced as a decrease in anxiety, in vigilance and in hopping through hoops. There is a perceptible decrease of focus on that which was previously unresolved. It no longer absorbs time, energy, resources, etc. Time, energy, resources, etc. are now refocused on new matters. To resolve something may be experienced as a satisfying joy, a kind of ok-ness, acceptance, peacefulness. It can be experienced as a self-statement that I have done the best that I can. I am satisfied. I accept that nothing more can be done. I acknowledge that I have done everything that is required of me. I understand and accept that some loose ends may remain untied. One's heart is full, open and unencumbered.

The survivor's stance and posture toward the perpetrator(s) and people who have

been in denial about the past abuse has probably changed. To be resolved may look like $\frac{3}{4}$ I am no longer trying to change them, persuade them, argue with them, plead with them, negotiate with them or bring them along. I am no longer trying to get them to acknowledge and to discuss the abuse, their denial, their overt or covert involvement with the abuse, etc. I am no longer emotionally invested or interested in what they think about the past abuse or about their present understanding concerning the abuse. Their craziness, inconsistency, unpredictability and their personal limitations have a significantly diminished effect on me.

To resolve the abuse may mean that I am no longer trying, putting energy into trying to change the other, the perpetrator(s), those in denial. The focus and life energy has shifted back to me living my life the way that I want. The resolve feels substantive and firm. I acknowledge and maintain the boundaries and limits that I have established with the perpetrator(s), with those in denial. I have stopped trying to alter them, trying to get them to see the past events in a different light. I have let go, disengaged, surrendered to the reality that I have no power to change, persuade or influence them.

In part I may deal with my former perpetrator(s) and those in denial by responding to their behavior. If they should do X or Y, then I do A or B. If for example, my father, the perpetrator, chooses to act crazy or act in a way that is unacceptable to me, then my firmness and my established limits for example, may have me leaving the situation. I may simply withdraw and free myself from the situation. I accept that I have no power to change him or influence him. When he chooses to do X, I simply do A. Part of being resolved may include being aware and acknowledging for example that my father for the most part has not changed, that he is still plagued with the inclination to be crazy and to behave in unacceptable ways. If I choose to engage him, I have my resolve. When he moves toward acting crazy, I simply withdraw. This is my planned response, my consistent response and my resolved response. Part of being resolved may also include maintaining separation from the abuser(s) or people in denial because they continue to harm me in some way. They may be toxic people that may require that I maintain appropriate physical and emotional distance from them.

Picking up the second term, acceptable, to be unfolded in Step 18, what do we mean by ... to the extent that is acceptable to me? Being resolved is subjective and therefore is defined by personal subjective criteria. What may be acceptable or unacceptable to one person may also be unacceptable or acceptable to another survivor under similar or dissimilar circumstances. Comparing perceived degrees of resolution between self and other survivors is not helpful. We do not walk in the shoes of other survivors and have limited access to the condition of their heart. We do ourselves an injustice when we compare our sense of resolution with the resolve of others.

What is acceptable to me? Acceptable implies that something is adequate, that something satisfies the need, that something fulfills the requirement. Acceptable alludes to the fact that life is imperfect, that we often have to settle for second best, that we never receive everything that we want, need or require. Acceptable suggests that life is a constant compromise, negotiation, agreed upon settlement of disputes and misunderstandings, a give-and-take, a you scratch my back and I will scratch your back existence. Though we can have it our way at McDonald's, most

of life is not so accommodating.

Another aspect of acceptable is how acceptable-ness is steeped in reality. When I am unaware and do not see clearly, a high probability exists that I am distorting reality. There are varied reasons why I may be unaware and my perceptual vision is blurry. Being unaware and blinded makes what is acceptable and what is unacceptable problematic. For example, my father may be crazy, displaying inconsistent behavior, narcissistic ways, exercising poor boundaries, etc. I may want and I may insist that he change, that he be different and that he do something to deal with his pathology. This insistence, my insistence, this refusal, my refusal, to be aware, to see reality and thus to accept reality, i.e., the craziness of my father, is going to make it difficult if not impossible for me to resolve the abuse with him to the extent that is acceptable to me. If who he is, is unacceptable to me, i.e., his craziness, narcissism, emotional unhealthiness, etc, then how can I resolve? To accept is to be aware and to see clearly.

