



The Awareness of Being: **Increasing our Capacity for Connectivity**

By P. N. Stoddard

This book is dedicated to every soul
who has experienced consequences from unresolved trauma.
May you seek and find all the characteristics and capacities that are aspects of your best Self.

Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

This book advocates for learning and unlearning processes and includes topics that may stimulate psychological and emotional issues. It is essential that readers take personal responsibility for maintaining their own safety. If at any time you're in crisis, please contact your local emergency services.

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Introduction

“Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough.”

~Mary McLeod Bethune

My parents “died” before I was born. They were slain, in a sense. Murdered innocence comes to mind here. From the few accounts I’ve been privy to, their parents died before they were born as well. It’s understandable that I would experience a similar fate. We didn’t die physically of course. We were busy being lived instead of truly living; like the lights were on (albeit dimly) and no one was home. For the physical to “die” while still pulsating is to be overwhelmed by something or in a state of suppression. It is to be spiritually diminished. Upon reflection, I believe I now understand what happened to us.

I love my parents. If you learned that someone you cared about was in a box, the box was in a hole, and the hole was backfilled, you’d attempt to dig them out using every tool you could get your hands on. This book is one of the tools I choose to employ. I care about quality of life. Love is a verb. The first sentence in this introduction may be seen as harsh judgment—shaming and blaming. It comes from discernment and love. I’ve learned to appreciate the role my parents have played in my life. I also see how they’ve been played— by shame.

This book is for anyone who has experienced unresolved trauma, seeks connectivity and purpose, is struggling with fear, and may not realize they’re probably also dealing with shame. I can relate to all the above. Writing it has been a beneficial process for me. If it turns out to be beneficial for someone else, *that*— as they say— would be “icing on the cake.” Sweet!

If you’ve ever asked the question how, who, or what do I want to be when I grow up, this book is for you. I’m using *grow up* specifically in the context of development, *how* in terms of thoughts and behaviors, *who* in regards to person and profession, and *what* in the context of higher Self and purpose.

Besides coming from discernment and love, the first sentence in this introduction is also a glimpse into how I’ve mostly understood the world since I was 37 years old— through the lens of metaphor, analogy, and simile. I view the world both symbolically as well as literally and I see how shame has slowly been destroying connectivity— to one’s Self, those who share our planet, and the earth itself.

When shame becomes toxic, the essence of what we are is belittled. This diminishment contributes to decreased agency, authenticity and acceptance. Toxic shame equates to spiritual poverty. In other words, when affected by toxic shame, our spirit becomes overwhelmed and doesn’t fully show up. Those of us who have been affected by shame may then go on to absentmindedly oppress those who are susceptible. This is a vicious cycle. Deep down, I believe we all have what it takes to show up fully in life. Showing up fully takes reflective work that can

feel hard to do. Typically, there's also a great deal of unlearning and relearning to be done in the process— unthinking and re-knowing, if you will.

Honestly, I believe my parents loved and raised me the best way they knew how. Of course, there were parenting and self-help resources available to them. I was born in 1964. Dr. Benjamin Spock's first child care book came on the scene in 1946. Pretty sure he wasn't the only child advocate willing to publish back then. In the western world, personal development has been around documentarily, at least, since the time of Aristotle. The term psychotherapy was coined in the late 1800s. Could toxic shame have prevented them from seeking resources? Were they too busy simply trying to survive to learn better ways to be? I believe it's never too late to be better when it comes to loving and raising ourselves and each other.

At first glance, with the amount of information available to most humans today, ignorance may be considered a choice. Truly though, is it a conscious choice? Were my parents and my parents' parents in denial, suppressing anything discomfiting that challenged their worldview? Denial is a defense mechanism after all. That which feels threatened will probably be afraid and may certainly get angry. Anger makes attack seem reasonable. When humans are being defensive, it begs the question— who or what is being defended and to what end?

Parenting is probably one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences we can choose. It's more challenging when we ourselves still act like children. As it is, childhood can be a lot to navigate. It can be easy to forget what's possible. When parents are not at peace, predisposed to get angry or "check out," growing up can feel overwhelming and impossible. Some experiences may be deemed best forgotten. I've definitely had parenting moments I would prefer to forget! I would do it all over though, and a whole lot better the next time around.

I have very few memories from childhood. My earliest was in 1965. I was around a year old. My dad was in the service at the time. I was sitting in the front yard of the house in Hawaii where he was stationed. I recall being alone and having a full diaper. I remember eating dirt or something not normally consumed by the majority of humans. My mom has told me that I ate bugs when I was little, a species she calls roly-poly bugs. Mom was around twenty years old at the time and pregnant with my sister. She had me, my two-year-old brother, and an abusive husband to contend with. Knowing what I know now about brain function and how unresolved trauma affects responsibility, I can certainly understand how it came to be that I was sitting alone in the yard with a full diaper and eating God knows what.

Around age five, I ran away from home with my little sister in tow. I vaguely recall my mom encouraging us to go. I vividly remember, at age seven, walking down the hall to my mom's bedroom to tell her about being sexually abused by her third husband. These experiences, in particular, stand out in my mind because I watched them happen. Like a movie. I wasn't in my body. I was viewing it from a higher vantage point.

When I was about ten-years old, my mom and her fourth husband procured an old horse named Pink Lady. That step-dad had four children from two previous marriages. Two were grown and gone by the time he and mom got married. My biological sister, brother, and step-siblings didn't spend much time with Pink Lady. I pretty much had her all to myself. Thin, older

than dirt, and very tolerant of my shenanigans, she was a dream come true for me. We lived in Oregon then. I spent every moment I could with that horse— rain or shine. On the day we moved, I was told to say good bye to her. One of the few photos I have from childhood is of a very wet little girl sitting on a very wet and dear old horse.

Mom found work with animal control after we moved to Arkansas. She rescued a Shetland pony we named Brandy. I was elated! I loved that pony back to health. Not long after getting Brandy, we moved again. I never learned what happened to either Pink Lady or Brandy. There's a part of me that doesn't want to know. In Wyoming I was able to spend time with some miniature horses near the trailer park where we lived by volunteering to clean stalls and brush the little cuties. I will always be grateful to my mom for providing me with those early experiences with horses.

I was done moving around with my mom by the end of 8th grade. The summer of my freshman year, I moved to California to live with my dad, step-mom, and her daughter. I begged my dad to let me have a horse. He relented. My after-school time was mostly spent training and riding a beautiful Palomino gelding I named Vaquero's Dream. I rode by myself or with a few friends who also had horses. Boys and school were a nuisance to me back then. I preferred to hang out with my horse.

For the majority of my young life, my mom appeared to me to be dependent on men and in survival mode. She did the best she could with the tools she had. I honestly believe we all do. I honestly don't know how much she looked for other ways to be. She married five times during the course of her life and suffered from depression and substance abuse. I'll spare you the details, but let's just say that the majority of the men she married had less than optimal parenting and disciplinary styles. I'm excluding her last and longest marriage. I never took the time to get to know him very well. We moved frequently with her fourth husband. Money seemed scarce. One of my fondest memories living with my mom was when a local fire department "adopted" us for Christmas. It's no wonder my husband of nearly 30 years was a firefighter.

Mom was generous with her time and talents. She donated her hand-knitted hats and blankets for newborns. She made Easter crafts with kids at the trailer park where she lived. She made the best deep-fried halibut I ever tasted. She gardens, knows how to can food, and make jam. I'll never forget camping for almost an entire summer. Her fourth husband was working at a logging camp. She managed to cook pies and cookies for the men who worked there by using an old Coleman stove and a gobs of tin foil. She's definitely someone most of would want on their team if all commercial systems were to collapse.

One of the gifts in living with my mom was that I got to make new friends every time we moved. Consequently, I had a diverse group of friends in high school. Horses were a common denominator with some of these friends. Comments written about my behavior in my high school yearbooks include words such as "hyper" and "spaz." The chaotic energy I displayed was labeled and judged. Alas, these were deposited in my shame account.

I spent time with my dad and my step-mom in the summer. Through my young eyes, and in contrast to how I lived with mom, my dad and step-mom lived a fairy tale life. They drove nice

cars, lived in a big house with a pool, and wore stylish clothing. It felt like living in the land of plenty when I was with them.

Dad had a tender side to him, especially for animals. He had a generous part as well. He tried to be a loving, connected father. On occasion, he would spend one-on-one time with my siblings and I doing something we enjoyed. We were very close until my junior year in high school. Something shifted in me around that time. I don't know what caused this shift. I do remember my dad standing over me and berating me. I remember feeling physically small while being yelled at. I actually had the bodily sensation of shrinking. Prior to this exchange, I had thought he hung the moon. It was traumatizing when I later learned of his even more diminishing and destructive behaviors.

I went to my first party that year and discovered escapism via alcohol. It wasn't until late in my senior year that boys became another way to escape. I had no clue how to effectively express, let alone navigate, feelings or emotions. Mine or anyone else's. Escapism through alcohol ultimately only served to create more shame— not that I was fully aware of shame's presence then.

Another exchange I had with my dad toward the end of my junior year culminated in him calling me a bitch and slapping me across the face. I sold my beloved horse and moved to Alaska to live with my mom. There, I fell in with the party crowd. It wasn't hard to find. Before I had graduated, I moved in with a guy who had anger issues and tended to be violent. When I chose to leave that relationship, I jumped right into another relationship (albeit non-violent) and moved to another part of Alaska. When I realized what a mistake I'd made, I called my dad and asked if he would buy me a plane ticket home to California. Thankfully, he agreed.

I lived with my dad and step-mom until I could afford to move out. Dad gave me a full-time job as a designer, and later manager, at the flower shop he and my grandfather owned. After I got off work there, I worked part time at a video store across the street. By working two jobs, I was able to afford my own apartment. I didn't live there long. I eventually shared a place with my step-sister. I dated off and on, although nothing long term or serious. I met my husband (now ex) when I was in my mid-twenties.

I was in my early thirties and had two children by the time I was privy to some of my dad's more destructive behaviors. Out of consideration for those who were part of that story, and are still on the planet, I won't go into details. I verified the accusations against him, and spoke with him directly about what I'd learned. He refused to take any responsibility for his behavior. My children were age one and five years old. They never saw him again.

At the time, I only knew how to see the choices and behaviors of those around me (including my own) as right or wrong, good or bad. I didn't know then how to be curious about why we showed up the ways we did. Not long after confronting my dad, I learned he had been diagnosed with Bi-Polar Disorder and displayed Schizophrenic tendencies. According to my step-mom, dad hated the medication prescribed by his psychiatrist, so he chose to self-medicate. His drugs of choice were material things, alcohol, and objectifying others— especially women.

To date, my mom hasn't been inclined to share much of her life story with me. I learned of some of my dad's childhood abuse and neglect from one of his last partners, after he had

physically assaulted her, slit his own wrists, and left his house. His partner said that my dad had shared with her that he had been molested by a relative, and verbally and emotionally abused by his father. Armed with this knowledge, plus the impacts of unresolved trauma back then, I imagine the relationship with my dad would have been different.

I don't recall a whole lot about my parent's parents. A few things I remember about my dad's mother was that she made the best macaroni salad in the world, and she endured my grandfather's cruelty. She wore blue jeans, Nike tennis shoes, and drove a VW bug. I recall being in the car with her once when she flipped off another driver. That got my eyebrows to raise. My grandmother remained married to my grandfather, though he purportedly refused to sleep in the same bed with her after she'd had a double mastectomy due to cancer. A couple things I remember about my grandfather was that he would occasionally buy grab bags for us kids at the pharmacy next door to the flower shop he and dad owned. It was said that he had been having a long-time affair with the flower shop's book-keeper. He drank and smoked quite a bit, despite losing a lung to cancer. Eventually, he lost the other lung.

Mom's parents moved to Alaska in the early thirties. They lived in a home nine miles north of town. We lived with them briefly before mom married husband number two. Septic ran directly under their house. I remember walking the boards under the house and pretending the sewage was acid. Water was collected in a huge open container on the hillside above the house. White clothes didn't stay white for long after being washed there. They took on a gray tinge. Grandma would chase the bears, attracted to the trash cans stored on the front porch, with a broom and a whole lot of yelling. Grandpa worked as a mechanic at the local cannery. He played Santa Claus and handed out candy at the community center down the road.

No doubt my parents had their challenges growing up. It's also fair to say, how my parents showed up for me, and how I reacted to them, contributed to adversity in my early years. It wasn't until I was 37 that I began to shift from surviving to thriving. The question that occurred to me, after what could be called an inciting incident, and the answer that followed, set the course for what I see, as the reclamation of my soul, and the restoration of my life. More on this in Chapter Nine.

I've done my best to make sense of what happened in my relationship with my parents; why we acted like we did, had the values we had, and caused the pain that we caused. Unresolved traumatic experiences, including toxic shame, have been the consistent answers to my questions. I'm grateful I eventually opened up to the possibility that everything I have experienced has been perfect in regards to my spiritual evolution. I trust the same holds true for them. That possibility story, in particular, has brought me a great deal of peace. It's a story that can be considered more of a worldview. I choose to believe that experiences I have happen *for* me, instead of *to* me. It may be that some experiences happen *because* of me. I get it can be hard to fathom that anyone would intentionally choose to experience anything potentially traumatic. There's a part of me that thinks there just has to be some explanation as to why such experiences occur. Here, I'm reminded of something a friend of mine likes to say: "Diamonds aren't made with fluffy pillows."

On one hand, many of the choices my parents made, and behaviors they displayed while I was dependent on them, were not the easiest to navigate. On the other, I experienced

freedom, contrast, and adversity. That last one may have you questioning my sanity. However, from the standpoint of spiritual development, I have honestly come to believe that the majority of the adverse experiences I had as a child and adolescent have been meaningful and useful.

Transformation and transcendence require resilience. It is possible to increase resilience through tolerable degrees of adversity. For such instances, I'm grateful to both my parents. If not for some of the experiences I had with them, I might not be as resilient as I am today. For example, I learned how to persevere and be strategic in my thinking. The freedom I had and Self-reliance I needed to employ at times served to provide me with a degree of independence I might not otherwise have had at such an early age. Also, the contrast between my parents (financial, religious/spiritual, intellectual, environmental, emotional), and their relationships with friends, family, and partners offered up varying ways to interact with others and lifestyle choices to eventually make.

One of my evolutionary mediums is film. In Tim Burton's film rendition of the classic tale *Alice in Wonderland*, The Mad Hatter told Alice that she had lost her "muchness". My interpretation of the term muchness is that The Mad Hatter was referring to Alice's loss of spirit. At that point in the story, Alice didn't truly know what she was or how able she was to respond to the situations she would encounter. My parents and I had lost our muchness as well. Any once adaptive behaviors we displayed that were related to our traumatic experiences had become maladaptive. We didn't function optimally. Our abilities and capacities were diminished.

Those of us oppressed by shame show up overwhelmed, diminished, and acting smaller than we're truly capable of being. A small part of us is reacting to an experience from the past. Throughout this book, I'm going to call these small parts *littles* or *little* as a compassionate reminder that these parts typically emerge when we're young and dependent. Maybe even before we're born, as in instances of in-utero trauma and epigenetics. We'll get into epigenetics a bit in Chapter Three. It's been my experience that we all have these small parts or *little* characteristics. They show up as emotions, thoughts, and maladaptive behaviors. These little parts of us are not bad or wrong. Though most would agree, they can be better.

Behavior often follows belief. One major consequence of the diminishment of spirit, due to unresolved trauma, is the tendency to take things personally. When we take things personally, we see unwanted, seemingly negative experiences through the lens of *to us*. Things happen *to us*. Others do things *to us*. Therefore, it's easy to fall into the trap of succumbing to destructive scripts and to act like a victim. It takes a completely different state of mind to see such experiences as for us, through us, and perhaps more challenging, because of us. Perspectives such as this require significant reframing of stories believed. As of right now, the story I'm telling is that the essence of what we are needs to be fully present for such a reframe to occur. Beliefs can be changed and behaviors improved.

I now see, thanks to the latest research on trauma, how easily (and common) spiritual diminishment can occur. Dr. Stephen Porges, founder of Polyvagal Theory, describes trauma as "the chronic disruption of connectiveness." Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk puts it this way, "Trauma robs you of the feeling that you are in charge of yourself." For me, this disruption started before I was born, continued into my childhood, eventually leading to a sense of disconnection to my best Self. Consequently, as a spiritually, socially, and emotionally immature

teen and young adult, I inadvertently contributed to the life of shame. I was so unconscious I honestly didn't think about choice much. This state of being ties in with the concept of learned helplessness, which I'll touch on in Chapter Six. Shame feeds off things such as lack of awareness, judgment and labels. Again, when shame becomes toxic, it can knock a soul unconscious.

Early shame inducing experiences and being in survival mode had taken their toll on my soul. I'm grateful that I now know how important it is to recognize my feelings and emotions. Once we're fully aware of shame, it can only exist through conscious agreement. The damn thing is, mistaken beliefs and opinions come with shame's territory. Facts are scarce. Looking back on my teen and young adult decisions, the behaviors I displayed are completely understandable. It honestly didn't occur to me to behave any differently back then.

Nowadays, behaviors such as those I displayed in my youth are attributed to mental health issues such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or reactive attachment disorder (RAD) and, quite often, a pharmaceutical prescription dispensed. This approach typically only serves to mask the real underlying issue, which I see as a battle between *little* wounded and disconnected aspects of best Self.

I consider these *little* wounded and disconnected parts the how and who we learn to be in order to seemingly be at all. These characteristics yearn to be recognized. Afterwards, wholeness comes from integrating them. Shame is often the underpinning of such parts *and*, not always so obviously, a real fun sucker! The joyful, peaceful, ever-loving Self is the essence of what I believe we all are, and that we're part of something much greater. As I'm becoming more socially and emotionally mature, I'm learning to transcend my own traumatic in utero, childhood, adolescent, and young adult experiences. I consider this process breaking the cycle of spiritual poverty.

As I've continued to learn and grow, I've pieced together a belief system some might call faith. I see the language of the Universe as being made up of metaphor, simile, and analogy—all forms of symbolism. I like to think of our amazing planet as a Universe-city; experiential learning the pedagogy. Trauma, adversity, and Self-actualization all part of the curriculum. I believe the majority of experiences are evolutionary opportunities, and that as we increase our awareness of what we are, we increase our resilience. The more resilient we are, the more able to transform and transcend trauma and adversity. That's a cycle I don't ever want to see break! Writing this book has been part of my own growth and learning. I am learning to teach and teaching to learn. Unlearning is a big part of this process.

When shame continues to be part of our reality, it's like experiencing a power outage. It's not that the power is unavailable. It's a matter of reconnecting to it. Finding those who can effectively support us in the meanwhile is like having a backup generator available. This book offers a shared language.

Grow Playfully is an entity I created to support my mission to playfully expand awareness of Self and Purpose so that lives are lived in love. By way of growplayfully.com, I provide one-on-one assistance and group exploration, specifically to increase connection to Self and Purpose.

I share this book unconditionally, with no expectations for any return on my investment. It would be lovely if you would carefully consider passing it on to those in your life who may benefit from its contents. It would also be an honor to read about your own stories of resiliency, transformation, and transcendence. A Grow Playfully Facebook community page has been set up to capture stories of evolution written by readers of this book. I like to call community members *Playful Growers*.

If the contents of this book have been of value to you and you'd like to make a monetary donation, please consider making a donation to the soundstruefoundation.org or the association of experiential educators, aee.org.

May you be patient, discerning, and non-judgmental in your exploration of this book's contents and with your own experiences. May you increase your level of compassion toward all sentient beings. Thank you for taking the time to explore these pages.

With gratitude and love,

PS

Geneva, Ohio
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Chapter One

Down the Rabbit Hole

"No, I'll look first," she said, "and see whether its marked 'poison' or not."

~Alice (In Wonderland)

We humans have an epidemic. As you probably gathered from the introduction here, I believe this epidemic is shame. In all its sneaky, invasive pervasiveness, left undetected and untransformed, shame diminishes the soul. It can become toxic. When it does, it constitutes trauma. Shame's prevalence is universal.

It's imperative that we see shame for what it is, its impacts on the psyche and, ultimately, our world. Without awareness, untransformed shame invariably gets built upon. Shame thrives on lack of awareness. My pointing out how we can inadvertently and inherently take on shame is in no way meant to add shame to the already shamed. My aim is increased awareness, in general, and the reduction of shame in our society.

I am not a licensed mental health professional, although I have studied and worked in the field (oftentimes literally!) of psychology for many years co-facilitating Equine-assisted psychotherapy, while functioning as the team's equine specialist. Neuroscience and psychology interest me and I invest in studying both topics. I don't claim to be an expert of any kind. I am, nevertheless, comfortable enough to write about what some call best Self, higher Self, or self with a capital "S". I believe this Self is beyond physical form, and that it can merge and manifest with and through physical form. It is the part of us that is aware of many things, including shame, other traumas and their impact.

Toxic shame is trauma. In this regard, this book can be considered trauma-informed approach advocacy. Generally speaking, it has not been written to treat the effects of trauma. When we sustain trauma to our physical body, many of us tend to heal relatively quickly and move on. When it comes to spiritual injury, such as what shame inflicts, if we don't know what we're looking for or lack the tools to address it effectively, we won't transform or transcend it. We may then inadvertently pass it on to someone else and, ultimately, take it to our grave. Growing evidence links shame with addiction, eating disorders, bullying, sexual misconduct, and many other individual and collective problems.

Trauma results primarily from disrupted relationships and stems from a sense of helplessness, disconnection, and fear. Two categories of trauma are direct (socially validated, identifiable) and subtle (chronic, compounded, cumulative, insidious). Shame qualifies under both categories. Its nemesis is resilience; the process of and capacity for positive adaptation during or following significant threats or disturbances. Trauma is a happening. When a non-

factual story about a happening gets created, that happening can go unresolved or untransformed. Humans are incredible story tellers!

You may be able to relate with your own “on my own” stories. Also common are the “there’s something’s wrong” and “don’t belong” stories. Truth is, we are not on our own, never were, and never will be. Whatever happened or happens is what happened or happens. These happenings are just *what’s so*. If something or someone was or is part of our experience, it may be on purpose. We can be curious.

Seeing happenings as just what’s so has been transformative for me. Making sure a less than true story doesn’t drive me somehow is my Self being responsible. Relative safety and increased Self-agency have been required for resolution. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be complete with what happened in regards to experiences I’ve had. I have no doubt I will encounter many more false stories prior to exiting the planet.

The more we understand something, the better we are able to transform and transcend it. Increased awareness is key. Transformation and transcendence don’t occur without it. Attention, commitment, and compassion are also a requirement. Without greatly increasing these capacities, shame will continue to run rampant, negatively impacting future generations and the planet.

Facing that which is painful and disconnecting can be incredibly challenging work. It’s also very courageous and responsible work. For well beings and the health of our planet, increasing our ability to respond far more often than we react is crucial. Thankfully, shame is increasingly being seen as the Self belittling entity it tends to be.

Until shame is seen, diminishment of spirit will continue. Even so, this book is not a war against shame. It’s about giving shame a time-in. What if all shame wants is to be recognized? What might happen if we give it centerstage?

Shame can be thought of as covering Self, much like nacre coats sand inside an oyster, thus creating a pearl. In terms of value though, I see Self as a diamond. The word diamond is derived from the ancient Greek *adamas* meaning proper, unalterable, unbreakable, and untamed. The most brilliant diamonds are multi-faceted. Well-formed diamonds reflect light in ways pearls simply can’t. To polish away at the many facets of brilliance that lay beneath the surface of whatever experiences have been had is to reveal the sparkle within. Hope is just one of the many facets that resides in you, otherwise this book would not be in your hands.

I get how happenings in our world can feel hopeless, heavy, and dark. Being diamond-like requires that we intentionally reflect on our experiences, no matter how seemingly horrific, and look for the gifts therein. Of course, this suggestion can be hard to fathom when we are in the thick of things. Yet, it’s only in deeply reflecting on our experiences that we’re able to find meaning in them. The most brilliant diamonds are exceptionally reflective and, like stars, they tend to show up best on a dark background.

Optimal reflectiveness takes being grounded, being able to endure a great deal of heat and pressure, then to cool down quickly. Staying cool is what creates the setting for clarity. As

aspiring metaphoric diamonds, this becomes our practice— stay grounded in the face of pressure, and be brilliantly, exceptionally reflective.

Of course, an actual diamond will break if it's hit hard enough in a certain place; that is, where it's weakest at an atomic level. I sometimes wonder if this world exists to seek out those places, to see what we're truly made of. Finding constructive meaning in life events is something that can greatly increase our resilience.

It can feel impossible to find meaning when a loved one dies, a relationship ends, a prized possession is stolen, a job falls through, or health declines. I'm reminded of a pivotal scene in the film *Arrival*. A wee bit of a spoiler alert: Amy Adams plays the character Dr. Louise Banks, who chooses to live out her life even though, at some level, she knows loss and pain are inevitable. Her character exemplifies humbleness, curiosity, courage, and love. She stands up for what she believes in. She's tough, not hard. She's resilient. If you knew ahead of time what you would encounter in your life, would you choose to live it anyway? If no, what might be lost? If yes, what might be gained?

I hope you'll see the contents of this book as an exploration with many invitations. Together, we'll take a look at what shame is, how it can show up, where it may come from, the impact it can have on life, what might be done to reduce its impact, and some ways to possibly increase connectivity to Self and others. As with anything else in life, please take what you can from this book and leave whatever doesn't resonate for you.

I also hope this book will **C** massive amounts of **COPIES**. Love me a fun acronym!

Compassion
Curiosity
Optimism
Perseverance
Integrity
Empathy
Self-awareness

First and foremost, our planet and the majority of its inhabitants need more compassion. What I'm inviting in this book will take strong will and a boatload of curiosity. Just when we think we've figured out how, who, or what we are, it's almost guaranteed we'll get opportunities to explore and potentially expand that definition. I suspect you came to this book with some degree of hope, which is synonymous with optimism. Please build on it! Self-actualization is a process and not an event. It takes time to unlearn conditioning and relearn intuitive ways of being.

Integrity, as in the extent to which we reflect the person we intend to be, is empowering. When we're in it, we are congruent in word and action. Thoughts are a different thing. We are not our thoughts. I will say this multiple times. Thoughts are important feedback. However, they don't have to become form in the way of words or actions. If indeed free will exists, free won't is also a possibility.

When I think of empathy, I think of it as a giant step toward intuition, compassion, and love. We are all capable of increasing these states of being. They are elements of Self, the term I'm using to describe what we are, in essence, from who we may believe we are and how we tend to show up when we're not aware of what we are. In the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "we are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

With shame as a burden, our hows and whos may show up as belittled and not depictive of best Self. Some refer to our hows and whos as parts, small self, or simply self. Again, I call them *littles*. *Littles* live in the past. They operate from unresolved feelings or emotions about something or someone. This will be covered in more detail in the next chapter under the heading FRAGMENTATION.

If you're not sure if you or a loved one has been affected by shame, please read on. There's A *LITTLE ASSESSMENT* included in Chapter Three that can assist with this exploration. If you're already aware that shame has been a part of your experience and want to explore invitations for transformation and transcendence, you may want to skip ahead to Chapters Seven and Eight. In regards to and respect for *littles*, studying the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model and listening to the audio book *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts* by founder Richard Swartz is a relational gold mine! A hard copy of *Beyond Behaviors* by Dr. Mona Delahooke and exploring Dr. Ross Greene's Plan B method may also benefit you in your efforts toward transformation and transcending the impacts of shame. I've also included an expansive resource list at the end of the book.

Astronomer, astrophysicist, scientist, and author Carl Sagan was known to have said, "it is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring. In our obscurity—in all this vastness—there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. It is up to us."

Chapter Two

What the Hell is Shame Anyway?

"Shame corrodes the very part of us that believes we are capable of change."

~ Dr. Brené Brown

"Shame is the carbon monoxide of the trauma world." an associate stated while we were at a workshop focused on the subject of shame as trauma. "Oh my God, you're absolutely right!" I exclaimed. Carbon monoxide is truly a perfect metaphor for shame. Shame can become toxic when unnoticed or dismissed. That is, until its effects on the psyche are behaviorally apparent. Any time we feel embarrassed, offended, humiliated, dishonored, ridiculous, depressed or powerless, it's a fair bet, we're experiencing shame.

At one point during the workshop, "healthy shame" was the topic of discussion. An oxymoron if I've ever heard one, I thought. Skeptically, I asked, "Is there really such a thing?" The workshop facilitators attempted to role play the difference between toxic and healthy shame. They began to argue with each other. Unintentionally, I'm sure, their role-play left me more skeptical. I wonder now if they had actually been referring to guilt as healthy shame. There appears to be a debate in regards to the difference between shame and guilt.

Perhaps the perspective of those workshop facilitators was influenced by social scientist, researcher and author Karla McLaren who talks about healthy shame. In a blog post on her website karlamclaren.com, McLaren deemed guilt a "weasel word" and that we substitute guilt for shame. She sees guilt as a legal fact and shame as anger at yourself. McLaren's distinction between guilt and anger speaks to dualistic or binary thinking (that there's a right and wrong). Considering we live in a dualistic/binary world and society; this way of thinking is completely understandable.

Let's say someone says they hate the sound of your voice and you take offense. Why? What might the offense be a reminder of? Your parents not listening to you or getting teased after a class presentation? Why does it matter what they think? Of course, you want to feel heard, that your opinion counts for something, and that you fit in. What's in your control in a situation such as this? Make them listen or shut up? What's the payoff for taking offense? To make the other wrong? Continuation of pain, grief, disappointment? What might be the cost of being offended? Well-being, peace of mind, connectedness? All of these states of being? I am not suggesting to not feel offended. On the contrary, I say feel it thoroughly and find out where it stems from, as with anything else being detected which creates unrest. Think of thoughts and emotions as feedback. When we start digging, we may find we're actually living in the past or needlessly in agreement with another's reality.

Shame is often passed on from one person to the next. Shame is the critical voice that says things such as we're bad, wrong, worthless, or stupid. Shame says we're not enough, that we're defective. When we agree with this voice, our behavior may reflect that belief. This labeling is yet another way to pile on more shame to the already shamed, essentially damning the damned. Unresolved shame is traumatic.

Trauma can occur in any situation in which the brain changes to accommodate an environment in which survival is the overriding concern. For example, extreme stress can overwhelm our ability to cope. The subjective experience of a threat to life, body, integrity or sanity may be traumatic. Without resolution, an adverse circumstance or ongoing set of circumstances that negatively affect us in the present can constitute future trauma. Extreme physical or psychological helplessness coupled with the overwhelming power of a negative emotion can also be considered traumatic.

I would wager that there is not a sentient being on this planet that has not experienced some degree of fallout from shame. Shame often wears the mask of blame. It can look like fear and contempt. It can masquerade as sympathy or love. When shame is directed at Self, as McLaren suggests, it's directed at those around us as well. Agreeing on a definition of shame (as with many words, for that matter) can be very helpful. Let's begin to explore the definition of a few topic-relevant terms.

DEFINITIONS MATTER

Psychologydictionary.org, which (as of this writing) claims to be "the most trusted psychology resource on the internet", featuring "professionally written psychology definitions." It defines shame as "an unpleasant self-conscious feeling that comes from the sense of being or doing a dishonorable, ridiculous or immodest act and feeling of shy after doing or making an attempt of doing something wrong". The same site defined guilt as "the term for the self-conscious emotion that a person will feel that features a sense of having done something wrong and with a readiness or need to mitigate their actions". Not much different than the definition of shame, with the exception of the need to ease the sense of having done something "wrong."

I couldn't find a definition for the word "self" on the *psychologydictionary.org* site. The Oxford dictionary defines self as a "person's essential being that distinguishes them from others." That's my understanding of individuation—distinguishment from others. This definition of self may very well be appropriate in the context of fragmentation, as our *little* selves are inclined to operate separately of Self. We'll get into the subject of fragmentation and further distinction between *littles* and Self shortly.

The word *self* once held a negative connotation for me. Who hasn't heard judgmental expressions such as, "Don't be so self-conscious!" or "You're SO self-centered!?" When I hear statements such as these now, and depending on the situation, I may take the time to question that person's definition of self. Opinions such as this may be a put down (an attempt to belittle) or they may constitute feedback (*little* or otherwise). Whether we're being self or Self, it's beneficial to notice.

As of this writing, Wikipedia defines self as “an individual person as the object of its own reflective consciousness.” Self isn’t an object or an it. Self simply is. Common definitions of self certainly relate to how a person shows up or who they think they are in an attempt to be distinguished, but not what they are in essence. Reflective consciousness can be seen then as a means to pursue one’s best Self. Back to the difference between shame and guilt though, for now.

Philosopher and professor of psychology John Vervaeke aims to speak to the difference between shame and guilt in his lecture titled *Awakening from the Meaning Crisis*, available on YouTube at the time of this writing (Episode 14, around 44:14). In it he says, “Guilt is your distress at having realized you’ve broken a moral principle. Shame is your distress at having violated a purity code.” Any references I could find on what constitutes a purity code were biblical and pertained to God’s plan for a person’s body and sex. From what I could ascertain, this is the belief that our bodies belong to God. Vervaeke uses the example that if his clothing fell off while he was delivering the lecture, he would be deeply embarrassed and experience shame because a cultural code says a person is supposed to be fully clothed while giving a public discourse. He wouldn’t feel guilt because he hadn’t done anything immoral or wrong. He would feel shame.

Vervaeke also says “Guilt and shame can be against each other. A person may be made to feel ashamed, though they’re doing something they believe, in a justified way as morally right.” He uses the example of activists in the Civil Rights movement. They were subjected to terrific amounts of shaming, yet didn’t experience any guilt in what they were doing. He goes on to say, “Purity codes are designed to keep the categorical boundaries that make a culture in a particular historical period run the way it’s running. They are highly tied up with the invested power structures who are usually invested in keeping things running the way they are running.”

Vervaeke states that boundaries are protected by purity codes. He says if he were to collect gobs and tons of saliva in his mouth, then spit it into a glass of water, mix it up, and drink it, many people would be distressed or grossed out by this action. Although not many would be disgusted if he kept the saliva in his mouth and then took a drink of water. In this he says that, “His body constitutes a boundary. Things within the boundary should not come out. The purity code says pieces of John should not come out into the world. John should not spit. John should not fart. John should not burp. John should not cut his finger nails and leave them in front of you.”

Our not wanting to see something doesn’t have to result in a moral judgment. Purity codes have conditioned many of us to react in disgust. Subjective stories are often the result. Children are especially susceptible to internalizing such bias. In many instances, whatever is presented can simply either be for us or not for us.

