

ASCA News • April 2001

P.O. Box 14477

San Francisco, CA 94114

web: <http://www.ascasupport.org>



From the Desk of George Bilotta

I want to acknowledge a mistake that was recently brought to my attention. In an article for Rotation C Topic: Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for November 1999, I was trying to dwell with our readers primarily around the concept of thankfulness. It was November and the Thanksgiving Day holiday was coming up. In the article however, I contrasted thankfulness with anger. The mistake that I made was that I should not have addressed two different concepts, i.e., thankfulness and anger in the same article. It led to some confusion among some ASCA participants and some participants feeling invalidated around their anger. I apologize for being the source of confusion and any double messages that the article related inadvertently.

If you have been a long-term reader of the ASCA News, you are aware that many of the topics, concepts and issues that I address through the ASCA News are often complicated and occasionally controversial. One of my goals for the ASCA News is to present articles that are thought stirring and challenging. It is neither my aim nor my desire to provoke readers, but rather to invigorate thinking. I want to encourage and support people to think in-depth about important issues surrounding recovery from childhood abuse.

In addition, I view the ASCA News as a venue to present themes that might not be covered in the 21-Steps or in the Survivor to Thriver, along with trying to elaborate and to add to the steps' or manual's discussion. I also try to include a practical application within most articles. How do we go about changing something in our lives, growing, moving-on, etc? Providing practical application in and of itself is a challenge. Finally, I try to add an element of balance and rebalance, perspective and viewing recovery from different angles within the ASCA News.

So much of our lives have been filled with pain, violence, negativity, disregard, harshness, etc. Sometimes we lose sight of and forget that there is another part of life -- the gentler, fulfilling, meaningful, engaging, etc. part of life. I sense that many survivors as well as myself are trying to move toward having a fulfilling and meaningful life. In part, I think that this is what recovery moves toward, i.e., to resolve the past sufficiently so that we can move-on and have the life that we want. It is almost like we have forgotten or perhaps never had the experience of being fully functioning, happy, fulfilled human beings. It is helpful to have a sense of where we are going which I think is what Steps 13, 15, 19, 20 all point toward.

One of the realizations that I have accepted is that to more thoroughly explore various themes I need to give myself permission to use more space. I have always tried to keep the monthly ASCA News to four pages. Consequently, I often find myself condensing thoughts. I have decided that it is too difficult, too prone to misinterpretation and consequently an unhelpful way to go. So starting with this issue, (though you may have already noticed over the past few months) I am taking

additional space to more thoroughly develop and propose thought-inducing themes. I hope that you will find this new arrangement helpful and more satisfying.

It has been almost a year and a half since I wrote that article on thankfulness. A year and a half seems a long time to wait for some concrete feedback. Please, please, please, if something that I write displeases you, rubs you wrong, seems inconsistent, is confusing for you, whatever, please let me know. You can let me know directly via email, telephone call, handwritten letter. You can sign your name or you can forward your thoughts to me anonymously. Whatever works for you. But please let me know if something in the ASCA News disturbs you. My contact information is always on the last page of the ASCA News, i.e., my email, telephone number and mailing address.

When I receive feedback I try to respond, correct and rebalance the situation. However, if I do not receive concrete feedback about something that is off putting and only receive feedback from people who enjoy and find helpful what I am writing, then it leads me to think that I am hitting the mark. I do not realize that some people may be upset or confused if they do not let me know. In addition, by providing me with some feedback if I have missed the mark, it will be a wonderful opportunity to re-explore a theme, to add to the discussion, to offer another point of view.

I am also contemplating the idea of writing some of the material so that it corresponds with the three stages of remembering, mourning and healing. The one hold back with this idea is that we are in all stages and steps all the time, though we may be focusing specifically within a particular stage and/or step or are more developed or recovered in one area than another. What I might try to do in the future is note how a theme, topic, issue, etc. might relate to the various stages or where the theme might tend to show up most prominently within the scheme of the three stages of recovery. It will take awhile for me to figure this out.

Occasionally, someone will forward an article, poem, etc. for the ASCA News. If you ever want to share something with the community send it to me. The same guidelines for writing something for the ASCA News are the same principles we use in ASCA meetings. I look forward to hearing from you.

