

ASCA NEWS -- DECEMBER 2002

*

THE MORRIS CENTER FOR HEALING FROM CHILD ABUSE

P.O. BOX 14477 . SAN FRANCISCO . CA . 94114

E-MAIL: tmc_asca@dnai.com . WEB PAGE: www.ascasupport.org . PHONE: 415.928.4576

*

APPEARING BI-MONTHLY, THE ASCA NEWS IS EDITED BY JONO SCHNEIDER

SEND SUBMISSIONS, REQUESTS, QUESTIONS TO OPENEDEND@AOL.COM. THANKS!

FROM THE ASCA BOARD...

The ASCA Board of Directors is excited to announce a new e-newsgroup for all current and past co-secretaries. Stu (in Chicago) has volunteered to maintain our e-group site. Although this e-group will be primarily self-moderated, Jessy (in San Francisco) along with other ASCA veterans, will both participate in and help facilitate the discussions. This e-newsgroup will allow ASCA support group facilitators around the world to ask each other questions and discuss ideas on how to improve meetings. We will also exchange ideas on areas such as Rotation Topics, handling difficult interventions, increasing membership, and promoting community and individual growth for our members.

If you are interested in being included in this ASCA Co-secretary e-group, please send your e-mail address to "asca-chicago@mindspring.com". Be sure to state which meeting you co-facilitate (or used to facilitate).

IN THIS ISSUE...

Part II of the interview with Stu F., from the Chicago area, continued from the October issue. Stu and Jono discuss ASCA membership and attendance, and what Stu has found useful as co-secretary to keep the meetings both safe and fruitful for its members.

Poetry by James Daniel and fiction by Thomas Taylor. Both pieces take an unflinching look at abuse from the child's point of view; both pieces use literature to great effect, speaking (to) the difficulty of a child's experience in being abused (the child being unable to cope with what that abuse means).

INTERVIEW WITH STU, PART II

Jono: ASCA is not as populated a program as, for example, 12-step meetings, for a variety of reasons, one of which, it seems to me, has to do with the difficulty of confronting ordinary childhood pain. That said, you are doing a remarkable job, and I know your ambition is to have a meeting going each night of the week in the Chicago area. How do you plan to do this? How have you been able to attract people to ASCA and keep them there?

Stu: I have been evolving a marketing strategy for about a year now. I've spent my entire adult life in business (a result of the abuse I received as a child – my true passion was music), so I have a lot of experience in building and running a business. I am by no means a top-notch business person, nor do I want to be. But I did it for many years, so something rubbed off.

Firstly, it seems to me there are three groups of survivors: 1) people who don't know they were abused as children; 2) people who know they were abused, but who are not getting help; 3) and people who know they were abused and ARE getting help. I think there is a different strategy for each of these groups. So part of what I am currently doing is developing the strategy for each of them, individually.

I believe the easiest group to work with, with regards to establishing an ASCA presence in the Chicago area, is to attract the last group, the people who KNOW they were abused and who are currently getting help. To reach them I speak about our meetings at every recovery environment I attend or come in contact with: from one to three 12 Step meetings a week; my New Warrior's groups and network (approx. 800 men in the Chicago area); my therapist's network of women who are doing gender-healing / transformational work (the Women Within organization, also numbering in the hundreds of members in the Chicago area); I have provided our meeting

attendees with flyers to distribute to THEIR other recovery groups; broadcast emails I send out 1-4 times per month to people in my database who I know are sensitive to this issue; I've telephoned some local hospitals and social service agencies; I have created a list of types of organizations which are likely to desire knowing of this resource (although have not contacted them, as of yet); I have gotten our meetings listed in "The Directory of Self-Help Organizations" published by the Illinois Department of Mental Health (a copy of which is usually purchased by most public libraries, schools, universities, and social service organizations); our meeting listings on ASCA's website; and word of mouth.

My plan of how to grow the number of meetings is: to Co-Secretary the current two meetings until they have grown sufficiently such that there is a very strong tradition within them, and that they will sustain their own rate of growth as a result of being healthy meetings. At the same time, it will be necessary for additional individuals who desire to go deeper into making ASCA a strong community in Chicago, to step forward to begin to work as Co-Secretaries for the current two meetings. I will spend time mentoring them until they are running the meetings well. As this progresses, I will then choose another evening on which to create a new meeting, and begin the whole process all over again, until there are at least seven meetings in the Chicago area, one each day of the week.

And then there's CAMP ASCA..... :-) (sound interesting?)

