

ASCA News • September 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

At the Board's meeting in late July, they came up with a wonderful idea. In an effort to increase participation in the creation of the ASCA News we are initiating a new venture. First, we are thinking of publishing the ASCA News on a bimonthly basis instead of issuing a monthly newsletter. The first bimonthly edition will be published on December 1st, followed by February 1st, April 1st, etc. We will use November as a transition month. Therefore the ASCA News will not be published in November.

The creative and exciting part of our newsletter experiment is to reach out to you, the reader. We invite you to participate in creating the ASCA News by volunteering to be interviewed over the telephone or through email. In revving up for the December issue, our October issue will publish comments and observations from six different ASCA participants from South Africa. Their comments might give you a feel for what we are trying to create in the new ASCA News format.

If you volunteer to be interviewed by me, I will forward to you the topic along with several questions that we would be exploring through the interview. For example, your interview might focus on your approach to recovery, how you work an individual Step, etc. By emailing you the topic and the basic questions ahead of time, you would have time to think about what you would like to say. You might even decide to jot down some notes or write-up your responses. I will probably ask additional questions based upon your responses during the interview to elicit more information.

You and I would decide upon a mutual time for me to telephone you. I would tape the interview. I would then transcribe parts of the interview and write-up your part of the article in your words. At that point I would email your section back to you to see if you wanted to make any changes. You would then email the article back to me.

An article might consist of pieces from the transcription of one, two or three interviewees depending upon who volunteers to be interviewed. If a telephone interview is not practical because of distance or impossible scheduling conflicts then we could explore doing an interview via email. The bottom-line, if you want to be interviewed, I will do whatever I can to make it happen. We want you expressed in the ASCA News!

In addition, various Board members will take turns writing a new piece: Thought Leadership. Beginning in December one of the Board members will articulate some aspect of his or her thinking on recovery, the direction of THE MORRIS CENTER and ASCA, or any other leadership related thoughts concerning recovery and our organization. This new piece, Thought Leadership, will offer our readership some insights into the thinking of the various Board members.

Another new piece for the newsletter will be Life Stories. This piece is meant to

provide any of our survivor readers an opportunity to share his or her life story. If you volunteer to be interviewed, I would interview you based on what you want to share with the readership. Again, I would tape the telephone interview, write the article, and send it to you for any possible adjustments or changes. You might also choose to write your own piece instead of being interviewed. There are many possibilities.

As always you may also choose to write an article and we will publish it in the newsletter, along with poetry, survivor art descriptions and the web page. Volunteer interviewees would have the opportunity to use their real name or a pseudonym. Our guidelines for articles are our standard ASCA meeting guidelines. For additional information concerning length, deadlines, etc, please contact me.

To make this promising venture a success, we need your assistance. We want our newsletter to be more about you, the reader. If you would like to be interviewed for the December 1st issue, please email me at georgebilotta@cs.com or call me at 508.835.6054.

The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is October 7th for the December 1st edition. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is December 7th for the February 1st edition. The deadline to initiate the process to be interviewed is February 7th for the April 1st edition.

If you would like to be part of our inaugural newsletter you need to let me know of your interest to be interviewed by the 7th of October. I look forward to hearing from you and collaborating with you.



A Reflective Moment for September

Caring for Our Bodies

by George Bilotta

For this month's reflection, I thought that it might be a helpful exercise to discuss our body and how the body impacts our recovery process. Whether we were physically, sexually and/or emotionally abused, our body was impacted. We store what is commonly referred to as body memory within our body as a result of the abuse. (You might find it helpful to refer to Step 4 in our ***Survivor to Thrive*** manual, page 75, which discusses body memories.)

At one time or another, we may take our body for granted. It is just there, more functional and mechanical rather than a creation of wonder, beauty and grace. Often we pay attention to the body only when it hurts due to sickness or an accident. Again we may pay attention when the body feels uncomfortable due to indigestion from eating fatty foods, bloating from over eating, stressed from overworking, irritable and tired from lack of sleep, etc.

Body Influencing Recovery

From the perspective of recovery from childhood abuse, the manner by which we go about attending to, caring for and treating our body on an ongoing daily basis will directly and often profoundly influence our recovery process. Why? The body provides fundamental energy for our recovery efforts and for daily living. For

survivors who often feel depressed, tired, overwhelmed and sluggish, adding energy to the body can be practical and helpful.

