



Signpost Ten

**“There is an inner child in each of us that wants to
be seen, heard and acknowledged.”**

~John Bradshaw

Meeting Pat was perhaps the most important piece to my healing journey. The next most important piece was reconnecting to the little girl within. When I started honoring my inner child, I closed the book on self-inflicted suffering and opened a completely different book on self-compassion.

Pat suggested inner child work to me soon after we met. I laughed and made fun of it -- the little girl within? There was no way I would consider connecting to an inner child inside. I was a grown woman. I hadn't been a little girl in a very long time. That was a past self who no longer existed. It felt soft, weak, immature and ridiculous. I'd worked for years to build up my tough exterior so no one could get in. Why would I want to open any of that up to connect with a part of me I didn't even believe in? I'd get eaten alive by life and people if I started being vulnerable. I wasn't going to play nice with some fake kid that was supposedly living inside me.

Two more years passed. I was still working with Pat but still taking as many steps backward as forward. I just couldn't get it.

My mind was always revved up, harsh, critical and judging myself for every move. Isn't this how we become better versions of ourselves? Isn't this the way change happens? By forcing, controlling, pushing and driving ourselves, things and people to where we think we and they need to go? Isn't this what separates the "average" person from the "successful" person, so we stay ahead of the pack?

(Even saying “average person” now breaks my heart ... I can't imagine judging anyone as average.)

I could not connect the dots. I could not see that my relationship with myself was in direct proportion to the quality of my life and relationships.

Conditioned patterns run so deep.

I desperately wanted to be loved, seen, heard, to matter and be special. And I truly believed that beating myself up was what would make this happen.

Two more years passed.

I came to a place where staying the same in so much pain was way worse than the risk and fear of trying something new. I was open and willing to take small steps. I realized the harsh relationship with myself was not the way to create healthy relationships with others. No matter how hard I tried, it would not work.

I can look back now and see the gift in it all taking so long. Decades to heal and get sober. I learned the lesson of how to wait. And to never, ever give up. There is always hope.

“It takes the time it takes,” Pat Parelli says about training horses. And that includes for people to change.

The dying of beliefs, patterns, ideas, ways of being.

A death to who I believed God was and who I believed I was, all of it came crashing down. There was so much destruction in that dying, it all needed to happen in the way and in the time that it all did.

And in the complete destruction, everything falling apart, falling away and broken into a million little pieces.

After many times and several years after Pat asked me to find a picture of myself as a little girl, I was ready to give it a try. The picture found me. She was calling out to me, and as soon as that crack happened, the light started coming in.

And with all that destruction and dying ... the walls, the sections and the closed off rooms were exposed. There was so much space that I actually could breathe again.

Pat had me put the picture of me as a little girl on my nightstand and look at it every night and morning. She said we are more open and less rooted in our thinking minds before sleeping and upon waking. These would be the times to start connecting with the little girl inside of me. It was not easy, and it took a very long time.

I had rejected and abandoned every piece of myself for so long that coming back home to her was a very difficult process. For lots of reasons, but mainly as I started turning towards her instead of turning my back on her, I could look into her eyes and see beyond my physical exterior and see my soul, my spirit and my essence. That piece of me that has always been inside of me and has never changed. That spirit that came to life when Christ breathed into me.

I got glimpses of her.

And I grieved. For the first time in my life, I grieved not for what people had done to me, but what I had done to myself. I grieved and grieved and grieved for a very long time.

When I could connect with her, even for brief moments, I began to see myself differently. I wanted to befriend her, advocate for her and show up for her in ways I never knew how to do.

I started to integrate my little girl into my present-day experience. It was a very slow process. The difference now was I knew she was there inside of me. Now that I knew she was there, I would never abandon her.

When old tapes would start playing in my mind with harshness and judgment, the picture of my little girl would flash across my heart. I would remember how that felt as a child. In that moment of awareness, it became an opportunity to retrain my brain to respond differently. I had many chances throughout each day to create a different pathway in my brain of how I showed up for her.