Purity code, aversions, and legitimate moral arguments often get confused. Moral codes and purity codes are separate, although it’s easy to see why the two get confused. Both are a set of rules. Both are heavily dependent on culture. Both are dualistic or binary in nature. Discerning the difference and agreeing or disagreeing comes down to values.

Common examples of moral codes and some questions I have about them are “Never kill, steal, lie, or cheat.” Is it ever okay to kill, steal, lie, or cheat? Why or why not? Also, think before you act. Might there be times when we act without thinking and the situation is better for it? Then there’s always do the right thing, even when it does not benefit you. Who’s to say what’s right?

Purity codes pertain to what one should or shouldn’t do with their body. Providing that my body isn’t touching your body or threatening it with a weapon, how can whatever I choose to do with my body possibly affect your body without your permission? You may see where I’m headed with that question.

I once sat with someone who had about four too many shots of tequila. She was throwing up. I contentedly munched away at some chips and hummus about five feet from her. She interrupted her vomiting long enough to glance up at me and declare that I “was not normal.” As vomiting doesn’t make for much of a spectator sport, it could have been she was referencing my ability to withstand joining her. My goal was simply to make sure she didn’t fall into the swimming pool or worse. Her hair was pulled back, she had a bucket and, surprisingly, considering the amount of alcohol she had consumed, pretty darn accurate aim.

My hands were free and I was hungry. She hurled too many tequila shots and got sick. The consequences of our choices tend to play out naturally. We don’t have to intrude on each other. She didn’t need my sympathy. She needed to express something that didn’t make her feel like her Self. I was caring for her and attending to my rumbling belly. No shame or blame necessary.

Self isn’t inclined to feel shame or guilt— remorse or regret on occasion perhaps. When something happens that typically leads to feeling shame or guilt, how the incident is perceived shapes whether what happened will be taken on as guilt or shame. Perception stems from personal experience and belief. Behavior is based on individual, social, and cultural agreement. Failing to meet our own, agreed upon, standards of behavior. This disappointment based on self-assessment can lead to shame. Failing to meet the moral standards of others can lead to guilt. If we accept the moral standard as our own and don’t make amends, we may top off guilt with an unconstructive dose of shame.

Shame researcher and author Brené Brown describes the difference between shame and guilt quite simply. To her, guilt says *I’ve done something bad*. Shame says *I am bad*. Here are a few more perspectives on the difference:

GUILT	SHAME
can result from a failure to meet our own standard of behavior and align with our own values	can come from not meeting someone else’s standards and values
can provide us with opportunities to be Self-aware	can motivate us to constantly seek approval
can contribute to interdependence and interpersonal well-being when action is taken	can keep us dependent and destructively independent (i.e., separate from each other)
may stem from compromising one’s own identity	can be the result of projection with agreement.

has the potential to motivate us to connect to an intuition (factual story) and make appropriate restitution	tends to create the urge to fight, freeze, or flee (from our own emotions and feelings and those of another)
is typically a feeling (accompanied by a value story)	can be considered both a feeling or an emotion (complete with value story and bodily sensation)

Outwardly, shame and guilt both present through blushing, confusion, downward cast eyes, slack posture, anxiety, hesitant speech patterning, and lowered head. Guilt and shame are both experiences. David Hawkins, author of many books including *Power Vs. Force* and *Letting Go*, found that guilt fosters an emotional environment for suffering and disease. Both create disease if left unattended. Both are destructive to our sense of Self. Both exist only when agreement to a moral or purity code is present. I'd say that's accurate in regards to the majority of feelings and emotions; not to say either are wrong or bad. They just are— until they aren't.

I have a dear friend who operates a big ranch and keeps quite a few cats around to minimize the rodent and snake population. She was sharing how she realized that a couple of the cats were too sweet to make good barn cats. She considered two of these cats too friendly toward people and dogs. With a great many coyotes on the property, such friendliness would probably not bode well for such kitties. They would most likely become coyote kibble.

Being an animal lover and recalling a cat carcass on her property a month before, I unthinkingly chimed in, "Yeah, this isn't a good home for nice kitties." Later, it occurred to me that this comment may be misconstrued (taken personally) and cause a rift between us. Feeling guilty, I soon apologized for the thoughtless comment and failure to not elaborate on it in the moment. Thank you guilt! Guilt can be productive if it's in our hearts to repair any damage we think we may have caused with our words or actions. The faster we move through emotions and feelings such as shame and guilt and make repairs, the better off we all are mentally and physically. How we relate to each other matters. Words matter. Language can be messy. If we're going to increase awareness of shame, we must truly understand how it differs from guilt.

As you may have noticed, I'm a supporter of Wikipedia. Why? Because it models collective wisdom. Very collaborative! Like great science, Wikipedia allows for the evolution of information. It's dynamic, as opposed to static. I hear that many secondary teachers attempt to steer students away from using the site. Apparently, the concern is that anyone can input information and not just "experts." This may actually make it a more reliable source of information as it allows for the challenge of story and opinion and strives for the most factual information on any subject listed.

At the time of this writing, Wikipedia described shame as:

A painful, social emotion that can be seen as resulting... from comparison of the self's action with the self's standards... but which may equally stem from comparison of the self's state of being with the ideal social context's standard. Thus, shame may stem from volitional action or simply self-regard; no action by the shamed being is required: simply existing is enough. Both the comparison and standards are enabled by socialization. Though usually considered an emotion, shame may also variously be considered an affect, cognition, state, or condition.

The roots of the word shame are thought to be derived from an older word meaning "to cover"; as such, covering oneself, literally or figuratively, is a natural expression of shame.

I may be getting into confirmation bias territory here, yet the roots of the word shame tie in with the pearl metaphor, yes? In response to this particular definition of shame, I do have one reflection— comparison is Self-deception. Alas, sigh, comparison is supported in many cultures and societies. Such acts of evaluation typically begin when we enter public school, from grades to sports. It's further developed through other constructs (i.e., trends) that can fuel competition. Of course, this also fuels our economy in many ways. I digress. Back to shame and guilt.

In his book, *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame— Based Syndromes*, Gershen Kaufman sums up many of the consequences of shame this way:

No other affect is more disturbing to the self, none more central for the sense of identity. In the context of normal development, shame is the source of low self-esteem, diminished self-image, poor self-concept, and deficient body-image. Shame itself produces self-doubt and disrupts both security and confidence. It can become an impediment to the experience of belonging and to shared intimacy... It is the experiential ground from which conscience and identity inevitably evolve. In the context of pathological development, shame is central to the emergence of alienation, loneliness, inferiority and perfectionism. It plays a central role in many psychological disorders as well, including depression, paranoia, addiction, and borderline conditions. Sexual disorders and many eating disorders are largely disorders of shame. Both physical abuse and sexual abuse also significantly involve shame.

The willingness to shine a light on shame, challenge our beliefs around morality, and have a different experience in how we relate to each other, requires that we think very differently about the role shame has played in our personal life, family, community, culture, society and world. In doing so, we may redefine civilization.

FRAGMENTATION

In the realm of psychology, what I'm calling *littles* is the product of what's called fragmentation. In a nutshell, fragmentation is when the psyche splits off into smaller parts. Psyche comes from the Greek word *psykhe* meaning soul, mind, or spirit. Again, I will refer to these smaller parts as *little(s)* in order to distinguish best Self from these small, split-off or fragmented parts. More importantly, use of the term *little* is a reminder that these parts came into being when we were developmentally young and dependent, possibly prior to birth.

These *little* parts, understandably, develop thoughts, feelings, and emotions that can become die hard beliefs. Many of these beliefs are unconscious and involve having no choice. While the belief exists that we have no choice in the matter of our own life, *little* or no choice

will be made. A belief in no choice relates to the concept of learned helplessness which we'll touch on in Chapter Six.

The therapeutic model called Internal Family Systems¹ (IFS), founded by Richard Swartz, speaks to fragmentation and Self in comprehensive and compassionate ways. "S" in the word Self is intentional in the IFS model. It's a way to recognize and discern between the inherent part of what we are (our true essence) from the young parts of the mind that have either been exiled or are being protected. There's also an inquiry process to help locate and differentiate these protective parts from our Self: Find, Focus, Flesh out, Feel, (be)Friend, and discover the Fear.

IFS describes Self as Calm, Confident, Curious, Compassionate, willing to be vulnerable, and possessing a great deal of Courage and Clarity. These capital "C" characteristics, or capacities of Self, are distinct from those displayed by the *little* parts of us burdened to seemingly protect a defenseless (as in not needing to defend) Self.

You may be familiar with the expression "don't throw the baby out with the bath water." When I first heard this phrase, it was explained to me that long ago the head of the household bathed first. Apparently back then baths were a great deal of work so they were taken infrequently. The family all used the same bath water. After the head of the household bathed, then came the next hierarchical member, then the oldest child, and so on. Finally, the baby was bathed. By then, as I'm sure you can imagine, the water was pretty murky. Therefore, it would have been easy enough to chuck the baby out with the dirty bath water.

When it comes to seeing through the murk to keep a *little* from getting thrown out, someone has to be vigilant. Tag! You're it! That said, the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model also invites Presence, Persistence, Perspective, Playfulness, and Patience. As with all the lovely C-words descriptive of Self, when we're displaying the above P-words, we're willing and able to be aware of our *littles*. By practicing these Cs and Ps, we can more effectively unburden *littles*, abolishing any maladaptive roles and limiting beliefs. The sooner, the better—mentally, physically, and spiritually.

The presence of Self allows for integration, or the bringing back together of all these split-off parts. Again, I call these our *littles* because my experience with my own split-off parts is that they are young, stuck in the past, afraid of the unknown, tend to live in pain, grief, fear, anger, disappointment, loneliness, resentment, judgment, etc. *Littles* need all the C's and P's they can get!

It's so very important to understand that *littles* are parts of Self. The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model calls our parts *firefighters*, *managers*, and *exiles*. The idea, in a nutshell, is that behaviors of *managers* and *firefighters* once helped us survive in moments of distress and may no longer be needed in that role. They have taken on behaviors which are actually a burden to them. *Exiles* are the parts of Self that have been disowned. *Managers* and

¹ **Please note:** The views in this book regarding *littles*, along with ideas on integration, are a reflection of my own experience, interpretation/current agreement. They may or may not precisely reflect those of the IFS model, its founder or practitioners.

Firefighters aim to protect *exiles* or keep them tucked away. Parts can be combative toward each other.

The process of integration is primarily an inside-out job, and relative to one's tolerance for experiential intensity. Of course, there are many outside-in resources available to assist those ready to start or enhance the process. Chapters Seven and Eight detail some ideas that have worked well for me. IFS founder Richard Swartz aims to assist with this in his audio book *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts*, available through Sounds True. There are many free resources available on the internet that speak to the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model that can be explored as well.

Be prepared! *Little*s can make quite a ruckus in the form of defensive thoughts, words, and behaviors. In the world of neuroscience, this is known as fight, flight, or freeze. Such disturbance is like having a broken antenna. In their attempt to be protective, the interference of *littles* tends to block Self from staying present. If Self is not tuned in to what's happening in the moment, Self will not respond right away. Not being tuned in is another way of saying we're unaware. Feelings and emotions, such as shame, cause stress. They maintain that there's something wrong with the person or situation. Not fun feels! Toxic stress cues *little* protectors into fight, flight, or freeze mode in the form of thought, word, or action.

Little stories/feelings and emotions interfere with our ability to see things clearly. Not seeing things clearly in the present moment is the result of *little* re-actions. This is also known as being triggered. When we search for the why of such presentations, we will find them related to something that happened in the past that either wasn't effectively resolved or where no choice was perceived to have existed. No blame intended here. Reactions are information. They are feedback to potentially be aware of. Noticing our stories and emotions, and being curious about their origins, can lead to the possibility of greater connectivity to source and Self.

An employer asked me to make a spreadsheet for her. What I put together was not up to her standards. When we were discussing her expectations, my eyes began to tear up. She suggested I take a minute. I took a deep breath and shook my head to stay present. The situation brought up unresolved shame and grief related to an incident I'd had with my dad—forty years prior!

I was eighteen and had quit a job. My dad snapped "I knew you couldn't keep a job!" Um, ouch. At that moment a *little* was activated. I don't recall what I said to him because I wasn't fully present. I'll take the liberty of speculating that *little* part of me thought something like, "What an asshole!" Now I've objectified my dad. He's a body part and not an entity I profess to love. In the moment of writing this, that *little* wants to justify that speculative objectification. In the spirit of integrity and authenticity, I'll share the thought. "After all, shit was coming out of him." This is the *little* part of me that tends to be sarcastic. Recognizing this, it's now a choice my Self can make to extend compassion to that *little* sarcastic part. I can now think clearly something like this, "I can see how his words were hurtful. It's understandable that you were upset with him. His words didn't feel supportive or loving. What he said was a projection from one of his own *littles*. I hope you'll forgive his unconscious behavior. I appreciate you looking out for me. Hey, speaking of jobs, are you up for a different one?"

My choice to quit wasn't really any of my dad's business. Or was it? After all, some fertilizer makes for great produce in the garden of life. Perhaps he was on script and destined to say what he said. The fact is, I don't know why he reacted the way he did in that moment. I only know that he did. Once that hurt *little* part of my Self acknowledges and accepts the reality of not knowing why of his reaction, and refuse to take it personally, a shame or blame story won't be created. This allows my Self to stay free of any emotional charge, slight, or rub. Together, *littles* and Self can create a different reality.

When we've caught on to a *little* story that puts the *little* in a position of vulnerability, no worries. This too shall pass and the way out is to travel on through. Self can whip out a AAA card— Acknowledge, Accept, and Abolish. Lean into the experience. Witness, empathize, and relate. Acknowledge that hurt, disappointed, afraid or angry *little*. Accept that it exists and feels the way it does. Assist in abolishing, with the utmost care and compassion, the story that *little* has held onto that somehow says it's "not enough", "on my own", "there's something's wrong", or "doesn't belong." Relieve that *little* of the burden it's carried— the emotions and feelings of that traumatic experience had when it was young and dependent. When we encounter such instances of recognition, we've been blessed with an opportunity to increase a *little's* capacity for experiential intensity and Self's ability to take the lead.

GRIEF

You may be familiar with the five stages of grief shared by the late psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler Ross. The stages she identified are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Not all stages transpire for everyone. They can occur in a variety of order. Ross and a colleague, David Kessler, were working on a sixth stage prior to her death. The sixth possible stage they came up with is meaning. Author and coach Tony Robbins has perspective on a sixth stage as well. He calls it creation.

For some, finding meaning is creation in itself. When it comes to grief, a perceived need for certainty can be a protective strategy. Certainty is an illusion. We may never know why something happened. But Self, present and in compassionate collaboration with any confused and suffering *littles*, can eventually move the grief process to one of gratitude, meaning, and creation. Meaning and creation can turn a perceived worst day into a perceived best day.

Losses of any kind (death, job, relationship, material things, etc.), where a strong attachment exists, are best honored with a grief process. The important thing for optimal well-being is not to get stuck in any one stage overly long. This could be denial, anger, bargaining, or depression. You'll know if this happens because the stuck-ness will be debilitating. Hurt, angry, or confused *littles* require supportive measures to assist with navigating the grief process.

As I shared earlier in the story with my dad's opinion that he knew I "couldn't keep a job," the experience of grief can pertain to situations besides the death of a loved one. There was a *little* part of me that was grieving the loss of an ideal father. Of course, I didn't know that at the time. I only knew how unsupported, hurt, and angry I felt. The reality is, he said what he said and, consequently, I felt what I felt. We had an experience together. Not only was that

experience an opportunity for me to eventually formulate a value in the context of relationships (i.e., how not to treat someone you profess to love), how my dad showed up and how I reacted, and eventually responded, are part of how, who, and what I am today.

PROJECTION

Projection is an example of how some *littles* aim to protect. It's what happens when one shows up and attributes what it (often strongly) thinks or believes is true onto another entity. This can be a slow acting fertilizer of sorts, like some of the experiences I had with my parents. It can also look like throwing feces around. Seemingly crappy behaviors are a *little's* way of managing an experience it doesn't yet have the skills required to respond effectively to.

When more than one party is involved, projection tends to leave at least one body in a state of reactivity. When more than one person is reactive, that's when things can get western. Judging, blaming, shaming, and justifying can all constitute projection (*little* attacks) and contribute to defensiveness (*little* protections).

I see war as a spectrum disorder. When we project onto others in an attempt to get a desirable or expected outcome, it can create or increase shame— even if the desirable or expected outcome is one that most would find agreeable. How can we tell if someone may have a history of being on the receiving end of destructive projection? From shame to war, defensiveness may be one of the most common indicators. Often, this leads to destructive conflict.

Projection is often used when criticizing another's actions. It can be found in statements such as "Shame on you! You *should* know better!" Don't let a *little* fool your Self here, projection is often an attempt at control or deflection. Such statements are used to designate obligation, duty, or correctness. Of course, not all projection belittles, is intrusive, or is an attempt to control.

When I became aware of the human tendency to project, I started conversations around the use of the word *should*. Aiming to increase awareness of intrusive, belittling, and controlling projections, I would by point them out in a fun way. I might exclaim in mock horror, "Did you just *should* on me?!" (Most people hear the word shit instead of should.) A playful exchange such as this can create a safe way to converse about projection, standards, and expectations— depending on the situation, of course. Not actually looking for an apology, I might ask, "Are ya gonna clean it off?" This inquiry being an invitation for the projecting party to take responsibility for the projection and potentially offer up a reframe. All the while I practice being open to the outcome of the exchange. This can teach discernment as to whether or not words being used are constructive. Future projections in that relationship can be minimized. Projection doesn't have to be taken personally *and* it doesn't have to be.

When words are used to control the actions of those in situations or relationships where the power dynamic is imbalanced, such as that of parent/child, teacher/student, patient/doctor, though the intention may be honorable, the delivery might not be perceived as constructive. Shame can be maintained by words when those words come in the form of projecting our personal values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, etc. onto those we perceive as differing from who or how we see ourselves. Self doesn't discriminate or victimize others.

When it comes to projection, it's important to discern the intention of the person perceptively using the word against us. As I mentioned earlier, shame tends to leave *littles* with a broken antennae when it comes to discernment and intuition. Is it simply that the person projecting is unaware of any potential negative impact and are well-intentioned, or are they being deliberately critical, controlling, or judgmental? Either way, a chat may be in order. With effective tools, a crucial conversation can be a matter of life or death to a relationship.

DISCERNMENT

I've seen the word discernment defined as best judgement. When we break down the word discern— dis meaning "apart" and cernere meaning "to separate," this definition of discernment certainly fits. Judgement creates separation. When I use the word discernment, I'm referring to our ability to spot when our hows and whos show up as *little*. It also means recognizing what is for Self and not for Self.

Recognize means to know again. Ultimate discernment is to know that Self is not *little*. *Littles* have disconnected from Self. In a sense (innocence), *littles* have gone rogue. With this awareness and discernment on board, *littles* can be recognized and unburdened. *Exiles* can be brought back into the fold.

With discernment, Self intentionally chooses what's best. This is a holistic approach to well-being. Whether it's a thought, behavior, belief, attitude, or opinion— whatever transpires isn't negatively impactful, no matter where it's coming from (inside or out). With discernment, we can see clearly, whoever or however it is, it's not about us (as Self). This way, we can employ a Self-statement, as in this (whoever or however) is for me or is not for me. In this way, we're not making what happened wrong or bad. It's just what's so. It can just be different than how Self might do it, see it, want it, need it, etc. This is a very intentional stand to take. If the intention is to stay present and connected, Self will steer clear of behaviors such as judgement, betrayal, resentment, and punishment. My marriage and divorce taught me that much, at least.

For a look at discernment in the wild, let's revisit the word should. Please know, I'm not attempting to eradicate any words from our vocabulary. I'm inviting deep consideration and intentionality of why, how, and if a word best be used. Also, if a word is potentially constructive or destructive.

When *should* is used to ask for advice or suggestions (as in "What should I do?"), I employ caution and discernment. Do I know if the asker has experienced the tyranny of *should*? Is their lack of agency and confidence due to destructive use of the word? If the person asking becomes defensive or resistant, a *little* may be steering. That *little's* perception may be that the person asked is trying to control them somehow, regardless of if they actually are.

When defensiveness ensues, it can look like the asker blocking advice or suggestions after having been asked for them. It may not matter how well intentioned and careful the advice is delivered. The reaction may not have anything to do with the person being asked, and if this hasn't occurred to those involved, a *little* frustration will probably be the result. Let that *little* know it's not alone! When attending to *littles*, listen and ask thought provoking questions.

Timing helps too. A *little* attempting to control a *little* will most likely exacerbate an existing concern or issue.² A discerning Self can spot this *little* vs. *little* dynamic.

Context and intention, the energy behind whatever is said or done, are important parts of discernment. When he was nineteen, our son obtained his National Emergency Medical Technician certificate level. The letter sent with his certificate stated, "You should be proud of your accomplishment." He was. I didn't have to tell him. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with telling someone we're proud of them. Although, if we constantly profess to be proud of others, we may have a *little* with a perceived need for validation. When the need for external validation is present, a *little* dependency is taking the place of Self-esteem. Discernment distinguishes what's what and who is how.

When witness to another's possibility of identifying success, I aim to wait for them to acknowledge an accomplishment first. Instead of celebrating for them, I'm learning to celebrate with them. For those who have experienced toxic shame, accomplishments may not register as their own. Celebration may feel undeserved. They may believe they just got lucky, or there's been some mistake. Seeing others model Self-celebration can assist. Again, when Self has been repeatedly "should on" in diminishing ways, a *little* may automatically become defensive.

You may be familiar with the childhood retort "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" While true in theory, it's not always true to form. Energetically and vibrationally, words can and do affect us. When it comes to peace of mind, the trick is to recognize the thoughts, words and behaviors of *littles*. Develop them to the point where projections that would typically reject or diminish them no longer matter.

Dr. David R. Hawkins, author Masaru Emoto, and physicist Ernst Chladni all studied vibratory impact on matter. Hawkins' research determined that states of mind and emotions have different vibrational frequencies. He developed a numerical scale of consciousness based on energetic vibration. Shame and guilt are lowest on the scale. In the mid-1990s Emoto studied frozen water droplets exposed to positive and negative stimuli. His research showed droplets formed visually chaotic or pleasing shapes depending on the words, music, or environment the water was exposed to. Our bodies are said to be made up of anywhere from 55-70% water. Chladni studied gasses and the effect sound had on them. Our bodies consist of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon, three of the gasses he did his research on. Back in 1787 Chladni also showed how sound vibration formed patterns in sand (called Chladni Plates), similar to Emoto's work. Cause-and-effect vibrational studies have been performed on other animals and plants. Yogurt too. Pseudoscience? Maybe.

A body can be seen much like a barometer for the mind— a body of evidence, if you will. Many of us are just starting to learn that, at an energetic level, words can literally and physically matter. Thoughts, words, and behaviors can contribute to disease in our bodies. The invitation is to pay attention to the feedback and go from there.

² For example, *managers* and *firefighters* aim to keep *exiles* safely tucked away. *Firefighters* can be seen blotting out the memory of *exiles*. *Managers* can be seen as trying to make up for perceived failures of *exiles* and *firefighters*. All sorts of presentations arise, none of which qualify as peaceful or joyous.

An analogy or simile one might use is life is like a stage. *Little*s can be thought of as actors on that stage. They're in the role they play until they receive another role. *Little*s yearn for a better role. Self can be thought of as the original writer, director and producer of the play. When *little* actors take over the performance, the writer gets fired, the director's experience can be a bit like herding cats, and the producer may need to search for resources. The performance is bound to get unfavorable reviews until all are working together.

EXPECTANCIES VS. EXPECTATIONS

Unmet expectations can lead to disconnection due to the presence of judgment. The energy and intention is what makes the difference between expectancies and expectations. Expectancies do not include judgment and expectations do. Judgment can come across as manipulation or force; both of which can bring forth a *little* defender, either contained or candid. If we're being resistant or manipulative, it's best to know who and what is being defensive and/or protective and defended and/or protected. The assumptions behind expectations are that we are in control or that we can predict the future, people have a high level of consistency, share our standards or values, or currently have the awareness, ability and will to meet our criterion.

When the label of good, bad, right, or wrong is placed on an activity, person, or experience, we are in judgment. An easy thing to be in as humans, right? Judgments are stories and rules about how we, things, and others should or shouldn't be. They may point to our own unacknowledged *littles*, especially those who have been exiled.

The thinking or language behind expectation will often consist of "you or they should..., need to..., ought to..., are supposed to..., had better..., " etc. These can be forms of projection—a disempowered *little* attempting to be noticed through sound?

The language of expectancy is more in alignment with Self. It consists of "I want or need..., I hope..., If it were me..., What I'd like to see is..." etc. Expectancies stem from discernment, our own preferences, wants or needs. They come from a place of curiosity, love, and understanding. There is willingness and ability to be open to the outcome.

When aware of a *little* judge or critic, Self can explore the origins of the judgments or critiques. This is being relational, considerate, and respectful. When we're aware we are or have been in judgement, and if the relationship is important, we will make amends. Then, we're being responsible as well.

Because words are vibrational energy and can influence, when we're honestly experiencing guilt or a similar varietal (remorse or regret), it's healthier to say something like "I hope you'll pardon..., " "please forgive my..., " or simply, "my apologies for..., " instead of prefacing a destructive or low vibratory word (such as sorry) with the words "I am." Anything said often enough and with enough feeling can affect how, who, and what we think we are.

IS IT REALLY PERSONAL?

Unique in the animal kingdom, the ability to create sound through language and music, is one of the awesome things about the experience of personhood. Do you know that if you break down the word person, it means through sound? Etymology can be so fun! Per=through. Son=sound. Sound is a form of energy. Humans are storytellers, and the stories we tell can actually matter.

Our *littles* tend to take things personally. "To take" means to receive or accept. Many *littles* tend to be very literal, linear thinkers. They honestly believe they are things such as names, bodies, professions, and other roles played. These are our whos and hows. Self is no object, yet many of us treat each other as such, so it's understandable that we may begin to think that what we are is a thing or an object.

It's certainly easier to dismiss someone or fail to have a much-needed conversation when we treat them as an object. First of all, it takes awareness, then curiosity, courage, and commitment to have conversations that matter in relationships. All of these lead to skill building.

In the story of my dad telling me he knew I couldn't keep a job, another thing I told the *little* hurt part of my Self is that perhaps my dad had overly identified in his role as a parent. His emotional reaction most likely came from one of his *little* stories. Perhaps he believed that my quitting would reflect negatively on his parenting. Maybe it was a projection of his own past failed attempts at employment. If either of our best Selves were present, a meaningful conversation was possible. It just occurred to me (for me?) that maybe my dad's reactivity was his way of accepting that *little* story he was telling. Either way, at the end of the day, to receive or accept are forms of agreement or belief. His acceptance, regardless of where it stemmed from, didn't have to be mine. I didn't know yet how not to take it personally.

When we take something personally, whatever was said or done is perceived as a part of our identity. This can now become a who and, when actionable, a how. Whatever was said or not said, done or not done did not meet a *little* expectation. So, under the guise of protection, a *little* is triggered out of disappointment, fear, frustration, or the like. When this becomes reaction, *littles* shoot first and leave it up to Self to ask the questions later.

A small part of me had held onto the pain from that experience with my dad, otherwise I wouldn't have reacted with tears when I felt I was in another "I knew you couldn't keep a job" experience. What a relief and gift to recognize the correlation between the situation with my boss and the spreadsheet that brought up unresolved emotion and unconscious agreement from so long ago.

If I'm ever in a similar situation and I react again, I'll know that *little* part of me is still in the process of letting go of that story. Ultimately, what matters most is what *littles* or Self do with an experience. Responding and reacting can both be beneficial, depending on the situation. "... *as within, so without...*" to micro-quote Hermes Trismegistus, purported author of the Hermetica.

How we define things matters. How we speak to each other matters. How we treat each other matters. Our mental states of being have always mattered. They will always matter.

If we want to transcend states of being such as shame and guilt, understanding distinction and impact is important. From there, we can take responsibility for these things or not. Either way, we still have made a choice. Although, it's only when we choose to recognize the *little* fragmented parts of us that we can grieve whatever was deemed lost, face whatever fear exists, and have faith that we will be whole once again. Ultimately, Self relieves *littles* of their burdens.

Lost in the projections of our *littles*, we will continue to expect those around us to see the way we see, believe the way we believe, and feel the way we feel. We will make things personal, take things personally, and attempt to impose a reality on those around us that isn't theirs— a reality that, more-than-likely, isn't even ours. We will continue to be at war.

Chapter Three

Little Things Matter

“Concerning matter, we’ve been all wrong. What we have called matter is energy, whose vibration has been so lowered as to be perceptible to the senses. Matter is spirit reduced to a point of visibility.”

~ Albert Einstein

I’m going to go a wee bit fangirl on you here. Consider this compilation of Einstein quotes which illustrate his unique perspective on construct:

There is no matter. Time and space are not conditions in which we live, but modes by which we think. Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, determined by the external world. Time does not exist— we invented it. Time is what the clock says. The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion. A human being experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical-delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Einstein’s also cited as saying that the more he learned about physics, the more he was drawn to metaphysics (above or beyond things called matter.) Time is both a fixed commodity and a process of becoming. We think there’s matter, and that’s the matter. Thoughts of being separate maintain separation. We agree or disagree to the construction or destruction of this world or we don’t care one way or another— apathy. We choose what team we’re on, how and what game we play, or, we remain on the sidelines.

A lot of what we experience on earth is binary. It’s reasonable that we would think dualistically. Naturally speaking, we’ve got what we call male/female, day/night, oceans/deserts, hot/cold, mountains/valleys, land/sea. These are commonly known opposites. Then there are the socially constructed: good/bad, right/wrong, rich/poor, peace/war. Love and fear may both be considered both natural (biological) and socially constructed. They are two sides of the same coin. Contrary to popular belief, hate is not the opposite of love. Hate stems from fear.

When we hate something or someone, what are we afraid of? Are we dealing with pain? *Littles*, already in pain, *are* easily hurt. When someone says or does something that hurts our feelings, this is certainly an accurate assessment. Whatever happens in an exchange, where hurt is felt, assists in bringing that hurt *little* to the surface. Situations such as this can be seen as a gift. Without awareness of these *little* parts, we are bound to be involved somehow in a

repeat of their historical fiction. *Littles* don't want to live in the past. Resolution occurs when Self fully embraces the *little* and the painful situation. The same holds true if someone "makes us" angry, sad, etc. Fighting or withdrawing tends to maintain hurtful feelings and emotions. They'll remain as they are until guided otherwise. Conflict and chaos (think vortex) are opportunities to see and shift ways of being. They pave the way for choice. Self is impervious to pain, disease, and death.

The ancient Greek philosopher, Democritus, purportedly stated, "The cause of coming-into-being of all things is the vortex." He thought in terms of determinism, so didn't believe humans had freedom of choice. To Democritus, free will was an illusion. He believed we are unaware of all the causes for our decisions. He's also purported to have said:

...the soul will either be disturbed, so that its motion affects the body in a violent way, or it will be at rest in which case it regulates thoughts and actions harmoniously. Freedom from disturbance is the condition that causes human happiness, and this is the ethical goal.

I see *littles* as the vortex. Within and upon them lay both natural and social construction. Democritus described the "ultimate good" as "a state in which the soul lives peacefully and tranquilly, undisturbed by fear or superstition or any other feeling."

As with everything else in the cosmos, our bodies consist of energy that vibrates at different levels or frequencies. *Little* fragmented parts of Self represent energy in motion (emotion) such as pain, fear, sadness, anger, etc. These are low or negative vibrations. As with a battery, the chemistry inside physical form determines how the form works. It takes both a positive and negative charge to conduct energy. With unresolved trauma, the negative charge will be stronger than the positive one. Such an unbalanced charge creates static electricity. Therefore, it won't take much of a rub to receive or deliver a shock.

However, if we didn't have contrasting experiences, how would we get to test our will, decide our values, or evolve collective consciousness? Without the existence of contrast, how would we develop our ability to either discern or judge, respond or react, stand or sit, speak or stay silent, give or take? All these aforementioned doings are ways of being. Every thought, word, or action is a vote for the kind of world created and co-created. Each body is evidence that lends itself to the collective choosing of the reality of life.

TWO WORLDS, ONE PLANET

Two young fish are swimming along when they meet an older fish who is swimming in the opposite direction. The older fish nods at them and says, "Mornin' boys. How's the water?" The two young fish swim on for a bit. One of them looks over at the other and asks, "What the hell is water?" This parable was included in David Foster Wallace's "This is Water" commencement speech, in which he argues against unconsciousness. Duality is the water we swim in. What would this world of ours be like without right and wrong, good and bad, win or lose?

Foster's parable put into context for *littles*—the reality of a situation can be hidden in plain sight. Self sees the big picture. Fully present and focused on facts, Self can be the ultimate

chooser of how *littles* and circumstances are responded to. Non-dualistic practices assist us in being able to comfortably hold two conflicting worldviews at the same time. This is also called “yes, and” thinking. “Yeah, but” thinking negates. Yes, and thinking is a collaborative practice and one we can engage in with *littles* so as not to intensify reactivity. Fully present and focused on facts, Self can be the ultimate chooser of how *littles* and circumstances are responded to.

Non-dualistic thinking is one of my practices. Great teachers help with this challenge. One of mine is Byron Katie. She puts experiences in perspective this way, “How do I know the wind is supposed to blow? Because it’s blowing.” In other words, whatever is happening is just what’s so. It’s not right or wrong, good or bad. *Littles*, with their perceived need for certainty and incredible story-telling abilities, make meaning of what’s so. They’re very adept at filling in the blanks and spinning tales.

Renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung has been credited in saying, “What you resist persists.” There’s a great deal of truth in the saying. The more we resist some of the things in life, the more we bring them to us. Another way to say this is that we feed what we fight. Resistance is part of life’s equation. Resistance can achieve optimal results. In terms of what we value, it can support persistence. What Jung may have been encouraging us to do here is to be aware of what we are experiencing, and to see seemingly negative thoughts and behaviors as what they actually are— things. It’s best to make friends with them.

When it comes to my own *littles* or the *littles* of those in my life, I like to imagine us in the after-life laughing and saying, “Ya outta get a freakin’ Oscar! What a role you played for me!” or “Whew, you really had me spinning there for a while.” Transformation can only occur with acknowledgement of what’s actually happening. When reaction comes in the form of denial, resistance to what’s happening interferes with change.