In addition, through the body and its senses, we experience and interact with people, events and things around us. As the primary instrument for embracing the world, without a properly functioning body everything else seems to falter. We live and experience life through our bodies. Through our bodies, we literally touch the world. Touching and being touched physically is one of the reassuring and comforting joys of life. Many survivors have been robbed of this simple pleasure.

A body that has been abused physically, sexually and/or emotionally has to varying degrees been numbed, desensitized, constricted and inhibited. As adult survivors if we do not consciously and deliberately attend with thoughtfulness and care to our body, our body along with its senses of sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing will continue to be lulled to sleep, dulled and anesthetized. When our senses become emotionally unresponsive, the world often looks and is experienced as gloomy, dreary, depressing, unattractive, gray, monotonous, stale, and lifeless. In such scenarios there is little meaning and purpose to getting up in the morning. There is little motivation to work on recovery.

Most people tend to take their body for granted. They usually do not pay attention to nor listen to their body. They do not acknowledge what their body is revealing to them, what it is craving and needing. How does your body fundamentally feel?

In general does your body feel alive, vibrant, relaxed, free, energized, open, comfortable, at home, alert, graceful, healthy, light, grounded, calm, harmonious, soft, rested, peaceful, animated, refreshed, strong, coordinated, etc.? Does it feel dirty, corrupted, crushed, awkward, tense, wooden, mechanical, heavy, frozen, tired, uptight, stiff, strained, betrayed, alienated, self-conscious, inadequate, inferior, closed-off, agitated, anxious, restless, pushed, sore, rag-dollish, closed down, etc.?

Through childhood abuse our body was usually not respected, cared for nor nurtured. For our perpetrator(s) our body was a thing, an object to be used for pleasure or as an object on which to purposefully inflict pain. Our body may have been brutalized, assaulted, punished, battered, kicked, slapped, raped, invaded, used, threatened, attacked, injured, sexualized, forced, violated, harmed, desecrated, pushed, ignored, etc.

Why Care for the Body?

Why is taking care of our body so important for recovery? As I mentioned earlier, our body generates energy for daily living. We need energy to do the things that we are called to do throughout the day. When we thoughtfully attend to our body, with nurture, we counter depression. If part of depression is the lack of energy, then energizing the body will help balance off some of our emotional depression.

In addition, as we thoughtfully care for our body, we stop taking our self for granted. We add to our sense of self-worth. By purposefully and resourcefully caring for our body, we reintroduce and/or increase gentleness, soothing and sensuality into our lives. Caring for the body has a way of increasing a sense of self-appreciation, balance and perspective. When we thoughtfully care for our

body, we support our ongoing recovery efforts.

Some Ideas on Caring for Our Bodies

Sleep & Rest

The first way to care for our body is to ensure sufficient sleep. Many people are perpetually tired due to insufficient sleep. They are sleep deprived. Most people require an average of 8 hours of sleep per night. Most people experience a significant difference in energy level and thus coping capacity when they have 7 to 8 hours of sleep versus 5 to 6 hours of sleep. When we are well rested, we cope better with the daily concerns, hassles, problems, difficulties and inconveniences of life. It takes energy to cope. It takes energy to process and manage the feelings that come up for us as we tell our story of abuse over and over again, as we develop new skills and ways of being with our selves and others.

Relaxation

A second way of caring for our bodies is through regular relaxation. The body craves refreshment throughout the day. The body calls for re-balancing following a period of work, a period of pushing the body. For example, many people perform simple stretching exercises, yoga or use other Eastern traditions of meditation to relax and replenish their body during the day.

Others have learned to relax and restore themselves through their senses. For example, through the sense of smell, people burn candles or incense. They smell flowers. We call this aromatherapy today. Through the sense of taste, we can learn to eat slowly, nibbling and concentrating on flavors and textures of foods and drink. The sense of touch offers the opportunity for self-massage or massage administered by another. Playing in clay or finger-painting can be relaxing for some people. Through our hearing, we can listen to music, listen to silence, listen to tapes with guided meditations, poetry, etc. Our sense of sight invites us to relax by pondering and gazing upon beauty, art and nature.

Nutrition: Water and Food

Nutritional professionals encourage us to drink 8 glasses of water a day. Through drinking water, we cleanse our bodies of various toxins and prevent dehydration. People who drink sufficient water report that they feel cleaner, have fewer digestive and intestinal problems, report less skin problems and have more energy.