It is such a powerful tool. When I feel like I need something from the outside, from another person, I have learned to put my hand over my heart and ask my little girl, "Sweetheart, what do you need? What is really going on down inside of you? What can I give you?" Connecting with my inner child has given me the ability to go inward first, connect with my spirit and my little girl and ask her what is really

going on. Where does she need to be seen, heard, acknowledged and encouraged? How can I show up and give that to her?

When I go inward first, I let go of the need for and expectation of others seeing, hearing, acknowledging and encouraging me. It releases others from the pressure of giving me what I have not been willing to give myself.

This doesn't mean I don't need outside validation from others, but it means my worth, value and lovability are no longer dependent on what other people can or cannot give me.

Reconnecting with our inner child has the power to change how we are in relationship with ourselves, which changes how we are in relationship with others.

This continues to be life-changing work for me. It becomes an ongoing journey as I learn to give myself what I most needed in childhood, and it becomes clear that this is also what I most need right now. Usually, the adult in us judges and criticizes our choices, which doesn't allow room for compassion and rejects those pieces of our younger self that is trying to get our attention and help us heal.

**“The moment you understand the importance of loving yourself,
you will stop hurting others.”**

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

Unless we stay on this awakening and healing path, what was modeled for us in childhood becomes the way we are in relationship with ourselves today. No matter how loudly we tell ourselves we will do it differently from the way it was done to us, we find ourselves repeating the same patterns. Reconnecting with my little girl was my missing piece. Going back and getting her and letting her guide me in new ways of how to be in relationships changed my life.

Letting her show me the way was what broke old patterns, conditioned ways of dysfunction, codependency and unhealthy boundaries. She showed me my truth and how to speak it.

“Inner child work is a reconnection with the unhealed part of you that keeps showing up and playing out the same dreams until it is acknowledged and

healed. This rejoining is an opportunity for you to go within and form a heartfelt connection with the lost inner child, which holds a great treasure: your unhealed emotional pain. When you give this part a voice, it softens and reveals your core wounding, illustrating how you go to this place. The lost inner child is deep inside, waiting patiently to give you answers that will help you better understand yourself and your wisdom.”

~ Robert Jackman

It's becoming your own parent, learning to re-parent yourself, treating yourself gently, checking in with your thoughts, feelings and needs, and healing any pain you experienced as a child. I have experienced life-changing power through this work -- there is nothing that altered the course of my life more than reconnecting to the precious little girl deep inside me.

By experiencing the connection and coming home to the inner child inside you, you are giving him/her a voice. Your inner child will reveal to you your deepest wounds and help you understand how you got to where you are. They will give you love and compassion to consciously choose a softer, more gentle, forgiving and loving way to show up for your life and your relationships.

“Our access to the true self is possible only when we no longer have to be afraid of the intense emotional world of early childhood.”

~ Alice Miller

Everything you need is inside of you. Everything. If you can give yourself permission to go within, connect to your inner child, and ask with the curiosity of a child, they will lead you to your next right step. Don't be tempted by your adult mind, which will want to take over with its judgments and criticisms. Simply look with wonder and awe at what your inner child wants to reveal to you. They will lead you to your innermost needs. Listen to what they whisper and believe in what they say, trust they know your deepest truth. Thank them and then compassionately give to yourself and witness how your external world changes.

The Practice, Sewing It to Your Heart

How do you feel about connecting with the inner child inside of you? Can you honestly acknowledge how you truly feel and what you believe about this concept? Do you even believe there deep inside you lies a version of you when you were a child?

Do you believe that how your mind talks all day long is what your heart hears? That this then becomes your lived experience of how you are in relationship with yourself? And this then becomes how you are in relationship with others? Can you give some evidence of how this does or does not play out?

Are you open to putting a picture of you as a child on your bedside table?

Do you have walls around your heart to protect yourself? What do you believe this wall protects you from? Can you see this wall may prevent you from experiencing all life has to offer? What do you think this wall prevents you from experiencing?

Do you believe that being in a compassionate relationship with yourself is the key to being in healthy relationships with others?

Do you believe you can extend true compassion to others but be critical and judgmental of yourself? What is your experience with how these two are related?

Can you compassionately look back and identify the emotional patterns you developed in your childhood? Can you see how some of those same patterns emerge for you as an adult?

“I don’t want to end up simply having visited this world.”

– Mary Oliver