It wasn’t all that long ago (mid-1800’s) doctors thought women were dying from “childbed fever.” Back in those days doctors attended to the newly arriving as well as the dearly departed. What was actually happening was that some doctors who performed autopsies were delivering babies right afterwards, without disinfecting their hands. This lack of hygiene was infecting a lot of new moms with deadly bacteria. The idea of washing one’s hands conflicted with the established scientific and medical opinions of the time. Today, patients are still infected by lack of hygiene, although not nearly as often. The maladaptive thoughts and behaviors of our *littles* are like germs that infect the trusting and unwary.

Ignas Semmelweis, the doctor who made the connection between unwashed hands and dying women, was mocked by some of the doctors he proposed proactive measures to. His attempts to convince his colleagues were largely ignored, rejected, or ridiculed. He was dismissed from the hospital for “political reasons” and harassed by the medical community. Despite this, he continued to speak out. Allegedly, he went on to suffer a nervous breakdown and was committed to an asylum by his colleagues. In the asylum he was purportedly beaten by the guards and died from gangrene two weeks after being admitted.

Of course, Semmelweis’ approach may have had something to do with the outcome of his efforts. Apparently, writing open and increasingly angry letters to prominent obstetricians calling them irresponsible murderers backfired. The practice of doctors washing their hands

prior to delivering babies in order not to infect mothers continued for about another 80 years. *Little* things matter, both literally and figuratively speaking.

When it comes to connecting with and unburdening *littles*, keep in mind, it may get western. If it does, hang on tight and do your best to enjoy the ride. Employ characteristics of Self while wrangling any *little* stories, limiting beliefs, and behaviors. My bet is that you don't want to end up going out like Semmelweis.

LITTLE CREATIONS

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study is a modern-day example of Semmelweis' effort to preserve life and increase the number of well beings on our planet, only without the magnitude of blame. The ACE study, conducted between 1995 and 1997, demonstrates an association of adverse childhood experiences with health and social problems as an adult. It began as a weight loss study. The lead, Dr. Vincent Felitti, conducted interviews with people who left the weight loss program and had gained back all or most of the weight they had lost in the program. It was found that the majority of two hundred and eighty-six people interviewed had experienced sexual abuse when they were young. Interview findings suggested weight gain might be a coping mechanism for depression, anxiety, and fear.

Felitti and his colleague Robert Anda then went on to identify childhood trauma experiences in over seventeen thousand clinical volunteers. These experiences included physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, physical and emotional neglect, mother treated violently, substance abuse and mental illness in the home, parental separation or divorce, and an instance of an incarcerated household member. The study indicated that any of these experiences can constitute trauma if experienced prior to age 18 and the individual is lacking the level of resilience needed to safely navigate and transform the trauma.

The study also found that the aforementioned particular adverse childhood experiences (aka, ACEs) are common, and that they often occur together. These experiences can lead to health problems later in life. Social and behavioral problems go hand in hand with unresolved trauma, as does the tendency to abuse substances. Other high-risk health behaviors identified in the study are promiscuity, obesity, depression, heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, and shortened lifespan via suicide. Without effective intervention, these health problems linked to high ACE scores can occur many years after the experience.

The results of the study showed that compared to children with no ACEs, a child with six ACEs or more is nearly three times more likely to be a smoker as an adult. Those with four or more are five times more likely to struggle with alcohol and sixty percent more likely to become obese. Boys with four or more ACEs are forty-six times more likely to become IV drug users later in life than those who didn't have any severe adverse childhood experiences.

My early life experiences score me a six out of ten on the ACE assessment. I smoked about a pack of cigarettes a day for twelve years. I drank heavily in social situations and can claim promiscuity in my early twenties as well. It never once occurred to me back then to associate these behaviors with shame or any other adverse childhood experience. The consequence was

that I unconsciously and unintentionally added to my shame account. Such deposits added to the level of chaos and rigidity I was already showing up with. I was slowly headed in the direction of apathy and the objectification of others.

When shame reaches our essence— psyche, soul, mind, consciousness, spirit, chi, life-force, Self, or whatever term you want to use— that’s when the trauma of shame causes chaos and rigidity. Shame becomes toxic. Chaotic and rigid behaviors are guaranteed to impact our life in ways that don’t support our innate need for connection or ability to respond. We become like walking reactors ready to detonate at the *littlest* perceived slight. The great news is, it’s not game over! As long as we have a pulse, hope, and some semblance of will, change is ours to make.

Still here? Excellent! I realize all this can be a lot to contemplate. Take your time. Though shame was not specifically identified in the ACE study, along with many other experiences that can constitute trauma, it can indeed be traumatizing and, when toxic, *be/littles* best Self. Unresolved trauma can, at any age, and in any form.

You may not believe this yet, but your best Self has something that no one else has— a very specific gift to give or perhaps multiple gifts. Just like there are supposedly no two grains of identical sand, no two humans are exactly alike— not even identical twins. Don’t ask me who compared all those twins, or the sand for that matter! Before we continue though, a quick recap-

- Shame is projected onto us from unaware caregivers, culture, and/or society.
- Shame often exists in those of us who grew up with someone who experienced depression or alcoholism, or behaved in negligent, abusive, overly religious, suppressive or oppressive ways.
- Shame is maintained through unconscious agreement.
- Shame covers the essence of what we truly are (aka, Self). When this happens, shame has become toxic.
- Toxic shame can constitute who we believe we are and how we behave by way of *little* stories or behaviors that are counterproductive to well-being and connectivity.
- Some *littles* (split off parts of Self) act as protectors. Some are exiled.
- *Littles* don’t yet know how to be calm, confident, curious, compassionate. These are skills they haven’t learned yet.
- *Littles* struggle to be vulnerable. The abuse and/or neglect they experienced created shame, fear, mistrust, confusion, memory loss, etc.
- *Littles* don’t yet possess a great deal of courage or clarity. *Littles* are in survival mode.
- *Littles* show up in ways that overwhelm Self.

All of this is to say that shame and other unresolved traumas can create the need for *littles* to show up and build a fortress around Self. It’s important to remember that these *little* protectors have been well intentioned. The boundaries (behaviors and beliefs) *littles* employ were once adaptive. However, when *littles* disconnect us from our bodily sensations, barricade our hearts, wreak havoc on our minds, and sequester our souls. Their behaviors and beliefs have become maladaptive and destructive.

Compassion for *littles* is imperative for access and integration. When we don't acknowledge a *little* and bring it into the fold, it will remain vigilant. Hyper-vigilant *littles* can make us look like puppets. They pull behavioral strings attached to unnoticed thoughts and misguided beliefs. *Little* thoughts show up like this: I'm so stupid. I should have known better. I'm sorry. I don't belong here. I'm not good enough. One of these statements is context dependent. If I find myself in a dark alley in a sketchy part of town and it occurs to me that I don't belong here, that may very well be a beneficial thought!

Dwelling on "wrongdoings" (blaming and replaying mistakes over and over) is harmful, especially when thoughts are based on distorted thinking. An example of distorted thinking can be the chronic, less than factual, use of definitive terms such as always, never, forever, and everyone. Credibility can be lost if this is how we present. Staying stuck in these types of *little* communication loops doesn't move the needle forward in our aim to reduce the impacts of shame and evolve consciousness. Being honest about what we have control over and what we don't can bring us clarity and peace.

Via inadvertent disrespect to Self, distorted thinking can lead to pity, flagellation, and deprecation. I call this last one defecating. Truly though, none are beneficial fertilizers. Distorted thinking prolongs suffering. It's like living in the sewer. Distorted thinking is not something Self engages in. With the awareness of thoughts, actions, and character traits that create disconnection from Self and those we care about, it's wholly possible to unlearn such ways of being.

A LITTLE ASSESSMENT

The following questions, used with permission, were posed by Beverly Engel, MFT in her article titled "Healing the Shame of Childhood Abuse Through Self-Compassion", which appeared on psychologytoday.com on January 15, 2015. I consulted Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapist Lia Ferrell to assist with clarifying which behaviors and beliefs burden which *little* parts, what IFS calls **E=exiles, F=firefighters, and M=managers**.

If you're unable to recall any childhood abuse or neglect at the hands of primary care givers, any shame you recognize may have occurred through experiences with other people (school, church, etc.)

1. Do you blame yourself for the abuse you experienced as a child? **M**
2. Do you believe your parent (or other adult or older child) wouldn't have abused you if you hadn't pushed him or her into doing it? **M**
3. Do you believe you were a difficult, stubborn, or selfish child who deserved the abuse you received? **M**
4. Do you believe you made it difficult for your parents or others to love you? **M**
5. Do you believe you were a disappointment to your parents or family? **M**
6. Do you feel you are basically unlovable? **M**

7. Do you have a powerful inner critic who finds fault with nearly everything you do? **M**
8. Are you a perfectionist? **M**
9. Do you believe you don't deserve **E** to be happy, loved, or successful? **M & F act from this belief to sabotage success**
10. Do you have a difficult time believing someone could love you? **E negative core belief (needs to be specifically identified WHY the child believes the world is not loving me) then lead to M's behaviors of pushing people away, etc.**
11. Do you push away people who are good to you? **M**
12. Are you afraid that if people really get to know you, they won't like or accept you? Do you feel like a fraud? **Same as #10**
13. Do you believe that anyone who likes or loves you has something wrong with them? **M**
14. Do you feel like a failure in life? **Same as #10**
15. Do you hate yourself? **M**
16. Do you feel ugly— inside and out? **E**
17. Do you hate your body? **M**
18. Do you believe that the only way someone can like you is if you do everything they want? **M**
19. Are you a people pleaser? **M**
20. Do you censor yourself when you talk to other people, always being careful not to offend them or hurt their feelings? **M**
21. Do you feel like the only thing you have to offer is your sexuality? **M**
22. Are you addicted to alcohol, drugs, sex, pornography, shopping, gambling, or stealing, or do you suffer from any other addiction? **F**
23. Do you find it nearly impossible to admit when you are wrong or when you've made a mistake? **M**
24. Do you feel bad about the way you've treated people? **M**
25. Are you afraid of what you're capable of doing? **M**
26. Are you afraid of **(M)** your tendency to be abusive **(F)** either verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually?
27. Have you been in one or more relationships where you were abused either verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually? **M, F, E**
28. Did you or do you feel you deserved the abuse? **M**
29. Do you always blame yourself if something goes wrong in a relationship? **M**

30. Do you feel like it isn't worth trying because you'll only fail? **M or F can hold us back**
31. Do you sabotage your happiness, your relationships, or your success? **M & F can have this job**
32. Are you self-destructive (engaging in acts of self-harm, driving recklessly, suicidal attempts, and so on)? **F**
33. Do you feel inferior to or less than other people? **M compares. M & F are parts that react to the E's core belief, sometime so immediately that the E's belief is not consciously perceived by the person.**
34. Do you often lie (**F**) about your accomplishments or your history in order to make yourself look better in others' eyes?
35. Do you neglect your body, your health, or your emotional needs (not eating right, not getting enough sleep, not taking care of your medical or dental needs)? **M & F both can do self-neglect, depending on the reason— to avert future harm? (M, because I may have to take scary action if I cared for myself), or (F, in order to distract from feeling/danger that may arise if one cared for the self?)**

There isn't any formal scoring for this questionnaire, but if you answered yes to the majority of these questions, it's safe to say you have been impacted by toxic shame. If you answered yes to just a few, it's evident that you're experiencing some degree of shame. I don't know a single soul who can't claim one or more of these indicators. I've experienced quite a few of them and still work to address a handful at times. It's definitely been my experience that when we have had a less-than-safe (emotional and physical) upbringing, the impact shows up behaviorally, at some point. Hurt people quite often hurt people.

Imagine being in a fast car, on a winding road with a seven-year-old at the wheel. Those of us who have experienced complex post-traumatic stress or relational trauma (such as what can come with toxic shame) have brains that, unbeknownst to us, may be in an almost constant state of alarm. *Little* at the wheel! Not the best chauffeurs if your intention is a happy, healthy and lengthy trip. I doubt anyone would call this a joy ride.

Little parts of us often end up unintentionally hurting others in order to deflect fear, pain, and other forms of suffering. When directed at our own bodies, as with cutting and imbedding, such coping or maladaptive protective strategies may be put into place to feel something, anything— even if it's physical pain.

What can be unknown or forgotten is that brains that have experienced trauma may have developed in ways that interfere with optimal learning. This, of course, would also interfere with the implementation of more adaptive behaviors. After attending to our own *littles*, we can better attend to those we care for. This level of understanding and response is essentially what it means to be trauma-informed. Otherwise, when someone or something in a learning environment is perceived as unsafe, what is being learned may not be what was intended. Optimal learning requires some semblance of safety, the degree of which is ascertained on a case-by-case basis. We can start by looking at our own maladaptive beliefs and behaviors through a trauma-informed and developmental lens.

AS BELOW, SO ABOVE?

Perhaps why we're on this planet and go through all we do is to have experiences for that which has always been and (I presume) always will be. Call this God, Infinite Creator, The Universe, Allah, The One Creator, ET, Bob, or whatever you'd like. Therefore, I've titled this section *As Below, So Above*. Perhaps it's the other way around. Maybe it's both. For all we know, human beings create one of the great mysteries of science— dark matter. But on to lighter, more numinous and esoteric subjects.

There's a spiritual concept described by Caroline Myss in her book *Sacred Contracts*. The idea is that we make agreements prior to being born. A sacred contract is a spiritual document that our soul recognizes. They are fundamental agreements that Self knows intuitively. Myss has an interesting 2017 TEDx talk titled *Choices that can Change your Life*. You may want to pause right here, right now, and check it out. If it's true our souls make sacred contracts, it makes sense that these agreements would be made for evolutionary purposes.

For all I know, my paternal grandfather may have had an agreement with my paternal grandmother to shun her the way he did after she'd had a double mastectomy. An opportunity for her to learn not to take things personally? Maybe my mom and dad had a prior agreement to have three kids and a short, violent marriage. What spiritual evolutionary lessons might be found in such an arrangement?

What happened between my parents and their parents is really none of my business. I can stand in judgment about happenings in my family all I want, but to what end? My relatives had the experiences they had because they had them. I have no idea why and may never know. Not knowing is something we can choose to learn to live with. How or who are we being when judging someone else's experience?

Whether our personal shame stems from an experience that was part of a contract made before we were born, projected onto us by those who simply lacked the knowledge and skills to show up differently at the time, or taken on some other way; by increasing our awareness of what's actually so in a situation, we can better choose how we show up in response. Conscious choice is about understanding that how we think about what's happening, what's happened, or what may happen impacts our life and the lives of those around us. Choices affect life.

Connecting with *littles* not only entails recognizing feedback mechanisms such as feelings and emotions, it requires being curious about them. In this way, Self can tune into any *little* stories that continue to negatively impact life. This is a commitment and a practice I believe we get to choose. It's also what makes change possible. As we unburden *littles* from any disconnecting fear, grief, opinions, beliefs, projections, etc., we increase Self-agency and efficacy. Our world changes in ways that bring us experiences of freedom, joy, and peace.

LITTLE STORIES

Little stories of inferiority begin a downward spiral that leads to diminishment of Self-agency and efficacy. These stories are often shame-based or further shame producing. Consequently,

little adaptations can appear as being overly sensitive, fearful, and behaving in ways that are distancing or distracting. It's as if brains exist to make up stories about what the body is feeling.

Stories of inadequacy and unworthiness affect our view of the world. This world view affects how we treat ourselves, those around us, and our planet. These stories may have been, and perhaps still are, held by a *little* part yearning to be recognized. Limiting stories may stem from cultural and societal "norms." With awareness of our own beliefs, values, standards, propensities, etc., we can choose to agree or not and behave accordingly.

One of my *exiles* exhibited sexualized behaviors as a child and young adult. This added to my shame account. My *little firefighters* also abused alcohol and experimented with a couple different drugs. My *managers* would often attempt to handle or fix those around me (i.e., they should, shouldn't do x, y, or z). They still occasionally manage to struggle with minding their own business. *Little* parts can war with each other. This internal conflict, left unresolved will continue to leave burdens in place and maybe exacerbate them. This either results in external non-beneficial conflict involving others through projection or gets suppressed.

In the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model, *exiles* are the parts that take on shame when we are young. These are the parts of us that have been disowned. *Exiles* carry not enough, on my own, don't belong, or I'm to blame type stories. Protectors are called *managers* and *firefighters*. They protect *exiles* and can be created at any time. *Firefighters* and *managers* attempt to keep *exiles* tucked safely away. *Firefighters* hold something wrong stories and tend to distract and react. Burdens these *little* parts carry include negative beliefs around defectiveness, responsibility, safety, and power. Once *little* protectors are unburdened of their protective roles, *exiles* acknowledged and accepted, all can return to their natural states of being. They return home to Self and all that entails.

Again, I consulted with Internal Family Systems (IFS) model therapist Lia Ferrell to assist in identifying the following behavioral examples, which include some degree of shame, and may be displayed by *little* parts. **E=exiles, F=firefighters, and M=managers.**

- Survival orientation **E**
- Escapism. Too much time spent on watching TV or sports, video games, easily read books, the internet, porn, shopping, etc. **F with distraction/reaction burden**
- Eating problems, especially eating to fill a void **F**
- Difficulty making decisions that affect other people (despite usually having adamant ideas about what should be done) **M/proactive**
- Difficulty asking for anything **M**
- Difficulty accepting gifts and difficulty enjoying gifts accepted **M**
- Filling needs and wants with crumbs (things that may have some little value but no one else wants)— **example of an E's core belief triggering an M**
- Difficulty taking constructive criticism-comes from little beliefs of **M, F, or E**
- Justifying actions, even when not asked to **M**
- Seeking praise but having difficulty accepting it **M**
- Understanding everything in terms of performance **M**
- Perfectionism/keeping an illusion of infallibility **M**
- Avoiding learning situations that are not quick, and so having trouble acquiring deep skills despite talent **M**

- Avoids trying new things if there is skill involved **M**
- Poor listening— dissociative **F**
- Very critical of others **M**
- Self-deprecation but an intolerance of criticism by others **M**
- Seeing everything in terms of right or wrong **M**
- Scarcity mind-set or zero-sum orientation **M**
- Black and white thinking **M**
- All or nothing thinking **M**
- Blaming others **M**
- Easily flooded— dissociative **F**
- Tendency to rage **F**
- Judging self on intentions, judging others on results **M**
- Never feels like an adult **E**
- Trying to be self-sufficient **M**
- Over concern with conformity **M**
- Over concern with rebellion **F** usually
- Fear of failure, even in situations where there is no pass/fail sorting going on **M**
- Constant busyness, unable to just be **M**
- Tendency to hurry things, even when there is time, perhaps out of a sense that one might be taken to task at any moment **M**
- Dependency on others to control us **M**
- Trying to control situations **M**
- Resenting being asked for anything, despite taking a stance of willingness to help **M**
- Denying anger— **M**, but leaking negativity **F**
- Denying sadness, but focused on losses, disappointments, and grievances **M**
- Wanting to give (with strings attached) and not receive **M**
- Tendency to conceal self-perceived faults **M**
- Secretiveness **M**
- Resentments— if being recycled as a way to control **M**, if to distract from feelings **F**
- Trying to control moods **M**
- Taking the role of victim **M**
- Anticipating rejection **M**
- Trying to please others **M**
- Concealing struggle **M**
- Concealing problems **M**

As you can see, there are a lot of managerial behaviors displayed by *littles*. Once upon a time, I wouldn't go out of the house without makeup on. No judgment here. Wear makeup. Don't wear makeup. I do both. My point here is, the story I had bought into (along with all those products!) was how much better I looked with makeup on. My focus was more on how my face looked and less on living my best life. A *little* why was living me. In reviewing the above list, who (what characteristic) would you say was behind the how (behavior) for me in that scenario? Those of us navigating the trauma of shame almost always have a broken belief system with false or limiting stories. These beliefs are best noticed so that Self-agency and

efficacy is fully realized. My *little* didn't understand that what we are, in essence, is not our face, or any other body part.

With intentional attention toward external representations, *littles* and Self can be recognized through spoken or written word, and behaviors. From the inside, we recognize our *littles* through thoughts/stories and sensations/emotions. No two humans are exactly alike. As Dan Siegel puts it, "Each of us has a unique mind: unique thoughts, feelings, perceptions, memories, beliefs, and attitudes, and a unique set of regulatory patterns." These patterns shape the flow of energy and information inside us. We share this information with other minds by communicating either verbally or non-verbally via eye contact, facial expression, body language, posture and gesture. This sharing is known as Memetics, the sharing of memes.

Richard Brodie, the original creator of Microsoft Word, wrote a book called *Virus of the Mind* which is about memes— an element of a culture or system of behavior that can be passed from one individual to another by non-genetic means. Shame qualifies as a meme. Memes influence culture. If culture is healthy and wholesome, individuals who are part of those communities and societies will be healthy and wholesome as well.

Those paying close attention to beliefs and values can see how our stories shape who, how, and what we believe we are, and the world we live in. Because thoughts and words create emotion (again, think energy in motion) and emotion influences us at a biological level, all of this creates our own personal show and tell. Not only do we act as our own storytellers, we can influence the stories of those around us. Here's how Dr. Curt Thompson, author of *The Soul of Shame*, describes storytelling:

In the exploration of storytelling, if we were in the business of describing the mechanics of our development, we might say we are witnessing the progressive emergence of the complexity of interactions between different functions of the mind, which is true. But we are not merely becoming complex beings made up of random mental processes. Rather, within that complexity we are also making meaning. In other words, we eventually use words and everything else in our toolboxes to make sense of— to tell stories of— our lives. And in this way, we not only acquire language, we also construct meaning. Our minds are at all times shifting and collating the various sensations, images, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors we experience. Within rhythmic periodicity our thoughts emerge, at times with intention and reflection, at times with impulsive automaticity, in order to make sense of or draw conclusions about those experiences, while in the process regulating emotion. This dance between these various elements of the mind is taking place ceaselessly and seamlessly throughout our day. We cannot not do this and live in this world. We can, however, be quite unaware that we are doing this.

In other words, biography creates biology. Awareness is key to choices and change that benefit us. How we use language (verbal and non-verbal) matters. For example, when feelings of guilt are the outcome of an experience, an "I need to..." story can suffice. With guilt there is often a relational story attached. It doesn't have to be an "I should have..." or "you should have..." kind of story. For those of us brought up in environments where we were consistently

shamed, “I’m sorry” may be a habitual reaction that we would be better off, all the way around, to unlearn. Again, when we’re honestly experiencing remorse or guilt, it’s healthier to say something like “my apologies,” “I hope you’ll pardon...” or simply “sorry,” instead of prefacing a destructive or low vibratory word (such as sorry) with *I am*. We are *so* much more than sorry. Knowing this, we can show up more fully in the midst of lower energetic states of being, such as those *littles* either impulsively or compulsively display. It increases one’s ability to consciously reduce distress and ability to destress.

Words, in general, exist to create understanding. They’re also used as weapons. When words are used to label or manipulate each other, they can further reduce the already marginalized, objectified, and oppressed. This happens when we fail to notice our thoughts, challenge destructive beliefs, and choose our words carefully.

Reframing destructive terminology can be transformative and restorative. The term “at risk” is used for those who are struggling with behavioral challenges or addiction. What difference might it make if they were seen as *at hope* instead? What if those perceived as homeless were seen as *home-free*? This lifestyle might actually stem from conscious choice. Consider the word disabled, meant to identify someone with a physical or mental handicap or impairment. The root word “dis” means “apart”. Do we really want to identify someone as being apart or separate? How about describing them as having a physical challenge or a learning difference? Here, I’m reminded of Christian evangelist and author Nick Vujicic. He was born with no arms and no legs. At age ten he contemplated suicide because he was bullied at school. What doesn’t kill us can make us stronger. He eventually connected with his Self and lives life purpose as an influential speaker. One of his audiences is school aged youth. Vujicic plays on the trampoline with his kids, golfs, skis, and swims. He aims to live a life without limits.

As I began to recognize some of my own limiting beliefs and behavioral deficits in the world of adulting, I saw that one of my *little* stories was that my parent’s choices and some of my early experiences were to blame for my ineptness. For example, when speaking on behalf of a cause that was important to me, my heart would pound wildly and my ability to think and articulate clearly was compromised. I was certain others could see my shirt moving from how hard my heart was pounding. I was also sure I sounded like an idiot. Someone once attempted to convince me I was excited instead of terrified. Lovely try, albeit ineffective. Yes, some of my parent’s choices and early experiences influenced how I sometimes showed up and who I thought I was. Who was behind this, as in it was my underlying *little* stories that really had ahold of me. My parents were nowhere in sight when I made those presentations. They were only felt through limiting beliefs— *little* stories.

One of my *little managers* would justify my perceptively less-than-stellar presentation skills with two stories in particular. One was that my dad forced me to take a public speaking class when I was in middle school and I wasn’t ready for it. The other story I had was that I’m super sensitive to judgment. True, I was forced to take a public speaking class and I felt terrified to present to a group of people before I was developmentally ready. It’s also true that I sense judgment pretty easily. The problem was that those stories got in the way of what was possible for me— to show up more fully in those situations. In other words, those external blame stories influenced how I continued to show up in the world— smaller and less capable than I really am. Those were *little* stories of blame, justification, and excuse.

Whether you were responsible in projecting your lack of awareness of shame onto others or discover that you've agreed to a story told by someone else about your Self, please, please, please practice compassion for all involved. If I was the betting type, I would put all my money on the idea that none involved knew better, and were most likely doing the best they could with the tools they had. The fact remains, the coping skills we used to help us survive a negligent or abusive childhood won't serve us in our aims at transformation or healthy relationships. Until we're aware of these ineffective ways of being, we will continue to use them.

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

Apparently, there is some debate as to the difference between feelings and emotions. As of this writing, there's no scientific consensus on the definition of emotion. As with shame and guilt, mind and brain, the words feeling and emotion are used interchangeably by many of us. The first time I looked up the word emotions on Wikipedia, they were said to be biological. I looked again and they were said to be psychological. At the time of this writing, here's what I garnered there in my search for the distinction:

Emotions "are mental states associated with the nervous system brought on by neurophysiological changes variously associated with thoughts, feelings, behavioral responses, and a degree of pleasure or displeasure." In other words, there is generally a sensation felt in your body that constitutes an emotion. Feeling was essentially defined as "usually refers to conscious subjective experience of emotions.", "...as a state of consciousness."

Feelings "are a perception of the physical world, and do not necessarily result in a universal reaction among receivers, but vary depending upon one's tendency to handle the situation, how the situation relates to the receiver's past experiences, and any number of other factors." This is another way of saying that feelings can stem from emotions. They can also stem from memories, stories, and beliefs.

Information posted on Wikipedia is subject to change, of course. I see this as progressive. The simplest way I've heard emotions described is that they are energy in motion. According to the late Dr. David R. Hawkins— in his map of consciousness— shame, guilt, and apathy are three of the lowest states of being, energetically speaking. Physical form is made up of matter. All matter is made up of energy. It turns out that vibration is not only how matter is composed, it's also how it decomposes. Words are vibratory. Thoughts and emotions have a vibrational frequency. Emotions can be involuntary. They have a beginning. They can also have a middle, and an end— a bit like a tunnel. In one end and out the other, *if* we want to go all the way through.

The job of our emotions is to get us to pay attention so we can choose to make any changes we deem necessary to our situation. In his book *Intra Connected*, Dr. Dan Siegel puts it this way, "Emotion can be defined as the integrative flow of energy from the body through the subcortical areas to the cortex." In other words, from the body to the lower regions of the brain (more primitive) to the higher regions of the brain where we make sense of things, experiences, and choices. From there, that energy can become a thought, word, reaction, or response.

Debbie Hampton, author of *Sex, Suicide and Serotonin*, shares this description on the difference between feeling and emotion on her site thebestbrainpossible.com. She is of the view that there are distinct differences between feelings and emotions, and that understanding the difference is helpful when we want to change unhealthy behaviors and find more happiness and peace in our lives. Here are some of the key points she's made there as to how she sees the difference:

Emotions

- *are lower-level responses occurring in the subcortical regions of the brain, ...reactions in your body altering your physical state*
- *are coded in our genes and while they do vary slightly individually and depending on circumstances, are generally universally similar across all humans and even other species*
- *precede feelings, are physical, and instinctual*
- *can be objectively measured by blood flow, brain activity, facial micro-expressions, and body language*

Feelings

- *originate in the neocortical regions of the brain*
- *are mental associations and reactions to emotions*
- *are subjective being influenced by personal experience, beliefs, and memories*
- *a mental portrayal of what is going on in your body when you have an emotion*
- *is the byproduct of your brain perceiving and assigning meaning to the emotion*
- *(are) the next thing that happens after having an emotion*
- *involve cognitive input*
- *(are) usually subconscious*
- *cannot be measured precisely*

Feelings are stories that are often discounted. We may not be able to measure feelings yet, although if we can identify emotions, we can claim our feelings once we learn how to articulate them. Shame comes fortified with stories. When we're able to effectively intercept these stories, shame will not succeed in becoming or remaining an emotion.

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

Feelings and emotions can be contagious. At the time of this writing, an explanation found on Wikipedia described emotional contagion as "a form of social contagion that involves the spontaneous spread of emotions and related behaviors."

Emotional contagion is a form of entrainment. Like everything else, it's an energy. If you've ever found yourself unintentionally tapping your foot to music, you've experienced a form of entrainment. The music moved you. The most prominent energy can take the lead, bringing less prominent energies into its rhythm. In other words, our unconscious emotional interactions with others can reach an energetic tipping point. This is the stuff riots are made of. It's also the

thing political movements are made up of. Many of us tend to think of riots as being destructive. They don't have to be. Riot, defined as an impressively large or varied display of compassion? Count me in!

On occasion, while working with clients, I have found my eyes begin to fill with tears. Some have been tears of sadness and some of joy. All were in relationship to not only the client's process; they occurred in my relating to one of my own *littles*. These awareness and discernment opportunities have been one of the greatest gifts I've received while assisting others in their endeavors to live a life of love. Moments where I reacted with anger, resentment, frustration, jealousy, etc., over the years were all unopened gifts, in the form of suffering, until I became aware they were burdened *little* representations.

BLAMELESS

Regarding emotional inheritance, babies begin to become conscious of and responding or reacting to their surroundings while in the womb. This is currently thought to begin between the 24th and 28th week of pregnancy. You may be asking what might a baby in a womb possibly react to? Stress due to shame via the nervous system at an emotional level, for one thing. If whatever is being expressed to us is perceived as unsafe, it can create stress in the body and mind.

We have what neuroscientists call mirror neurons in our brains. Once we exit the womb, emotional inheritance can be reenacted by copying the expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements of someone else. Whether verbal or non-verbal, this copying is a form of agreement or mirroring. When we (consciously or not) agree and mirror another's expressions of emotion, we can feel and then emote that reflection. Shame can shut us down *and* shut us up. Therefore, we may not emote effectively or in our best interest. Like stopping mid-tunnel, the emotion of shame can become trapped and create psychological stress. When this stress becomes toxic, it can create all kinds of diseases that can literally kill the host if not effectively addressed— cancer, autoimmune disease, diabetes, etc.

Prominent psychologist Richard Lazarus defines psychological stress as a "... particular relationship between the person and environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing." In a nutshell, ongoing stress, or toxic stress negatively affects the body. As all is energy and connected, ongoing stress can ultimately impact Self.

If someone is attacked after being knocked unconscious, there's probably not too many people who would accuse them of being part of the attack. Of course, there are those who would view the situation through the lens of fault and place blame on the one attacked. Perhaps saying something such as, "They got attacked because they were in position to be attacked." I suppose there could be an agreement (a sacred contract?) between attacker and attacked. Is it fair to blame a child who spent nine months stewing in stress hormones because their mother was in an abusive relationship.

Perhaps that mom believes she has no other choice but to stay in the abusive relationship. Such a misperception could be tied to the theory of learned helplessness, which I'll touch on in Chapter Six. If this mom believes the abuse is something she deserves or if she feels shame about her situation, she may project that shame onto her child in an unconscious effort to feel better. In order to change her life, she'll have to be aware of such misconceptions, move to a different state of being, and create better stories. If she doesn't, her children will share her experience to whatever degree they do.

Again, biologically and biographically, toxic shame is a matter of inheritance for many of us. This possibility is more recently coming to our attention through what's called epigenetics—the study of how we inherit disease, which can be thought of as dis-ease. Using the story above, and stated simply, epigenetics may be seen as any major emotions (dis-ease) your mom experienced when you were in the womb can then become yours. Shame, stress, fear, joy, peace—you name it. We can inherit emotions organically, at a molecular or atomic level. Studies are showing this inheritance can go back multiple generations. Healing has also been conducted using regression techniques for those experiencing trauma in this life thought to be carried over from unresolved past life trauma.

The celebratory news about epigenetics is that the markers aren't fixed in the same way DNA sequence is. Some of these markers can change throughout a lifetime, and in response to outside influences. Outside stimuli (i.e., chemicals, lifestyle factors, lived experiences) have the potential to cause epigenetic changes. At the time of this writing, it isn't clear to researchers exactly which exposures affect which epigenetic markers. Some theories and research point to belief, such as what's shared in Bruce Lipton's book, *The Biology of Belief*.

Epigenetics is another way of saying "shame is the lie someone told you about yourself" as Anais Nin is attributed to have said so succinctly. Nin also believed that "life is composed greatly from dreams, from the unconscious, and they must be brought into connection with action. They must be woven together." When we become aware of a lie and don't challenge it, we may go on to perpetuate that lie. With awareness comes choice. The choice to change the beliefs and behaviors that don't increase well-being means unlearning any that don't serve that Self. Belief is agreement and vice versa.

Perhaps the cycle of shame continues because, ironically, many of us find fault in those who continue such cycles. We can inadvertently shame the shamer, judge the judger, and blame the blamer. Some do this with much misguided intentionality, without giving it a second thought. Such behavior stems from a lack of knowledge as to the overwhelming effects emotions, inaccurate stories, and toxic stress have on the brain and body. As a deeper understanding of how damaging cycles such as these can be seeps in, most will do more to intercept it.

I wonder how far back the origins of shame can be traced. Appears to me, it's been hanging around for a hell of a long time—a bit like a really ugly, itchy sweater. If someone gave you a massively less than appealing sweater for your birthday, would you happily wear it? My guess is probably not. Ugly sweater contestants aside. Some might politely accept the garment and donate it later. Some may tell the gift giver they think the sweater looks like the south end of a northbound baboon. One could have a *little* story about how the giver of the sweater hates us

and wants us to look ridiculous. Someone might choose to wear it out of fear that they'd hurt the gift giver's feelings if they didn't.