Eating a balanced diet provides the fuel for our body to turn into energy. Again nutritional professions encourage several smaller meals throughout the day rather than one big meal especially in the evening. In taking care of our body, in nurturing our body, we are called to develop a consciousness and a reflectivity about what we choose to eat. Sometimes we do not have a choice. For example when we are a guest, we may have limited choices. Most of the time however, we can choose when and what to eat.

Some survivors have various eating and food disorders that resulted from being abused. This creates additional challenges for these survivors who struggle to take care of their bodies.

Hygiene

Proper and ordinary hygiene practices, not only keep our bodies clean and free of diseases, but they can also be transformed into nurturing experiences of self-soothing, self-intimacy, self-awareness. Whether we are talking about bathing the entire body, or focusing on a specific area of the body, like teeth, fingernails, toenails, hair, hands, feet, etc., brushing, scrubbing, washing, bathing, cleaning, these common everyday practices can become a conscious reconnection with the body rather than an unreflective task. They can become multiple ways of gently caressing, loving and empowering our body.

Exercise

Exercising the body can become a major ally in our recovery process. Exercise helps to counter depression. Exercise is an excellent way of ridding the body of stress. Exercise in general invigorates and enlivens. It does not matter whether we engage in gentle stretching, walking, running, swimming, aerobics, weight lifting, etc. From a recovery perspective exercise simply will help invigorate the body.

Summary

Many survivors have participated in various body therapies that they have found helpful and powerful for their recovery. There are many schools of thought proposing different approaches to nurturing, healing and restoring the body, especially the body that has been traumatized through childhood abuse. If you have the financial resources you might want to explore some of these alternative and complimentary avenues for healing.

My bottom line is simple. Paying attention to our body, not taking the body for granted, approaching the care of our bodies in a thoughtful, gentle and reverential manner could be a wonderful and potent ally in our ongoing process of recovery from childhood abuse. How do you plan to attend to your body today?

You can offer feedback concerning the preceding and following articles by sending an email 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 Editor: James Daniel



Greetings from the new poetry editor of the **ASCA News**. Since the earliest I can remember, poetry has been a big part of my life. The rhythms and rhymes of nursery rhymes read to me by my grandmother were a great comfort to me growing up. Now I'm writing my own. I feel very fortunate to share them here with you.

The poetic art form has allowed me to dabble in the world of archetype. Use of symbol and metaphor has helped me see things from my past with a new, wider and more compassionate perspective. A lot of healing has been bestowed upon

me through the grace of poetry.

I encourage all you poets and potential poets to send in your poems with themes of childhood abuse and neglect. Let me know if you'd like to be considered for publication in the **ASCA News**. I can't promise that every single poem sent to me will appear in the **ASCA News**, but I can promise you that I'll sincerely read what's sent to me. If you're a new poet, still developing your style, in want of assistance or feedback on your creative endeavors, I'll be glad to help out. I'm always good for an encouraging critique.

I believe self-empowerment can be found, embodied and glorified through the written word. Happy writing!

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



Poetry

Walking on Shells

by James Daniel, Copyright 2001

Feedback to poet: ribturtle@aol.com

When it was least expected
Came the beatings
Just when the egg shells I was walking on
Stopped crunching under my feet
Came the beatings
Just when I thought I was in the clear
When for a second I didn't feel the fear
Came the beatings
Arms out of nowhere flailing around
Whirling like the blades of a crazy helicopter
And I couldn't get out of the way.

The impact on my spine
The impact on my shoulder blades
Hair being pulled
Thrown up against walls
Like a rag doll
I let her have her way with me
As I watched it from the ceiling
Hiding behind the blades of the ceiling fan
Obscuring my senses just enough
Not to believe it was happening
As it was happening.

And afterward, after the sick wind retreated
I'd gather myself up
Collect myself as best I could
Feeling defeated, feeling ashamed
Why couldn't I protect myself?
Why couldn't I fight back?
And where was my father?
Why couldn't he protect me?
Wasn't that his job?
And why did my mother hate me so?
And why would she pretend as if nothing
happened each morning after?

I believed I'd be bald by the time I graduated from
high school
That is, if I ever made it to high school
I'd run away but they'd come after me
And make it twice as bad as it was before
I'd love to tell someone, but who would believe
me?
The bruises weren't big enough
At least not on the outside
So I go back to walking on shells
Keeping my antennae continually on the rise
Picking up on subtleties, in hopes of being better
prepared
For the next inevitable surprise.



