

ASCA News • June 2000

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Notes from the Board President Margaret Jayko

Calling All Members: Join ASCA's Spring Renewal

For the first time in our 10-year history, THE MORRIS CENTER now has an activist Board of Directors. At our first Board meeting, held in San Francisco on May 7, the Board voted to significantly expand the number of ASCA members involved in organizing and leading the organization. Several Board-member led committees are being set up. Every ASCA supporter is encouraged to consider becoming involved in the myriad of activities that contribute to making ASCA the cutting-edge in the recovery of adult survivors of child abuse.

Work you can volunteer for right now includes:

"Participating in the online ASCA meeting and helping to polish up our website. Just press the "e-mail" button on the www.ascasupport.org website: Adult Survivors of Child Abuse, ASCA, and let Webmeister Bob Roberts know you want to be involved/what you think.

"Writing for, or helping to solicit articles, poems, etc., for the monthly ASCA newsletter. The deadline for getting into the July issue is June 15. Volunteer to interview people in your local chapter, send along a book review, or jot down some tips or questions from your meeting. Just e-mail your contribution and/or ideas to the new Editor-In-Chief, Diane Whitney: Diawhitney@aol.com.

"Have ideas about involving more therapists, survivors, institutions in ASCA? Community Outreach Director Amaroq de Quebradas is eager to get out there with you and start talking to people. Contact her at: amaroq@sirius.com

"Are you interested in learning and/or honing the precious skills involved in being an ASCA meeting Co-Secretary? Are you a Co-Secretary who would like a bit of consultation and discussion of questions that have come up in your meeting? Are you an ASCA participant who would like to work on training and coaching others to lead ASCA meetings? Well, then David Vandever is the person to talk to. He is now organizing Co-Secretary training and coaching, and can be reached at: dvandever@aol.com

This is just a taste of the plans that the Board, together with The Morris Center's Executive Director, George Bilotta, has begun working on. The whole July issue of the newsletter, in fact, will be devoted to introducing all the Board members and our goals and committees. Any questions or suggestions can also be directed to me, the newly elected Board president, at: Maymo@aol.com.

Remember: everything we do to build ASCA, no matter how small it might seem, is an aid to recovery and a blow to child abuse.

Margaret Jayko
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The following brief article is a continuation of our monthly series focused on pondering some of life's basic questions.



A Reflective Moment

Approaching Life

by George Bilotta

Most people appropriate the time to think, to strategize and to make decisions concerning the practical and functional aspects of life - like school, profession, employment, hobbies, friends, relationships, retirement investments, vacations, interest groups, psychotherapy, support groups, etc. We imagine being a teacher, designer, attending a particular school, pursuing a particular career, being in a committed relationship, focusing on recovery, living in a particular geographic location, wearing certain cloths, eating certain foods, involving ourselves in certain kinds of entertainment, activities, etc. On the other hand however, most of us seldom allocate time to think and strategize, to make decisions concerning cultivating personal characteristics or dispositions, matters of the heart - like compassion, gentleness, appreciation, kindness, empathy, patience, receptivity, humor, joy, wonder, integrity, courage, etc.

It is the difference of approaching life and proceeding through life with a basic small box of crayons in which to draw and color life's possibilities, or proceeding with a huge, hundred plus box of crayons. How we approach life, how we experience life, how we interact with life I think has more to do with our personal dispositions, matters of the heart - like compassion, gentleness, appreciation, kindness, etc. than with the practical and functional decisions we make around career, relationships, cloths, etc. I would also say that cultivating matters of the heart for the average person is more powerful than focusing on psychotherapy. Why? Psychotherapy does a wonderful job assisting people in resolving psychopathological traits such as anxiety, aspects of depression, compulsions, addictions. Psychotherapy helps us to function better, feel better, etc. Psychotherapy however, does an inadequate job concerning matters of the heart.