Once we take a close look at something, deem that it's not for us (hopefully with love in our heart for the giver), we can say something such as, "I hope you won't be offended or hurt. I appreciate you thinking of me. It would be lovely to wear something that reminds me of you, although this is really not my style. Would you mind if I exchange it for something that is?" If they feel hurt or take offense (reactivity) at the careful and thoughtful response you've given, the spiritual law of free will permits that hurt and offense is theirs to take. We all have our own work to do. Take responsibility for what you honestly can.

BOUNDARIES

Ultimately and ironically, what most desire when it comes to boundaries is freedom. The topic of boundaries is an important and complex one. Not something I'm super qualified to go into in a whole lot of depth. One perspective I do appreciate though on the subject is from psychologist and author Tara Brach. In her book *Radical Acceptance*, she explains that recognizing all that's happening inside us, and regarding all that's seen with an open, kind and loving heart, is what she calls *radical acceptance*. She teaches the process using the acronym RAIN: Recognize, Accept, Investigate, Nurture. Accept, not in terms of being passive. Accept, as in be open to whatever's experienced— be fully engaged in the moment in an allowing way. Brach has also been cited as saying, "The boundary to what we can accept is the boundary to our freedom."

When I acknowledge and accept the thoughts, words, and actions of my *littles* without judging, blaming, or shaming them, I am essentially voting, through my new way of being with them, for a more integrated, joyful, and peaceful life. Some call this holistic. Once I've accomplished this, I can then practice extending this way of being to those around me that who, for now, may live in a different state of being. I suppose that would make me a model citizen. Grin. Wink. Go ahead and groan.

There's a great line in the film *Cloud Atlas*, said by the character Robert Frobisher, "All boundaries are conventions waiting to be transcended. One may transcend any convention if only one can first conceive of doing so." Radical acceptance and transcended conventions take a great deal of introspection and discernment. Our world isn't exactly what most would call blissful. *Littles* can be seen as perfectly imperfect products of our collectively uncivilized society. Though it may not feel like it and it may be hard to fathom, the things we experience here may actually be perfect, from a spiritual evolutionary standpoint.

Learning with and from each other is how our ideal reality can be created. Earth, with all its constraints continues, for now, to be a place of possibility. In such a field of possibility, we have the opportunity to take responsibility for our freedom. To act instead of react. To embrace *littles* with an openness of mind and heart that allows these disconnected parts to face the facts of their existence, learn to trust again, and reconnect. As we collectively imagine ways to move beyond such imposed boundaries, to break the rules, if you will— this is the practice of freedom.

Inspired by the conclusion of Bell Hooks' book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, I'll leave off on the topic of boundaries with this— things are finite. No one has a crystal ball. Our most profound experiences push us out of our comfort zone. We can intentionally look for challenging opportunities and find constructive meaning in them. We can find those who dare to challenge us in ways we have yet to encounter. Opportunities involving guidance such as this allow us the space to be radically open and honest. These are environments where we are truly free to choose. Because of this, we are better able to learn and grow without limits. If not, *little* parts will keep Self from living a life knowingly chosen.

Chapter Four

The Fallout: Fragmentation

“There are two primary choices in life, to accept conditions as they exist, or to accept the responsibility for changing them.”

~ Denis Waitly

In early 2017, I chose to remove my Self from a relationship of almost thirty years. Leaving was a courageous choice. Two things I value are healthy relationships and connectivity. Both are where I want to spend the bulk of my resources. Some of the behaviors my husband and I displayed in the last decade of our marriage were not indicators of health, relatedness, or connectivity. Deep down I knew our marriage was destined to fail and that we would continue to suffer the consequence of simply trying.

We didn't always show up as the calm, confident, curious, compassionate, willing to be vulnerable, and in possession of a great deal of courage and clarity that Self exemplifies. We had substantially polarized and no longer shared the same values.

The instinct to leave was an instance of fully trusting my Self. I wasn't afraid or angry when I made the choice. I knew I needed to change my circumstances. I also knew what was in my power to control. Leaving can be a loving act. Giving him space to make the choice to remain in our marriage or terminate it was compassionate and respectful. No longer living under the same roof didn't mean we couldn't have some semblance of a healthy relationship. Physically leaving also didn't mean we weren't connected in an even more important and eternal way.

This man I had been with for so long was, admittedly, resistant to change. Resentment was evident. I loved us both enough to leave before contempt entered the scene. Yet, when he told me he didn't love me and wanted a divorce, a *little* part of me felt like a failure. The five months that followed my leaving were especially challenging due to fearful *little* thoughts, filled with uncertainty, that attempted to seep into my soul.

If he and I had been fully aware of how shame and other unresolved traumas cause fragmentation and disconnection, while working together to respond to and integrate our *littles*, we might still be together.

Below are some common occurrences that, unresolved and perpetuated, lead to the demise of relationships.

LITTLE MISTAKES

Mistakes aren't wrong or bad. They're feedback. They're something to learn from. Where we go a *little* insane is when we continually fail to learn from the same or similar *little* mistake. This is especially true when a *little* limiting belief exists that what we are is a mistake.

Now when I recognize *little* limiting beliefs and *little* mistakes, a director's clapper board comes to mind. When all involved are committed to nailing the scene, retakes happen. If pain is part of the equation, the invitation for a closer look at the scene is even more clear—once the pain subsides, of course. Pain is a *little* feedback. With favorable action, pain plus reflection can lead to progress. Mistakes can be opportunities to learn about *littles* and Self-efficacy. The same destructive mistake made multiple times is not a mistake—it's a compulsion, addiction, or habit. No commitment to "kick" the habit equates to no change.

Taking the time to reflect on what happened prior to making a mistake is putting Self in the driver's seat. When we don't take the time to reflect on mistakes, we experience dissatisfaction, a sense of incompleteness, or discomfort. Bodies harbor this dis-ease. Suffering is prolonged when we're in denial, justify our behavior, or throw pity parties. Self chooses to be thoughtful and careful about any given situation, to look for what's fact, and what's a *little* story. Self is aware of human tendency toward confirmation bias, how we interpret experiences and information as evidence for an existing belief or theory. This is, more often than not, a *little* mistake.

I used to tell my kids that when they made a mistake it was probably because they just didn't know better, having never made that particular mistake before. A mistake like that could be considered dumb. If they do the same thing again (especially after claiming to know better), the same mistake can be considered stupid. In this way, I'm talking about the choice and not the person. If we keep making the same mistake, believing the result will change, we are being a *little* insane. The root word *in* means not, opposite of, or without. *Sane* means health. Who can't claim moments of not being healthy?

No one is their mistakes. *Little* mistakes are opportunities to learn. Where we get into serious trouble is when we're being a *little* insane a lot. *Littles* behaviors completely takes over the show of Self. When our *littles* know better, we, as a species, do better. As Laozi so eloquently put it, "To know and not to do is not yet to know." There's a lot we still don't know.

STONEWALLING

This behavior comes from *littles* who don't want to talk about it—for whatever reason. Overly burdened and banished *littles* may not feel like talking about an experience or behavior. They may not know yet how to share their experience. They may lack trust. Each brick in the wall is based on past experience.

Stonewalling keeps potential supporters "out" as to what concerns or issues actually exist. It also keeps a *little* trapped in a burdening role and falls under the category of either flight or freeze biologically. In highly contentious environments, stonewalling might be used as a strategy, especially where fear exists, competition is valued, and the skillsets of those in

“power” are minimal. If this is the case, stonewalling constitutes a fight. (Authoritarian parenting and totalitarian governments come to mind.)

It is possible for Self to recognize stonewalling and unstack the wall brick by brick, albeit in an environment of trust. Efforts require a great deal of commitment, patience and compassion so that *littles* collaborate— or, at the very least, cooperate. Trying to kick the wall down all at once may cause overwhelming pain and lead to the urge to give up.

On occasion, I still attend to my metaphoric wall kicking *little*. This *manager* has been known to feel frustrated when “up against a wall.” While writing this book, I discovered that this *little* of mine fears disconnection, and yet has also been instrumental in assisting me in writing this book. Not discussing concerns and issues can cause anxiety (I call it pamdemonium) for this younger part of me. Here’s a partial recap of the huddle we had:

Self: What is disconnection to you?

Little: Not knowing.

Self: Not knowing what?

Little: If everything is going to be okay.
(Big deep breath.)

Self: What is everything?

Little: Me, you, the world, people, animals.
(Tears. A shaky smile. Another big breath.)

Self: I understand. Not knowing can be scary. I believe if we stick together and trust each other everything is going to be okay. Can we do that from now on?

Little: Yes, I think we can.

Self: Me too. Thank you for trusting me on this and for helping to write this book.

GASLIGHTING

Are you in a relationship where unsubstantiated blame exists? If so, you may be in the midst of one type of psychological abuse known as gaslighting. This is where false information is presented with the intent of making someone doubt their own memory and sanity. This form of abuse can come from anyone and is not a behavior Self employs. Left undiscovered, gaslighting can lead to toxic shame. Not all blame is gaslighting, but all gaslighting is blame. Blame is a form of projection.

It’s helpful to look for patterns, and not just in regards to gaslighting either. Look for any pattern of any behavior that causes problems in a relationship. When Self is present, evidence is looked at closely. Distorted thinking and personal projection will be kept out of the picture. When we realize we’ve displayed a pattern of destructive behavior, Self can take responsibility and make amends. Be on the lookout for excuses that aim to justify the behavior. This is a *little* defense mechanism. *Little* justifications can further damage the relationship. Looking for patterns can increase our ability to think more clearly, rationally and realistically about what’s actually occurring.

Speaking of making amends— while doing final revisions in this book, I noticed where a *little* blaming was happening in my own thought process. Originally, I had begun the topic titles with the headings Little Gaslighters and Little Stonewallers. Upon careful inspection, I recognized the energy of blame. Those topic titles could be perceived as psychologically unsafe to *littles* who tend to employ these strategies. It's labelling. Recall how this chapter began. It's not at all my intention to cast blame, not on my *littles* or those of my ex-husband. That would be a *little* mistake.

During our almost 30-year relationship, stonewalling was a *little* behavior I displayed. There are childhood experiences I may never share with another person. Once I made that connection, the story this *little exile* of mine shared came through by way of the chorus from The Goo Goo Dolls' song "Iris":

"...I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am"

I can live with that for now. I responded to this *little* fearful part of me by telling it that it didn't have to tell another person if it didn't want to. Those experiences were shared with my pup Falkor. He handled the information quite well. No surprise. He's one of the least judgmental souls I know. Telling Falkor is enough— for now at least. That little part of me no longer lives in exile. The burden it's carried is substantially lighter. If one day that's no longer the case, we'll cross that bridge together.

CONFLICT

As toxic shame often creates fear, apathy, and confusion, avoidance of healthy conflict may result. The above states of being create stress or anxiety, indicators of survival mode. The late Wayne Dyer has been cited for saying, "The truth is that there is no actual stress or anxiety in the world; it's your thoughts that create these false beliefs. You can't package stress, touch it, or see it. There are only people engaged in stressful thinking." Fear causes stress and anxiety. When stress is present, that's when secondary emotions such as anger, disgust, resentment, etc. can enter the scene. When experiencing conflict, behaviors such as gaslighting, lying, and stonewalling can also come into play.

While I was driving down the freeway in my boss' truck, a car sideswiped the driver's side door and mirror. I experienced a brief moment of confusion, then disbelief as the driver sped off. "Oh no you don't, you little fucker!" The words flew out of my mouth a millisecond before I stepped hard on the accelerator in an effort to catch a glimpse of the hit and run driver's license plate. Thankfully, I came to my senses before any more damage was done.

I have a distinct accountability theme running through my life. I mentioned the above incident to a friend, who also works as a therapist. I asked her if she thought love or fear were at the wheel. With zero hesitation, she replied fear. I was afraid they would get away with it. She was correct. My Self was being confused, and my friend wasn't afraid to tell me so. I'm

sure glad I asked! There are indeed instances when accountability is a loving response. My friend exemplified that by challenging my *little* misperception.

In the hit and run example, my *little* story was that accountability equated to love. Therefore, attempting to chase the other driver down was an appropriate response. The truth was that I was literally being driven by fear and reactive. Um, calling that driver a “little fucker” was one clue. The second clue was the excessive speed I employed while in hot pursuit. But to what end? Best case scenario, the person may have been held accountable for damages and the reaction to flee. In that situation, employing right hemi thinking, instead of remaining reactive myself, finally tackled the cost benefit analysis.

Ultimately, a spiritually constructive encounter occurred between my best Self and the *little* who was afraid the other driver would get away with such behavior. Defensive driving is on the road rage spectrum I later quipped to my *little* lead footed, name calling, accountability burdened, storytelling younger self. Such behavior will not get us the peaceful state of mind we aim for.

There are two kinds of conflict, beneficial and non-beneficial. Both types of conflict can feel uncomfortable, depending on the skills of those involved. Beneficial conflict can move situations and creation forward in ways that contribute to resolution. It can also increase the health of a relationship and the quality of constructive efforts. It can actually increase connectivity. Non-beneficial conflict? Not so much. The risk may outweigh the benefits— such as with chasing someone down the freeway, hell-bent on justice. Burdened *littles* involved in conflict do tend to create bigger issues and obstacles for their selves.

Self is able to remain objective no matter the type of conflict. Awareness of intent and interpretation can make a difference in outcomes aimed at resolution. It helps to find out if those involved are honestly committed to resolving concerns and issues. Hit and run drivers do not fall into that category. Actions prevail over words.

It helps to know if *little* concerns based in fear are taking precedence or if we’re dealing with an actual issue. I think of it this way, all issues are concerns but not all concerns are issues. Distinguish concerns from issues. It’s always worthwhile to invest in resolving issues. Concerns can get built upon and become issues. Is it a shared concern or issue? Is there agreement on what it even is? Do the parties involved value the relationship more than a perceived need to be right? In other words, are all parties involved in service to well-being or the best outcome of a shared project, or does one upmanship exist? One upmanship is a game of superiority. What might be the cost in not resolving the conflict? What might be gained? The Five Whys and Five Hows technique, originally developed by Sakichi Toyoda, can assist with the identification and solution process.

This is not an argument for masochism, but the benefits derived from healthy conflict. I’m suggesting serious consideration of the cost of not addressing conflict. When we move toward whatever we’ve been avoiding in order to better understand the why of the avoidance, we are better in position to acknowledge and accept the situation. Such circumstances provide opportunities to connect with *little* misperceptions and maladaptive *little* behaviors. When

acknowledged, accepted, and unburdened of their *little* stories, this creates stronger, healthier relationships.

Leaning in is also how we learn the facts of a situation. Moving toward something or someone to gain a better understanding of what happened before unbeneficial conflict occurs is a forward thing to do. Many of us are taught not to be forward. Perhaps negative consequences occurred when you spoke up as a youngster. In being forward now, what might be gained?

Complacency is a time-bomb. Conflict avoidance pretty much guarantees a similar situation will present itself down the road, such as a lost job or friendship, divorce, health scare, or financial hardship. Self can look closely at such situations, connect with any *littles* involved, and make a course correction. We don't have to be "healed the hard way," as a friend of mine likes to say. It's okay if we do though. Been there. Done that. Best to be proactive by reflecting on complacency and conflict avoidance before hard happens.

With increased awareness of *little* inclinations, Self at the wheel, and effective skills in place, embracing beneficial conflict is life-changing. Relationships are strengthened, accountabilities held (when not life-threatening), and much deserved raises have a better chance at being granted. Distinguishing the difference and avoiding non-beneficial conflict is life-saving. *Between stimulus and response there is time* is one of my favorite mantras, especially when conflict (of any kind) is part of an experience. When present, calm and responsible Self can remind *littles* of this.

INTRUSION

Have you ever had someone say or do something that many would consider intrusive? As in, however whatever was done was none of that person's business, though they apparently thought it was. You may have just spotted a *little manager*.

When two of the best human teachers I've had, to this day, (a daughter and son) were around age six and two, we were in the midst of building a new home. I had signed on as the general contractor. The tile store I shopped at had a playhouse. I told the kiddos they could play in it for just a little bit while I talked to the man at the counter. Sale completed, I went to the playhouse, got their attention, and let them know it was time to go. They began to exit the playhouse just as the exit door swung closed behind me. A woman burst through the door yelling at me that the kids couldn't open the door because it was too heavy. Was she an overjealous child advocate? A *little* triggered because of unresolved abandonment issues? No clue. Reactive? Yelling was certainly an indicator. Any of her business? Debatable. An opportunity for me to respond? Definitely. I have a *little manager* that can be impulsively intrusive, so I can relate. When Self-present, discernment is possible as to whether or not a particular characteristic is best employed in a given situation.

The gift in that experience was that I got to practice increasing, what author of *Already Free* Bruce Tift calls, "my tolerance for experiential intensity." The woman's reaction gave me pause, for sure. I was able to respond to her that it appeared to me the children hadn't even tried to open the door. In regards to *littles*, the metaphor in my response may have been lost on her. It

wasn't lost on me. I got to look at how that metaphor might apply to how I showed up at times. Which *littles* of mine might be struggling with a closed door?

When it comes to showing up in the face of perceived intrusions, practicing mantras can assist in increasing our tolerance and developing the capacity to respond instead of react.

Between stimulus and response there is time.

Between stimulus and response there is time.

Between stimulus and response there is time.

LITTLE DISTRACTORS

We humans tend to over-identify with our thoughts, words, behaviors, roles (gender, race, title, etc.). These are our whos and hows. Over-identifying with these things may be what is distracting us from Self and purpose. Pay attention to *littles*, but don't get distracted by them.

Day-to-day life on earth can feel like being on *Ninja Warrior* or *Survivor*. It may feel as if we're being tasked to get through some medieval gauntlet. Cue the tense musical introduction and deep voiced announcer here: Will it be the *who*, the *how*, or the *what* that ultimately survive or thrive? Dun, dun, dun! With increased awareness of who is being how and why, Self can choose best how to allocate resources of energy, attention, time, and money. There's certainly no shortage of things that vie for these resources.

There are distinct differences between a human being, a human doing, and a human being done to. Humans being are present to their circumstances. Humans doing show up as mechanistic. Humans being done to are *littles* remaining burdened with the role and responsibilities of leadership and lacking the skills to do so. Leadership is Self's role. *Littles* need love, nurturing, and guidance. They yearn to be all the qualities of Self and are distracted by their burdens. The distracted can be quite distracting.

Let's face it, humans are fallible. We'll continue to make mistakes. Hopefully, we'll learn from them in time. Without effective Self leadership, *littles* will continue to display maladaptive behaviors. Hopefully, each of us will become more aware of these tendencies, lean in, and mind our own business. Until then, wars will continue to be played out on the world stage. Our consumer society will continue to expand. Unless we pay more attention to why, how, and what is being consumed, we'll take all other species and the planet down with us.

Chapter Five

Little Addictions

"Beneath every behavior there is a feeling. And beneath each feeling is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behavior, we begin to deal with the cause, not the symptom."

~Ashleigh Warner, holistic family psychologist

Needs and wants are two very different things. Discerning the difference is crucial. One of my *wants* is that readers of this book fully understand how toxic shame and other unresolved traumas can impact the psyche. I also *want* readers to know how diminished awareness and not integrating *littles* can lead to further destruction of said psyche. Not only will I survive, if these *wants* don't come to fruition, I will continue to thrive. But what about future generations and the environment? *Little* addictions are based on misperceived needs, a cause of global proportions. The fate of our planet hinges on actually knowing the difference between wants and needs.

It's discernment to know that Self is not a who or how. We can increase our ability to identify, acknowledge and accept *little* behaviors as being What's So for now. Very discerning. No judgments made. Gobs of compassion given. This does not mean we have to live with *little* destructive behaviors that diminish us, each other, and our planet. Without effective interventions, *littles* will continue to overwhelm us with unsubstantiated story and emotion.

Addiction is a common and detrimental *little* protective strategy. It's comprised of all three protective stances— fight, flight, and freeze. It takes skill to express counterproductive feelings in constructive ways rather than to project, stuff, or numb them. These are all *little* coping mechanisms. Recall that *littles* live in fear, especially those who have been exiled. *Littles* are the most vulnerable parts of us. They want to be free. Shame holds them hostage. They pry at the basement door, bang on the walls, and scream at the top of their lungs... until they don't. When not relieved of the burdens they carry, they can lose hope. Hopelessness is heavy. Prior to the point of hopelessness, *littles* employ whatever they can to lighten the load. They honestly believe they'll feel better if they just have one more drink, buy one more thing, make more money, live in a bigger house, find a better-looking spouse, etc.

A negative addiction is anything that creates an adverse effect in the participant when they are no longer optimally experiencing the relief or reward the substance or behavior brings. Unresolved shame or trauma can lead *littles* into addiction. *Littles* are under the perceptive delusion that the substance or behavior is adaptive. Another way to look at this is that *little* perceived needs are getting met. In the bigger picture though, these perceived needs may actually constitute wants. Many an industry is supported when *little* biographical wants are

perceived as *little* biographical needs, and even more so when perceived *little* biographical needs are considered biologically necessary.

If you skipped Chapter Two, you may want to go back and read toward the end so you understand what I mean by the term *little*. In regards to addictive behaviors, *firefighters*, as the IFS (Internal Family Systems) model calls them, are parts of Self that protect the parts of Self that have been exiled. I'm calling these parts *littles*, as a reminder that they usually split off from Self at a young age or due to lack of skill. They can take over in a variety of ways and make it quite challenging (although not impossible) for Self to lead. Loss of connection and communication with Self results in increased burdening of the system. In healing and unburdening these *little* parts, Self becomes the leader.

In today's consumer society, negative addictions are a threat to all of us, including our planet. *Littles* can be compulsive about anything— beliefs, behaviors, material things, etc. Once we recognize these *little* ways of being, we can look deeper at how they impact relationship to Self, each other, and the planet.

Addiction occurs in unison with three factors: 1) a product or behavior that relieves discomfort, 2) a person otherwise unable to cope, and 3) a source of pain they are ill-equipped to handle.

Besides the commonly known "hard" addictions such as drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, food, and gambling, there are a plethora of substances and behaviors that fall under "soft" addictions. How many people consider thinking an addiction? This is one I contend with! Idle use of social media is a big one. How about drama and gossip? Fishing? Knitting? Scrap-booking? Helping others? Acting helpless? Watching television? Playing computer games? Shopping? Getting in the last word? "Needing" to be right? Religion? Politics? Soft addictions can be every bit as soul-sucking as hard addictions. None are wrong or bad. However, they may be *little* learned behaviors that interfere with a well-adjusted and purposeful life. One way to discern if a behavior is a *little* compulsion is to be curious about the following:

- ✓ Is the behavior, activity, or substance of choice being repeated over and over again in the hopes that something of material value or personal recognition will be obtained?
- ✓ Does the behavior, activity, or substance lead to mood-modifying experiences that can be relaxing and exciting to the extent that it seems there's not enough of it?
- ✓ Does engagement in the activity or substance involve the experience of losing track of time beyond the time intentionally allocated?
- ✓ What is the financial cost?
- ✓ What is the cost to other areas of life, including relationships?

Many things in this world encourage or increase negative addictions. Some addiction programs and procedures employ negative addictive behaviors when it comes to treating those who are in recovery. The use of humiliation tactics to "break" those with addictions, despite research showing how ineffective and harmful this can be, can be seen as a behavioral

addiction in itself. Tactics aimed at confronting *littles* as if they are flawed or wrong invariably backfire. However, these practices continue in the treatment industry, particularly with adolescents. Those traumatized as children can be re-traumatized by such forms of treatment, exacerbating both post-traumatic stress and the negative addiction.

The use of substances as a coping mechanism is marketed as socially acceptable. Ever notice the ever-increasing profusion of pharmaceutical commercials? I recently heard a commercial on the radio promoting a specific brand of wine be consumed as a way to contend with family gatherings during the holidays. There are far healthier and more productive ways to attend to seemingly annoying, hostile or hopeless situations, such as how some family gatherings and dis-eases are perceived.

NATURAL HIGHS

Our bodies come equipped with natural highs— chemical healers found to contribute to well-being— in appropriate dosages. Called neurotransmitters and neuropeptides, these are signaling molecules that allow for (you probably guessed it!) bodily feedback. Oxytocin and endorphins are super yummy. All best serve when in balance, especially dopamine and serotonin. These last two, when out of whack, can signify a negative addiction. An easy way I've found to recall the scientific terms for these natural high substances is by using the acronym DOSE (dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins.)

The primary difference between neurotransmitters and neuropeptides is that neurotransmitters are fast-acting and produce a short-term response. Neuropeptides are slow-acting and produce prolonged action. Both essentially act as mediators for the transmission of impulse from one neuron to another, and they can form gangs. When this happens, balance is questionable.

Dopamine, a neurotransmitter, is known to be highly addictive. In balanced levels, it serves us well. As it's linked with compulsivity and perseveration, when unbalanced it can contribute to diseases, such as Parkinson's and schizophrenia. Other diseases like restless leg syndrome and ADHD have been associated with decreased dopamine activity. Peripherally, it's been used in the treatment of heart failure and shock. In a nut shell, dopamine sends signals via nerve cells to the brain, which affect other areas of the body. We get 'hits' by being recognized or acknowledged somehow. For instance, getting likes on a Facebook post, giving and receiving compliments, leveling up in a video game, hitting a payout on a slot machine, and thinking that we are absolutely right about something.

The current consensus in the pharmacology sandbox is that dopamine signals preference or aversion of an outcome, which in turn propels behavior toward or away from achieving that outcome. In other words, it can be used to both determine where attention and energy goes or doesn't go.

Oxytocin, also known as the cuddle hormone, comes from certain types of physical touch and trusting relationships. Imagine the deficit of this neuropeptide for those who are abused and neglected in physical ways. Oxytocin is believed to play a role in social learning. There are

even indicators that it may assist in lessening noise in the brain's auditory system. *Little* naps? We can increase our oxytocin levels by connecting with our own *littles* and Self, and to those around us in healthy moments of bonding.

Serotonin is sometimes called the leadership chemical, as levels have been found to be higher in dominant individuals. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter. Like dopamine, when levels are too high it can create harm in relationships. Can you say extremely competitive *littles*? The role serotonin plays is more complex than that of dopamine. Serotonin has been linked to pain, learning, mood, appetite, sleep, memory, and even autism. The majority of it is produced in the intestinal tract. It stimulates vomiting. Constipation and diarrhea can be indicators of serotonin malfunctions. Both of which are common for those of us with unresolved trauma. Nutrition plays a key role in maintaining serotonin levels.

Endorphins are best known to derive from activities such as aerobic exercise and running. Sometimes these activities can be overdone and mess with homeostasis. Endorphins can mask pain. They reside in our immune systems. Laughter has been linked to increased endorphin levels. Smiling, dancing, reading jokes on the internet, or watching funny YouTube videos can also raise levels. Neuropeptides, such as endorphins, are produced by nerve cells in the brain. I picture dolphins to remember this one.

More than a hundred neuropeptides, also known as molecules of emotion (shout out to Candice Pert!) have been identified so far. The work of Pert, Caroline Myss, Bruce Lipton, Joe Dispenza, and many others who study emotion on a molecular level, point out the potential physical and biological effects emotions can have on our overall health. Hormones such as insulin and angiotensin are two examples. These nerve cells express in lots of ways. They are what allow the systems of the body (brain, heart, gut, blood vessels) the ability to communicate with each other. When out of whack, they have detrimental impacts on mental and physical health.

When dopamine and serotonin are left unbalanced, these neurotransmitters (combined with *little* stories of despair) create habits that, over time, stop being choices made by a *little's* tendencies and become biological needs. This can make Self recognition even more challenging, but not impossible. When compulsive or negative addictive behaviors and substance abuse continue, shame increases.

POLITICS AND RELIGION

Many of us have heard it voiced about how it's best to keep politics and religion out of a conversation. For some, not talking about these things may have kept them on the planet for as long as they've been here. That's how righteous *littles* can get about affiliations. They argue and may even kill over such ideologies. Political and religious attachments can be seen as who and how we're being. We get into trouble when we over-identify with such roles.

Generally speaking, I've steered fairly clear of investing my time and energy in both. Not that I don't vote or pray. I do. All the time. Every day. Out loud. I believe it's important to weigh in on topics that are meaningful, wholesome, and have the potential to contribute to the

well-being of all inhabitants and our planet. There are many ways to vote and pray. I consider much of this book's contents both vote and prayer. Time spent, purchases made, and behaviors invested in can be seen as votes and prayers. Resources spent are like filling in bubbles on a ballot for the life and world being created.

I do believe there exists an entity far greater than any of us can imagine and that this entity is authoritative— not authoritarian. It may be that this entity is a collection of all energies and experiences. How's that for non-denominational, non-partisan, and non-binary?! When what constitutes a religious or political affiliation is any belief or system organized in such a way that those who maintain it attempt to suppress or alienate those who don't share the belief or resemble the system, I find it easy to understand why so many people steer clear of both. Stop and consider the amount of death and destruction many politics and religion have contributed to. Of course, it can be argued that much has been accomplished for the betterment of our species via these systems.

Did shame stem from fear and the illusion of control, then turn into the righteous thinking and belief systems of today? Those who righteously engage in dogmas may argue that shame is a good thing. When asked about the purpose of shame, they'd probably say that shame keeps people from doing bad things. At some point in history, shame began when someone perceived as being in power decided what was good, right, and safe; what was bad, wrong, and unsafe. It may be that those who continue to rationalize and perpetuate shame are supporting such concepts in an attempt to control those around them. Many constitute closed systems.

It may also be that those who continue to practice such controlling, fearful, and harmful ideologies are unconsciously or unintentionally perpetuating shame. Those who over-identify with their political leanings may be doing so as well. Bottom line though is, ideologies or persons followed blindly are not in service to Self. As my aim is to increase awareness, it is not my intention to blame or judge such systems. I'm simply suggesting we question "authority."

In his book *Intra Connected*, Dan Siegel mentions the acronym G.O.D., which stands for Generator of Diversity. This acronym certainly fits in with the nature of our planet and may even fit in with some fundamental teachings. Our current binary/dualistic societal model can be seen as limiting diversity into only two categories. It is possible to hold two opposing views as true— and everything in between. All facts are true. Not all truth is factual. Factual is wherein the majority of debate lays. To state "I don't know" may be more fact than truth. Although, it's less common to hear and even more uncommon in terms of beliefs.

If G.O.D. as Generator of Diversity resonated for you, as it did me, maybe everything happening here on this planet is perfect— even seemingly destructive religions and politics. Ultimately, the meaning we make and the action we take while engaged with either is a reflection of how we are being and who we think we are. Just not what we are. In this regard, perhaps religion and politics are feedback mechanisms— experiences to be had. A faith such as this would tie in with the concept of Myss' *Sacred Contracts* touched on in Chapter Three. Perhaps we do live in a freely determined world— one scripted prior to birth that also consists of free will.

If someone made an agreement to shame others, it may be that they would not remember having made such an agreement. They'd simply be psychologically hard-wired to behave that

way. There'd be no convincing them otherwise. Let's call this unconscious control. I knew a woman who appeared to play such a role for her daughter-in-law. She would often comment on her grandsons with remarks such as "your hair looks awful" or "you dress like a bum." Her daughter-in-law resented this behavior and would get angry. Such was their dance. The behavior of the mother-in-law may qualify as an activity of a sacred contract between she and her daughter-in-law, offering lessons for all involved.

In a family system, unconscious control may be a role of the head of the household. If such a role is completely unimpeded (*little* or no resistance) this can constitute a power imbalance. *Little* burdens can get built on in the event of such imbalance. On the world stage, Adolph Hitler can be an example of such an avatar. In religious and political arenas, church leaders and presidents may qualify.

Perhaps you're familiar with Randall Terry? He ran as a democrat against President Obama in 2012. Terry identifies as a pro-lifer. He's invested a great deal of time and energy as an anti-abortion activist. He's also helped organize protests on behalf of persons diagnosed as being in a persistent vegetative state and campaigned against gay marriage and homosexuality.

It appears Terry has been indoctrinated into a culture or system reluctant to consider differing viewpoints and life choices. As of this writing, Terry believes homosexuality to be a "...sexual addiction, self-abusive and a horrifying, degrading lifestyle." Bigotry and prejudice can be seen as *little* negative addictions and Self-abusive. Bigotry and prejudice can lead to a horrifying, degrading lifestyle. The statement "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me" has been attributed to Randall Terry. Other sources site it was first used in 1650 by politician Anthony Weldon. Regardless of who said it, the statement has somehow managed to survive and constitutes shame mongering. Those in the trenches of such cultures and systems can be easily and honestly provoked. They appear as being self-righteous.

As it turned out, Jamiel, one of Terry's adopted sons, made national headlines with an announcement that he (Jamiel) identified as a homosexual. Fear was part of Jamiel's experience with his adopted father. For a child to "strongly fear" a parent's disappointment or lack of approval points to a power imbalance in that relationship. Jamiel was killed in a head-on car accident November 30, 2011 at age 31.

Prior to Jamiel's death, Terry claimed in an interview for belief.net that Jamiel is "bringing great sadness to our home and embarrassment to our family." Was this truly about Jamiel or more about Terry's beliefs? Jamiel and Terry's story reminds me of the 2018 film *Boy Erased*. A main theme of this film is conversion therapy, which has affected hundreds of thousands of young lives— some to the point of suicide. When someone is perceived as powerful enough to bring great sadness to a home and embarrassment to an entire family, it's a safe bet, *littles* are in motion. A war is afoot, even if it's a one-sided war. When a religious or spiritual tenet is used as an attempt to deny another's experience, it's being utilized as a weapon. This applies to political dogma as well.

Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, claims that understanding politics and religion must begin with an understanding of the human moral sense. As a first step in this direction, he defines moral systems as "...

interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interests and make cooperative societies possible.”

I reached out to Haidt to get a better understanding of what the term *mind* means to him. He asserts that emotion and intuition carry far more weight in our judgments than reason does. He creates the metaphor of the moral mind, one that makes judgments instantly based on feelings and bodily sensations, as the elephant. The elephant is in control, though it is steered by the rider, which is the rational mind. The rider also has the job of acting as a press secretary, explaining the presidential verdicts of the elephant. Reason is not the slave of emotion in Haidt’s view, but it is certainly secondary. It is difficult to change anyone’s mind, including our own, unless we talk to the elephant.

The rider can be considered Self, and the elephant our *littles*. How we talk to the elephant is immensely important. Trying to dominate it is futile. In many cases, it has amassed quite a presence. In other words, it’s been being the way it’s been being for so long it honestly thinks it knows best and that it is absolutely right. It may be fair to say when Terry and his son had conflicting morals, Terry’s elephant went on a rampage. Perhaps the rider wasn’t holding the reins. I get it. Who of us hasn’t felt fearful and out of control at times? The thing is, if force is part of the rider’s strategy, the elephant will fight for its life.

