



Adult Survivors of Child Abuse (ASCA) Global Newsletter

Fall 2016

In this issue, you'll meet Fire-Brown, a TEDTalks public speaker who is also the founder of the Atlanta ASCA support group. Next, you'll be



introduced to Kim, our newest volunteer who will help answer emails sent to our ASCA website. Finally, you'll learn the history of ASCA, researched and written by one of our board members. All articles, photography and artwork were created by Adult Survivors of Child Abuse.

The Morris Center and the ASCA Program continue to grow worldwide with over 50 support group meetings. We need your help to reach more survivors. Please consider [volunteering](#), following us on [Facebook](#), or by making a [donation](#) in any requested amount that feels right for you. The Morris Center wants to remind all of you that you are awesome and appreciated.

[The Morris Center for Healing from Child Abuse](#)

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Volunteer, comment, find us
on Facebook



Fire-Brown
*ASCA Atlanta founder,
TEDTalks public speaker*

Most of my life was seemingly normal. There were some manic behavior and signs of being a borderline personality. For instance I lacked trust in people and what they said. I was suspicious and anxious. There were some relationship issues with men; I discovered being a lesbian.

Despite these challenges, I attended college, became a stock broker and worked successfully in financial services. My family life was happy and close. I recognized I present well: I'm very pretty, out-going and talkative. Yet, along with these qualities, I have always thought (known) that I was "damaged". I remember being molested and repressed the actual acts.

In 2006 I was triggered by an event involving a (verbal) sexual assault. It was very traumatic: a scary homeless man approached me at 11pm in a seclude area and while touching his genitals, he used crude language to tell me to give him oral

sex. I got away but was terribly traumatized. I drove home crying hysterically.

Within days of this, I began having nightmares, then memories and flashbacks of my sexual abuse. I became more anxious and agoraphobic. Depression and being a drunk took over. Three years later I eventually checked in to mental hospital and began therapy.

I kept a journal through my healing process. I recommend Survivors do this. I later named my journal "Journal of a Suicide Failed" and am currently looking into publishing it. I blogged and I found ASCA. I kept journaling about the 21 Steps from the [survivor to thriver manual](#). While focusing on Step 15, I decided to start an ASCA meeting in Atlanta. We have been doing the meetings for 5 ½ years now. It has been the best thing I've ever done. I accomplished so much through my healing journey.

Recognizing I had a story to tell, I began speaking publicly. In April 2016 I did a TEDTalk: "Healing Adult Survivors of Child Abuse". It was the video produced: [watch the video by clicking here](#) I've dedicated my life to working with Adult Survivors of Child Abuse. The accomplishments are rewarding.

Now, I live my life thriving. I went to school for two years to become an Ultrasound Technologist. I have traveled to speak monologues. My relationships are healthy. I'm happy and healed. Some days I have a memory or trigger because of public speaking: nothing I can't handle in a healthy way.

This is possible for all Adult Survivors of Child Abuse.

- [Fire-Brown](#)
- [ASCA-Atlanta](#)



Kim's story

Meet ASCA's newest email correspondence volunteer

How I became a Survivor and am now a Thriver in process.
As it always is, a process.

I was born in July of 1973, the baby girl of two young parents along with my two older male brothers, 5 and 7 years my senior. My mother and father were married young and definitely not equipped to be perfect parents (not that any parent is perfect since kids don't come with a how to manual). My parent's own upbringing passed on generations of dysfunctional behavior . Behavior which was passed on to myself and my brothers.

I was sexually abused by my oldest brother, my father, and physically, mentally and emotionally abused by both of my parents. I lost my identity, innocence, and my soul was damaged before I even hit the age of 5. I had the delusional thoughts that all families were this way. As I grew to be an adult and have children, I realized affecting me and my life in many ways, was the a result of the abuse in my past . The

pain of the abuse was so hard to bear, that I indulged in behaviors that were self-sabotaging. Instead of living, I only existed in this life. I was a drug abusing, co-dependent, self-loathing mess.

Both my parents came from alcoholic and drug abusing households, with all the dysfunctional properties and roles that come with it. I was often times told that I was a mistake, not planned. I always felt as if I never had a voice, a place where I belonged, a safe environment. I was isolated on many occasions because my mother just didn't want to see me or deal with me. I often would be grounded to my room for months on end and could only come out during dinner, go to the bathroom and to school. I would bang my head against the wall, in sheer frustration and feeling alone in my own home.