For example, gentleness is more core to being a human being than being in a healthy relationship. One cannot have a healthy relationship without cultivating a certain degree of gentleness. You can develop all of the functional and practical communications skills that the world has to offer, but if we lack gentleness the interaction will remain lacking, unsatisfying. A relational interaction that lacks a sense of gentleness comes across as hard, cool, pragmatic, functional, etc. If I cultivate a sense of gentleness, whereby I try to look upon and interact with people, events and things of the world in a tender, kindly and soft way, then the way I experience different situations in life will increase in tenderness, kindness, softness. Because I try to cultivate gentleness in my life, I consequently end up coloring interactions with life in all its complexity and diversity, in all its depth and numerous possibilities. Life becomes brighter, more interesting, fuller and more

enjoyable. The relational interaction is deeper, more satisfying, more meaningful.

As for how this specifically influences adult survivors of child abuse, I think childhood abuse in its many forms, with its diverse consequences, influenced our heart, shaped the core of who we are more profoundly than many people realize. Abuse not only effected us psychologically, emotionally, but it effected our heart, our core. When a father seduced us leaving us frightened, alone, confused, in pain - our heart, our core lost a degree of compassion. When a mother refused to believe or intervene with a family member who was sexually assaulting us, leaving us bewildered, in agony, in despair - we lost a degree of joy and appreciation from within our heart, our core. Childhood abuse and its lingering consequences chipped away at our heart, our core of who we are. It left us with a little, limiting box of crayons to draw and color life.

If we fail to cultivate the matters of the heart, the core of who we are, we will continue to approach life in a pragmatic and functional manner. Though we may be and feel successful in career, athletics, hobbies, etc., when you really take the time to sit and ponder, can you imagine living in a world, living your life without matters of the heart, dispositions like compassion, gentleness, appreciation, kindness, empathy, patience, receptivity, humor, joy, wonder, integrity, courage, etc.? Cultivating personal characteristics or dispositions, matters of the heart, is a life long process. Dispositions of the heart can be cultivated and will have a profound effect on how we take up the daily tasks of life.

Questions to Ponder

1. What do you think that you would gain by cultivating matters of the heart?
2. What would it mean for you to focus on cultivating matters of the heart?
3. Reviewing your own journey through psychotherapy, how has it helped you to function better, to feel better, and how has it helped you in matters of the heart?
4. How can you balance being practical and functional, yet still cultivate matters of the heart?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Sharing Basics

Occasionally, members inquire into the parameters surrounding what can or can not be shared in an ASCA meeting. Though we have clear Meeting Guidelines especially guideline 6 which prohibits any type of discussion or disclosure of past or present perpetrator type behavior, and guideline 7 which prohibits derogatory language concerning minority groups, etc., and the Share Guidelines which encourage us to speak about our feelings and to share in a way that others can "take-in" what we are saying, additional clarification may be helpful for some participants.

First, sharing is a two way street. We share and disclose for the purpose of liberating ourselves from our secrets, our shame, our humiliation, our painful story of childhood abuse, the negative effects on our lives. We also share to relate our successes, our strategies, our growth and unfolding as human beings who have been impacted by childhood abuse.

Yet we share in the context of a community of ASCA members, people who have been through similar experiences. Thus our shares are meant not only as a catharsis and an opportunity to gain insight and support for ourselves, but also to connect with others through our sharing. We all know how various shares impact us - how we nod in empathy, how we squirm with discomfort, how our agitation oozes out, how our sadness releases tears as we listen to others share.

Some people think that they should be permitted to share anything they want and in any manner that they want. When our ASCA guidelines and spirit of sharing are crossed and not observed, a meeting can quickly descend into chaos. Most of us have had experiences of this happening in a meeting. We feel unsafe, confused and frightened. At this point a meeting ceases to be helpful, and has turned counterproductive. Share guidelines are not meant to control. Rather share guidelines have the purpose of providing the conditions for the optimal healing experience for everyone - sharers and listeners.