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 April **Enriching the Soil that Fosters Our Emerging Self** by George Bilotta

Many of us are acutely aware that the abuse we suffered during childhood wounded and hindered our sense of self from fully developing and emerging. Many of us have probably questioned how our sense of self, how we perceive and feel about ourselves, how our self-esteem would have evolved if we grew up within healthy families, if we were not abused. For many survivors part of recovery is fostering a renewed sense of self or as step sixteen would state - I am strengthening the healthy parts of myself, adding to my self-esteem. In part it

involves enhancing the dimensions and characteristics that we like and replacing and/or decreasing the dimensions and characteristics that were distorted through the influence of abuse and growing up within an unhealthy family environment.

For me the basic stuff, the fundamental soil, the center out of which our sense of self emerges and grows is through an enriched sense of awe and wonder in our everyday lives. Cultivating awe and wonder in our everyday lives fundamentally opens me up to the realization of who I am as a person, the wonderful mystery of me. Awe and wonder open me up, permitting me to see and embrace myself with all my strengths, beauty and wonderfulness along with a gentle acceptance of my weaknesses, the parts of me that remain underdeveloped. Awe and wonder are the enriched soil out of which my true sense of self can grow, develop and emerge, and then be viewed, valued and embraced.

Opening up is important because most often closing down, shutting down, closing out, blocking out were necessary survival tactics that we employed to stay alive, to survive the pain, the suffering and the bewildering mess that we found ourselves in as children. For many survivors the process of opening up is difficult, scary and full of anxiety. Yet, if somehow we do not learn and practice how to open up then much of life will be walled off, closed off, unavailable and lost. For me opening up via cultivating awe and wonder in my daily life has been a safe, private, readily available and non-risky way to foster my renewed sense of self, to enhance my self-esteem. Opening up, I believe, is part of Steps 1, 2 and 3 in Stage One of Remembering. Opening up is also part of Steps 8 and 13 in Stage Two of Mourning. Opening up is also part of Steps 15, 16 and 17 in Stage Three of Healing. From my perspective, opening up is very important within the recovery process from childhood abuse.

What is awe and wonder? It is for example the experience evoked when holding an infant. There is something about holding an infant that evokes a powerful set of feelings and behaviors within the fragileness, vulnerability, sacredness and innocence of the infant. What is evoked is what we call awe and wonder. We are open when we hold the infant. Similarly when we stroll down a secluded beach mesmerized by the power, beauty and enormity of the ocean, the environmental setting seems to evoke awe and wonder. We are often stunned, humbled and overcome with the magnificence of the ocean. In that moment we are open to the mystery of Mother Nature. Listening to some ASCA shares can sometimes evoke a sense of awe and wonder. As we sit listening, (or reading shares on our web page within the ASCA e-meetings) we are astonished, taken aback, wondering how this person who has been so abused, hurt and wounded manages to carry on with his or her life so well. Listening in this manner to ASCA shares, we are sometimes awe inspired. We open ourselves up to the people who speak from their heart, the center of their being. We feel deeply touched.

Opening up has everything to do with providing the conditions, the rich soil needed to be deeply in love with self and others. Loving deeply with passion whether towards oneself or toward others involves not only the previous examples of holding the infant, walking the beach, listening to that special ASCA share, but also being mystified, stunned, warmly and refreshingly overwhelmed with the beauty, power, majesty, wonderfulness, fragileness, etc., of self, the other, nature, etc. Most often this is something we did not receive or marginally received growing up within an abusive environment. Cultivating awe and wonder in our daily lives can

help us I believe to maintain our openness to self, others and the things of the world. Cultivating awe and wonder is one way to keep our hearts open to the mystery of who we are, to the mystery of others, to the mystery of life. In so doing, in my experience it enhances a sense of self, self worth, self-esteem.

How do we go about cultivating awe and wonder in our everyday lives? I will try to respond to this question through some examples of my own daily life. On a daily basis because I value what cultivating awe and wonder can mean for me in my life, I aim purposefully at trying to be attentive to and reflective about the people, events and things around me that might evoke awe and wonder. For example, I have two cats, Cleo and Hobbs who have been a part of our family for 13 years. Every morning it is the same basic routine. Pick me (Cleo) up and rub my belly. It is a brief moment to ponder the security she senses, the trust, the amazing sense of connection that she has with her human caretaker. For me it sets the tone of the day - try to be gentle, try to be open, try to take in the goodness that life is presently offering.