I did have a few constants growing up because my middle brother was complete opposite,. My middle brother treated me with unconditional love and protected me. I am ever more grateful for him now as I know that he was a blessing all throughout my life. He guided me in the right way on many occasions and has always been there for me. I also had my grandmother on my mom's side. She was a wonderful sweet loving woman and her house was my safe haven. My head in her lap as she brushed my hair was a safe place for me. She made me feel loved and cherished. My grandmother would tell me good things about me. It was hard to believe those words but even though she is not with us any longer, in my therapy she still is my safe place when I need to self soothe. I definitely put myself in her lap, hear the sound, smell her smell and feel her touch and hear her voice. It is an instant guided meditation process for me and where I go to and visualize when I am in crisis. I realize my grandmother's spirit is always with me in my healing process.

In my process of healing, I always had a desire to reach out to people such as myself, and help people who are having a hard time dealing with their past. I am not a therapist, but my I am starting the first steps this year on that journey. This past year I had a wakeup call which made me more aware of who I can be. I came to know I am a good person. I am smart, loving, and possess the good qualities that I never thought I had or deserved. When I found ASCA, it was like a

light and excitement went off in my head. Here was a way that I could give back, focus on my healing continuously, have support and not feel alone,. With ASCA, I hopefully can be able to help other people by providing them resources to start their own healing process. This has always been a passion of mine. I enjoy helping people and letting them know they are not alone in their journey to being a Thriver. This is hard work because it's exhausting, maddening and absolutely unbearable at times dealing with abuse in your childhood. I learned it is possible to become a survivor and move forward to being a thriver. The journey is long and hard, but worth every minute. That is why I wanted to volunteer for the ASCA email correspondence team: To give back the tools that were given to me.



Original photography by John M.

THE HISTORY OF ASCA AND THE MORRIS CENTER

by Diane Whitney

With the phenomenal, international growth of the ASCA program over the past 26 years, it's easy to forget the early pioneers whose deep and abiding commitment made it all possible. In fact, some newer members of the ASCA community probably don't know what the Norma J. Morris Center is or how it is connected to the ASCA program. Hopefully, this article will answer those questions and bring everyone on board with a historical perspective.

In the mid 1980s, a Jesuit priest and psychologist named George Bilotta became friends with two members of his San Diego parish, Norma and Bob Morris. Their friendship continued after George left the priesthood and relocated to San Francisco. In 1989, Norma and Bob sold their business and Norma proposed to George that they collaborate to provide therapeutic services to some under-served community. After some discussion, it was decided that their focus would be on incest survivors.

At the time, the topic of sexual abuse of children had already emerged on the radar screen of the therapeutic community but it was still thought to be a relatively rare phenomena. Sexual abuse of children was also still an uncomfortable topic for the general population.

Despite this, George and Norma pushed forward and in 1991, they incorporated the "Adult Survivors of Incest Foundation"(ASIF). Efforts to obtain funding were unsuccessful so Norma became the sole source of financial support for ASIF. Under its auspices, individual and group counseling services were offered to incest survivors at George's office in San Francisco. However, the reality soon set in that there were simply not enough referrals to make the provision of clinical services financially practical.

In 1992, George made a crucial connection when he met Patrick Gannon. Patrick, also a psychologist, had been working with high risk families in the Tenderloin

district of San Francisco for many years. In the course of that work, he dealt with many cases of child abuse and was trained to identify, assess and treat those young victims. He was surprised to discover that many of the parents of these abused children had themselves been abused as children. He concluded that his success with the children depended upon his intervention with the parents as well. Based on these experiences, he wrote the breakthrough book "Soul Survivors" in 1989, a book that would eventually become the theoretical model for the ASCA program.

Impressed with Patrick and his work, George hired him as the Clinical Director of the fledgling ASIF . With Patrick on board, the mission was soon expanded to serve all survivors of child abuse, not only incest survivors. In recognition of that expansion and in honor of Norma Morris, who continued to provide funding, the name was changed to "The Norma J. Morris Center for Healing from Child Abuse". (hereafter The Morris Center).

In early 1993, The Morris Center placed an ad in a free newspaper called "Recovery" inviting adult child abuse survivors to come to a meeting to discuss the possibility of creating a self help program.

The meeting was held in Patrick's office and about twenty people showed up, including the current president of the Morris Center Board, Jessy Keiser. Jessy recalled the experience this way: "I remember feeling excited, hopeful and also a bit vulnerable. Some who attended the meeting were therapists as well as survivors, some had been in individual therapy, some had been in 12 step programs for years and were now seeking a self help program specific to recovery from childhood abuse. All who attended were eager to establish a program that did not yet exist. None of us knew how much work lay before us. And none of us could have anticipated how our efforts would unfold over the next two decades to become what today is a worldwide recovery community ".