Second, outside of Meeting Guidelines 6 and 7 mentioned above, there is no restriction concerning the content of our shares. Some people sense that their shares may be too intense for others or that others may feel uncomfortable with what they want to say. When this thought arises, we might begin our share by stating to the Co-Secretaries that we want to share something but are concerned that it may be too intense or that it may make others feel uncomfortable, and that we may need some help to stay within the guidelines. What this introduction to a share does is frees us up. We disclose our need to share something that feels potentially overwhelming and a stretch of the guidelines. At the same time we open ourselves up for support and assistance by the Co-Secretaries to keep us on track. Everyone in the room - sharer, co-secretaries and listening members are all rooting for us, wanting us to succeed. We are all doing the best we can with difficult material.

Third, sometimes sharers are intervened upon by the Co-Secretaries, not so much for the content of a share, but rather for the manner, the tone, the flavor by which the share is being presented. For example, if I start shouting and screaming, standing up and moving about in an agitated way, the manner of my share, the style of my share, its tone has turned destructive. The share is no longer productive and helpful. Though it may feel cathartic for me, it has destroyed the sense of safety and soundness of the meeting. When a share veers off course and impinges on the integrity of the meeting, its safety, its predictability, then the share must come to an immediate halt, usually by an intervention of a Co-Secretary.

Another example to illustrate manner, flavor, style, nuance of a destructive share is how a sharer goes about disclosing explicit sexually abusive behavior of their perpetrator. Most survivors at some point in their recovery find it helpful to relate what concretely happened - the rape, the seduction, the assault, the badgering, the threats, etc. However, some survivors who may be unaware, lacking in insight into this particular aspect of their lives, might describe the situation in a way that comes across as sexually arousing, as sleazy and slimy, in a manner meant to provoke others within the meeting. We all can probably recall one or two past situations in a meeting when a share moved from describing and relating something from a wrenching heart, to describing and relating material that comes more from the unhealthy part, from the out-of-control part, from the pathological part of self.

This type of a share usually seems okay in content, but rather the way, the manner, the flavor of presentation definitely feels and is experienced by the meeting members as inappropriate, unhelpful, not within the spirit of sharing. The reality is that some people who attend ASCA meetings hurt so much that they are often unaware of the way they come across. Though they may not consciously intend to be provocative, they inadvertently are provocative. Provocation of any kind is always inappropriate and is unhelpful in our meetings. Often the intensity of a sharer's rebuttal to a Co-Secretary's intervention is an indication of his/her inappropriateness.

Fourth, in turn, not every share that a listener may experience as uncomfortable is inappropriate. There are many things that people might share that are appropriate but that some people may feel uncomfortable. Just because I may feel uncomfortable, uneasy, agitated by a share does not make the share inappropriate or unhelpful. A feeling is a feeling, is a feeling, neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad. But to make a judgment about the inappropriateness of a share one must move from feeling to thinking. Does the share violate any of the guidelines? Is the share being presented in a manner that is provocative? If in a concrete way we can not affirm the specifics of the violation, then the share is probably stirring up our own unresolved stuff around the material of the share, therefore we feel uncomfortable, uneasy, agitated, etc. Though uncomfortable, the share is still appropriate.

Finally, as stated at the beginning of every ASCA meeting, "by participating in this meeting we all agree to honor and abide by ... any interventions made by the Co-Secretaries." Again, sharing is a two way street. To maintain the integrity of a meeting it is helpful to approach a meeting in a spirit of trusting the Co-Secretaries, of trustingly deferring to the difficult decisions that Co-Secretaries sometimes have to make during a meeting. Again, interventions are made not to control or humiliate, but rather to maintain the integrity of the meeting. Co-Secretaries do the very best that they can. One reason we have two Co-Secretaries is for a check and balance. If you think that you will feel controlled if a Co-Secretary in all honesty and sincerity thinks that he/she needs to intervene on your share, then you might not be ready to participate in ASCA meetings. A measure of good will is helpful when participating in ASCA meetings.