Another example of cultivating awe and wonder in an ordinary everyday manner for me is making my stovetop espresso. For me making my espresso in the morning is a conscious and deliberate ritual filled with expectation and anticipation of something wonderfully delicious and satisfying about to happen. There is joy and satisfaction in tasting the initial sips of espresso. I focus on the flavors, the weight of the rich liquid on my tongue, its warmth, its depth of flavors. I ponder in amazement at how a few grounded beans can make such a refreshing liquid experience.

As I read and sometimes peruse specific articles within the morning newspaper, it is often filled with little articles that spark awe and wonder. In a newspaper that is filled usually with much human misery, tragedy and hate, I am awed and filled with wonder as I ponder the many examples of human resilience, heroism and kindness. Examples of neighbor aiding neighbor, the cutting edge marvels of science and medicine, etc., fill the daily paper beckoning me to be still as I wonder in an incomprehensible way what many dedicated people have created. In some ways I do not skim or just read part of the newspaper but with selected articles I ponder and allow the news article to disclose its awe and fill me with wonder. It sets another tone for the day - don't take life and the environment around me for granted, try to be appreciative, try to interact with respect.

No matter how often I use it, my computer is simply another fascinating means that provides awe and wonder throughout my day. Usually, when I first boot up my computer, I tend to check my email. In seconds I receive notes sometimes from around the world. It is truly amazing for someone like me to click and have almost instant response by receiving messages and information from thousands of miles away. It is simply beyond my comprehension how talented people have enhanced my life with this type of technology. Throughout the day while at my desk with my trusty computer, additional tones for the day continue to echo - reminders of others out in the world working. I wonder how our cooperative work improves our world, how each of us contributes in a unique way to the whole, how we each have a place in society, that we are all trying our best even though we often fall short.

So within a couple of hours into an ordinary day and throughout the day, there have been several distinct experiences of awe and wonder that have opened me,

that have set the tone for the day, that have humbled me, that have placed life into perspective.

This ongoing enrichment of my being through ordinary daily experiences that evoke awe and wonder opens me up, adds substance and concrete form to my sense of self. How? What does it add? The how is that through focusing, pondering, staying momentarily with the numerous experiences of awe and wonder that come my way throughout the day, I remain open, or I am reopened, or opened up a little more. What does it add? In this openness I can see and feel who I am, my strengths, my talents, my beauty, my wonderfulness. The openness also exposes my weaknesses, my lacks, my faults, my many things that I would prefer not to notice. But the light of awe and wonder also sheds a beam of gentle acceptance, compassionate understanding, an embrace of acknowledgment that it is okay that I have these underdeveloped sides of me, that I am not a bad, ugly, incomplete person because I have underdeveloped aspects. I understand, appreciate and let sink in a little more that to be human is to be incomplete as well as wonderful.

So awe and wonder help me to remain open. In this openness I see myself in my glory and in my incompleteness. In this openness I am aware, see, understand and accept a little bit more, who I am. The awe and wonder, the openness, provide some measure of balance and perspective. It counters the past negative junk that stated that I was no good, bad, ugly, not worthwhile, would not amount to anything, etc. Enhancing our sense of self, building up our self-esteem through cultivating awe and wonder which can help us to be open to life and the world around us, is only one of the many ways to grow and to change in this particular arena of our lives.



Rotation C Topic: Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for March

Resistance: The Rusty Hinges of Recovery

Resistance, both a common everyday experience and a standard psychological concept, somewhat resembles the rusting hinges on the doorway to our ongoing recovery. If we tug, pull and force the rusty hinged door to give, to release, to deny its rustiness, a high probability exists that in trying to pressure the door open that there will be a break, a fracture, an unhinging of the door. More harm and more mess seem to occur in our lives when we use force, harshness and/or impulsiveness than when we approach problems, difficulties and dilemmas in a thoughtful, gradual and light handed manner.

Everyday resistance includes putting off unpleasant tasks like household chores, deferring tax preparation until April, dieting, exercising, etc. Resistance within our recovery process might look like - avoiding reading that article or book on the subject of abuse. Or forgetting to make that call to a psychotherapist, a support group, or deferring confronting our abuser or a family member. Or not acknowledging that our abuser is possibly emotionally bankrupt which may necessitate appropriate distance from him or her. When we lift the lid off of any type of emotional resistance we can look and peer down into the pain, hurt,

displeasure, distress, discomfort, dislike, etc., that functions as the rusting resisting agent.