With regards to attracting people and keeping them coming -- I have been extremely passionate about ASCA's program and when I speak with anyone about it, they just seem to get enthused themselves.....Listen, it's something I really believe in. And I am pursuing myself, whether they come along or not. Not that I'm being manipulative by having that attitude, but I think that that attitude of independence is powerful to someone who is seeking help but is also

skeptical of the “seller’s” motives. I just tell them “listen, there’s no money in this for me. I just need an environment in which to do my own recovery work. If you’d like to come, I’d love to have you.....but either way, I’m going about taking care of myself.” I think people are intrigued when they find something that’s working for someone else, at least enough to check into it further.

As far as keeping them there, everyone has come to our meetings with such passion about how this has effected their lives, that it’s pretty simple – our meetings are just SAFE and HONEST.....and THEY CAN SPEAK ABOUT WHATEVER THEY NEED TO. There are many other recovery meetings, from other organizations, in which there are un-written rules about what can be said and what cannot be said.

You can’t take people’s defense mechanisms away from them – they have to be ready to surrender them, of their own volition, in their own time. Their defenses are there for good reasons – to help them take care of themselves. If you try to take people’s defense mechanisms away from them, they only will feel under attack, and fight to keep them.....not a good strategy in working with survivors. So our meetings are loving, supportive, safe, and allow the individual to control their OWN pace and content of recovery. This has been a powerful experience for all of us.....and has kept all of our friends coming back, so far.

Jono: ASCA, as you know, is not group therapy, although its effects on its participants is very therapeutic, as it allows members to express long-repressed childhood feelings in a nurturing and encouraging environment. How do you relate to this idea? Do you see a therapist, and, if so, how do you integrate your therapy issues with what you speak about in ASCA?

Stu: My whole life I've wanted to shout, to scream about what happened to me, but nobody wanted to hear it.....they either explicitly told me that they didn't want to hear about it "anymore", or they were bored and would leave me when I wanted to speak about it, or they would SHAME ME for not "getting past it, already.....when are you going to let dead dogs die?" Even therapists I've had did not want to allow me to talk about my past, or didn't place high value on it. As a result, I just felt MORE shame and frustration over the years.....and hopeless.

It is ESSENTIAL to speak about what happened, for this reason: the "ways" we are today ARE DIRECTLY as a result of actions, decisions and thinking we evolved, as a result of what happened "yesterday". And yesterday's "ways of being" were the results of what happened "the day before 'yesterday'".

So the way we are today, which is making us miserable and possibly even sick, is DIRECTLY as a result of what occurred in the past, and the thinking we developed as a result of those experiences. What our families and "friends" have done by preventing us from sharing and reworking what occurred, was to prevent us from re-writing our "stinking thinking" along the way, which would have allowed us to heal and move on. They un-wittingly prevented us from growing and healing, which was what they overtly were saying they wanted for us – our growth and healing. But instead, their actions had the reverse effect – depriving us of our getting past the traumas.

The truth for ME is that they (family, friends, therapists, whoever) didn't want to hear about my sadness, because they themselves did not want to remember their own traumas.....so me trying to have them listen to mine was just too painful for them. ASCA FINALLY welcomes, gives permission and encourages this healing process.....a complete departure from what "I"

always got, anyway. ALL my feelings and memories are honored and accepted in my ASCA recovery, and it's been a blessing.

I AM back in therapy. I found a new therapist in October 2001, who is very sensitive, caring, compassionate, genuine, informed, bright, well-educated.....all characteristics I needed before I would begin therapy again, if ever. I printed off a copy of "Survivor to Thriver" for her, which she promptly read. I bring my manual to my therapy sessions and discuss elements of my current work I've written in the manual. I am also incorporating "The Artist's Way" (a program of recovering one's creativity), into my overall program of recovery.

I have done extensive work on the SAFETY FIRST! Plan in my manual and therapy, and am using it to establish a sustainable situation for myself before descending completely into all the other emotional issues I need to be working on. My life circumstances are so unstable and disruptive, that I am constantly being derailed. So I must get my "Hot List of Crisis" mostly resolved, to provide me with a safe "nest" for me to do my healing work.

The manual has accurately instructed me to do this as the very first, necessary, preliminary work to be accomplished before taking on the rest of my ASCA recovery. So that's what I am currently working on: my financial crisis; housing crisis; legal crisis; and addictions.

My therapist is actively helping me address these areas, to get them stabilized, so I can direct my full attention to my emotional resolution work – which I've NEVER been able to do because I've NEVER resolved these crisis in my life. Indeed, that's my family's history, that their lives have been predominated by their crisis.....they taught me well.

I have brought my manual and my current struggles with these crisis to my meetings, sharing all the details, and am getting tremendous emotional support, well-wishes, and blessings.....yeah, now if they'd only give me money :-)

I am using my manual as an orderly approach to straightening out my life and moving through my issues in some orderly way, a way that is productive and not more overwhelming than necessary.

Jono: How do your groups approach topics for meetings? What discussions have you found particularly fruitful?