Randall Terry is an example of how shame can be perpetuated by beliefs that will not contribute to healthy, connected relationships. I wouldn’t say Terry is wrong. I wouldn’t say he’s right either. Maybe we do make sacred contracts and that all that happened between them was part of what he and Jamiel had scripted. How Terry shows up is a product of the stories and choices he’s agreed to, whether conscious or unconscious of these things— much like the rest of us.

When the relationships in our lives are deteriorating, our first priority can be to look within. In doing so, we may find answers imbedded in our early experiences that correlate to programming our young minds took on as “Truth” and that aren’t based on evidence. Once we really get to know and accept what happened and abolish *little* burdens (less than factual stories around that happening), *the Truth will set us free*. That which is True can be proven.

When we disown, alienate, judge, label, condemn, deny, dismiss, or disrespect *little* experiences, deterioration of the connection is guaranteed. This can hold true when aimed at the experiences of those we come into contact with. Maladaptive, ineffective behavior is evidence that something is not working well for us or a relationship. Misinformation, substances, and behaviors that limit our natural capabilities and what’s possible for us will not transform and transcend our current reality.

Exploring early experiences can assist us in becoming more aware of messaging underlying any reactive states of being. Such reflection can start a *little* internal riot. *Littles* may have unmet expectations. For example, those on the hunt for sympathy have been known to attack compassionate efforts. If this is the case, prepare for a tantrum, at the very least. You may want to process the questions on the page with a trusted friend or mental health professional.

- ✓ What were some of the messages you received as a child about your intelligence, ability, importance, and value?
- ✓ What influence, if any, do you think these messages have on your thoughts and behaviors today?
- ✓ Was there anything about how you were raised that you wouldn't incorporate in efforts to connect with *littles*?
- ✓ In what ways can you see that your upbringing had a positive impact on you? What skillsets did you take away that may be helpful in connecting with *littles*?

Chapter Six

Little Blind Spots

“It’s not what you look at that matters, it’s what you see.”

~Henry David Thoreau

I’ve heard it said there is nothing so blinding as the perception of form. How I translate this is that if I believe I am my name, my role, my body, etc., I won’t distinguish the essence of what I am from these things. In the world of architecture, form follows function. This essentially means purpose is the starting point for the design. With awareness of choice, willpower, a team of integrated *littles*, and imagination, Self is free to be the architect of a life well envisioned and lived.

- ✓ When was the last time you asked your Self, “what is my purpose in life?” or “how do I want to be when I grow up?”
- ✓ Are you living that vision or anything close to it?

Cognitive science has proven over and over again that the majority of humans have blind spots. We literally don’t see what we don’t pay attention to. Shame, all by itself, is major contributor to this way of being— of this not seeing. It shifts our focus. Blind spots are essentially beliefs and experiences that block out more enlightened views of how things are and what we’re capable of. *Littles* are like blind spots.

A few behaviors, conscious or not, that tend to get in the way of seeing opportunities and leaning in to possibilities are complacency, denial, and ignorance. Yes, it’s less work to continue doing whatever it is that we’ve been doing than it is to change. Failing to recognize debilitating beliefs and maladaptive behaviors when these things are no longer of service in aims of health and happiness are examples of this *less work*. For example, only socializing with those who think or act in the same or similar manner can be a matter of maintaining the status quo for *littles*.

Our blind spots can easily hurtle us into apathy for other beings. With persistence and understanding, empathy and, ultimately, compassion are possible in our relationships. Again, leaving someone you care about in a box, in a hole, covered with dirt, is not a compassionate act. *Littles* who strongly believe they are safer all boxed up and tucked away will hunker down. Neither enabling or beating up *littles* are effective interventions. Shift comes from within, a merging of heart and soul. When this merging of heart and soul happens, a stand will be taken for what matters. Here, I’m reminded of the ending of the film *The Whale* starring Brendan Fraser. I won’t give it away. I’ll just say this— unconditional love is powerful. Especially when we turn it toward *littles*.

“If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change,” Physicist Max Planck was purported to have said, although the statement is often attributed to Dr. Wayne Dyer. Excellent advice, regardless of who said it. It helps to remember that *littles* only create perceived reality, not actual reality. In other words, they create a type of truth, but not capital “T” truth. Considering different perspectives can alter perceived reality. How fabulous is it then that we live in such a diverse world!

Too often we stick to the familiar. Sometimes the familiar sticks to us. This could be a person, a job, a place, a belief, or a bodily sensation. When no longer seen as a fit, the curious and committed Self inquires as to the why of continuing to settle with unsuitable scenarios. Like when I experienced heart palpitations and couldn’t think clearly. My ability to confidently present as an adult had been adversely affected by *little* stories. Left unchecked, these stories became a limiting belief which turned into limiting behaviors. The reality was that a *little* feeling manifested as an emotion. Until I paid attention to the emotion, it affected how I showed up. I was in the dark and under the influence. I didn’t see the limiting belief until I looked for it. As we practice looking for them, limiting stories, beliefs, and behaviors are spotted. Until then, it’s like driving down the road in the pouring rain with no windshield wipers.

MEMORY

While this book was in final editing, I had a dream that I was at a conference. I had been asked to speak about this book. I gave a presentation along with a Q & A session. Speaking with a colleague afterwards, I asked what she thought of my presentation. She said it seemed to go really well but there were times where I did not speak to the timeline of my life as I had in the book. When she said this, I attempted to remember the presentation but had no memory of it. My Self was overwhelmed during the presentation, which is why I had no accurate recall of the timeline. I interpreted the dream as a reminder that how we present to others when we’re overwhelmed is not the truth of what we are. It’s just how we’re being. Memory can be distorted or nonexistent when we’re overwhelmed.

Like blind spots, memory loss can be a protective *little* strategy. As I’ve already shared, I have few memories of my childhood. This may be for the best. In some instances, memory loss may not feel advantageous— like when we actually want to remember something and find we don’t have access. It helps to think of instances such as this as feedback. Another thing to be aware of is the use of statements such as, “I forgot”, “I can’t remember”, “Before I forget”, etc. Examples of reframes are, “While I’m remembering”, “I need a moment to remember”, or “While I’m thinking of it.” Again, words are powerful.

Research investigating the impact of trauma and toxic stress to the hippocampi (where memory is stored in the brain) is ongoing. My paternal grandmother, who had Alzheimer’s disease, comes to mind for me here. There’s a growing body of evidence that links unresolved trauma with cognitive deficits in old age (such as Alzheimer’s and dementia). Early intervention may prevent long-term deficits in memory function and development of dementia in adulthood.

I testified in court, having witnessed a man abuse a horse. I took the stand across from the man. As I spoke on behalf of the horse, I felt like a deer caught in the headlights. I experienced

full on brain freeze. Not the kind from sipping a Slurpee too fast. Heart palpitations on high, I recounted what I had seen. On the street below our home, the man in question had attempted to load a horse into a transport trailer. He whipped her until she reared and fell over backwards. As soon as she got back on her feet, the whipping would continue. At one point, she fell and her head was under the trailer. The man continued to whip her. Anyone knowledgeable about the mechanics of a horse knows they can't get up if their head is pinned down.

Being somewhat acquainted with horse training, it didn't take me long to see where mistakes were being made in his technique. I called down and asked if there was anything I could do to assist. "No, she's just being stubborn," the man replied. This is when I called animal control and started to film the situation. The man was charged with abuse. The horse survived a concussion and was placed in a new home. What also assisted with the case was that I filmed the same horse being calmly loaded in a trailer just two weeks after her ordeal with no drama or trauma and in under 10 minutes.

By now, you may be asking what all this has to do with memory loss. When I testified in court, the prosecuting attorney asked me what day the incident had transpired. Not that it was detrimental to the case, but in that moment of questioning I was unable to recall (for the life of me!) that the incident had happened on my birthday. I wasn't all that old when this happened, so it wasn't a moment of senility. Not the common definition of senility anyway.

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

The term "learned helplessness," coined by Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD and Steven F. Maier, PhD., is what can happen when sentient beings are faced with prolonged aversive stimulus to the point that they stop trying to get away from it. In humans, learned helplessness has been thought to affect one's ability to control the outcome of a situation. Shame can be a prolonged aversive stimulus.

When a *little* belief exists that we're helpless or incapable, we can be made to feel or act in ways our Self would not otherwise feel or act. In other words, helplessness can be a limiting *little* belief about choice. When the belief exists that we have little or no choice in the matter of our own life, we tend to make *little* or no choice.

Learned helplessness is a blind spot, a matter of unconscious incompetence. When you have a minute and a half to spare, search YouTube for *Stuck on an Escalator*. This clip seems to mock and, at the same time, encapsulate the concept of learned helplessness. The image of being stuck on an escalator is ridiculous, and it's analogous of how many of us act at times. I see learned helplessness as diminished Self-efficacy and reduced perception of the possibility of discernment. It's the absence of agency, autonomy, instinct, and intuition.

Seligman did a bit of a recant on, at least some, of the original findings of learned helplessness theory. He claimed that neuroscience showed he and Maier's theory had it backward: control is not inherently ours, we don't learn to be helpless, we are born helpless to begin with. It's easy to see how these scientists see passivity as a default, unlearned response to prolonged aversive events. The same holds true in the case where a fetus is

stewing in stress hormones for most of a year. That baby's central nervous system is bound to be affected. The same nervous system that's attached to a major biological operating system—the brain. Unnoticed and unresolved, these energetic impacts can get built upon and manifest physically.

Littles on the fringe— especially those unclaimed— aren't only burdened by abuse and the neglect of basic needs (systemic regulation is a need), their ostracization can be maintained by preventative efforts aimed at keeping them from facing the facts of a given situation. In some instances, this can be the equivalent of pampering, smothering, and over-protecting a child to the point of developmental disruption. In IFS speak, these are the behaviors of *managers* and *firefighters*. When this is the case, agency and Self-reliance has been hindered. The promotion of a default state of helplessness and passivity will more than likely be an outcome. Coming from *littles*, these may be forms of acceptance and authenticity. Understandable, yet will not lead to independence, let alone interdependence.

There's a scene in the film *Instinct* starring Anthony Hopkins where his character opens the door to a Gorilla's cage and essentially describes learned helplessness as it relates to the Gorilla's situation. For those looking for examples how our *littles* can show up when not in sync with the nature of Self, Cuba Gooding Jr. and Maura Tierney's characters play out what's possible in relationship to life and loved ones in the realm of personal transformation.

A big difference between humans and other animals is the size of our prefrontal cortex. This is the thinking part of our brains, also known as executive functioning. This part of the human brain is currently thought to begin developing between four or five months after conception, reaching full maturity around age twenty-five. Many of us tend to forget that we are technically animals.

Consider how most animals engage in preservation. Unmolested and uninterrupted, they have the ability to respond instinctively and/or intuitively. Animals in nature are very aware of the subtlest of cues from their own species, and from those that prey on them. They stay safe and intact because of this. When they encounter situations where their bodily systems become imbalanced, they release any stressful, potentially problematic, or traumatic energy by shaking, yawning, and through other types of movement. They naturally know to do this and it isn't condemned or suppressed by the herd, pack, flock, school, etc.

The human psyche is also equipped to steer clear of potentially dangerous, stressful, and painful situations. Held captive or diminished, aspects of Self burdened, we won't necessarily do this automatically so it'll have to be intentional. Think ADHD and other attention deficit disorders here as one result of this captive, diminished, burdened state of being.

In 2009 I went to South Africa with a friend and associate for work related training. We took the time to visit an elephant sanctuary in Pilanesberg. The employee who gave us a tour told us how park rangers once attempted to manage herds by moving young elephants. Separated from the hierarchy of the natural herd environment, they began to display destructive behaviors. Some even went so far as to rape and kill rhinos in the area. It wasn't until park management introduced more mature elephants into the juvenile herd that the destruction stopped.

Brains and other bodily systems that spend too much time in disunited states of stress and survival mode, without adequate guidance, reflect where they reside. Harmony and balance are missing. The misunderstanding of where this dysregulation stems from is often where a great deal of shame gets dished out and consumed. This is partially due to our executive functioning, stories told and believed. I have seen evidence of other animals displaying postures of shame and diminished spirit. These are imposed states. They're learned and can be unlearned.

When in the clutches of shame, guilt, and stress, I'd make the case that we are born into captivity and are all too often discouraged from releasing potentially problematic or traumatic energy. In other words, the how, who, or what of us is created experientially— after, and even before, birth. These states of being determine the quality of our lives and our contribution to society. Our ability to override automated or habituated biological tendencies takes willpower. Ask any Navy Seal or neuroscientist. We don't have to try to be fearful or traumatized. For the most part, we do it unconsciously. If we want to live a life with less fear, we will acknowledge and accept where and why we live in fear, then challenge and reframe any stories that don't keep us psychologically safe. This is to consciously unlearn fear and helplessness. Some of us are born more physically and psychologically fearful and helpless than others.

Imagine, you're a fetus whose mom is being physically and emotionally abused. She believes she can't leave the relationship, and behaves in scared and helpless ways. There you float, in a soup of stress hormones. After being born, your tiny body experiences separation from all it has known in the relative "safety" of the womb. You are physically helpless and dependent, born to a mother who's being physically helpless and dependent on a father who shows up as traumatically reactive. What are the odds that your Self-efficacy won't be affected?

Imagine that your parents detest changing diapers and don't try to hide their disgust. What do you think the odds are that your immature psyche and tiny body won't eventually be impacted? Crappy pun intended. Arguably, not funny. Constipation is no laughing matter.

Flash forward five years. Your small, still relatively new, material operating system (body) hasn't yet learned to regulate emotions, let alone articulate them. How could it? The majority of the experiences it's had have consisted of judgment, rigidity, and chaos. You live in a state of dysregulation and discomfort.

Next, you're placed in a public school system with a zero-tolerance disciplinary policy toward students displaying "inappropriate" behavior. Out of frustration and lack of emotionally articulate language and skillsets, you pull another student's hair and hit them. Your teacher has thirty or more other children with varying needs, not to mention she may be dealing with her own unintegrated *little* parts. Overwhelmed central! You're sent to the principal's office. Parents called. Let's just say they're less than thrilled at being called to the principal's office. "Suspended at five years old?" they scream as they load you into the car. You can imagine what might happen next.

Tack on another ten years. Unless there's been an effective intervention, your experiences may still have your best Self stuffed in the trunk on a regular basis. Your experience has mostly been that of being in full-blown survival mode. You feel trapped and helpless. Again, why wouldn't you? Much of what you've experienced has probably been construed as personal. It

stands to reason why you may be feeling helpless, hopeless, not enough, etc. You have pretty much been dependent on a chaotic, rigid, judgmental system your entire young life.

Isn't ideal parenting and education to teach tiny humans to take charge of their own lives? If so, are we intentionally challenging and teaching them in ways they are able to see their problems as resolvable so that, by the time they're turned loose in the world, they recognize that they are capable and responsible? If not, dependencies are being created. Unless we're still dependent on such systems or neurologically impaired to the contrary, we can unlearn unhealthy relational habits and learn better ones. This is re-parenting *littles*. Based on current neuroscience, I'm going to say this optimally and cognitively happens in our mid-twenties.

I know someone who tends to ask, "what should I do?" Regardless of my response (i.e., Have you tried...? What's worked for me is... Have you read...?), this person blocks questions and resources faster than a babysitter's boyfriend when a car pulls up. The defeatist attitudes and defensive behaviors of *littles* leave Self out of the choice equation. These behaviors can also leave a *little* of whoever's being asked for help to wonder what good the exchange was and to give up on assisting the person who asked for help.

After detecting a distinct pattern in these exchanges, there was a part of me that ended up telling this person "I don't know" purely to save time and energy. I wonder now, what might have been the payoff in these exchanges? Was I playing out an old relational pattern that once belonged to a parent? If so, theirs or mine? Was it a pattern I unconsciously agreed to? Was I being reactive when I said I didn't know or did I honestly not know? What I know for sure is that I was feeling a *little* frustrated.

I've vowed that the next time this person calls for advice, I'm going to be my better Self and ask better questions such as— What have you tried? Does this remind you of anything? A similar situation, perhaps? What worked then, if anything? Discernment is needed so dependency isn't a result. Prolonged dependency creates helplessness, which can lead to hopelessness and depression. It's important to see how our own *little* behaviors, social systems, and institutions create dependencies, inadvertently or not.

On the flip side, I also know someone who recognized at the age of fifteen that she was in a familial situation that did not bode well for her. She got out by going to live with the family of a friend. This family supported her in ways that allowed her to finish school. She now lives a happy, healthy life in service to others.

I displayed some degree of learned helplessness when I was younger: the times I didn't pass on that one drink too many, say no to sex with someone I barely knew, or end a relationship because of some perceived slight. I wasn't being my best Self in such moments. Although, I was doing my best with the tools I had at the time. Awareness of choice was a tool I did not have in my tool box then. I was being lived.

It can be said that necessity is the mother of reinvention. Gratefully, I eventually recognized the need to be a parent to my *littles*. Parenting can be challenging, even if we have had the most amazing parents ever. What if we experienced the parents we have had so that we could one day become the parent we are meant to be? Of course, we don't have to have actual

children to be apparent. See what I did there? Grin. Wink. Our *little* internal family system can be considered an opportunity to be the parent we needed.

What if the experiences we have are on purpose, so that one day we choose differently? There are situations that are out of our control, such as the weather and the past. Hopefully, we learn something from both. We can reframe any restrictive or diminishing stories we have about our experiences. Some believe that how others treat us is completely out of our control. To me, this is where authentic, effective, and compassionate feedback can come in. Our ability to relate and respond to each other is what allows for this potential service. Fear and apathy get in the way of our ability to respond.

When we compassionately focus our attention on the parts of us that have unmet needs and meet those needs, learned helplessness and hopelessness will be resolved. Techniques such as Jill Bolte Taylor's Brain Huddle, and models such as Internal Family Systems (IFS) can provide assistance with this. More on the Brain Huddle in the next chapter. Resolution is ultimately up to each of us.

I say be resolutionaries! First, as individuals, then, hopefully, as a functional society. Passivity can be overcome by learning to connect to Self. Increased awareness of how and who we are being is a huge part connectivity and community. Recognizing we are much greater than our hows and whos is a huge step. It's a step into power.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

In the psychology sandbox, the term cognitive dissonance is used to describe what happens when there is a discrepancy between the reality of a situation and what is being perceived. In other words, we be conflicted! Or perhaps we just be confused? I'm not always exactly sure yet. Grin. Wink.

Cognitive dissonance is typically tied to the beliefs and values we hold and, as they pertain to *littles*, those that hold us. Someone who claims to love animals, eats meat, and is uncomfortable thinking about where that meat comes from is an example of cognitive dissonance. Another is for a spouse who believes in equality in marriage, that expects their partner to do all the house-keeping and child-rearing, and then feels guilty about their lack of involvement in these tasks.

A slightly crappy personal example of my own cognitive dissonance is thinking my dad was an asshole the time he informed me that he knew I couldn't keep a job. When I came to my senses, I felt guilty about my reaction. Obviously, no person *is* an asshole. Although, we (re)act like one when thoughtless shit comes flying out of our pie holes. Derogatory name calling is defensive, verbally abusive, and potentially be *littling*. Acting this way is a maladaptive way to release feelings of fear, anger, disappointment, pain, guilt, etc. It's *should*-ing on another. Such projections don't reduce or resolve feelings or emotions. More often, they tend to exacerbate them and further disconnect.

Objectifying my dad in such a way can be seen as cognitive dissonance because my thought was not factual or responsible. What's so was that, in that moment, my dad did not respond calmly or curiously. We were both overwhelmed. I've since chosen to reparent that *little* part of my Self. That part of me isn't gone and may still crop up every once in a great while. Nonetheless, because I pay close attention to my thoughts, I'm typically able to stave off verbal and behavioral reactivity.

When we speak in counter-productive ways, we are most likely attempting to express a feeling or emotion we don't yet have the vocabulary for. When we realize we've displayed *little* mistaken perceptions, we can make any necessary amends and choose to seek and find better words and ways of communicating. *Atlas of the Heart* by Brené Brown is one such resource for expanding one's emotive sensing and vocabulary, also known as "emodiversity."³

FREE WILL

When it comes to free will, there are those who play in the cognitive sandbox that are skeptical such a thing exists. I see awareness as a prerequisite for free will. I obviously choose to believe that it does exist. Confirmation bias? Perhaps. Free will states that we get to have our biases. The opposite of free will is determinism.

In regards to philosophy and science, and according to brittanica.com, determinism is "the thesis that all events in the universe, including human decisions and actions, are causally inevitable." To some extent, determinism is aligned with the concept of Caroline Myss' sacred contracts introduced in Chapter Three. When it comes to spiritual law, there may be truth in both theories. "All events though?" Eyebrows raised here. "Really?" I ponder, unconvinced.

In his book *Why Free Will is Real*, philosopher and political scientist Christian List states that free will requires three related capacities: "1) The capacity to consider several possibilities for action, 2) The capacity to form an intention to pursue one of those possibilities, and 3) The capacity to take action to move toward that possibility." All three give us the ability to weigh options at crucial points, to select preferred options, and to work toward them. They enable us to respond and are interconnected by possibility.

The film *The Adjustment Bureau*, starring Matt Damon and Emily Blunt, is one of my favorite films on the topic of free will versus determinism. Damon plays a politician. Blunt plays a dancer. Their characters are being managed by a group of hat and suit wearing personalities who have a map of what they believe is supposed to happen with Damon and Blunt's characters. It's also a love story. Itty bitty spoiler alert— Damon's character challenges the map.

Perhaps the debate between free will and determinism lies in the hemispheric regions of our brain. In the battle between *littles* with their perceived needs and Self. Any contradiction between the perception of a *little* and the reality of a situation creates some level of stress or

³ *The variety and relative abundance of emotions experienced. Research has found that more diverse emotional experiences, both positive and negative, may be related to better mental and physical health outcomes.*
<https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000753>

anxiety in the body. Again, this is feedback that requires a great deal of presence and understanding so that a *little* is seen for how and why it's being and believing as it does. Seeing can happen either in the moment or after some reflection. It's fair to say that when we react, we are being unconscious. Done to? Done for? When it comes to discerning who is being how in regards to *littles*, intuition is especially handy!

Which of the following terms or behaviors would you associate with someone in touch with their intuitive Self?

- goes with the flow
- contextual
- supports
- trusts
- fearless
- risk-taking
- open
- expansive
- non-verbal
- experiential
- holistic
- based in the present moment
- flexible
- available
- unconscious
- fluid

The above are all terms that have been associated with how the thinking and emotional regions of the right side of the human brain operates. Consider which of the following behaviors shame and other unresolved traumas might behaviorally manifest:

- focus on past/future
- focus on details
- win/lose
- busy
- judgmental
- compares
- analytical
- linear thinking
- rigid
- fearful
- stern
- conditional
- manipulative
- superior
- thinks in terms of right/wrong and good/bad
- selfish

- critical
- bullies
- doubtful
- cautious
- constricted

These behaviors have all been associated with how the left thinking and emotional regions of our brains tend to operate. None of these ways of being are bad or wrong. They simply are either working for us or they're not. When we're operating primarily from our left hemisphere, characteristics of our right hemisphere aren't being utilized in that moment. That's why it's important to shift gears. Self can notice the left hemi dominating and can pause and engage the right hemi. See what's happening or has happened from both perspectives.

Humans and other sentient beings have hemispheric leanings and different innate learning styles. Some are natural. Some man-made. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, also known as MI theory, comes to mind here. My own inherent learning propensities fall primarily in the intrapersonal category. I tend to think existentially. Currently, there are eight categories in MI theory. I aim to develop my interpersonal intelligence. Assisting others with increasing awareness of *littles*, Self and purpose is a means to accomplish this aim.

The story I hold now is that my personal inclination for analysis stems from being in a multitude of traumatic situations in childhood. Back then, it was a survival or coping mechanism. Lately, I've come to realize that in some of my interpersonal interactions, this tendency is counterproductive to connectivity. Some *little* ways of learning to "read the room" can lead me to not always do so.

When aware of the who and how of our beingness, we can reposition our intuitive Self as wanted or needed. We'll explore intuition a bit more in depth in the next chapter. In the meantime, here are a couple more conceptual behaviors that can also keep us in the dark, so to speak.

CHOICE AND CHANGE BLINDNESS

The concept of choice blindness is part of what's called introspection illusion. The latter is when we firmly believe that we fully understand where our emotions and thoughts come from. They're deemed valid, but not the emotions and thoughts of another. At a collaborative community meeting focused on reducing adverse childhood experiences, I asked about fifty members how many of them thought of shame as trauma. Nearly every hand in the room shot up. Next, I asked if they thought other people in our broader community thought of shame as trauma. A couple of people raised their hand. I later asked a colleague what she thought of the disparity in response to the questions I had posed to the group. She replied that she didn't think they understood the questions. *Easy enough to rectify*, was my thought. A case of introspection illusion? As in, *we in here know shame can be traumatic, but those out there don't*.

Choice blindness is the failure to notice that what's received is different than what's wanted or needed. For sure I was surprised by the results of questioning collaborative community members. Definitely not blind to the disparity in response. I neither wanted or needed a specific outcome to my inquiry. I was simply curious about the prevailing perspective.

Some *littles* don't know that it's okay to be curious and that curiosity is a choice. Self is well aware of the difference between a want and a need. Self acknowledges and can empathize with *little* wants, yet doesn't compulsively cater to them. Self aims to always meet the needs of *littles*. The question to ask your Self is "what do I value most?" Discerning what's for you and not for you is required in order to make the choices needed to conduct necessary change.

It helps to pay close attention to situations in life that seem to be the most challenging for us when it comes to making choices. Look for themes and patterns. A theme might be relating— a biggie for many of us. Patterns might look like a belief such as cheerful people annoy me or if I want something done right, I have to do it myself. Absolutely true? Unlikely.

One of my old relationally themed stories was that people who didn't use their blinker to signal a turn were inconsiderate. Communication is a theme here also. In response to that *little* story, I've found it helpful to ask, "What can I do right now that fits with how I want to show up in the world?" In other words, if my goal is to be calm and curious, "What can be done right now to bring acceptance to this experience?" Another question I ask, "Where do I want or need to be a better communicator?" This helps me be more aware of a *little* unmet need, which may turn out to be a want.

Awareness comes from attention. Attention comes from intention. We see what we pay attention to. Dan Siegel puts it this way, "The mind flows as energy and information are channeled through the process of attention."

It can be helpful to notice how much time our *littles* spend in the past. I don't mind visiting the past. I don't wish to live there. It can't be changed. That would be like trying to change the weather. It's just what's so. The only benefit I can see in venturing into the past is to pop by for a brief visit, look around, retrieve anything valuable that was left behind, then head toward the possibility of envisioning and creating a better future.

Change blindness is exactly what it sounds like, we don't visually notice change occurring. Often, because change can be very gradual. Change blindness is the fraternal twin to what some cognitive scientists call inattentional blindness. It's the result of our attention focused (or being directed) elsewhere. Magicians demonstrate this phenomenon quite well! If not at a magic show, then by who and how? Perhaps a competitive *little*? One who's being easily distracted? I can relate to both of these states of being. When I experienced inattentional blindness first-hand, it blew my mind! I got very curious indeed. My curiosity led to co-presenting on the topic of perception for two years in a row at an international conference. Specifically, on how perception can impact sessions in the field of equine-assisted learning and psychotherapy. Having our minds "blown" (regardless of how it happens) can inspire an increase in consciousness, creativity, opportunities, and intuition.

Intuition has a lot to do with the who, how, why, and what of attention being paid. If you'd like to learn more about change/inattentional blindness, check out the book *The Invisible Gorilla*

by Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons. These particular authors and cognitive scientists link this phenomenon to intuition and how deceptive they think intuition is. I doubt shame was factored into their equation. Although, their view of deception supports a world rife with *little* perceptions and distractions. Toxic shame and unresolved traumas keep us from our intuitive Self.

A friend once told me *unconsciousness is the belief that we don't have a choice*. There's some truth to this statement. Ultimately, beliefs are a choice, but only if operating at that level of awareness. That level being knowing that beliefs and choices are constructs, like everything else in this realm. Awareness and consciousness are synonymous. As we level up in this game of life, we learn to be the architects of our own lives. We believe we have a choice.

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take Arms against the Sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them: to die, to sleep
No more, and by a sleep, to say we end
the heartache, and the thousand
natural shocks that Flesh is heir to?
'Tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished.
To die to sleep,
To sleep, perchance to Dream;
Aye, there's the rub. ~ William Shakespeare

"To be or not to be?" (Self or *little* at the wheel?), Shakespeare asked his audience. Will you let a *little* feeling or emotion stuff your Self in the trunk in the attempt to avoid the "slings, arrows, heartache, and natural shocks?" Will you "take Arms against the Sea of troubles" and put a *little* who shows up to "sleep," thus relieving them of their protective stance and putting an end to "the heart ache" (a *little* burden?) Will your Self show up in ways that are calm, confident, curious, compassionate, vulnerable, courageous, and in possession of great clarity? If you choose to practice these latter states of being, I invite you to wrap arms around instead of "against" your *littles*. It's best they're told a compassionate bedtime story prior to tucking them in.

If all the world is indeed a stage and each person merely a player, how awesome is it to know, without a doubt, that we can choose our role in the production? The journey to become whole (*littles* and all) begins with understanding we are not the thoughts, feelings, sensations, or behaviors of *littles*. They are actors playing the role of directors, writers, and producers— all in the form of thoughts and behaviors. These are just happenings had. They will remain as they are until lines are rewritten and a new role accepted. Otherwise, *littles* will create scripts involving chaos, anxiety, apathy, confusion, judgment, rigidity, and irrational fearfulness that, on some level, seem reasonable. When clarity ensues, we realize that these states of being are

just what's so, until they're not. All can be considered *little* states of being and valuable feedback. We each have it in us to shift this beingness through acknowledgment, acceptance, and abolishment of *little* stories, thus relieving *littles* of their burdens and protective duty. We can change the performance and be way more playful in the process.

LIMITING BELIEFS

It's important to understand the why of our beliefs and get curious about those that keep us stuck or are not constructive. Change in perception is what leads to a different reality. This applies to limiting beliefs. We can't let go or change what we don't acknowledge and accept. Letting go entails that we not only acknowledge and accept that something isn't the best fit for us. The willingness and ability to challenge *little* stories that pertain to that something is also required. This is how they're intercepted and abolished. Otherwise, these stories will maintain the status quo—*littles* burdened and Self held hostage under the guise of protection.

I acknowledge my mom's third husband physically and sexually abused me. I accept this as fact. It's what's so. It happened. There's nothing I can do to change that fact. I can acknowledge and accept the happening of the event. I was in position, for whatever reason, to have that experience. This is the only story I have around that incident. If a part of me had held an untrue story, I would work to abolish that story and unburden that *little* of that story.

What one does with an experience after the fact matters— to them, for them and/or because of them. It may even matter to someone else. When something happens, our consciousness is raised or lowered by what happens next. Eventually, I chose to use that experience to identify similar energy and intention, such as what he presented with, and do my best to steer clear of it. In this way, I not only choose not to be burdened by the experience, I've let it go *and* it's one I won't forget. I do not condone behavior such as what he displayed *and* I've declared it not for me.

Again, when we're young and impressionable, we're dependent on whoever provides our basic needs. It's easy to believe stories we're told when we are young (burdened with?). We may rely on others for information about who we are, how we're being, and even what's true or false, good or bad, right or wrong in our environment. Disempowered? Lies we're told as children, that we're imperfect, not good enough, not worthy, or don't belong create the burden of shame. Something as subtle as a look of disgust or resentment delivered on a regular basis can be devastating to a young mind.

A blatant message such as "stop talking!" heard often enough can be interpreted by a young brain as "what I have to say doesn't matter" or "I'm only safe when I'm quiet." Children tend to internalize such statements. These then become *little* burdens. Anything agreed upon at a young age and never challenged has the ability to set up residence and become a limiting belief. This can't be stressed enough— *littles* don't have the level of discernment it takes to see that such projections don't have anything to do with them. If the person delivering such messages is someone the child depends on or looks up to, that child may incorporate that person's *little* belief into their own identity and begin to act as if that belief is true about how, who, or what they are.

Beliefs considered positive can also have negative impacts. For example, if we're told we're really smart then have an experience that runs counter to that belief, we may experience shame as a result of that internalized story. In other words, we feel less than what we are in a situation where we make a less than smart choice. This is because we over-identified with the "you're really smart" story and then failed to live up to it. The bottom line is this, when our experiences in life don't match who we believe we are, or how we think we (or things) are supposed to be, suffering is the result. When we become disheartened and depressed, we won't see what's there to see. The baby gets thrown out with the bathwater.

Humans are social animals. We're wired for belonging. It's very common when we're young to take on the projections of those we depend on for our most basic needs. It may have been that if we didn't agree with things we were told when we were young, we were punished. The perception is that it's safer to conform. As we become more mature, aware, and discerning, we recognize we have a choice in how long we're willing to let someone else or something else dictate our reality and sense of safety.

Belief, attention, and agreement are huge factors to be considered in the effort to see things differently and change circumstances that aren't working for us. Again, *littles* are very susceptible to confirmation bias. Biases come in multiple forms. For example, an information bias is when a *little* believes it's stupid, bad, or an idiot. It stands to reason that the body then acts in ways that are perceived as stupid, bad, or an idiot. Form follows function— or disfunction— in such instances. *Little* limiting beliefs, such as those just mentioned, feed shame. You could even call them self-fulfilling prophecies.

If we've forgotten what we are— spirited, loving, merciful, and fearless entities— we will be overwhelmed by helplessness and confusion, powerlessness and misperceptions. We will be blind to possibility and beholden to limiting beliefs. We will not consciously choose to change and will be controlled by the "natural shocks" that Flesh is heir to, as Shakespeare so eloquently put it. We all have it in us to dream bigger and better. Belief is a powerful thing.

Chapter Seven

Mind Over Matter

**“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.
I’ll meet you there.”**

~ Rumi

An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy. “It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil— he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good— he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you— and inside every other person, too.” The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?” The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.” This fight is for agency, authenticity and acceptance— also known as freedom.

Along the same lines as the parable above is the work of British psychiatrist and neuroimaging researcher Dr. Iain McGilchrist in his book *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. His work has to do with how brains, generally speaking, are constructed. McGilchrist has extensively studied research on split-brain patients. Aiming to reduce seizures, these patients have had the part of the brain severed which connects the two hemispheres. Studies on split-brain patients show that when someone has a right hemisphere stroke, parts of the person go missing and their world is altered in devastating ways.