From that initial meeting, a Leadership Council was formed. Patrick's book, "[*Soul Survivors*](#)" provided the excellent foundation for what was to become the ASCA program but there was still much

work to be done before meetings could be launched. According to Jessy, the Leadership Council labored for the next 3 months, sometimes tediously discussing and developing guidelines, principles, meeting formats, scripts and other recovery tools.

Finally, in May, 1993, the first ASCA meeting was held at the University of San Francisco. Almost 100 people showed up, which provided validation that a group such as ASCA was much needed. A few months later, the first training workshops were held for survivors who were interested in co-facilitating meetings. Before long, additional meetings were up and running in Oakland, San Mateo, Santa Rosa, San Rafael and as far away as San Diego.

Over the next several years, ASCA continued to thrive and expand. Among the achievements George cited were six survivor conferences in San Francisco, San Diego and Santa Rosa, three art exhibits featuring survivor art, sponsorship of two survivor poetry contests plus numerous in-service trainings for mental health and social service workers. This was all made possible by the deep commitment of many volunteers, who poured their hearts into the ASCA program. It was also made possible by the ongoing financial support of Norma Morris, whose generosity allowed ASCA to have office space and maintain key staff, including George as Executive Director, Patrick as Clinical Director and Lisa Lindelef as legal counsel.

ASCA was also the first survivor organization to have a Web page. With the growing popularity of the internet, a crucial decision eventually had to be made. Should ASCA materials be made freely available online? George described his feelings and concerns about that process as follows: "Giving away something that was so hard earned and precious was a liberating experience but also fraught with concern. How would people run the meetings without the hands-on support and guidance of the program founders? Would it work? Would it be safe? "

For the most part, those concerns proved to be unfounded. While some pseudo ASCA groups did

spring up, using only parts of the ASCA protocol, the materials were overwhelmingly used as intended. Numerous new meetings were born and many survivors also used the materials for their own personal recovery. Likewise, many psychotherapists started using the materials with their clients.

In 2002, the Morris Center and ASCA went through another challenging transformation. After donating over a million dollars over the years, Norma Morris' changing personal circumstances made it impossible for her to continue financially supporting the Center. George had already shifted his position from Executive Director to consultant and, in an article in the June 2002 ASCA News, (which can be found in the [newsletter archives](#)) he informed the ASCA community that he would continue as a volunteer consultant from his new home in Massachusetts. He also announced that the Morris Center would henceforth be "largely in the hands of its industrious president, Jessy Keiser and its talented and competent Board of Directors."

That Board, with some changes in membership over time, continues to function to this day, with Jessy still at the helm. Some of the tasks the Board continues to undertake include:

- Offering support and guidance to new and existing ASCA groups**
- Answering phone, email and postal mail inquiries**
- Maintaining the ASCA website**
- Publishing the quarterly newsletter**
- Publishing the monthly UPLIFT newsletter**
- Training new and current ASCA co-facilitators to conduct safe meetings**
- Developing alternate ways to hold meetings e.g. virtual meetings**
- Managing the budget and seeking new funding sources**
- Creating materials for new meeting formats**
- Executing required government filings to keep our non profit status**
- Brainstorming new ways to help The Morris Center continue to grow and thrive**

We hope that the ASCA community is aware that the Board stands ready to serve you in any way we can. We welcome your input, your questions, your volunteer energy and your contributions to the newsletter. We hope that everyone who has been associated with The Morris Center/ASCA, feels a great sense of accomplishment for all that we have achieved together over the past 26 years.



Original artwork by Amaroq



ASCA
Chicago, IL

Support The ASCA community

If you would like to volunteer, have comments, or would like to provide supportive feedback for anyone featured in this newsletter, send an email to ascanewseditor@gmail.com. When providing supportive feedback, please remember to include that person's name in the subject line of your email. The Morris Center provides training, coaching and mentoring for Adult Survivors of Child Abuse who are interested in volunteering. New volunteers are always welcome.

Be featured in the ASCA Newsletter

Please submit: your own stories, photography, artwork, poetry and other self-expression, book reviews, and upcoming events to ascanewseditor@gmail.com.

A special thank you, to all those who have made a [donation to the Norma J Morris Center](#). We would not be here without you.



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