Stu: Because our meetings are just under 4 months old, we haven't even covered all the steps yet. But basically, we are following the suggested 3 meeting rotation of "Lead, Step, Topics". All our attendees have always found at least something of value, and usually A LOT of information of value, in whatever it is we read in that evening's meeting, be it a Step or a Topic from the Meeting Support Materials link on the webpage. Recently I've been bringing in some small sections from other books, such as "Healing the Child Within", and expect to also use "Soul Survivors" by J. Patrick Gannon, among other resources.

The topics in the manual and on the website are a wonderful collection of information - it's my impression people are getting HUGE benefits from everything we are reading.....it's like cold water on a hot frying pan.....it's soaked right up.

I WILL say that numerous attendees have told me personally and during their meeting's share, that the ASCA meeting is having a profound effect on them; that many of them are starting to have nightmares; that they are having memories they haven't had for many years; that the

meetings are going deeper for them than any of the other meetings they are attending. Numerous people feel that they can discuss things at our ASCA meeting that they can't or won't discuss at their other recovery meetings.

That feels great to me, and I think is a tremendous accomplishment. And that they feel safe in doing so.....it's fabulous. I couldn't be happier with what's going on in our meetings. They're great for me, anyway.

Jono: ASCA does not require people to engage socially outside of meetings, but, like 12-step meetings, friendships that begin in ASCA can be extremely supportive and nurturing to one's individual growth. For example, many of my close friends are people with whom I go to ASCA meetings, and these friendships help me integrate my past and my present. How has this experience been for you? What would you say about the quality of these friendships?

Stu: Well, because our organization is so new (just 4 months old) I am just getting to the point of beginning to have contact with people outside the meetings, mostly by phone or email. But that's ok.....it's slow and deliberate and cautious and safe. And I feel good about that. I expect that over time my ASCA acquaintances will become some of my most intimate friends. As I heal and am healthier and more available, and as they do the same, I think this period in my life, in ASCA, will end up being the most important time I've ever had.....the period in which I was finally able to put the pain of my childhood to rest.....at least, that's what I'm hoping. I think the friends I'm making at ASCA are going to be some of the closest relationships I've ever had in my life. At least I hope so.....(my ever-present fear – the product of my childhood)....

THE SCALDINGS (HIT FIRST, DON'T ASK LATER)

BY JAMES DANIEL

"Take a bath."
No, I'm afraid to take off my clothes
"Come on, come on, you're safe here
Just calm down.
I'll make some hot water
Make some tea
You'll see."

The water's too hot
It's happening again
Just what she used to do
She said I smelled bad
She thought I was filthy
She called me a pig
She scrubbed off my maleness
While she wore a wig.

I see her not caring
Me falling downstairs
Her laughing, her coldness
Tension and madness
The black narcissus
In evil female form
Aquamarine, plastic plants
Nothing lit, nothing warm.

She calling my innocence
Synonymous to her darkness
Her heart full of hate
She likens it to love, how profane!
Filling my head with her poison
Blinding my eyes to light
Mirrors everywhere, candles in cellophane
Aquamarine furniture, aquamarine walls.

Ketchup falls from a tray
Onto her beloved aquamarine carpet
She accuses me of malicious intent
She tells me to put tea in the cups
I tell her I don't know how
She says, "Don't be stupid!"
I rip bags open and pour out leaves
Her rage consumes her, then targets me.

Enemas with vaginal douches

Rape, incest, seductiveness
"Don't touch me, get away!"
She doesn't want me, but won't let me go
Reaching for my genitals
Seeing hair between her breasts
Running to my room, closing the door
Praying to God not to see anymore.

"We're doing this for your own good
Some day you'll thank us
We know that you should
We're doing all this for you"
"If you would talk to your father
Then he wouldn't drink"
"Slow down or I'll jump out of this car..."
...As she nears her own brink.

"We like your brother better
We wish you were born a girl
We named you after your crazy
Uncle Jimmy who died needlessly
But we don't talk about him
Your grandmother first gave birth at 12
Your grandpa is your grandma's uncle
But we don't talk about them."

It's too hot, it's too hot! "No, it's not!"
As she pushes me down in the tub
Constricting my diaphragm
Clenching my ribs
Holding my breath under hot water
'Til my feelings can run down the drain, alas,
I wish I could follow them, but here I remain.

Copyright 2002 James Daniel.

POSSUM

BY THOMAS TAYLOR

"Time for bed, Timmy."

Dutifully he approached his father, giving him an obligatory peck on the cheek while feeling the stubble of his day old shave.

"Good night, Timmy," as his dad snapped the paper a little straighter.