Discussing Share Basics might take several meetings to fully explore. Hopefully genuine discussion about sharing will lead to more helpful sharing for sharers and listener, as well as less need for intervention by the Co-Secretaries.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for June:

Sadness

When we pause and reflect back upon our childhood abuse, sadness usually fills our heart. A heavy sense of sorrow and a kind of weighted fatigue seems to envelop us. Sadness is possibly the boiled down reduced sticky essence of the effects of childhood abuse. No matter how much work we spend on our recovery, no matter how much growth and rejuvenation we experience, when we sit and ponder what happened to us as children of abuse, we will always experience a certain sadness, heavy-heartedness, lowness of spirit. Sadness is a type of

mourning that comes in waves, that diminishes with time, but never totally leaves. In a sense there is a part of our heart that will always be fractured due to the betrayal, due to the pain that we experienced in our youth.

There are other life experiences that might also weigh down our heart leaving us feeling sad. The death of a loved one, the loss of a significant relationship, the destruction to our lives and bodies caused by chemical dependency, a life threatening illness or a catastrophic accident, are but a few examples of life experiences that leave us saddened, heartbroken, downcast.

There are two aspects of sadness that require investigation. One thing is not to fight the sadness. Allowing the sadness to wash over us, like a wave, experiencing its heaviness, just allowing ourselves to feel the sadness is helpful. Why? Because what happened is sad and we probably did not have sufficient opportunity to experience the sadness when we were children or teenagers. When we try to fight the sadness, we waste considerable energy. We only deceive ourselves, trying to trick ourselves into thinking that we are not sad when we are sad. It's a waste of energy. A good cry is much more rejuvenating than making believe that we are not sad.

A second aspect of sadness is that the object of our sadness needs to be placed into perspective within our entire life. Sadness will always be a part of our heart's ache. Yet our heart which has infinite capacity, is also full of many happy, fulfilling, energizing experiences and memories. Balancing the sadness is in a sense to celebrate all that is going well, all that we have accomplished, all that we cherish. It is not denial to say something like, "Yes, it is sad what happened to me, I do feel sad. Yet, there are many things going well for me. I have many wonderful experiences and memories that sustain me, that encourage me, that help me through the day."

This is balancing our lives, giving full measure to the sadness but also full measure to the celebration of what is going well. The antidote to sadness and other feelings that may seem negative or uncomfortable, is not to deny them, but rather to cultivate and to balance the other side of the feeling spectrum. We can sometime become lost in the forest of recovery. When our lives focus only or mostly on the past, the negative, the pain, then we lose our balance. We lose perspective. We end up denying the other valuable aspects of our lives.

Questions:

1. What are your experiences of sadness as related to your childhood abuse recovery?
2. When do you see yourself denying your sadness?
3. What is a helpful way for you to allow sadness to wash over you?
4. What is your experience of trying to balance the sadness with the celebration of what is going well for you in your life?

The New Board of Directors of THE MORRIS CENTER for healing from child abuse will formally be introduced through our July issue of ASCA News. We will dedicate most of the issue to introducing the new Board to you.



Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the ASCA NEWS. In addition, Co-Secretaries or some designated person from the meeting should be downloading the ASCA NEWS. It is then duplicated and distributed to the meeting membership.

1. Our voice mail system has been significantly revised. In early May we had to move from our elaborate computer based information system to a Pacific Bell voice mail. Only 2 minutes is permissible for a greeting message. We crammed as much as possible into the 2 minute greeting message. We suggest that all Co-Secretaries listen to the voice mail greeting message 415.928.4576. If you have any suggestions or comments please contact George Bilotta, georgebilotta@cs.com or 508.835.6054. Next month we will submit a proposal to add individual ASCA meeting voice mail boxes.



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.