This moves our discussion into the delicate matter of acceptance. When I accept the fact, when I acknowledge and accept reality, for example that my father is narcissistic, this acceptance is not the acceptance that approves of his narcissism and that applauds his narcissistic ways that resulted in the abuse. Rather acceptance of his narcissism is to be aware and to see that in all reality my father is narcissistic, that part of him is only concerned with himself, with gratifying himself, with filling himself often at the expense of others. I acknowledge and accept this reality. I do not minimize his narcissism. I do not make excuses for his past abusive behavior. When I arrange to be with him, to engage him, I am aware, I have my radar automatically scanning for his narcissism to turn its ugly face. When his narcissism appears, I withdraw, I free myself from the situation.

When I accept my perpetrator(s), when I accept family members who deny the past abuse, I am accepting them for who they are. I accept the reality of who they are. I am aware of who they are. I can plainly see who they are and I understand who they are. This is dealing with the reality of my situation. This is dealing with the unpleasant stuff and painful junk that life has dealt me. I do not swoon into wishful thinking if only he were different, if only I had another father, another family. When I accept reality and surrender to reality, when I accept my perpetrator(s) and family members in denial, I stop struggling. I stop fighting reality. I stop trying to change reality. I stop trying to fix something. I stop trying to fix people and events that I can not fix.

In part, acceptance may consist of being aware and seeing the Jekyll and Hyde, the good and evil. I do not forget the abuse, do not absolve the abuse, but rather accept for example our parent(s) with their Jekyll and Hyde personalities, their pathologies, their limitations, often extreme and ugly limitations. Acceptance may also include acknowledging that they are also wounded, hurting people, even though they may not show their pain. Acceptance is seeing, hearing, feeling with a resolved set of eyes, ears and heart.

For example, part of resolving the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me may include accepting my father, the perpetrator but not the abusive behaviors. With a resolved heart, with my feet planted firmly in reality, I accept him as a limited, wounded, pathological, unpredictable, narcissistic person. Ironically, in his Jekyll and Hyde characterization, this person may also have the

capacity to give somewhat, to be supportive to a certain extent, to be engaging on some level. However, not all formerly abusive fathers have this capacity.

He also happens to be my parent, my father, whom on some level I may still love and care about, even though he has been abusive and evil in the past, and has the potential to be abusive in the future. I accept that what he has to offer is limited. But I might still want to engage with him or others on that limited basis. Why? Because I have determined that in some way, that on some level, that it is good, positive and that it holds the potential for growth for me to engage for example, my father on a limited basis. Not all fathers however may be worthy of engaging. This is a decision that each survivor needs to make. For example, should I continue to engage a parent who was also my perpetrator?

This capacity to accept reality and the people who compose my reality has more to do with me, the survivor. It has less to do with the perpetrator(s), with the people who live in denial of the abuse. It has more to do with the new eyes, ears and heart that I have cultivated during my process of recovery. What is acceptable to me may not be acceptable to another survivor. Or what is acceptable to me at my level of recovery may not be acceptable to another survivor who is at another level of recovery. Life and how we live our lives is subjective.

When I stop struggling, when I surrender to reality, when I stop resisting reality and accept the reality of my situation, then options and possibilities come forth. It is within this type of reality oriented environment in which I am fully aware and see clearly that I can resolve the abuse with my offenders to the extent that is acceptable to me.



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.



Survey Results

During the months of October through December 2000, a survey was distributed to all the ASCA meetings and also placed on our web page. A total of 28 ASCA participants responded to the survey. Fifty-seven percent of the participants have attended ASCA for a year or more, with 68% having participated in ASCA for at least 6 months. Some of the results included the following:

Eighty-six percent stated that they are either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the way most of the meetings are run. Fifty-seven percent stated that they were extremely satisfied. Twenty-five percent stated that they check our web page at least once a month. Several participants mentioned that they do not have access to the web. Thirty-nine percent use our Survivor to Thriver manual at least once a month. Whereas, 43% note that they never use or use only once a year the Survivor to Thriver manual. Thirty-nine percent reported that they read the ASCA News every month, with 29% stating that they never read the ASCA News. Several participants mentioned that they never see the ASCA News at the meetings.

Participants reported a wide variety of means and techniques that they used for recovery from their childhood abuse. Sixty-one percent noted psychotherapy, 51% mentioned ASCA and other support groups, 36% stated that reading was helpful in their recovery, 21% suggested that friendships with others in recovery helped and 14% noted that writing assisted in their recovery.

As to what participants most appreciated about ASCA, 21% mentioned the people in some form, 14% specifically noted safety, 14% wrote about honesty in some manner, another 14% acknowledged support, 11% recorded the community aspect and 11% was thankful that ASCA existed.



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.