What split-brain patients have demonstrated is that our two hemispheres do tend to disagree with each other. According to McGilchrist, the left hemisphere is reasonable in terms of justification and the right is more rational. The accounts of hemisphere disputes, as told by McGilchrist and others who have studied the phenomenon of split-brain patients, are absolutely fascinating. Well, okay, only if you’re into that sort of stuff. If so, his book mentioned above and *The Divided Brain* documentary based on *The Master and His Emissary* are a great place to feed your curiosity on the subject. The song “A War in Me”, by the artist Kenna, also speaks of the battle of opposing hemispheres.

DO YOU MIND?

Of course, you do. We all do. The term mindfulness is quite popular on the self-help playground these days. It reduces the effectiveness to talk about mindfulness without first agreeing on, at least, a working definition of mind. Most people use the terms mind and brain interchangeably. It’s no wonder these subjects can be so confusing.

The majority of humans know that brains are extremely complex organs that help coordinate the activities of the body. Minds can be seen as distinctly different, albeit connected. Both can be seen as mediums, channels or means— ways to express. Bodies, like two-way conduits, contributing to collective consciousness.

The working definition of mind that best resonates for me, as of now, was put together by Dr. Daniel J. Siegel and a group of his colleagues. "The mind is a self-organizing, emergent, embodied and relational process that arises from and regulates energy and information within the body we live in, between our self and other people, and with the planet." In this definition, an integral part of the mind is comprised of the relational process of energy and information flowing between and within us. These are thoughts, words, and behaviors, all backed by beliefs. Siegel's work, and others who engage in conceptually separating the mind and the brain, holds great promise for the those of us working to resolve trauma.

McGilchrist makes a similar statement about the mind in his book *The Master and His Emissary*, which speaks extensively to the paradox of the brain. He describes the betweenness of emotion:

Our feelings are not ours, any more than, as Scheler (*Max*) said, 'our thoughts are ours'. We locate them in our heads. In ourselves. But they cross into personal boundaries, as though such limits had no meaning for them. Passing back and forth from one mind to another across space time, growing and breeding but to where we do not know. What we feel arises out of what I feel for what you feel for what I feel about your feelings about me. And about other things besides. It arises from the betweenness. And in this way, feeling binds us together. And more than that, actually unite us since the feelings are shared.

I interpret the "we" he refers to as Self and "ourselves" as *littles*, whos, or hows, and his reference to *our*, *your*, and *me* as constituting the collective consciousness. His two-volume existential masterpiece, *The Matter with Things: Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World*, builds on *The Master and His Emissary* and is, what I call McGilchrist's opus. It is music to my soul. A valuable and challenging read for those wanting to explore the bigger picture of how we collectively got where we are today and aim to see the turning of the tide.

At a quantum level, everything we see around us is made up of energy and information. Defined as the strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity, the word energy has also been linked to words such as spirit, vibrancy, sparkle, and power. Chaos and rigidity are also energy and information. Siegel speaks to this, pointing out that all diagnosis in the Diagnostic Statistics Manual (DSM), used by the mental health and insurance industries, contain some degree of either chaos or rigidity. Unresolved trauma affects the mind, which in turn can affect the brain and vice versa. It may be that the majority, if not all, descriptions and labels in the DSM can be linked to unresolved trauma.

Like mind, consciousness has been equated to the internal essence that makes up mental life. To objectify or reduce what we are to individual functions or what we are, in essence, is a mistake. If we want to live big, we need to stop letting *littles* live us.

The root words that make up conscious are con=with, sci=to know, and ous=full of. We can be conscious or unconscious of many things. When we're talking about awareness, we're also talking about being conscious. And, as with consciousness, there are multiple levels of being aware. What are we being aware of? How are we thinking about whoever, however, or whatever this is? What can we say, without a doubt, is absolutely true in regards to who, how, and what? Recognizing our whos, hows, and what *is* being conscious— *with, to know, full of.*

In the game of life, leveling up requires intention, attention, commitment, and action. Being conscious is a tall order. When we're fully aware of our thoughts, words, and actions, only then can we choose to make adjustments regarding how we show up— the how, who, or what we are acting like. Once again, thoughts, words, and actions are just things. Self is *no* thing. With Self leading team *little*, skills are developed, capacities increased, and connections made.

There are many ways of being in this world. We all start out unconsciously incompetent in many regards. We don't know what we don't know. Very early examples of not knowing any better include our inability to get our own food, clean up after ourselves, walk and talk. We simply do not yet have the skillsets to do these things. We don't even know we're capable of doing these things one day. Next, we can experience being consciously incompetent. We know we don't know. This is where we start to realize there are things we aren't doing optimally yet, such as using the toilet consistently, figuring out what's safe to draw on, and how not to annoy the family dog to the extent we get bitten. Conscious incompetence can be frustrating and painful!

If we survive potty training, "inappropriate" artistic expression, and being bitten, we can enter conscious competence. We now know what we know. We seldom soil ourselves (incontinence due to advanced age excluded here.) We understand that drawing on walls may get us in trouble with some people, and also know how to treat a dog so we don't get chomped on. Ultimately, we can become unconsciously competent. We don't even have to think about what we know. Things like walking, riding a bike, and driving a car become second nature.

Some survivors of trauma have to practice basic biological unconscious competencies, such as breathing naturally and relaxing our bodies. We have to unlearn habitual ways of being that relate to traumatic experiences and learn healthier ways of being. If not, we experience undue stress and can be unconsciously competent at behaviors and substance use that aren't a recipe for well-being, joy, and freedom. Unlearning and learning require a growth mindset.

As we go through life, the majority of us experience both growth mindsets and fixed mindsets. A growth mindset can be seen as belonging to Self, as this mindset displays some of the characteristics of Self as described by the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model. A growth mindset displays many of the behaviors of the right hemisphere shared in the last chapter.

Fixed mindsets can be seen as primarily belonging to the *little* parts of us that are afraid, have been hurt, struggle to trust Self and others, and hold limiting beliefs about what's possible. The fabulous news is that our brains aren't fixed. They are plastic, in a way. In other words, characteristics can be reworked, rewired, or reshaped. This is called neuroplasticity. The book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck speaks to this. There are also coaching books aimed at encouraging growth mindsets.

A fixed mindset will, more often than not, contribute to a fixed mindset. I served as a CASA (court appointed special advocate) for seven years working with children who had experienced severe abuse and neglect. CASA is a non-profit organization that works with the judicial system. In one case, a guardian of one of the children I advocated for was inclined to believe that the child would never be more intelligent, that the IQ of this child was set. The belief that this child's mental abilities were fixed was not benefiting them individually or how they related to each other. As an advocate for this child, I worked to shift the guardian's thinking on brain development. IQs are not necessarily depictive of what's possible in terms of capability.

The mind can be thought of as the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think; the faculty of consciousness and thought, intellect, and attention. For all you "Trekkies" out there, imagine if Captain Kirk and Spock were able to co-create a baby. The best of both worlds would be if this human had an emotional life, yet was able to preside over that life in such a way so as to not be depleted energetically. This is entirely possible! Well, not the part about men co-creating babies. Mindfulness can be considered a mental state achieved by focusing our awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and compassionately accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, before they take us over.

HEAD GAMES

McGilchrist speaks to the division of the right and left hemispheres and how they engage with the world. The left hemisphere is primarily where language exists, although the right one can take this activity on, if needed. The left one doesn't know what it doesn't know. Unconscious incompetence? It's more focused on details. It sees things in black or white. It puts people in categories. The left also tends to block out and disregard the right. It tends to be oppositional. The right sees the big picture and is capable of compassion. It understands uniqueness and that we're always changing.

An important idea that McGilchrist emphasizes is that we need both hemispheres, and that what we have currently, collectively created on this planet is more depictive of the left hemisphere. He claims that, as a species, we are neurologically operating out of balance with nature. I couldn't agree more with him.

While reading *The Master and His Emissary* and *The Matter with Things*, I was reminded of dualistic myths/stories in our society pertaining to concepts such as Satan/God, Hell/Heaven, Bad/Good, Ego/Nature, as well as the theory of fragmentation. I wondered, where do *littles* that tend to throw us off course typically hang out in a brain? I then discovered an interview that neuroanatomist and author Jill Bolte Taylor did on Mindvalley Talks via YouTube titled "How to harness your brain's 4 characters to live peacefully and intentionally." She was promoting her book *Whole Brain Living: The Anatomy of Choice and the Four Characters that Drive Our Life*. I immediately bought the book. Lo and behold, there was Taylor's perspective on my wonderings about where *littles* tend to hang out in the brain. How fun is that? It appears to me that they lean left. Please don't confuse this with political leanings. That would be an overwhelming *little* mistake.

Littles that take on a seemingly negative stance seem to reside in the left hemisphere (hemi). Those in the right hemi yield a more positive attitude. Like McGilchrist, Taylor advocates both sides of the brain be seen as valuable. In *Whole Brain Living*, she invites a technique she calls a Brain Huddle. I see this as one method to use in the process of integrating *littles*.

1. Get to know the characters of your brain (thoughts/emotions/behaviors/characteristics).
2. Give them each a name (if they don't have one). Please be kind.
3. When needed, invite these *little* parts (by name) to do a check in.

Our experiences, as McGilchrist explains, can be perceived through one hemi, then be sent over to the other hemi for further consideration. Both of which contain emotional and thinking quadrants. We run into trouble when a thought or emotion gets stuck in the left hemi and doesn't get back to the right hemi for final consideration. Self-presence guides this process. Captain of the team in the house!

According to Taylor, left hemi thinking characters tend to show up as analytical, verbal, judgmental, concise, and busy. Left emotional (emo) hemi characters can show up as rigid, superior, fear-based, righteous, manipulative, critical, and dualistic. Right hemi characters, on the other hand, are the opposite. Their thinking leans toward nonverbal, compassionate, seeks similarities, is flexible, resilient, and open to possibilities. Emotionally speaking, right hemi characters are kind, fearless, unconditionally loving, grateful, creative, and supportive. These are just a handful of examples as to how these hemispheric characteristics can present.

I keep the names of my *little* characters simple for my Self. I call behaviors stemming from my left thinking hemi Pamela. Those from my left emo hemi I named Pampers, the youngest of my parts. Characteristics from my right thinking hemi come from Pam. This part works closely with Pamela. I call characteristics from my right emo hemi Pammy. This character is a lot of fun, although doesn't always "read the room"—think Tigger from the *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories.

Imagine the conversations and recognition potential Self can have with *littles* and other loved ones using a dialog process, along with chosen names created for reference. Talk about getting inside one's head and the possibility of being more supportive!

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE... OR FEEL?

Again, *little* protectors tend to live primarily in the left hemisphere. Most left hemi characteristics would not fall under the heading of intuitive, or indicators of best Self. They can be seen as instinctive when originating from the more primitive regions of the brain—specifically, the amygdala. It's best not to discount any *littles*. They hold value, even if the thoughts and behaviors they display aren't ideal or effective when it comes to connectivity. Keep in mind, they once played an important role and don't know they're part of something greater—your Self. When they believe this, they will show up differently. They'll be less burdened and feel better.

When Self isn't present, a question such as "How does that make you feel?" may land at a very primal level in the brain (left emo hemi). Anyone asking this question may, intentionally or

not, be inviting a *little* to hop behind the wheel. I knew someone who would sarcastically react to this question this way, "With my hands." A *little* funny. Also, avoidant/stonewalling. Some may react to this question with anger. Remember, such reactions are not wrong or bad. When "out of our mind" we're simply more prone to fight, flight, or freeze behaviors and won't create the results actually yearned for. Even if they appear as defensive, deep down, *littles* long for connection, freedom, joy, etc.

I've heard the words faint and fawn tacked on to the better-known F-word trio of fight, flight, or freeze; all of which may actually be responsible behaviors, depending on the situation. Fainting can be seen as a form of freezing. It's what prey often do when they're caught by a predator. Akin to faint, fawn is essentially the act of giving in, compromising, or accommodating. Again, any of these acts may be situationally appropriate.

I once attempted to convince a baby cottontail rabbit to play dead the day my pup caught it. He was joyfully tossing it up in the air. *All you have to do is pass out and he'll leave you alone*, I thought, as I attempted (miserably) to intervene on the rabbit's behalf. Eventually, it stopped struggling. It turned out that I needed to be far more interesting than a squirming bunny! Once the pup and I left the vicinity the little cutie hopped away— hopefully without too much damage and a valuable lesson learned. Freezing, for at least a minute or so, can be a valuable practice when we're caught up in energy in motion.

Even though there's a *little* part of me that's asking how many bloody F-words does one neurological concept need, I propose the word Feel be added to the original F- word trio. Here, I'm using the word Feel in place of intuition. I see intuition as a type of resonance— Self's inborn, natural, undomesticated ability to know, deep down. I don't see intuition as a thought or an emotion. It isn't a story or sensation. Feel is unconscious competence. It's our inherent ability to read between the lines, so to speak. It's what allows us to hear the unsaid and see the unseen. A common definition of intuition is the ability to make successful decisions without rational, analytical thought or inference. We'll dive deeper into intuition more in the next section.

The point I'm attempting to make here is that Feel is also a part of the bodily system. It stems from the mind as a primary aspect of Self. It's our natural ability to discern. Fight, flight, and freeze are lower-level instincts. Feel can be considered a higher-level instinct— higher than thought.

Increasing our Feel/intuition is a way for Self to show up more fully. Again, I am distinguishing the term Feel from *little* feelings/stories and emotions/bodily sensations. I believe Feel is an innate skill the majority of us unlearn during the domestication or socialization process we experience. As I grow through life, I aim to feel less in terms of any *little* stories that keep me stuck, to immediately recognize these emotions/bodily sensations, and to Feel more deeply in regards to intuition and compassion.

The morning after I wrote this section on intuition, my pup began furiously barking at 5:30 AM. It was pitch dark out. I live in the country and couldn't throw a rock at my nearest neighbor if I tried. Naturally, I was curious about the bark. He just turned a year old and doesn't bark a whole lot yet. I'm still working to understand what he's trying to tell me at this

stage in our relationship— especially after being jarred out of a deep sleep! I remained in bed and called him over to me. He trotted over to my bedside, quieted down, but was tense.

Next, I heard the beep-beep of a car being locked or unlocked. Pup goes ballistic! Up I hop and pup and I head to the front door. Through the ornate glass panel, I see a car in the driveway with its headlights on. Next to the driver's side door stood a man with his hands in his pockets. I turned on the porch light, quieted the pup, opened the door and asked the man if I could help him. He very apologetically said he was lost and supposed to be picking up a friend. He apologized again, got in his car, and drove away.

Here's what I didn't experience between waking up, turning on the light, opening the door and making that inquiry— fear. No bodily sensations or story were created. *Little*s are like a lost friend waiting in the dark for a light to come on and a fearless question to be asked. Without my intuitive Self, I would have been overcome by fear in that moment and would not have opened the door.

Of course, thinking is one on-ramp to the state of Self-actualization, a fancy way of saying the achievement of our full potential. Philosophy can be seen as a means to that end. Something philosopher and author Simon Blackburn wrote in his book *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* has stuck with me: "How you think about what you are doing affects how you do it, or whether you do it at all." I had this statement taped to an elliptical machine I once owned. I had a *little* story about being averse to using it. Notice, I said *once owned*. Yep, I did choose to give it away. Then, I was gifted a treadmill. I can take a hint. Glad my body isn't what I am. However, if I don't take care of the vehicle (body) my Self is involved with, I may not achieve my full potential— my purpose here on earth.

Blackburn also wrote, "To process thoughts well is a matter of being able to avoid confusion, detect ambiguities, keep things in mind one at a time, make reliable arguments, become aware of alternatives, and so on." The premise here is this: in order to do the things that help keep our integration process moving forward so that we can live a meaningful life, it's important to challenge (and possibly change) the way we think about what we need to do in order to actually live the life we're meant to live.

Our two brain hemispheres are thought to primarily operate the opposite sides of the body. So, on one hand, overthinking can get in the way of intuition in the moment. On the other, thinking can be very valuable. How much we think depends on where we are in the process of developing intuition.

There's a fun scene in the movie *Top Gun: Maverick*. Spoiler alert? Bradley, played by Miles Teller, goes back into the war zone to find Maverick. Both men are now on the ground. Maverick screams at Bradley, "What were you thinking?!" Bradley screams back, "You told me not to think!" As the flight training instructor, Maverick had been working to increase his student's intuition. In that moment, in that scene, it appears ol' Mav had a *little* momentary lapse of insight. For a split second, hemi-spherically speaking, he was leaning to the left.

INTUITION (aka. FEEL)

A big part of many cultures nowadays, especially here in the United States, is reliance on “experts.” Excessive dependence on the opinions of others can interfere with Self knowing and, thus, decrease intuition. Of course, there are times when external influences can be useful, and a lot of folks make their living as experts. However, once I get my Self and *littles* in order, no one is more of an expert on what’s needed for me than I am.

Take sleep for example. According to the National Sleep Foundation experts, adults are at their best if they get 7-9 hours of sleep a day. This may not be factual information for everybody. Generalizing, for sure. When more Self-aware, we’re quite capable of realizing when we’re operating optimally or not. The evidence is all there: clarity, energy level, ability to concentrate, etc. When not as Self-aware we may strive to get 7-9 hours of sleep, such as what someone else recommends. We may even feel like there’s something wrong with us if we don’t— as in we “should” be getting more sleep. Overly dependent *littles* will even go so far as to drug the body, all because there’s some level of agreement that 7-9 hours of sleep is recommended, even if there’s evidence that amount of sleep is not necessary.

Interestingly enough, the National Sleep Foundation receives support from the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). You know, the agency that dictates what’s legal and what’s not, what’s “safe” and what’s “not safe.” Ironically, the FDA permits alcohol and cigarettes, along with a plethora of pharmaceuticals involving less than healthy potential side effects. What might be the consequences of taking sleep medication? How might those drugs affect other areas of your body and life? If you’re convinced you “should” get 7-9 hours of sleep then discover 4-6 hours is optimal for you, what might you do with that extra 3 plus hours each day? You may choose to take the time to figure out why you’re not sleeping well in the first place, connect with any worried or stressed *littles*, or further your Self-purpose. It’s possible to break free from the perceived physical “needs” and opinions of others in order to connect with Self and fulfill purpose. We don’t have to let the FDA or anyone else determine how much sleep we need, or anything else for that matter.

Some of us Feel compelled to get up in the wee hours of the morning. We may do well on far less sleep. We may even find it energizing or rejuvenating. I know someone who obtained two doctoral degrees when he was fairly young, one as a medical doctor and the other as a psychiatrist. He gets about an hour of sleep each night. He’s one of the most brilliant, intuitive, highly functioning people I know. What works for him is he meditates, eats well, and engages in activities that energize him. If whatever you’re doing works for you, keep doing it, by all means!

Look at the phenom Wim Hof (aka, The Iceman— not to be confused with the serial killer.) Besides holding a previous Guinness World Record for swimming under ice and prolonged full body contact with ice, Hof holds a record for a barefoot half marathon on ice and snow. He has also climbed Mount Everest to an altitude of 24,300 feet wearing nothing but shorts and shoes. I believe we can, more often than not, defy the majority of current understanding of what’s possible psychologically and biologically for the human body, regardless of whatever adverse climates we find our Selves in.

Another definition of intuition, thanks again to Wikipedia, is “the ability to acquire knowledge, without recourse to conscious reasoning.” Right now, you may be thinking something like, *but, Pam, you’ve been encouraging us to become conscious of our thoughts throughout this entire book, now you’re suggesting that we don’t think?* If so, please allow me to reduce the size of your *but*. Grin. Wink. Conscious reasoning (thinking/analyzing) are key words in the definition above. When justification is coming from *littles*, that’s being reasonable. Again, intuition can be seen as unconscious competence. Intuition can appear as being unreasonable or irrational. This is not something the majority of us are comfortable being.

An example of being aware of the difference happened while writing this section. I love it when this happens. I’ve found phone texts can be very “shiny objects” to one of my more distractable *littles*, especially while I’ve been working on this book. I had listed a car for sale. Very soon afterwards, I received a text from someone who claimed to be interested in purchasing it. The text read, I have cash in hand, willing to meet you tomorrow. Next, he texted asking me to send him a vehicle report. He was even “sweet” enough to send me the website address where I could pay to get the report. Um, red flag #1. I politely told him I wasn’t inclined to spend the money to get the report. He tried to text me into it; it’s only fair considering how much money you’re asking for the car. Red flag #2. His defensive, manipulative attitude clued me in further. I knew intuitively this supposed buyer wasn’t legit. Then, conscious reasoning set in. I Googled VIN scams. Yep, they’re a thing. Yay for intuition, curiosity, and post-conscious reasoning validation while I continue reclaiming my unconscious competence! Thanks for the prompt *little* Pamela. Was he an employee of the VIN report company or a scammer? As an example of how a reasoning or rational *little* can be repurposed, validation can be part of the evolution of increasing intuition and developing trust in Self. It’s best not to become dependent on such perceived needs for validation though.

Reasoning has been defined as the action of thinking about something in a logical, sensible way. Pamela, the *little* part of me with the burden of proof, also wanted to verify the knowingness of that situation. Google came in handy for this. My Self didn’t honestly need the October 25, 2018 ABC Action News report on VIN scams as validating my unthinking knowing. Pamela did though. I chose to respect and accommodate that, as I’m still working to increase trust with that *little* part of me. Neither does my Self need to know if that text came from an employee of an internet company that makes money running VIN reports. I knew the person on the other end of that text was not honestly interested in purchasing my car. The initial knowing was intuition, albeit with a *little* dependency attached. No worries. *Littles* get confused. When aware of an unmet *little* need or, in this case, a want, the choice to engage that *little* part in conscious reasoning may be part of the integration process. Trust your own process and be open to the outcome. Being respectful of a *little* part creates more trust in Self.

Albert Einstein is known to have said, “The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.” One interpretation of this is that we have two completely different built-in operating systems, two opposing ways of looking at the world, as with the Native American story of the two wolves, Kenna’s song *War in Me*, and what’s being unveiled through the work of those such as McGilchrist and Taylor. Einstein was inviting us to claim the gift. Dishonoring the servant in the process is counterproductive.

Circling back to the tale of two wolves, one wolf is described as analogous to ego. Ego has a problematic connotation. Ego is often perceived like it's the enemy of the state. Arguably, the enemy of the state of being the best Self we can be. The bottom line is that if we want to live balanced, connected, healthy lives in a balanced, connected, healthy world, we have to make friends with our *littles* and invite them to play different roles for us. If we vilify or demonize them, that would be shaming or inviting guilt— both low energetic vibrations.

My *little* Pamela is an extremely strategic thinker. Also, very analytical and somewhat competitive. Pamela was very helpful and protective in those roles when I was young and dependent. I now understand how this *little* doesn't always serve my current aspirations. We converse quite a bit. This part of me protects Pampers, my *little* left emo hemi character who took on a not enough belief— the same *little*, who, according to my dad, "couldn't keep a job."

A friend of mine once told me I suffer from the curse of knowledge. I laughed when she told me this. There was some truth in what she said, although, at the time, I didn't see the suffering. Reflecting on that conversation and the context, I was able to see where I was still being a *little* in want of significance. Pamela and Pampers were in cahoots. Being in want can constitute a less than or scarcity mentality. Both are forms of suffering. They're burdensome. Though my friend didn't specifically say it, it's possible she intuitively recognized my *little* wanting to be perceived as relevant and intelligent.

Now, when I spot this behavior, I do a check in. I say something like, "Thank you Pamela. I appreciate you and all you've done for Pampers and I in the past. You worked hard to be smarter than the people that said and did harmful things when we were young and dependent. Right now, all that thinking is getting in the way of some important aims I have. I'll call you if I need you. Rest easy now, as I aim to increase my intuition level and not come off as trying to be better than anyone else. Stay tuned. Wonder-full experiences await us! Thank you again. I love you." This is another example of integrative talk. What helps significantly is that I am truly grateful to these *little* parts of me.

Jill Bolte Taylor has wondered (out loud) what the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator would have looked like if it had addressed all thinking and feeling regions of the brain. That would indeed be something to see! For those familiar with the Myers-Briggs, can you say alphabet soup? It is possible for Self and *littles* become acquainted through personal assessment, although the outcomes of such assessments depend on how Self and self-aware we are.

The Myers-Briggs is one of dozens of personality quizzes. The thing is, *little* parts that aim to protect or fear to be seen can take over the process. This can look like being critical, over-thinking, dishonesty, etc. It's best to be in a calm, curious state of mind when taking such assessments. This will pave the way to glean insights into how *littles* relate to Self.

I tend to rely on themes and patterns in real life experiences, as well as honest, constructive feedback to assist in discerning where I'm at with character development. I've found Taylor's compilation of left and right quadrant emotional and thinking characteristics included in *Whole Brain Living* quite useful. Imagine, selecting which *little* characters your Self would like to invite to be on an Internal Integration Advisory Council aimed at increasing Self-efficacy and agency.

Again, the confusion, chaos, and disconnection many of us feel is not surprising given our cultural norms, societal expectations, shared history, neurological and biological makeup. Best to outwit (better yet, to intuit) any historic (or prehistoric) tendencies so we don't end up unintentionally clubbing each other to death with inordinate amounts of rationality and absolute reasonable certainty.

Chapter Eight

Be Cause. We Can!

**“When we increase our tolerance of experiential intensity,
we decrease our impulse to escape from the immediate truth of our experience.
We begin to dissolve neurotic organization.”**

~Bruce Tift, *Already Free*

Alan Alda said, “You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your situation. What you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover is yourself.” I’m not convinced we “have” to do anything in this world except vacate the premises at some point. Physical form is the premises. Everything else we do here is a choice. If we see cause as “a person or thing that gives rise to an action, phenomenon, or condition,” we can *be cause* in our own life. We can choose to create a better reality.

Free will is a spiritual law. Another spiritual law appears to be the law of confusion. This is where our *littles* come in. Their burdens muddy the water so to speak, so that we forget what we really are and what’s possible. Simply the act of being born may constitute enough trauma for some to forget what they are and why they’re here. Such confusion may relate to a concept such as Caroline Myss’ sacred contracts, in that whatever agreements were made prior to entering this life will be forgotten.

Life’s a bit like playing poker. Cards can be seen love, dislike, limitation, unhappiness, pleasure, etc. Imagine if you knew your hand and everyone else’s. What would be the point in playing? The championship game we can each play is to acknowledge our *littles*, accept the role being played as maladaptive, and abolish their burdens. We don’t have to fold if we get dealt a crappy hand. Play the response card. It will always trump a react card. Have an A.C.E. in the whole (spelled intentionally with a w).

A: Aware of any *little* fragmented parts that would best serve Self with a new job description.

C: Compassionate toward *littles*, Self, and other sentient beings.

E: Evolving always! Keep *littles* close to your heart and focused on doing their best better and better best in order to be your best Self. This is a process.

Aware, compassionate, and evolving are cards in the deck that can be played at any time. Having this A.C.E. in the whole is your best bet when it comes to trumping those Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) dealt when young. It will always pay off to identify *littles* and lovingly challenge limiting beliefs, such as “I/they can’t,” “it will never work,” “it is what it is,” or

“this is just who I am/they are.” The card *littles* play most often, introduced in Chapter Two, is projection. Watch closely for it. It’s a definite tell.

When aware the projection card’s been played, consider asking your Self in a quiet moment, while contemplating whatever was projected, “Is it true? Can I absolutely believe it’s true? Who how, or what would I be without this thought?” Questions such as this are posed by practitioners trained to do what’s called The Work, a process created by Byron Katie. The Work is designed to explore stories, many of which turn out to be *little* projections. There’s a free hotline available (at the time of this writing) for those interested in the process at instituteforthework.com. The Work is beneficial conflict. It’s a way to mind our own business and discern fact over fiction.

Another inside-out methodology called The Diamond Approach, developed by A.H. Almaas, also aims to increase Self-efficacy. Described as inviting us *to discover our inner love of truth solely for its own sake*, and simply needing *a sincere desire to know what is true* in regards to one’s self. The teaching uses *instinct or belief of who one is* to describe what I call *littles* and IFS calls *parts*. Where my language may deviate from Almaas’ is in use of the term Self. This may be a matter of definition. He and I both describe what we are by using verbiage such as soul, essence, and spirit. The Self I speak of knows all experiences are useful and contribute to that which is greater. From what I can ascertain, that which I call *littles*, The Diamond Approach terms as *psychological and related barriers* and describes these barriers as consisting *primarily of fixed beliefs about oneself and reality in general, deeply held attitudes and inner positions, and compulsive patterns of reactivity and behavior*. I agree whole heartedly with Almaas that *these inner attitude, positions, and assumptions reduce awareness of oneself, limit understanding of what’s possible and impede the natural unfoldment of one’s potential*.

Whichever developmental insight methodology you choose, it’s best that it challenges any limiting beliefs holding you down and any rules holding you back from a life well-lived and loved.

NEEDS AND WANTS

Beneath every *little* behavior there is a *little* feeling/story, and beneath every *little* feeling/story lies the perception of an unmet need. *Littles* have actual needs— to be responded to, unburdened, and integrated. Due to their arrested development, it’s common that what they perceive as needs are, in reality, wants. What hasn’t been grieved? Is there an unmet expectation? Is it related to the perceived loss of someone or something? A relationship? A job? Health? A treasured object?

We suffer when we pursue something that doesn’t belong to us or isn’t meant for us. This is an indication that we have been led astray. We know we are on our path when we refuse to compromise Self. Things and experiences are either for Self or not for Self. When we’re present and using discernment, the perceived “needs” of *littles* (our own or someone else’s) won’t impact our well-being. Wants can certainly be acknowledged, accepted, and even catered to— as Self chooses.

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, humans come equipped with a hierarchy of needs. The first level of needs to be met for our survival are physiological. These are physical requirements. Our bodies cannot function properly and will ultimately fail if these are not met. These basic needs are air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. Clothing may be debatable for some. Here's hoping those folks have shelter as needed!

SAFETY

When it comes to integrating *littles*, safety first! Again, perception creates reality and safety is a matter of perception. Safety can extend to well-being in terms of personal, financial, health, love, and belonging.

If we have a history of violence, whether verbal, emotional, sexual, or physical, we will re-experience some degree of stress if part of us is still burdened by what happened. This is called Post Traumatic Stress (PTS). Stress (or distress), such as what's experienced with unresolved trauma, does not correlate with a sense of safety.

To acknowledge and accept *littles* while working to decrease maladaptive behaviors requires characteristics and capacities of Self.⁴ Outside support can help with the development of these characteristics and capacities. Of course, not all therapists have the same education. The same holds true for coaches, counselors, and the like. To expect that any one assistant would operate with all characteristics and capacities of Self as described by the IFS model would be an unrealistic expectation. Unburdening or unlearning *littles* while attempting to focus on developing *all* of the characteristics and capacities of Self alone may not be realistic either. I'm not saying it's impossible though.

Character development hinges on awareness, intention, and attention. The burdens that *littles* carry are the extreme beliefs and emotions that drive us. These beliefs and emotions, once adaptive, are now maladaptive. We can focus on evolving one or two characteristics or capacities at a time until we display them consistently in a variety of settings. If enlisting aid, prioritize the characteristics and capacities aimed for and look for someone that displays them.

If we have yet to transcend shame it will be felt somehow, as a reminder. For example, the use of the word *should* in the form of judgment was once a bit of a trigger for me (i.e., "You should know better Pam!"). When I'd hear this, a *little* part of me would feel defensive. My eyes would narrow and my jaw would clench. Depending on the situation, those indicators once would have been built on with some semblance of fight, flight or flee. I may have been verbally defensive or mentally objectified the person. Terminating the relationship might have been another emotional reaction. These ways of being were not wrong or bad. They weren't effective either. Overwhelmed and Self not fully present are a more apropos description of my state of mind in such moments.

The practice of staying present allows for discernment of intention and connection to the moment we're in, instead of living a *little's* past or imagined future fear. It's only in remaining

⁴ These can be reviewed in Chapter Two under the heading FRAGMENTATION.

present that we “increase our tolerance of experiential intensity.” We remain in the position of choice. When we see someone’s comment as a projection, we can choose to have a more effective and productive conversation with them— beneficial conflict, if you will.

When the setting is optimal, extending an invitation to see a projection as the unmet want, need, or opinion of a *little* can be a game changer in a relationship. This works well if both parties are willing and equipped to participate at this level. If not, the conversation will be tricky. Psychological safety is a foundational component. It creates trust, a vital element and an interesting topic. *Littles* can learn to trust what is safe. They just don’t know what’s best. A hot stove will always burn. The same holds true in our interactions with each other when violence (verbal or non-verbal) is part of the equation. When *littles* feel they deserve to be punished, they’ll prompt touching the stove.

It can be hard to fathom why a physically grown person would seemingly choose to remain in an unsafe situation or relationship. Those overwhelmed by the burdens of *littles* only appear to be freely choosing similar environments as those experienced in youth. It’s not uncommon for *littles* to remain in or return to familiar environments. Those who do are often judged and shamed. We can make much better sense of such situations. There’s no magic wand that creates unburdening and unlearning at a certain age. There’s experiential learning and unlearning. Experiential growth is non-linear. When trauma-informed, we see situations such as these developmentally instead of chronologically.

The term *psychological safety* was shared (maybe coined?) by Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis in their 1965 book *Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods: The Laboratory Approach*. They defined psychological safety as a climate “which encourages provisional tries and which tolerates failure without retaliation, renunciation, or guilt.” Amy Edmondson, a professor of leadership and management at Harvard Business School, has more recently put it this way, “a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.” Minding our own business would look like putting psychological safety into practice for our *littles*. After which, we can better assist those we’re in relationship with in minding their own *littles*, without being intrusive. The when and how of our approach is significant in regards to intrusion.

For those with unresolved shame, punishment or humiliation can be the (seemingly innocuous) expression on someone’s face. *Littles* experiencing shame will employ adaptive strategies for coping with any anxiety associated with what they perceive as a psychologically unsafe experience, environment, or unsettling event. Psychologist Gershen Kaufman calls these “shame spirals.” Being shameless better allows for the experience of psychological safety. Shameless environments also help create psychological safety, thereby reducing stress.

Psychologist Richard Lazarus defines psychological stress as a “...particular relationship between the person and environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her wellbeing.” The stress that comes from feeling unsafe ultimately stems from fear, of course. A common manifestation of *littles*. Fear is a blessing and a curse. It helps keep us physically safe and can make us show up as psychologically unsafe.

When it comes to reacting in fear, behaviors can take the form of freeze or flight—silence/shutting down, placating, inauthentic accommodating (also known as fawn), etc. Fight behaviors might look like substance abuse, self-mutilation, suicide, murder, and war. It's not hard to understand why in organisms and organizations lacking psychological safety, some with unresolved trauma "go postal." Psychologically unsafe environments foster passive-aggressive behavior. Civilization would be substantially improved if all K-12 education systems focused as much on social and emotional learning as they do on math and science.