For example, a wife and mother may resist seeing and then acknowledging that her husband is abusing her children. The resistance or the rusting agent is the distress, hurt and anger that would accompany such an acknowledgment. The resistance, the rusting agent, prevents her from seeing, from seeing the reality around her. Another example might include the difficulty that many survivors experience in trying to enhance their self-esteem. If they should think and feel well about themselves, then it might create confusion and conflict concerning "if I am such a worthwhile person why was I abused?" They will probably also resist seeing and acknowledging that they are wonderful, enjoyable and have many skills. They resist since the concepts do not fit their mindset, because they feel uncomfortable thinking positively about themselves. Or in thinking well about themselves, they may decide to venture off and try to have the life that they want. This might necessitate leaving all behind and it probably scares the dickens out of them.

From a basic psychological perspective what causes us to be resistant is often, but not solely, the fear, hurt, pain, displeasure, anxiety, uncomfortableness, etc., which its roots tend to be more unconscious rather than conscious. Since most of us are not masochistic, we tend to avoid pain and discomfort. Look at how many people resist losing weight that their medical doctors have advised. We resist losing weight not because we do not have the strength, the will or the knowledge that it will be good for us, but rather perhaps because we will feel deprived, feel hungry, feel empty. We resist these feelings. Many survivors feel such a high level of deprivation that the thought of dieting, i.e., purposefully depriving themselves of food, a primary pleasure in our day, is an unpleasant and unthinkable choice. For many people eating is a way to deal with anxieties of various forms. For some survivors they need the weight as a guard against being perceived as attractive and physically inviting. For many people these types of feelings and hunger bring up a wide variety of unresolved stuff from their lives. Also, for some survivors with extra weight they have a medical condition that presents other problems and challenges for them and has nothing to do with resistance.

It might also be helpful to consider the concept of resistance as an aspect of change or the inability to flow with change. Many people feel stuck, incapable, unsettled, anxious or fearful of change. We might say that we would then have a certain degree of rigidity, inflexibility, adamancy and/or intransigence concerning our unconscious or conscious refusal to try to change, to try to change our situation, to try to change by looking at self or a situation from a different perspective. So part of my resistance might also have something to do with my concerns around change.

The question now arises, how do we deal with our personal resistance, with the rustiness on our door hinges to life, on our door hinges to recovery? What might be the solvents and the lubricants that dissolve and loosen the rust, the resistance? Since resistance tends to be more unconscious than conscious, dealing with resistance directly is often not possible and in the least difficult and frustrating. Forcing ourselves is usually counterproductive like tugging and pulling on a rusty door. We can force ourselves to wash the kitchen floor, but we really cannot force ourselves to stop being resistant, to resisting that which on an unconscious or conscious level is perceived as being harmful, unpleasant, overbearing, offensive,

painful, depriving, etc.

On the other hand, doing nothing or having no alternative to dealing with our resistance is similarly unhelpful. So maybe one possible practical approach to the various forms of our resistance would be more along the lines of fostering the opposite of resistance. Maybe the opposites of resistance would eventually be the solvents and lubricants that dissolve and loosen in part our rusty resistance. For example, the opposite of resistance could include concepts like flexibility, pliability, responsiveness, adaptability, resiliency, letting go, surrendering to reality, detachment, acceptance, effortlessness, etc. So perhaps by focusing for example on becoming more flexible and tolerant in general, that this type of exercise of stretching ourselves, flexing and broadening, might help us to deal with our resistance in general. Naturally there are other ways people deal with resistance.

If we could force ourselves, we would have already have conquered our resistances long ago. Most of us are strong people. We are survivors walking on the road of being thrivers. We have strength, stick-to-itiveness, persistence, etc. Unfortunately, strength, perseverance and force are not the issues or the answers in reference to our unconscious or conscious resistances. Ironically, dealing with resistance seems to have more to do with the attraction or complementarity of opposites rather than the head-on confrontation of the illusive resistance. We resist but can we bend?

Questions:

What has been your experience of emotional resistance?

Can you name some of your areas of resistance?

How have you tried in the past to resolve your basic resistances?

What has been helpful to you in the past concerning dealing with your resistances?