Possible Rotation C Topic: Ongoing Commitment to Recovery

In the meeting it might be helpful to use the Summary paragraph at the end of the Step Elaboration article on Step 3 as an introduction to a Rotation C Topic for September.

Questions:

1. What might dilute your commitment to recovery?
2. What encourages and fosters your ongoing commitment to recovery?
3. What has been your experience of your commitment to your recovery process?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Supporting THE MORRIS CENTER & Our ASCA Program

Every year around this time, and only once a year, I raise the question of monetary support for **THE MORRIS CENTER** and our **ASCA** program. I do this at this time of year to coincide with the United Way's annual fundraising campaign. We exist and have been successful financially in part because of the continued generosity of **Norma Morris** and other financial donors, perhaps like

you.

Many people throughout the year give some type of financial donation(s) to their favorite charities. We simply ask that you consider giving a donation to **The Morris Center** and **ASCA**. Raising money for adult survivors of childhood abuse continues to be extremely difficult and almost nonexistent. We often cannot even find a grant to which to apply that fits what we do through **ASCA**.

If you give to your United Way, all you need to do is request on the form that your United Way contribution be directed to: **The Norma J. Morris Center for Healing from Child Abuse**, PO Box 14477, San Francisco, CA 94114. If you do not contribute to the United Way, we encourage you to think about forwarding a donation directly to **The Morris Center**. Please make your check payable to: **The Morris Center** and mail to: **The Morris Center**, PO Box 14477 San Francisco, CA 94114. Thank you for your consideration. No donation is ever too small.



Step Elaboration

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

*Step Elaboration augments the material provided within our **Survivor to Thriver** manual*

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

Commitment - Doing Something About It

Step 3's commitment to recovery implies a promise to oneself. We promise to do something about it, the abuse, (**Survivor to Thriver**, page 74), that we suffered years ago along with the disruptive consequences that continue to follow us. Through **ASCA** to do something about it includes committing ourselves to *Stage One* Remembering no matter how difficult and painful.

We tell our story about the abuse as well as its past and present consequences. We tell our story over and over and over again until the negative emotion has been significantly decreased. In addition, we tell our story continuously until we gain sufficient awareness of how the abuse in the past has influenced us and continues to influence and affect us.

Based upon this awareness and knowledge gained through *Stage One*, in *Stage Two* Mourning we commit to do something about it by assessing and working on resolving the painful feelings and harmful effects of the abuse. Continuously telling our story makes us acutely aware of difficult feelings that need to be acknowledged, expressed and managed. We also uncover a discerning truth about the destructive impact of the abuse on our body, mind and soul.

In *Stage Three* Healing, we commit to an ongoing process of growth. From an **ASCA** perspective, this growth process includes and concludes recovery with the formation of a new self and the reunion of one's soul (Step 21). I prefer discussing the formation of a new self as a self that lives in a healthy manner and enjoys a meaningful and fulfilling life. We also call this thriving.

Commitment's Dilution and Encouragement

Since Step 3 includes the ongoing commitment to one's recovery, we must also be aware of what can dilute our commitment to recovery. Also, what encourages and fosters an ongoing commitment to recovery? First, however, we must acknowledge that recovery from childhood abuse is difficult, painful, often confusing and full of unpredictable repercussions. Recovery stretches us, challenges us, and often results in feeling uncomfortable. Recovery demands time, energy, focus and planning. Survivors who approach recovery haphazardly gain limited progress. Recovery is more a deliberate and thoughtful process.

What Might Dilute Our Commitment to Recovery?

Many factors contribute to the dilution of our self-promise to recovery. Some of these factors include feeling overwhelmed, unbearable pain, feeling exhausted and drained, and a lack of support from family and friends. In addition, unrealistic expectations and a self-imposed recovery timetable could result in a sense of frustration and failure.

Furthermore, life's distractions and realities like employment and careers both domestic and professional can dilute our available time and energy. The usual and average daily stressors associated with living, working, recreating, as well as obligations to family, friends, work, community, church, volunteer engagements, etc., all potentially contribute to the dilution of our commitment to recovery. They can also be encouraging and fostering of our recover as well.