I first experienced the benefit of consciously releasing a *little* emotion in a yoga class not all that long ago. The instructor and I were the only two people in the room. As I got into the pigeon pose, I began to sob. Snot and tears were in mass abundance! The instructor was so calm and compassionate that I leaked on and continued to sink deeper into the pose, fully aware that a trapped emotion was being set free. I had done this pose in class before a handful of times. As the only student in the room, it appeared my body was receptive—the perfect pose and in the presence of a safe person. Uncomfortable, awkward position, snot, tears, and all— WHAT A GIFT!

Human needs are the third level of Maslow's pyramid to Self-actualization. This includes the feeling of belonging. Not being fully connected to Self adversely affects our ability to form and maintain significant relationships when *littles* don't feel like they fit in. All social, sentient beings need to experience true belonging and acceptance in their tribe, group, herd, pack, etc. This need for belonging can override physiological and safety needs, as witnessed in children who cling to abusive parents and those who remain in domestic violence situations.

Discerning what's wanted from what's actually needed can increase both physical safety and psychological safety. This in turn increases both self-respect and Self-respect, as well as trust. With trust and respect comes integration. With integration comes increased resilience. All the Cs and Ps the IFS model uses to describe Self are prerequisites for full integration. We certainly don't have to practice them all at once. Time-in and time-out are both options. Self chooses. Self creates psychologically safe environment for *littles*. The image of Russian dolls comes to mind here. Self being the largest of the dolls, of course, and able to hold all the smaller ones.

RESPECT

Maslow suggests we all have a need to feel respected. I've taken the liberty to put the topic of respect (per Maslow) into context to continue making the case for recognition of *littles* and Self. Respect for *littles* is key to integration. Our level of awareness as to how and why our bodies show up in the ways they do verses what we really are, in essence, plays a huge part in respectability. Expecting those we come into contact with to respect us when we're unaware or in denial of the maladaptive behaviors of our *littles* won't get this need met. Each *little* acknowledged, accepted, and burden abolished increases responsibility. To know, claim, and transform any thoughts and behaviors that don't ultimately serve us paves the way to show up with those that do. What we engage in on a regular basis creates our quality of life.

Diminished Self-recognition stemming from absence of *little*/self-recognition equates to low *little*/self-esteem. Partly, this comes from not seeing the value in our experiences. *Littles* don't

know to look for evolutionary meaning. Low *little*/self-esteem can show up as pursuits for glory and control. Behaviors such as attention seeking, over-talking, demanding respect, etc. are examples. Fame and fortune are outside-in attempts that won't build authentic Self-esteem because *littles* are at the wheel.

Maslow identified two types of esteem, a "lower" version and a "higher" one. Emotional behaviors such as anxiety, depression, checking out (over indulging in television, computers, food, mind-altering substances, etc.) hinder us from obtaining higher levels of esteem and respect. Beliefs and behaviors of *littles* are often regarded as lower. When recognized and unburdened *littles* contribute to higher Self-esteem. As self and Self-esteem increases, what those around us say and do doesn't *have* to impact us in detrimental ways. We become more independent and can head toward interdependence. When higher needs aren't met, we can experience inferiority, weakness, and helplessness. The recognition and unburdening of *littles* is a prerequisite for Self-actualization.

Regarding Self-actualization, Maslow writes "what a man can be, he must be." Determine what we want and don't want, need and don't need. What do we value? What really matters to us? This level of discernment will require risk and may involve fear. Huddle with that fear. Clarity is essential. To be "what a man can be" might mean letting go of something or someone familiar that no longer supports our betterment and how we want to show up in the world. For sure it means staying out of *little* perceived comfort zones (carefully!) and striving to do our best better.

To get to Self-actualization, Maslow believed that all the previous needs (basics, safety, belonging, respect) must be met, although not necessarily in that order. He understood that Self is found in the giving of a higher goal via altruism and spirituality. He called this transcendence, the highest and most inclusive or holistic level of human consciousness.

When I detect strong feelings or a less than optimal reaction about something or toward someone, I've found it helpful to get insight on questions such as:

- ✓ *How am I or was I being that...?*
- ✓ *What is this or was that situation honestly about?*
- ✓ *Who or what does this remind me of?*
- ✓ *What unmet need might be underlying my thoughts or behavior?*
- ✓ *Is this a want or a legitimate need?*
- ✓ *What can I can do to get that need met?*

POSITIVE ADDICTIONS

Positive addictions are non-destructive hobbies that increase happiness. They can be a way to lead a *little* into taking on a better role or relinquish a negative addiction or compulsion. I think of them as reinventing happy hour! While engaging in positive addictions, we are swapping out substances and behaviors once used to fight, flee, or freeze from past or present experiences for more adaptive substances and behaviors aimed at well-being.

William Glasser coined the term positive addiction in his 1976 book of the same title. These are activities, substances, or behaviors that are intentional. They are whatever can assist us in keeping destructive behaviors and substances at bay and living a life we love. Rewarding activities that increase feelings of Self-efficacy qualify. What new behaviors, activities, or substances might be in service to your Self, *littles*, or other sentient beings and will allow you to experience more joy and peace? The criteria Glasser suggested is that whatever is chosen that these activities best serve Self when:

- non-competitive
- take up an hour a day maximum
- done fairly easy (no major mental effort required)
- done alone. No dependency on other people
- contain some value (physical, mental, spiritual)
- involving the belief that, if we persist in doing it, some improvement will result
- negative criticism is excluded

When choosing a positive addiction, jot down specific situations in the past where you chose to engage in what can be considered a positive addiction.

- ✓ What specifically did you invest your time in?
- ✓ What happened as a result of that investment?
- ✓ What might be a specific situation where you would choose to engage in a positive addiction in the future?
- ✓ What positive addiction would you choose?
- ✓ What might result from this new choice?

A positive addiction could be something used in the past that's worth investing in again or it could be something entirely new. Use whatever works in favor of your health to replace something that isn't. One of my *littles* believed smoking cigarettes for twelve years was working well. I quit when I found out I was pregnant— cold turkey, as they say. I had a big enough why.

Once we shift out of maladaptive behaviors, unburdened *littles* work well for Self. Trying to fill a void, many *littles* behave as if peace and happiness comes from the outside— a cigarette, a drink, a better job, more money, bigger house, more attractive spouse, cool car, etc. True happiness is an inside-out affair and it's a love affair.

As I've kept my Self at the wheel, I've quit abusing alcohol. One of my soft addictions used to be excessive book buying. I still have books on my shelf from 10 years ago I haven't taken the time to read. I made it a point to haul those books with me when I moved cross country. Not as punishment. This was a reminder to my Self and *littles* that we reap what we sow. The movers charged by the pound.

INTEGRATION

The etymology of the word integration is borrowed from Latin *integrates*, perfect, participle of *integro*, which means *I make whole, I renew, I repair, I begin again*. It is the act of bringing smaller parts into wholeness. This can be seen as *littles* returning to Self and Self returning to all that is and will be.

Dan Siegel shares the term “Mwe” in his book *Intra Connected*. The term essentially means to bring all parts together/make whole. Being intra connected is about unconditionally loving our Self, others, and our environment. This includes *littles*, as they are part of Self, others, and our environment. They just don’t feel like it yet. Inter connected can be seen as the full recognition that what we are is not separate from everyone, everything, all that is and forever will be. Of course, the very last part of that sentence is a matter of speculation and faith.

Sentient beings yearn for freedom, joy, and connectivity. Brené Brown defines connectivity “...as the energy that exists between people [and other sentient beings] when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” To slightly paraphrase Bell Hooks, author of *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*: Increasing our capacity for connectivity is about changing the way we go about our lives so that our values and habits of being reflect our commitment to freedom.

I have yet to meet another person who can honestly say they don’t have a part of their Self that doesn’t occasionally engage in judgment. Judgement is the number one disconnecter in relationships. Many a manifestation stem from judgement. If present when a *little* judge shows up, Self will notice it. That awareness is half the challenge of keeping a *little* from taking over until it’s huddle time. The other half is to reflect on why it holds the belief it does and take that belief to court without further judgement or persecution. When our judgmental stories are intercepted, they are less likely to have us acting out in ways that negatively impact our relationships.

As a student of what connects and disconnects us, I’ve seen conscious and unconscious righteous judgement damage and completely destroy relationships. When we experience judgment from someone whose opinion is important to us, shame, confusion, and anxiety are feelings and emotions that can easily manifest without adequate discernment. It’s also a symptom that there’s a power imbalance present in the relationship. Self emphasizes power with and power to, instead of power over.

By intentionally employing thinking characters of the brain, Self works with *littles* and ultimately choose a course of action to increase personal power. Jill Bolte Taylor’s four quadrant whole brain chart from *Whole Brain Living* is a useful reference for this process. *Littles* tend to automatically employ characteristics from the left thinking and emotional quadrants. Ultimately, it’s important for Self to employ characteristics from the right hemisphere thinking quadrant when reflecting on a distressing or helpless feeling experience as this allows Self to stay more present and discern where responsibility is needed. *Atlas of the Heart* by Brené Brown is also an excellent resource in identifying and expressing feelings.

When beginning to sense overwhelm, Self can pause and identify the *little* who is recalling the a past event or is fearful of a negative future outcome. If no pause comes, unresolved pain or fear will put the body into fight, flight, or freeze. Take time to pause, which is different than freezing, because it's deliberate. Practice pausing as soon as you're aware of a potentially overwhelming feeling or emotion. As long as you're physically safe, this is a great time to stop and drop into your heart. Stay there for ninety seconds. Once the emotion subsides, get really curious and compassionate and progress from there.

It helps to be clear about our values and what matters most to us. The experience of emotional pain and fear can lead to insensitive behavior as a protective strategy and show up in ways that may be perceived as disrespectful to Self and others. Treating values and beliefs that are perceived as meaningful as if those values and beliefs are wrong or unimportant is disrespectful. This happens most often and with the greatest damage when *littles* see others as coming from a different background. I believe, spiritually, we all come from the same background. We aren't having the same experiences, and that not having the same experiences is on purpose. Pain is a fun sucker. Fear gets in the way of purpose.

TIME-IN

Give *littles* a time-in instead of a time-out. Remember, *littles* aren't bad or wrong. Ultimately, it doesn't serve the whole to punish the parts. Deep down, *littles* yearn for understanding, compassion, and unconditional love. They crave connection. These are experiences many of us don't get enough of on this planet. *Littles* may believe they need to be forgiven when, in actuality, they've done nothing wrong. By connecting with our *littles*, it's possible to relieve them of their burdens and assist them in finding a role they'd rather play. Again, compassion is paramount, especially toward *littles* who feel fear, neglect, or abandonment.

Unlearning judgement can be a challenge when we were raised on dualistic beliefs like right and wrong, good and bad. When we operate as if something is what it is until it's not, we make room for the thoughts and behaviors of *littles* to just be what's so for now and can better assist in the unlearning and relearning process.

Noticing our *little* thoughts alone can decrease impulsive behavior, which can take the form anything from a facial expression to bodily harm. We're not just unlearning these *little* ways of being, we're doing what's best and what's better for our Self and each other. We're doing this for all we value, for what truly matters to us.

There's always time, and a plethora of ways, to offer emotionally and physically safe invitations for *littles* to express themselves. Some ways I've found to be beneficial is to make, build, or grow something or someone. Listening to music that matches the energy of the feeling or emotion experienced is a medium for validation and integration.⁵ For instance, look at the song "I Melt with You" by Modern English. *I'll stop the world* can be interpreted as Self taking the time to acknowledge and accept a *little* thought or emotion. *You've seen the difference and*

⁵ It's important to end musical experiences on a positive note. Examples listed in Chapter Eight.

it's getting better all the time is, of course, about awareness and recognition of progress. *The future's open wide* can be the belief in possibility and choice— such as, to intercept and not display a behavior or hang onto a belief that is no longer in service to Self, others, or the planet.

Venting to a trusted, nonjudgmental, Self-centered person can be helpful. (Not to be confused with a *little*/self-centered person.) Journaling can be very useful. (I've included a plethora of journaling prompts collected along the way at the end of the book.) The Work of Byron Katie mentioned earlier in this chapter is a form of dynamic journaling. Dialoging with a practitioner and facilitator of The Work can be beneficial. They are trained to spot *little* stories that disempower Self. At the time of this writing, Katie's organization offers a free helpline to callers who have completed a worksheet and would like assistance with doing inquiry that pertains to it.

Remember, *littles* help us adapt or survive where skills are absent. They take on whatever burden they do out of situationally perceived necessity. They crave leadership. What compassionate questions or words might you ask or say to *littles* in order to ultimately create more awareness, love, peace, and joy? When experiencing a moment of confusion or conflict, be curious about anything not understood or relatable. Really listen to that *little's* story. Resist the urge to fix or change the story.

Just sharing their story with a compassionate person can be enough for a *little* to release it. *Littles* with long-held beliefs may be reluctant to let them go at first. Given the option to hold onto them, they may be more inclined to replace them. Imagine how exhausting it's been, carrying their burden. What they don't need though is sympathy in the form of pity. Keep in mind that as they've been on the frontlines, so to speak, any condemnation directed at them can be seen as a form of judgment and blame. Both are potentially further shame inducing and invariably leave a *little* stuck in the trenches. Acknowledgment and acceptance are what create trust.

Littles believe things that aren't true and disbelieve things that are. Self knows belief and truth are not the same. Even though something is familiar, belief in it doesn't make it true. So, instead of challenging a *little's* belief directly, it can be more effective to invite the *little* to explore the opposite belief.

Best to be prepared for defensiveness, the degree of which will match how emotionally invested the *little* is in a belief. When the time's optimal, explore this together. You may want to ask the *little* to predict what might happen if their belief turns out to be true. What might happen if it turns out not to be true? Whatever it comes up with is its perception. Best not to argue with that. Shift happens. Time and the possibility of a contrary experience will prevail here. Be curious about anything your *little* shares. This feedback is typically presented as mentally (thought/feeling) or bodily (emotion/sensation.) Questions one might ask a *little*:

- ✓ *When did you learn to believe what you do?*
- ✓ *When did you learn to behave how you do?*
- ✓ *How old do you think I am?*
- ✓ *How did you serve me when you thought I needed it the most?*

- ✓ *Do you honestly want to continue doing what you're doing? And/or, what would you rather be doing?*

What was it like to hear your *little's* story? Perhaps the *little* has a name? If so, what does it call itself? If it doesn't already have a name, you may want to give it some ideas. In the process of identifying and possibly naming a *little*, refer to them as anything other than how you would describe your Self. I do not describe my Self as Pam, Pampers, Pammy, or Pamela. These are simply names or labels to me. If you have a *little* that thinks, speaks, and behaves in ways that are incredibly theatrical, maybe call it by your favorite drama actor's name. Be creative. Do your best to have fun with the process!

When aware of a *little* thought that elicits an overwhelming negative emotion, huddle with that thought. For example: Let's say the world is in the middle of a pandemic. You're shopping at a big box store. You see someone with their cart full of toilet paper. The thought is, *that person is a greedy, selfish asshole*. Unwaveringly explore the thought by consistently writing down a positive opposite. Fold a piece of paper in half lengthwise. At the top on the left side, write a short positive sentence in response to the negative thought. When you notice a negative thought that supports the original negative thought, write it on the right side, then write the same positive sentence on the left. Do this for at least ninety seconds or until the emotion subsides. This can be done as a thought process, although writing is more effective as it engages the body.

That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	Bullshit.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	They're greedy, selfish assholes.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	Look at all the toilet paper they have.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	They're taking it all.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	They're greedy and selfish.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	They should leave some for others.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	I don't believe it.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	It's hard to believe.
That person is doing the best they can with the tools they have.	

- ✓ Did any negative thoughts become less conclusive, frequent or stop entirely?
- ✓ Is there actual evidence contrary to what the *little* believes?
- ✓ What might be getting in the way of trusting the evidence? Another *little* perhaps?
- ✓ What role does this *little* play?
- ✓ What might be the *little* unmet perceived need or want in the situation?

Is there more than one *little* in play? If so, who is dominating? Ideally, you want a team, with Self as the team's leader. How might you connect, influence or inspire *littles* to team up? I see this as the ultimate *why* of techniques such as a brain huddle. Self spends time and attention on *littles*.

Self can encourage *littles* in conflict to express opposite positions. They can be supported in looking at both sides of any contradictions they go back and forth between. It's like having an

entire debate team at your disposal. Be curious about any discrepancies in *little* arguments, and sit with any emotions. Jill Bolte Taylor calls this the ninety-second rule. According to her, bodily sensations typically last about ninety seconds. Remember, they're just feedback— energy in motion. They can be instinctual or intuitive.

Emotions are like waves. Self-surf those puppies! Pause. Breath. Notice the energy. Be steadfast in your Self-conviction and don't fight with it. You'll lose your balance. There's plenty of time to pause and reflect. You may want to ask a *little* where it lives in the body. Maybe it knows of another *little* who believes the opposite of what's being expressed. What might these two contradictory parts really want? Perhaps they want the same thing. Practice staying balanced— tuned in and present. Ride out that emotional wave to a sunny, sandy beach where all can relax.

While getting certified to scuba dive, I experienced a *little* fear. Multiple times, in fact. The instructors assisted me in staying present while underwater. We practiced skills needed to survive a dive. First in a pool. Then out to sea. I could tell the instructors knew exactly what to look for when it came to *little* fearful presentations. Survival was their goal. Thriving was up to me.

The same held true with the jump instructor I was strapped to before leaping out of a perfectly good airplane. He had a literal parachute on. Mine was metaphorical. We took time to get to know each other a bit. It turned out his other job was working as an engineer. He certainly knew how to assist in engineering a more grounding experience for me while headed 13,000 feet up and preparing to jump. He engaged me in conversation, pointed out interesting sights as we ascended, and double checked the rigging that connected us.

Both dive and the jump instructors were practiced in supporting participants in staying present and focused on the task at hand. No *little* Self-nappers allowed to take over the experience in their class! It's possible with Self-presence to be aware of a *little* fear and not let it take over an experience.

Being overwhelmed by a *little* is akin to a carjacking. The moment we're aware of a bodily sensation (*little* getting restless), if the sensation becomes a thought (*little* wanting to drive), imagine your director clapper and respond with "CUT!" (You may not want to do this out loud.) Time to huddle?

BEING AUTHENTIC

According to Brené Brown, authenticity entails near constant vigilance and awareness about the connections between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. All parts of the brain need to work together. In her book *I Thought It Was Just Me (but it isn't)*, she points out that *in the presence of an authentic person, many of us can even feel it in our bones*. Also, that *authenticity is something we revere in others and strive to maintain in our own lives*. Regarding how shame impacts authenticity, she reveals:

Shame often prevents us from presenting our real selves to the people around us— it sabotages our efforts to be authentic. How can we be genuine when we

are desperately trying to manage and control how others perceive us? How can we be honest with people about our beliefs and, at the same time, tell them what we think they want to hear? How do we stand up for what we believe in when we are trying to make everyone around us feel comfortable so they won't get angry and put us down?

Being consistent with the portrayal of how one is in private and with others is another way to describe being authentic. When authentic is defined as natural, sincere, spontaneous, open, genuine, the combination of narrow expectations and burdened *littles* can make this quite challenging. When it comes to speaking out, here are some examples of messages and expectations:

- Be honest, but don't hurt anyone's feelings.
- Be confident when you speak, but don't come across as self-righteous.
- Say what you need to say, but don't make anyone uncomfortable.
- Be direct, but not offensive.
- Sound intelligent, but not like you know it all.

Do these rules seem ridiculous to you? Rigid? Contradictory and subjective? Who defines honest, confident, comfort, moral, offensive and intelligent. How they do it is what makes it subjective.

However, when *littles* do show up in our lives, might they honestly be sharing their perceptions? Aren't they based on past experiences, feelings, and emotions? In a sense (innocents), might they be showing up as sincere, spontaneous, and genuine, given their environmental impacts? I'd say so. Even though reactive behaviors may be authentic, they don't bode well for healthy, connected relationships. Most won't stand for them. The challenge is to find ways to reduce such behaviors without judgment, shame, or blame. This is definitely something I'm still practicing.

Brown also states, "We cannot share ourselves with others when we see ourselves as flawed and unworthy of connection. It's impossible to be "real" when we are ashamed of who we are or what we believe." This also pertains to judgment and blame. Self is courageous and gives *littles* the recognition they yearn for, without ignoring or punishing counterproductive behaviors.

TRUST

In *The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work*, Charles Feltman focuses on the work place, although the information can be generalized and applied to any relationship, internal or external. In it, he shares:

Trust is defined as choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions.

When you trust someone, what you make vulnerable can range from concrete things such as money, a job, a promotion, or a particular goal, to less tangible things like a belief you hold, a cherished way of doing things, your “good name,” or even your sense of happiness and well-being. Whatever you choose to make vulnerable to the other’s actions, you do so because you believe their actions will support it or, at the very least, will not harm it.

Some people tend to extend trust to others easily and with little or no evidence it is warranted. They only withdraw their trust if it is betrayed. Others believe that people must earn their trust by demonstrating trustworthiness. Whether you tend to extend trust more or less easily, you do so by assessing the probability that the other person will support or harm what you value in the future. In this sense choosing to trust or distrust is a risk assessment.

Littles need to be seen and the stories they value as valuable. For Self to extend appreciation and compassion to *littles* is not only a prerequisite for integration, it’s a trust builder. Again, the level of defensiveness encountered with a *little* will match the level of fear and mistrust it harbors. The process of integrating a *little* who is afraid and mistrusting may get worse before it gets better. A *little’s* way of trying to get Self to let them remain the way they are might implicitly be “How dare you love me!” This will most likely be evident by any counterproductive thoughts and behaviors when it comes to establishing trust. So, dare greatly! These *littles* can put up quite a fight. Great big abundant care is what’s called for so as to move onward and upward together.

Invite, invite, invite. Attention and compassion breed trust and are probably the most important investments when it comes to increasing connectivity. Autonomy and agency were most likely denied hardcore *littles*. Attempts at force or bullying will increase a *little’s* viewpoint and diminish trust. The practice of staying present with *little* thoughts before they manifest into counterproductive emotions, such as anxiety or stress, is also a trust builder.

A *little* stress or uncertainty can be of value. Too much is damaging. When we’re allowed to struggle relative to our developmental capacity, while receiving support in the way of unconditional love, we are better able to discover what’s needed and work toward getting that need met. The best approaches are invitational, because it allows for clarity and flexibility. This helps *littles* feel respected, safer, and well cared for. *Littles* do need to know how much we care before they care how much we know.

The film *Dead Man Walking* with Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn illustrates compassion toward *littles*. Sarandon’s character represents Self behaviorally, for the most part, and how the right hemisphere tends to operate as pointed out by McGilchrist and Taylor. Penn’s character would be considered an outcast, “white trash” by many, and displays more characteristics of the left hemisphere. Exiled and terrified, protectors in play, Penn’s character denies the accusations against him— almost to the death. Again, my aim is not to disparage or vilify the left hemisphere. Even though the hemispheres contrast in terms of values and how they operate, they also rely on each other. As the IFS model’s founder states, “there are no bad parts.” When both sides are working together for the benefit of the whole, they are operating in an

integrated fashion. Until their needs are met, unseen *littles* will experience separation and, I dare say, hope. Hope to be seen. Hope for compassion. Hope for unconditional love.

Like a caterpillar transitioning into a butterfly, the process of integration can feel messy, sticky, and restrictive— scary even. I find the whole metamorphosis or instar process of caterpillar to butterfly fascinating. Butterflies need to beat their wings against the cocoon to get stronger. Being freed from the cocoon rather than bursting out on their own can kill them or, at the very least, cause them not to fly. The gooey disintegration part in the middle of the process looks like a hot mess and a lot of work. It's perfectly natural though. Like the instar process, struggle will most certainly be part of the experience while integrating *littles*. We can struggle best by not listening to the critical, uneducated opinions of those around us while we go through our process. What if this world is like a cocoon for the evolution of our souls? Best then to trust the process, no matter how it unfolds— bruised wings and all.

RESILIENCE

The more resilient we are, the better able we are to transcend adversity. Whether internal or external, supportive relationships are an important part of increasing resilience. This is especially true when such relationships focus on our ability to search for and identify what's possible. The more resilient we are, the better we're able to master developmental tasks, build and maintain healthy relationships, optimize our education, and lead productive and fulfilling lives. We get to thrive. This isn't possible without increased awareness, intention, and action.

The most effective therapeutic relationships I've had to date have experientially assisted me in identifying my blind spots, Self-recognition, and with integration of my *littles*. Call me a Self-directed, positive neuroplasticity junkie! These relationships haven't all been with people. Many animals have played a role in my development and continue to do so. Finding meaning in adverse experiences alone has greatly reduced or eliminated overwhelming emotions related to those experiences. I've also learned to generalize and apply many of the experiences I have to other areas of my life. This has maximized my ability to unlearn ineffective strategies and choose more adaptive behaviors.

If, like me, you consider resilience a process, are you referring to a process of *individuation through a structured system with gradual discovery of personal and unique abilities*, as Wikipedia so eloquently puts it? If so, what would it look like to focus your efforts on the four suggestions found on there? They are:

1. *The ability to make realistic plans and being capable of taking the steps necessary to follow through with them*
2. *A positive self-concept and confidence in one's strengths and abilities*
3. *Communication and problem-solving skills*
4. *The ability to manage strong impulses and feelings*

Suggestions two, three, and four above look like prerequisites for the three capacities Christian List speaks to in *Why Free Will is Real*. Quick recap:

1. *The capacity to consider several possibilities for action*
2. *The capacity to form an intention to pursue one of those possibilities*
3. *The capacity to take action to move toward that possibility*

The first suggestion from Wikipedia could suffice as a compilation of all three suggested by List. All necessitate a strong belief that we have a choice in the matter of our own life. Perhaps faith in Self is the greatest requirement of all.

BE MINDFUL

Be the watcher/viewer/auditor/audience of how your *littles* and Self show up. No matter what you call it, practice noticing your thoughts/feelings, sensations/emotions, and behaviors. Challenge any limiting beliefs. Be curious and proactive about counterproductive behaviors. Practice compassion. We can do this anytime we're not asleep, unconscious, or, um, dead.

We don't have to sit back straight, cross-legged, thumb and index fingers forming an 'O' on our knees. Honestly, I find that particular technique tedious and physically uncomfortable. We can be completely aware of our own thoughts/feelings, sensations/emotions, and behaviors as we go throughout our day. It's a practice. The more we do it, the better off we are. This is meditation *and* it's being mindful.

When it comes to being more mindful, and being my Self, the Cs and Ps of the IFS model mentioned in Chapter Two inspire me. The following is my interpretation and practice of these attributes. Please keep in mind that character development is, like skill building, a process. Unlearning the opposite of these attributes will be part of the process for many of us.

BE CALM

Also known as being regulated, being calm enables presence. Regulation is our ability to experience and maintain any perceived stress within a degree of tolerance. Toxic stress leads to dysregulation and is the root of many mental health disorders. As we increase our ability to regulate our feelings and emotions, we increase our tolerance for experiential intensity. This is why I like Taylor's Brain Huddle exercise mentioned in Chapter Seven. Regulation takes team work. Self is able to acknowledge and accept any *little* stressful thoughts and attend to them before they become an unnecessary emotion or destructive behavior. Calm enables us to better assist those around us with their ability to regulate.

Dysregulation is not wrong or bad. It's important feedback. Get really curious about it. It's an opportunity to practice being calm. Time to huddle? If so, what is the perceived unmet need, or is it a want? When calm, we can be curious and careful. When aware of such feedback, we can take the time to formulate a response to internal or external conflict, instead of reacting to it.

BE CONFIDENT

How a body presents is quite telling in regards to what is happening on the interior. You've probably seen people who walk with their shoulders slumped over and their eyes downcast. They are more likely to get mugged or taken advantage of in some way than someone with the opposite posture. How we keep our environments can be telling of our internal happenings. Confidence can be an outside-in job as well.

How we use our body can increase mental confidence. Power posing has been shown to increase the feeling of confidence. Legs spread shoulder length apart, chin up, eyes forward, hands on hips. Think Superman here. Putting a pencil or something similar lengthwise between one's teeth so that a smile is formed can help shift lower energetic states of being.

Taking care of our bodies so they perform optimally is another card to play. In regards to exercise and diet, do whatever is a fit for you. If you find your energy level, physical agility, and health are working for you so that you accomplish all you aim for, you're on track. If not, your Self knows what it needs to do and there's no shortage of resources that can assist. One way I care for my body is by eating a vegetarian diet and reducing my intake of processed foods. (I still have a tendency to grab up some processed vegetarian protein.)

I intentionally don't subscribe to cable TV or WIFI at my house. Part of my relationship with a gifted treadmill is that I borrow DVDs from the library. I only watch them when I work out. The shows have to be riveting, otherwise there's a *little* part of me who thinks of the treadmill as— cue dramatic music, dun, dun, dun— THE DREAMMILL. One method I employ to extrinsically motivate that workout resistant couch tater tot is by watching a show for an hour while I get some cardio in on the bod. *Little* and gets an entertaining show. Body and soul get to hang out on the planet a bit longer. Win/win/win!

BE CURIOUS

We can't challenge what we think we know in order to see what's actually occurring without big time curiosity. Curiosity takes vulnerability. It's okay to not know something. Besides, displaying curiosity can increase it in those around us. Being curious also contributes to our mental health.

Magical things start to happen when we increase our curiosity. When we become curious about what happened before what happened happened— in regards to the ways and whys of how we and others show up, we are now actively seeking to understand personal dynamics. This level of understanding can lead to increased compassion and acceptance. This can also lead to recognition, appreciation, and love. For example, I'm often curious when one of my *littles* or a loved one has a story such as "I hate..." or "I can't..." This could just be a lack of skill. It may have nothing to do with will. What might the content or situation be a reminder of? If statements such as these come from someone I care about, I encourage them to challenge the thought.

When experiencing a thought or behavior that is energetically draining, pause for a huddle.

Focus on a solution that address any unmet needs. Some huddle questions that may be relevant:

- ✓ *How's this (action or reaction) working for us?*
- ✓ *What exactly is the goal here?*
- ✓ *What are we learning?*
- ✓ *What might make this a better experience?*
- ✓ *Are we achieving what we need?*
- ✓ *What matters most?*
- ✓ *What haven't we tried or what can we do differently?*

BE VULNERABLE

Acknowledging and accepting *littles* is being vulnerable. Admitting to not knowing something is also vulnerable. Reaching out for assistance and finding a resource that's a fit to assist with integration can be a gift. Any stigma perceived related to seeking resources comes from a fearful or prideful *little*.

Start by acknowledging and accepting that fearful *little* part. Find out what their story is. One tactic is to write down those feelings on paper. If it feels safer to destroy what you've written, do it. Make it a ceremony of sorts even. Sharing *little* stories with a pet is also helpful. When ready, enlist the support of someone trustworthy to share that feeling/story with. Unless you want their feedback/opinion, let them know ahead of time that you just want to say whatever it is out loud to a trusted friend. Tell them you don't need them to fix or advise, to just please listen. The main objective is healthy release of that feeling or emotion.

Giving and receiving feedback can feel vulnerable. Were you taught to give and receive feedback in constructive ways? I wasn't. Most of the people I know were never taught this skill. If you're game to flush out a *little* blind spot, consider inviting a close friend out with the intention of asking for feedback. A couple of questions you may consider asking are, "What's one of the most annoying habits I have?" or "What is something I do that hurts me or you or leads to my ineffectiveness?" Do your best to stay present for any feedback they give. This way, you'll be able to intercept any *little* defenders who tend to take feedback personally.

If asking anyone else the same question(s), look for themes or patterns in the feedback. It's additionally important to objectively and intuitively consider the source. If I have history with someone who isn't inclined to give feedback, I consider our history. Trust may be an issue. It may or may not be an optimal time to discuss this. They may have a *little* who doesn't perceive us as being safe. Any reluctance on their part may be based on lack of skill or past experience. Are we psychologically safe yet to receive any feedback? When we speak honestly about understanding how we may be perceived as being unsafe, it's because Self has recognized that *little* tendency and can now make amends. This is a trust builder.

Along with the source, it's important to keep context in mind when reflecting on any feedback, especially when it's unsolicited. I was once given unsolicited feedback that I'm too analytical. As the feedback was given in an accusatory way, I didn't have to think about it.

Awareness and vulnerability enable us to connect to our own *littles*. Intuition and discernment come in handy in instances when we're in the presence of someone else's *little*.

BE COURAGEOUS

Mark Twain wrote "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear— not absence of fear." When our aim is to integrate *littles*, courage may look like moving toward something feared in the external world in order to do what is appropriate and necessary to overcome an internal fear. Let's say you have a fear of snakes. A fearful *little* can transform a stick into a deadly snake in a heartbeat. If closer inspection is a safe option, what kind of snake is it? I knew someone who was so fearful of snakes he'd kill the ones that eat the poisonous ones. (Counterproductive.) This level of fear is reactive. It's not proactive and it's not responsible.

For those familiar with *The Pink Panther* films, recall inspector Clouseau's long-suffering manservant Cato. One of the things Clouseau employed Cato to do was to ambush him. Cato would attack the inspector from places such as a freezer or from underneath the canopy of Clouseau's bed. This assisted Clouseau in being vigilant. Cato took the brunt of these dramatic and (for fans) comically amusing exchanges. The inspector would do things like kick Cato in the face during such ambushes. All theatrical entertainment aside, I say inspect away! There's much for Self to be vigilant about. Please though, don't beat up your employees.

Littles can perceive the experience of the slightest fear, emotional pain, embarrassment, or uncertainty as a death threat. They believe they are a body, a role, a title, etc. That's why trust, compassion, and courage are essential. Being courageous is an opportunity to understand the facts of a matter— even if it has manifested as a fear of snakes. Scaffolding (building up to) making friends with non-poisonous and even poisonous snakes is a possibility. Google Ocean Ramsey. Touted as The Shark Whisperer, Ocean swims with sharks. Yep, even twenty-foot great whites. She doesn't do this in a cage.

Courage takes action, and, as Twain suggested, it involves resistance. A courageous Self can resist the behaviors of *littles*. Notice the thought and carefully inspect it before it becomes a harsh word or regrettable behavior. When it does, make amends sooner than later. Saying what we need to say productively and effectively takes courage. "Consciously uncoupling" (shout out to Katherine Woodward Thomas!) with a partner takes courage. The same goes with quitting a job that is no longer a fit. What is courageous for one person may not appear to be courageous to another. Stay clear of comparison. Remember, it's Self-deception. In a society so focused on competition and achievement, this takes courage too. What someone else thinks can only matter if we believe that it does.