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

One of the duties of the Co-Secretaries is to decide upon an appropriate topic and corresponding material for the meeting when Rotation C, a topic oriented meeting, takes its turn. To aid in this task, we present a possible topic in the ASCA News every month like this month's topic, Resistance: The Rusty Hinges of Recovery. All past topics along with their accompanying narratives can be found on our web site.

The Co-Secretaries and the meeting membership can chose the suggested topic of the month, select a topic from our extended list on our web page, or opt for another topic that may be more helpful for their particular meeting group. Some meetings have taken a few paragraphs from recovery oriented books or articles. Others have written some of their own material.

There is one basic guideline that may be useful in following when selecting an alternative topic. Topics need to be inclusive for the entire meeting membership. For example, to select the topic of incest might leave out some members of the

group, since not all ASCA participants have experienced incest. Or to choose the topic of suicide might again leave some members wanting since not all ASCA participants experience suicidal ideations or have attempted suicide.

The guideline around inclusiveness means that the topic needs to be sufficiently broad to accommodate all meeting participants. A broad and general topic like this month's topic of resistance is capable of including everyone. Yet, as you have read in the above resistance narrative, the narrative can present a particular focus or perspective. Participants may or may not identify with the general written perspective of the topic, but they can always identify with the basic topic itself. So whether a person agrees, disagrees, likes, dislikes, applauds or yawns concerning the written material focusing on the topic, everyone in the least can identify and ascent to the topic and consequently address the topic in their shares.

Sometimes a focused topic can be broadened sufficiently to include everyone. For example, there is a school of survivorship that would strongly argue that to forgive the abuser is an important aspect of recovery. Yet, there is equally another school of thought among survivors that would argue just as strongly that to forgive a perpetrator is impossible and that forgiveness is actually a form of denial. Irrespective of where you stand on this topic, forgiveness is a human experience and therefore is an issue that every survivor needs to come to grips with one way or another. So instead of stating and presenting the topic as e.g., The Need to Forgive Our Perpetrators, or Forgiveness Is a Sign of Health, or Forgiveness: The Last Stage of Recovery, simply stating the topic as Forgiveness: What Do We Do With It? or Forgiveness: What Does It Mean? or Forgiveness: What Are the Pros and Cons? could stimulate an in-dept sharing among the members. Every ASCA member has some type of lived experience with forgiving someone and being forgiven by someone. With a little judicial thought most focused topics can be broadened to be inclusive and helpful.

Topics are not debates. The idea behind the topic rotation is to provide an opportunity to review and discuss material that is important to recovery from childhood abuse, yet may not be covered in the 21-Steps or in general through our Survivor to Thriver manual. The manner in which Co-Secretaries decide to present Rotation C topics can often make a difference for the meeting membership. Some meetings routinely spend a few moments developing a list of potential topics for future meetings. Co-Secretaries might find this procedure helpful and supportive.

A final note in reference to opting for an alternative topic is to raise some general questions. At the conclusion of all the topics that I write, I suggest some questions to ponder. The questions are always very general to permit maximum projection onto the topic and questions.

If you have a suggestion for a topic, let me know. My contact information of email, telephone number and address is always listed on the last page of the ASCA News. Many topics presented in the ASCA News come through suggestions or requests made by ASCA members like this months topic on resistance.



Poetry

INSULT TO STRUCTURE

Crying and crying
Where am I now?
What are all these creatures around me?
Strange faces of animals staring at me
Through wooden bars
Shelf upon shelf going up to the sky
I can't reach for any
They're all up too high
I'm wet and I'm hungry
All they can do is stare
I cannot form words
All I can do is cry and cry
Mommy, Daddy, where are you?
Don't you care?

In like a hurricane
Blind muddy red rage
She picks me up, yells,
Shakes me hard like a rattle
My head wobbles loose on top of my spine
I clench my muscles the best that I can
Now I can touch the faces around me
Now I can rise to the uppermost shelf
Up here it's safe, just the creatures and myself
Down there I've stopped crying
She's left
Door's open
But I can't get out
I'm too afraid to move.

Confused, what just happened?
I don't feel wet, I don't feel hungry
I don't feel anything
I'm staying up here
I don't have needs up here
There's no anger up here
I can be quiet up here
They'll not know I'm here
With all the creatures
With all the blank stares
With them I'll stay
Of all the pain down there
I'll do my best
To stay unaware.



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.



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.