Dilution through Partial Recovery

Another type of dilution to our commitment to recovery is what I refer to as partial or surface recovery. In partial recovery, a survivor works through aspects of *Stage One* Remembering and *Stage Two* Mourning. It includes telling some of one's story of the abuse and wringing out some of the emotional charge associated with the more acute aspects of the abuse. This type of dilution usually follows with feelings and intellectualizations that I have done enough. In partial recovery survivors achieve sufficient recovery to halt the more noticeable pain and discomfort.

Missing from partial recovery however is the transformation of significant dysfunctional patterns learned through being abused. In addition, maladaptive behaviors derived from trying to cope with the resulting consequences of being abused may not have changed. Therefore partially recovered survivors still experience many dysfunctional and maladaptive behaviors including self-destructive and self-defeating behaviors, decreased self-esteem, poor relationship skills, insufficient coping mechanisms to digest life's daily stress, etc. They lack the formation of the reunion of their new self and eternal soul (Step 21). What they have accomplished is a noticeable decrease in pain, distress, debilitating depression, etc. In essence, they feel good enough. They have no particular reason or motivation to continue their recovery process.

Dilution through Resentfulness

Another kind of possible dilution to our commitment to recovery may result from a behavioral stance of resentfulness. All survivors feel resentful for being abused. It is usual and normal. We feel resentful that we were abused. We feel resentful that we find ourselves in this position of having to dedicate time, energy and resources to recover, etc. Feeling resentful is not the problem. Feeling our resentment is healthy. How we manage our feelings of resentment like any other feeling requiring

management may be the point that becomes problematic and dilutive to our ongoing recover.

Why? From my perspective, in a behavioral stance of resentment we focus our time and energy primarily on the other, the perpetrator(s) and the compliant family, rather than the focus and energy being applied to what we need in order to recover, to live a healthy, meaningful and fulfilling life. When we become stuck in resentment, our energy is drained. We usually feel frustrated. We do not seem to move on with our recovery process.

Managing our feelings of resentment is important. We need to attend to, flush out and process our resentment. We need to manage our feelings so we are not overwhelmed, nor do we behave in a dysfunctional manner. In doing so, we free ourselves. We are in a better position to apply our time, energy and resources to telling our story, assessing and resolving the pain and effects of the abuse, and continuing our process of growth toward a new self.

What encourages and fosters an ongoing commitment to recovery?

There are several areas that I think encourage and foster our ongoing commitment to recovery. First, doing something about it a little every day makes the task of recovery easier to handle and digest. We are more apt and willing to take little nibbles of recovery rather than to try to take an overwhelming bite that is difficult to swallow and digest.

Second, interpreting recovery, especially *Stage Three* Healing recovery, as the usual process of ongoing growth as a human being can normalize our recovery process. Every human being has "stuff" to work on. As a survivor we might have specialized stuff and issues but we are like every other person on our planet called to grow and reform ourselves until the day we die.

Third, noticing, acknowledging and celebrating our incremental steps of growth can be motivating and encouraging to our ongoing commitment to recovery. It is the opposite of taking our recovery work and our selves for granted. The familiar saying that every journey is taken one step at a time is particularly relevant to us survivors working on recovery.

Fourth, forming a vision and dream concerning how we want our lives to unfold and our personhood to grow fosters our commitment to ongoing recovery. Each of us needs meaning and fulfillment in life. As human beings we are all called to create a vision and resulting mission for our lives. Our vision and mission provides us with meaning and fulfillment, joy and satisfaction, harmony and peace.

Summary

In summary, Step 3 is a promise to self to do something about the abuse. We tell our story of the past abuse, assess and work on resolving the pain-filled feelings and the harmful consequences of our childhood abuse, and commit to forming a new self. But our lives are full of dilutive elements that can hinder our commitment to our recovery. On the other hand, we also have resources to foster and encourage our commitment to our ongoing recovery process. Part of the reality of recovery from childhood abuse is that recovery takes time. It is difficult and painful. Yet, the rewards coming from the formation of the reunion of our new self and

eternal soul (Step 21) I think are well worth our ongoing commitment and efforts.

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Announcements

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 have expertise and time to promote our web page within the Internet, please contact George Bilotta for details.

If there are changes in Co-Secretary assignments, please let us know so we 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: email: georgebilotta@cs.com, telephone: 508.835.6054, mailing address: 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020.

Remember that if you want to submit an article for the **December** issue of the **ASCA News**, our deadline is October 7th for interviews, November 1st for written articles. If your meeting is not receiving the ASCA News contact George Bilotta.



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@cs.com. 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.