“Good night,” he replied timidly as he shuffled over to his mother. He felt the wattle of her skin briefly touch him, caressing him with the down of her facial hair. A shudder washed over him as the cloying scent of Chanel #5 overwhelmed him. The cloud left him reeling in a hallucinatory funk as he stumbled towards the stairs.

Hesitantly he brought the ladder clattering down as the maw of the opening gaped at him. Unnerved slightly, he crept up the stairs and scurried over to the single cot as hurriedly stripped off his clothes and put on his p.j.’s. They were cold and slightly damp as he huddled under the army blanket trying to stop the shivering. The light glowed weakly against the shadows of the night and the rafters offered hidden dangers. The smell of mold and age suffused everything, alongside all the failed dreams.

A thousand age old fears clamored through him as below he heard the sounds diminish one by one until the weight of the quiet pressed in on him—laughing at him and his childish fears.

“Hush little baby don’t say a thing cause daddy’s going to buy you a diamond ring.”

He turned off the light and huddled under the covers, swallowing haltingly as his heart started to race. Nervously he began squeezing his legs together as he tried to quell the increasing hysteria within him.

What was that? His mouth dried out as he squeezed his legs faster. It felt kind of good as the surging blood in his head pulsed and roared against the silence.

And suddenly his body wracked in a spasm as something that looked like yogurt shot out of his penis, catching in his pubic hair and sticking his pajamas to his skin. It was a vaguely familiar sensation as he recalled a girl in shiny clothes encircling him and soaring with him in the inky technicolor of his dreams. Her hair had cocooned him and floated him, but he had awaken in a panic to find her gone with only a stickiness to remind him. He reached down now to smell and taste a little of this fluid. It smelled kind of mushy and felt slimy, making his mouth pucker and catching in the back of his throat as he swallowed.

A sudden upswelling of cicadas caused him to freeze, terrified that he might be discovered and punished for soiling his pajamas. And so he waited against the night, rigid with fear until finally, exhausted he fell into the turbulent vortex of dream.

A crack of the stair electrified him out of his fitful sleep as the stair springs made a panging sound. The stickiness had now dried and trapped him like that of a spider's silk. Paralyzed he could not turn on the light to drive back the monster as it came ponderously up the stairs.

He lay inert—a possum exuding death, but the scent only aroused the massive presence coming towards him.

It sat down next to him as its bulk pushed into him. A hand came down on his chest caressing him, warning him. Timmy's fear caught in his throat. Who could he call?

A slight trickle of urine escaped Timmy as he fought to breathe. The hand came under the blanket, probing. It was cold, as a shudder hissed from Timmy.

"Shh," it said as it pulled up the pajamas, greedily kneading Timmy's stomach and causing a paroxysm of pain in his rigid abdomen.

And then the spider delicately tickled its way down and under Timmy's waistband to his shriveled penis.

"Noo," Timmy moaned as he sought to scrunch back away from the spider.

"Be quiet," it warned as it felt the dried crustiness. "Now you know," it said in a whisper as it pulled the blanket back and took Timmy's trembling penis in its mouth. "Does that feel good?"

Shame, fear and pain washed over Timmy as he lay rigid and mute. And then his body betrayed him as he felt his penis grow inside the warm wet cave of its mouth.

"I knew you would like it," it said triumphantly.

Timmy felt the sandpaper scrape across his chest and smelled the hair gel waft over him.

It pulled the blanket back as a rustling caused a zipper to open. The dark became even more blinding as it lowered itself over his face. He felt the tip of a rigid penis brush against his lips and flinched as it insinuated itself into his mouth, the pubic hairs tickled his nose. A hand behind his head

urged him on, impaling him further and further. Timmy remembered seeing some TV show where a snake was swallowing a big rabbit as he struggled to stay conscious. Where was she? Surely she would hear the noise and take him away to a lovely place, but the silence only heightened the lonely agony of his fear. Its massiveness suffocated him as it quivered and became still. And then its penis pulsed, jerking in Timmy's mouth as wave after wave flooded him with the same thing that had come from Timmy.

Timmy tried to wake up, but the dream did not stop as it wrenched from Timmy's mouth and continued to spew over his face and eyes. Tears mingled with the strands of the web that blinded and ensnared Timmy as it pushed him down.

"Go to sleep," as it slipped back into the night and Timmy would struggle to breathe whenever fleeting images wound through his tortured nights. It was just a bad dream; after all, mom and dad love him.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

- An Interview with Rana, one of three directors of the non-profit organization Wo+men Against Child Abuse (www.wmaca.org), and a facilitator/co-secretary of meetings in South Africa. Rana talks about the mission of her organization and where she sees the role of ASCA in the greater community at large.
- Laurie Frye, member of the Thursday night Berkeley group, on her own identification with the aggressive sexual feelings of her father, and the difficulty and confusion of separating out her own real feelings in relation.