Once upon a time, I would feel very tense when boarding airplanes. When it comes to embracing fear, one of the things I enjoy doing is challenging experiences, especially alongside loved ones. Together, we've gone skydiving, snowmobiling, and experienced a lake and river tour in a helicopter. Skydiving and hot air ballooning helped with my fear of heights. This was after participating in belaying, ropes course, trapeze, zip lining, and parasailing. I highly recommend scaffolding experiences when fear is present.

I must confess, I let the movie *Jaws* fuel a fearful *little* of mine. When I was a teen, I used to freak out when I was alone in a swimming pool at night. I suppose that once I swim with sharks, I'll be pretty much be prepared to swim just about anywhere in the deep blue. Warmer waters for now though. I'd start off with a whale shark with its harmless gill rakers, not a great white with its potential limb takers!

BE COMPASSIONATE

Compassion is synonymous with care. I believe compassion is on a spectrum as well. The opposite is apathy. Sympathy and empathy sit in between— apathy, sympathy, empathy, compassion. Apathy and sympathy are *little* coping or defense mechanisms. The book *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, with Connie Burk can be a valuable read for those who care for others and are experiencing burnout. I wonder if those experiencing burnout tend to sympathize or overly empathize with their charges. You can get a sense of van Dernoot Lipsky by watching her 2015 TED talk titled *Beyond the Cliff*. Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield, Rick Hanson, and Kristen Neff are just a handful of researchers and teachers who focus on increasing compassion.

When people say "take care," what do they mean exactly? Are they just saying it out of habit, like how many of us say, "nice to meet you" or "how are you"? Are they intuitively picking up on a blind spot? If so, theirs or ours? When *littles* show up as apathetic, perhaps unreciprocated caring was a painful experience. If we hear "take care" often enough, it's probably worth paying attention to.

Apathetic or sympathetic *littles* need to be relieved of these coping or defense behaviors if the aim is to show up effectively and compassionately for those who are suffering. Apathy can get us in all kinds of predicaments. With over sympathizing or empathizing, the risk is over-relating and taking on suffering from the situation they're in. This has been called *overcare*. It is a *little* protective strategy. Coined by the Heartmath Institute, overcare is akin to compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, empathetic strain, and secondary trauma— to name some of the alternative labels. Overcare imparts a sense of upset, stress, worry, or drain. When experiencing overcare, Self has been overwhelmed. This is a form of emotional contagion/entrainment which I mentioned in Chapter Three.

In order to steer clear of emotional contagion, I practice detached involvement. In *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What We Don't Know*, professor and science author Adam Grant speaks to detachment in two ways— detaching opinions from our identity and detaching our present from our past. Detached involvement is Self's effective responsibility to "hold space" for another's story. In detached involvement, we openly hear one another out yet don't take anything on in the way of feeling/story or emotion. This practice is additionally helpful when given feedback, especially of the unsolicited variety. The practice is to not identify in any way, shape, or form with the emotion or feeling that is presented. This doesn't mean not relating. On the contrary, it's about staying intentionally and attentionally connected, although not to the extent that Self is overwhelmed by the other person's energy or story. The goal of detached

involvement is to stay present, no matter what. What we are, in essence, cares in a way that there is no attachment to the outcome.

Seldom are we upset for the reason thought. The upset pertains to the suffering of a *little* part of us that has a burden or an unmet perceived need. Think of it this way, something is coming *up* FOR you in the moment of upset. That something is setting Self up for recognition (insert process of choice here), and possible integration. It's a representation. When I experience an overwhelming emotion in regards to someone else's experience, I get super curious about that experience. It's probably an indicator that points to one of my own unrecognized *littles* in need of some TLC. What a gift these moments are, and I'm grateful for them.

BE CLEAR

Clarity refers to ease of understanding. Once we see how shame shows up, and how it can impact Self, we can recognize *little* thoughts and behaviors simply as feedback and opportunities to practice responding more effectively and in alignment with our values. This awareness and practice can increase any Self super yummy, non-reactive verb chosen in order to improve quality of life.

Know what you want, know how to ask for it, and know when you get it. This statement, shared by a horse training clinician, left an impression on me. My interpretation is this— have a clear vision of the outcome you're looking for. What does it look like, sound like, taste like, smell like and, most importantly, Feel like? See it in your mind's eye. Equip your environment with tools that enable you to achieve the outcome you seek. Be generous with your gratitude when you manifest the outcome you aim for.

I'm still in the process of developing clarity. This is why I practice inviting feedback on some of what I put out into the world. It helps me identify my blind spots, which increases my capacity for discernment. In this way I aim to do my best better and my better best.

BE PATIENT

Whew! Talk about processes! Patience is a challenge for many of us. When we're not being patient, it shows up in our expression. Those around us, especially youngsters and those with unresolved shame, may see this expression and internalize it. In other words, they may make our impatience about them. When this occurs, we inadvertently contribute to or validate *little* stories.

I'm still working on learning to be more patient with *littles*— mine included. My greatest teachers of patience have been animals and children. More lately, I've extended that honor to some who have been on the planet for quite a while. Inside every dysregulated sentient being is an unhealed wound or fear and the existence of maladaptive coping skills. There's *so* much we can learn from those who don't see through the same lens that we do, who don't speak the

same language, or have the same abilities. Nonviolent, nonverbal communication is a magnificent skill to practice while increasing patience.

BE PERSISTENT

Take time to achieve your objectives. Patience is not only a virtue, it's a prerequisite for persistence. A never-ending story is life played as an infinite game (shout out to James Carse!) I have faith that we get many opportunities to create and develop and that it's possible to achieve our objectives, whatever they may be. Like Confucius said, "It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop." If you feel stuck, who's stopping you from achieving your objectives? Don't get mad at them, get with them. Lead the way. Your Self won't allow anything to stop you for living your purpose. It's *your* life. Live it on your own terms. Carpe diem!

BE PERSPECTIVE

From a grammatical standpoint, Pamela (my *little* left thinking hemi part) struggled with writing "BE PERSPECTIVE." Obviously, we worked through it cuz here 'tis, in all its glory. English majors, feel free to look away!

When we're being aware/conscious, we're being perspective. Perspective is synonymous with viewpoint and outlook. Being perspective is encompassing all that's seen, from the inside looking out and the outside looking in. It's not only the take we have on things, it's how we interpret, evaluate or assess things. These things can be thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors.

Being perspective is the ability to objectively view all of those things and not get caught up in them. In this way we are being without bias. It's detached involvement. It's being in the world and not of it. Experiences are educational opportunities. Possibilities are endless. Scientifically and objectively speaking, we are able to be open to results. This is a requirement in order to answer some really tough questions, such as:

- ✓ How might our unresolved traumas have inadvertently harmed Self, each other, and our world?
- ✓ How might our relationships with all of these be different if we took full responsibility for this?

These are big questions that require even bigger responses. It's imperative we aim for these higher states of being. We can even be playful while doing so. Sometimes we have to shoot the arrows first, then paint the targets around them in order to get a bullseye every time. Some might say that's cheating or breaking the rules. I say break 'em!

BE PLAYFUL

I've heard it said that the opposite of play is depression. Depression rates are indeed skyrocketing! These rates are indicative of lives being lived in survival mode. Is it even possible to experience depression when we intentionally practice a playful state of mind? Play, broadly defined, is anything that supports and energizes a pleasurable, organic back and forth flow of exchanges. Energetic exchanges, that is. Recall, *littles* tend to live in a dualistic, binary state of being. I believe that deep down, buried under all our *little* stories, we all have what it takes to rise above things like depression.

Through imagination and play, it is possible to be in the world and not of it at the same time. Hanging out in this realm can be like the ultimate adventurous video game or the most epic film ever! There is no shortage of resources for those aiming to level up or be the hero. Choose your avatar, your tools, your mentors, and your allies. George Bernard Shaw said, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." I say "game on!"

Playing with *littles* is something I can't invite enough. Many opportunities and mediums exist for this purpose. Seek and find whatever works for you. Some of my favorites are music, film, dialog, relationships, travel, and writing. More recently I've taken up some in-depth dog training. Here, I get to teach a *little* more patience. Then there's the ukulele that calls me from a closet in the spare room. That's for sure an activity where I'll increase patience.

Choose your playful experiences, reflect on them, generalize, and apply the outcomes to other areas of your life. Find meaning for your Self. Invest in a *little* character development. I find playful processes especially helpful when exploring solutions to a concern or issue one of my *littles* is having. Here are a handful of transformative mediums you might want to consider:

MUSIC

When it comes to integrating *littles* and shifting emotional states, I have entire playlists aimed at catharsis and well-being. As with every great story, playlists can have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They can be thought of as a conversation between a *little* and another *little*, a *little* and Self, or vice versa. See which lyrics resonate for a *little* or for your Self. For example, here's one Self can play for *littles* that feel disconnected: "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" by Green Day, followed by "Baby Come Back" by Player, topped off with "Open Arms" by Journey or "I Won't Give Up" by Jason Mraz. Co-create a lyrical story with a beginning, a middle, and an end with a *little*. Use three songs or thirty, whatever it takes to get the result desired.

Again, it's important to leave music sessions such as these on an improved note. Feel free to meet *littles* where they're at energetically. If the energy is chaotic and dysregulated, pick a song that validates this. Use the next song(s) to assist in slowing down and regulating that energy. Leave it in a much calmer and relaxed state with the final song selection. When you recognize the energy as low or seemingly depressed, find lyrics or a rhythm that match that, then elevate that energy by selecting upbeat and positive songs. Pick three from your favorite

artist or genre. How about a themed combo? Here are further examples of playlists to consider.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Tainted Love" by Soft Cell 2. "Un-Break My Heart" by Toni Braxton 3. "We Belong Together" by Mariah Carey 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Demons" by Imagine Dragon 2. "War in Me" by Kenna 3. "I Want to Know What Love Is" by Foreigner
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Always on My Mind" by Willy Nelson 2. "Never Really Over" by Katy Perry 3. "Let's Stay Together" by Al Green 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Iris" by the Goo Goo Dolls 2. "Eyes Open" by Taylor Swift 3. "In Your Eyes" by Peter Gabriel
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. "Somebody To Love" by Queen 3. "When Doves Cry" by Prince 4. "Just Give Me a Reason" by Pink & Nate Ruess 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Long Way" by Wookiefoot 2. "You're It!" by Wookiefoot 3. "Keep It Light" by Wookiefoot

Music can relate to an energy or state Self wants to experience or come from a preferred genre. It's helpful to pay close attention to the lyrics and energetic qualities of the music we're drawn to as it can also be an indicator of a *little's* feelings and emotions. Music is a way to reflect, project, deflect, and protect. Who or what is being projected, deflected, and/or protected through some of your favorite songs?

Consider Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" from their album *Nevermind*: "With the lights out, it's less dangerous / Here we are now, entertain us / I feel stupid and contagious." In 1994, Nirvana's lead singer Kurt Cobain was found dead at his home in Seattle at age 27. Police concluded he had died from a self-inflicted shotgun wound to his head. Prior to that, it was reported that Cobain struggled with heroin addiction and chronic health problems, such as depression.

Take a look at some of the lyrics in Rob Thomas' song "I Am an Illusion," from his debut solo album *Something to Be*, which was released not long after Matchbox Twenty band members took a break, purportedly to focus on their families:

I am an illusion

I am the damage

I am the relief

Sometimes I'm people

I never hoped that I would be

If I take in whatever they turn out

What's that gonna make me now

It has been reported that both musicians experienced much adversity in youth. As of this writing, Thomas is still going strong in the music industry. As his career has progressed, he has collaborated with other songwriters in order to "keep things fresh and not feel like I'm going back to the same well and just writing the same songs over and over and over."

Writing lyrics and making music can undeniably be cathartic. Awareness and intentionality are key in regards to ultimate impact. Taylor Swift and Alanis Morissette strike me as artists

who appear to understand the intricate nature of energy regarding this evolutionary or transformational medium. Thomas is another. I'm not sure how aware Cobain was of this. Quality of life is representative of state of mind. Music can be a remedy. It can also maintain or exacerbate a tragic situation.

Music engages both the left and right hemispheres of our brains. Regarding emotion, music without lyrics may stimulate the right more than the left because the right is thought to primarily process information non-verbally. The most profound experiences I've had with music have been entirely instrumental, listened to while relaxing, and not thinking about anything. I had nowhere else to be and nothing else to do. I was also wearing an eye mask and noise cancelling headphones. I was very intentional with this process. Oh, the downloads I received. Mind altering!

U2 fan? Bono has a fabulous audio book titled *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*. Truly a work of art. He's mixed music, story, and sound effects into a beautiful compilation of the band's journey from Ireland to global stardom.

FILM

When looking through the lens of metaphor, the study of film along with the intention of applying anything that relates to one's life is an opportunity to recognize one's *littles* as well as one's own uniqueness, power, and higher purpose. When we use films to reflect on our experiences and muse about future possibilities, we go beyond simply being entertained. It's a way to be on purpose—to be cause—to create or recreate. All great stories include major character development. There's certainly no shortage of films to play with. Rewatch your favorites through the lens of metaphor, simile, and analogy.

If challenged by a *little* with a compulsion toward addiction (of any kind), perhaps check out *Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot* starring Joaquin Phoenix, *The Good House* starring Sigourney Weaver, *The Basketball Diaries* or *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* starring Leonardo DiCaprio. There are some interesting series made for television. *Devs* and *Westworld* come to mind as far metaphorically rich character content to play with. Identify any parallels to your own characteristics. See them as feedback, not wrong or right, good or bad. Aim to stay present and support any fighting, flighting, or freezing *littles*. Reflect, generalize, and apply.

- ✓ Is there anything about any of the characters in the film Self or *littles* yearn to be like?
- ✓ Are there any characters your Self or *littles* relate to?
- ✓ Is a huddle and cuddle in order?
- ✓ What positive addiction might you create together?

When it comes to character development and adventure, two of my favorite classic stories are *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Both are metaphor, simile, and analogy smorgasbords! I especially appreciate director Tim Burton's film version of Alice. In it, an adolescent Alice finds herself in Underland. This dream world presents Alice with many challenges to overcome. She's accused of being the wrong Alice. "How can I be the wrong Alice when this is my dream?" she asks. The characters she meets escort her to the wise and absolute Absolem who asks her, "Who are you?" She states her name. "Stupid girl," Absolem

replies. "We shall see." Absolem then requests the Oraculum, a scroll-like map, be shown to Alice. He explains that the Oraculum "tells of each and every day from the beginning." It's a map of sorts that lays out challenges Alice is destined to navigate.

Is it possible that each person on this earth has their own version of an Oraculum, akin to Caroline Myss' concept of sacred contracts? Might it actually be that we choose challenges for our soul's evolution before our life on the planet has even begun? If so, there would truth in saying something happened *for* me and that it was *because of* me that it happened. In other words, that I am the cause of much of what I experience in my life. If this is the case, we all are being cause, one way or another.

Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*, and his follow up *Through the Looking Glass* are an invitation for us to identify and navigate our own challenges. Who in your life has or is playing the role of Red Queen, White Queen, Bandersnatch, or Absolem? Are there any situations that correlate with the slaying of the Jabberwocky? There are many characters and metaphors to contemplate in this story. If you watch these films, you may want to give some thought to what really stands out to you and why. What are the beliefs, substances, or behaviors in your life that expand you? Which ones make you small? Have fun with your metaphoric exploration! There are no wrong answers.

There are so many films that can be put into context for a *little* exploration, development, and Self recognition. I recently watched the film *Camille*, starring James Franco and Sienna Miller. If you view all the main characters in the film as small parts of a much greater story, it can be pretty darn entertaining. Perhaps I'm just easily entertained? I can live with that. When the film *Inside Out* came to our local theater I couldn't wait to see it. Another animated film I appreciate is simply titled *9*, and was co-created by Tim Burton. If you enjoy classics, check out *12 Angry Men* starring Henry Fonda.

It's impossible to see our Self as the star and how and why *littles* play supporting roles unless we intentionally look through that lens. Besides those I've already mentioned, other films that make the list of my top 100 are *Transcendence*, *Inception*, *Cloud Atlas*, *Contact*, *Lars and the Real Girl*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *The Butterfly Effect*, *What Dreams May Come*, *Ground Hog Day*, *What About Bob*, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Matrix* trilogy, and the latest addition to the trilogy, *Resurrections*.

Some of us think *The Matrix* films are more documentary than simply entertaining fiction. Is this world of ours and everything in it an illusion? We humans have created quite the binary existence here, that's for sure! I can completely relate to the character Neo in *The Matrix*. That was me at age thirty-seven, just going through the motions until I had an experience that blew my mind. That was my call. It came with an invitation to choose between who I thought I was, how things were, and what I wanted to be. I answered the call and chose adventure not knowing what that would actually look like. I'm still on that trajectory.

A huge influence on the film industry, and one of my favorite teachers, is the late, great Joseph Campbell. He studied all the world's myths and religions. His most well-known work is *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, connecting the archetypal hero with world mythology. He created what he called The Hero's Journey, a template of what all great stories involve—

possibly even yours. Once you're familiar with Campbell's template, it's easy to spot The Hero's Journey in films and literature.

There's a particularly lovely scene that can be related, in a sense, to the practice of integration at the end of the film *Glass* by M. Night Shyamalan. *Glass* is the follow up to the films *Unbreakable* and *Split*. If you watch *Glass*, look for the exchange between characters played by actors James McAvoy, who plays Kenneth and his many *littles*, and Anya Taylor-Joy, who plays Casey Cooke. It would be helpful to watch the film *Split* first so as to better understand the relational history between characters Kenneth and Casey.

There are books dedicated to the use of film as a transformative medium. Consider *Positive Psychology at the Movies* by Ryan M. Niemiec and Danny Wedding, *E-Motion Picture Magic* by Birgit Wolz Ph.D. or *Reel Therapy* by Dr. Gary Solomon.

When it comes to producing award-winning action and abilities in your life, whenever you're aware of a *little* thought that doesn't fit how you want to act, imagine your Self with a clapper board. You know, those things movie directors use to identify takes on a production. Can you say Self director in the house? Cut! Take 2..., or 20..., or 120.

THEATER

Acting can also be an excellent medium for emotional catharsis. *Littles* already cast in a role and put in a play can learn a lot about themselves and others. Performing can be used to respect and validate *littles* feelings/stories— give them literal centerstage to consciously relieve burdens and reduce stance. *Littles* won't do this optimally without Self presence. Self will be very intentional about what roles to cast a *little*. Therapeutically effective programs build Self-confidence by increasing social skills, playfulness, and ability to express feelings and emotions.

Use discernment and caution. Drama therapy models that use acting as a form of escapism can be ineffective and counterproductive in connecting with *littles* and increasing Self-efficacy. A 2015 study of 782 actors showed that over 40 percent drink to "let go" after a demanding performance and 80 percent are active users of drugs deemed either legal or illegal. As psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk so succinctly put it, "the body keeps the score." Bodies don't discern what's necessarily. Knowing what works and what doesn't is Self's role. Mind over matter.

LITERATURE

We can play with books, articles, and poetry the same way we play with film and music. In their book *Read Two Books and Let's Talk Next Week*, Janice Maidman Joshua and Donna DiMenna invite clinicians to use bibliotherapy in their practice. Self is your personal clinician, and with the wealth of information available on-line these days, you only have to pay energetically— with time and attention. I assure you; the investment is well worth it!

I've included a list of resources you may find useful at the end of this book. If you're inclined to do a progression of books that correlate with— and in some instances, build on or tie in with concepts in this book— consider (in order) *Virus of The Mind* by Richard Brodie, *Internal*

Family Systems Theory by Richard Swartz and Martha Sweeney, *Whole Brain Living* by Jill Bolte Taylor, *Think Again* by Adam Grant, and *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself* by Joe Dispenza.

Again, the words mind and brain are often used interchangeably. For example, when Dispenza uses the word *self* in *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*, my interpretation is that he is primarily speaking of *littles*. It also appears that when he uses the term *mind*, he's referring to the brain. Again, I believe *littles* are constructs of our experiences in this world (via cause and effect.) I consider the mind more akin to soul, spirit, essence. Self will recognize the distinctions in the various terminologies.

There's certainly no shortage of books out there on any subject you choose to tackle. I enjoy listening to books in audio format. This has increased my listening skills considerably. When I find my attention diverted by something, I rewind the book to where my Self got distracted and continue the practice of staying present with the book's contents. Sometimes, I end up rewinding multiple times with the same segment. I also get curious about why I'm so distracted. Is there a *little* distracting me or what? If so, what is it about that segment of the book I struggle to pay attention to?

If aiming to develop your ability to spot and think metaphorically, consider books such as *Metaphor Therapy* by Richard R. Kopp, Ph.D. or *Metaphors in Mind* by James Lawley and Penny Tompkins. If the library doesn't have what you're looking for, see if they will order it in.

Exploring poetry is another positive addiction idea. Reading and writing poetry can lead to influential insights. Two poems I found that are in line with some of the themes of this book are "The Guest House" by Rumi and "Love Never Lies" by Cleo Wade, author of *Heart Talk: Poetic Wisdom for a Better Life*.

Give a *little* an outlet. Like Madonna sings, Express Yourself! Writing poetry can be very therapeutic. Written during a break up my senior year is one of my short *little* poems. As it turned out, he was already lost (overwhelmed) back then. So was I.

*If dreams could last forever
and dreams could just come true
We'd live and love and laugh
just like we use to do
But dreams don't last forever
and dreams just don't come true
'cause if they did
I know that I
would not be losing you*

PACK 101

Love dogs? Consider watching episodes of Caesar Millan's shows *Better Human, Better Dog* or *Leader of the Pack*. Look through the lens of the dogs being littles and leader/human as Self. As with parenting books, training books and videos abound. Check with local trainers to see if they allow auditors at trainings or clinics. When viewing trainers and techniques, keep power

dynamics in mind. Think power-with and power-to instead of power-over. Power-over techniques and tools rarely work in the long run— unless you aim to teach learned helplessness. It's best to put non-fear-based relationship techniques into context for your Self, *littles*, and any other sentient beings.

My dog Falkor is increasing my awareness of how I show up emotionally. He insists that I shift into a playful state when calling him. Seriously, he won't mind unless I do. He is not one to be bossed around. He recently started barking at shadows. This behavior was all of a sudden, like he just discovered up. I noticed it only happened at night, in one corner of my bedroom. Curious, I turned off the light. That calmed him down. Alas, it turned out to be too challenging to read with that light off. Turning the light back on prompted more barking. I tried "leave it", a command I thought he knew. Apparently, not yet. Next, I tried a rarely used command, "NO!" No luck. Finally, I barked with him. He came over, sat by me, and was quiet. Go figure! Maybe he was trying to calm me down or he just needed to be validated.

Working with animals is like working with *littles* in that we want or need them to learn to adjust to change and adapt to new situations. Understanding how they think and feel lets us be more effective with this. Trust and respect are vital. Learning what comes natural/instinctual or habitual for them is essential to know, that way Self can better discern next steps in their development and identify a better fitting job. This means Self prevailing over instinctual or habitual behaviors that don't bode well. Connection requires patience, Feel, and timing. Play around with different techniques. Don't let sympathy or pity undermine your efforts. Find what works well for all involved. Feel free to bark with the dog if that's what works for you both!

HERD 101

Intrigued by horses? Same thing as with dogs— consider watching training videos, audit local horsemanship clinics, read books on horse training. You don't have to own a horse to benefit from their teachings. Consider watching the film *Buck*, the story of Buck Brannaman or the documentary series *Cloud: Wild Stallion of the Rockies* by Ginger Kathrens.

A magnificent mustang I adopted, who I named Kumu, has taught me valuable lessons. Once, when we were at a training clinic, he was standing next to me quietly grazing. The lead rope was draped over his back. Suddenly, he stopped grazing and walked away (quite purposefully!) Curious, I followed. The clinic was held on a fifty-acre ranch, so he had plenty of places to go. He walked past several horses on his way, without stopping to interact with them. Not typical equine behavior. Eventually, I lost all sight and signs of him. I whistled and listened. Crickets. Just when I was about to freak out, I stopped, closed my eyes, took a deep breath and "planted" my feet firmly on the ground. I opened my eyes and began walking in the direction my body Felt pulled. A few minutes later, still following that Feel, there was Kumu walking toward me.

On that note, last, but SO not least in the line-up of characteristics we can strive for:

BE PRESENT

There is so much to learn from those around us, those other sentient beings that many perceive as not like us. Anais Nin wrote, in her 1961 work *Seduction of a Minotaur*, "We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are." This was an English translation, based on a passage from the *Talmud*. Overwhelmed and looking through the lens of *littles*, Self is not present to see the Truth of a given situation.

"Be the change you want to see in the world." has been attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, although it's been debated whether that's accurate. The much more expansive idea of which Mahatma Gandhi apparently did say is:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change toward him. This the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.

Building on that, and gleaned from the *Dhammapada* sayings of Buddha, we're reminded that:

The thought manifests as the word. The word manifests as the deed. The deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character. So, watch the thought and its ways with care and let it spring from love, born out of concern for all beings...
As the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become.

So, here's a Self-presence increasing invitation: Commit to practice being ridiculously and extraordinarily present for at least thirty days. Pay extremely close attention to your thoughts and emotions. You may want to document them somehow. Don't justify or defend anything that comes to mind. Just notice it. Be especially mindful in situations where you criticize, condemn, judge, hold a grievance, gossip about others, or are controlling. Notice when you're focused on the past and thinking about the future. Pay attention to whether you're met with responsiveness or reactivity by those you're around. What happened before the response or reaction?

Being aware of how we're showing up in the moment helps us recognize the impact our verbal and non-verbal communication can have on those around us. What's working? What not? What improvements are possible? Keep in mind that transformation can be confusing, chaotic, and disorienting to *littles*. There's no shortage of resources. No matter how you choose to do this important and challenging work, be persistent. Find support as needed.

READY TO EXERCISE YOUR INTUITION?

The following exercises are shared courtesy of author and teacher Sharon Franquemont, intuitionworks.com. She's been teaching others how to channel intuitive powers for more than 25 years. Franquemont calls her methods "Taking Charge" practices. You may find some of

these exercises more effective and joyful than others. Experimentation is part of developing intuition. Use the ones you like and feel free to change others to fit your needs. A dedicated intuition journal is useful. Such a journal can help you keep a record of what has happened, evaluate your intuition, and learn which exercises work well for you.

Exercise 1. Work with direct (literal) intuition.

- *Find a place to sit comfortably.*
- *Follow your breath by counting '1' on the inhale and '2' on the exhale.*
- *When you are relaxed and quiet, identify an event or situation that you'd like more insight about.*
- *Focus on the event or situation intently for a few minutes.*
- *Ask for a direct intuitive experience about it in the near future.*
- *Let it go.*

Exercise 2. Work with indirect (symbolic) intuition.

- *Get a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.*
- *Ask yourself, "What does my life need right now?" three times in row, pausing between each question. Imagine you are going toward a more meaningful answer each time you ask.*
- *When you've finished with the 3rd question, pick up your pen and draw one symbol on your paper.*
- *Interpret this symbol. What does it suggest you add, subtract, or enjoy from your life?*

Exercise 3. Learn to look for and pay attention to intuition's subtle messages.

- *Invest in your sixth sense. Imagine that your eyes, ears, hands, skin, emotions, and intellect could stretch out into the invisible world and capture sensations, information, inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom like a cable or a cell phone captures invisible waves of sounds and images.*
- *Let yourself 'walk' through your day sensitive to other dimensions.*

Exercise 4. Choose a sense to work with. (Intuition uses the senses to describe or receive information and or knowledge. Choose one and practice with others as you see fit.)

Your Intuitive Body

- *Make a date with yourself on your calendar and allow 2-3 hours.*
- *When the time comes, get in your car (or if you are without a car, you can walk) and begin to drive without knowing where you are going.*
- *Resist the first few 'ideas' you have about where you are going. Wait for the idea that makes your body very relaxed. Your body is your best barometer of what is right— if your choice arises from intuition, you will experience inner stillness, silence, and 'knowing' it is right.*

- *When the barometer is correct, go visit the person, place, or event that is suggested.*

Your Intuitive Eye

- *Sit quietly anywhere, any time.*
- *Relax your eyebrows and forehead.*
- *Let the muscles of your face 'melt' into ease.*
- *Inhale and exhale rhythmically.*
- *With your inner eyes, create a vision of you radiating health and happiness to every part of your body and to all those around you.*

Your Intuitive Ear

- *Pretend that you have an inner DJ and invite your DJ to play a song which is relevant for you.*
- *Listen to what you hear— it may be only a few words— and ask why your intuition chose that song at this moment.*

Exercise 5. Work with dreams and altered states.

- *Before you go to bed at night or lay down to rest during the day, put a pen and paper next to you.*
- *After you lay down, mentally ask your intuition for a dream or day dream image that will benefit your life and the lives of those around you.*
- *Repeat your request as often as possible before you drift off.*
- *When you wake up, even if you don't remember anything specific, write or draw whatever comes into your mind.*
- *Look over and evaluate what you receive. Act on the advice where appropriate.*
- *Repeat as needed.*

Exercise 6. Ask a question.

- *Ask yourself: If I knew I would receive help from my intuition, what is it I am most concerned about or most interested in growing now— relationship skills, rewarding career, personal evolution, financial stability, etc.*
- *Formulate a question and ask it internally as often as you can.*

Exercise 7. Focus your love.

- *Find a spot to sit comfortably.*
- *Identify something you really love to do or a place that you love.*
- *Using your imagination, allow what you identified to 'fall into' your heart area and nest there for the duration of the exercise.*
- *Inhale on the count of '1' and exhale on the count of '2' however imagine that it is your heart that is breathing.*
- *Allow your 'heart breath' to caress your thoughts as it moves in, through, and around the nest.*

- *After 5 minutes of caressing the thing or place you love, invite your thoughts to return to your head area.*
- *Focus on your breathing heart.*
- *Use your intuitive senses to know what gift of understanding has been left or been born in the nest.*
- *If nothing is there, let it go for the moment.*

Exercise 8. Practice with real situations.

- *On a clear day, the light of the sun comes long before the sun itself rises. Imagine a question which is like the first rays of light; it is a good question, but the real question has not yet risen.*
- *Observe the first question while you patiently wait for a more valuable and real question to emerge.*
- *Record the real question and begin to work with it.*

When striving to increase intuition, authenticity is vital. If you are not calm, curious, compassionate, or patient, notice it. This is being present and authentic. If you feel fearful or confused, notice that too. Notice every *little* thing that comes up for you— even the slightest sensation/emotion and fleeting thought. Lean in. Get curious. This is perspective taking. It's not hard for Self to show up and do this. It can feel hard to *littles*. Remind them. We can do hard things.

Chapter Nine

Being in the Flow

“When you are inspired... dormant forces, faculties, and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”

~Patanjali

In the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Sam asks Charlie, “Why do I and everyone I love pick people who treat us like nothing?” Charlie pauses for a moment, then responds with something his teacher told him when he was complaining about the men Sam was attracted to: “We accept the love we think we deserve.”

It had been about 7 years or so since I had spoken to my dad. I’d heard his health was poor. Maybe he had grown, I wondered. Perhaps he was ready to take responsibility for his choices and make amends to those he’d harmed? I reached out to him. The phone rang. I realized I was holding my breath. I let it out.

Two more rings. Then, the sound of a voice I hadn’t heard for quite some time— “Hello”, came the deep voice of my father.

“Hi dad, it’s Pam.”

He tersely replied, “Pam who?”

I responded with a deep sigh, “I can see how this conversation is going to go. Goodbye.”

Somewhat frantically, he replied, “Wait!” Then softly, “I’m sorry. How are you honey?”

I told him I had been thinking about him and wondered how he was. Of course, after his initial reaction, I had a fair idea. After a brief chat we agreed to meet in person the following week.

It wasn’t easy, but I wrote two letters to him before we met. A part of me wanted so much to be in a healthy, loving relationship with that man I once thought hung the moon. Another part of me needed to be prepared to put distance between us if he still refused to acknowledge, take responsibility, and make amends for the destructive behaviors he’d displayed.

The first letter shared the part of me that wasn’t willing to be around those unwilling to take responsibility for harmful behavior. The second letter shared the part of me that, despite his past behaviors, hoped we could have a healthy relationship.

At the end of our meeting, I didn’t have the heart to give him the first letter. I gave him the second letter, which also explained that rebuilding our relationship would be a process. Certain

boundaries were to be maintained. Mainly, I didn't want him to stop by or call my house unless he was invited.

I never saw him again. He wrote me a letter shortly afterwards telling me to "fuck off." He died about six years later. I don't regret my choice to shield my children from someone who, clearly, was out of their mind. I didn't have the skills necessary then to deal with the level of fear, anger, and defensiveness my dad harbored. Even if I'd had all the tools in the world, the strength of our connection in this world didn't depend solely on me.

If my dad had been equipped with the skills to navigate the hurt, betrayal, and pain of the abuse and neglect he had experienced in his own childhood, I imagine his life would have been very different. He might still be on the planet. Instead, he continued to project those feelings and emotions onto others. Maladaptive behaviors, such as objectifying and manipulating those around him and abusing substances took their toll on the quality of his life and relationships. Was he contractually obligated to play that role? I don't know. One thing I do know, because of him, I've increased my ability to forgive the people I love their *little* mistakes and also my tolerance for experiential intensity in working to relate to their misperceptions.

When someone's *little* mistakes and misperceptions continue unowned and unresolved, when those same whos and hows show up in violent, intrusive, and destructive ways, I'm learning it's best to get out of the way. It's not my job to fix them. Self-preservation requires investigating representations (hows and whos)— first and foremost. I believe we all have it in us to do this. It takes both will *and* skill. When it comes to creating change in our life, all we can ever do is the best we can with the tools we have. There is no tool shortage, regardless of a *little* misperception or mistake that there is.

INCITING INCIDENTS

Inciting incidents are experiences that create a major shift in one's life. They may include, but are not limited to, divorce, death of a loved one, illness, job loss, an epiphany, or a "mystical" experience. The inciting incident that occurred for me at age 37 was that I experienced, what can best be described as, a breakdown. It could also be considered a breakthrough or a spiritual awakening. How it began is that I had the overwhelming feeling that someone close to me was going to die— specifically, my husband or one of our kids. Overwhelmed is a bit of an understatement. That thought, and the emotions I experienced along with it, seemed horribly irrational.

Coming out the other side of this experience, a question occurred to and for me: what do I want to be when I grow up? The answer that came to me was actionable. In other words (however clunky), I got a *do* answer to my *be* question. I discovered that I wanted to assist people in their personal development alongside horses. In that moment, I had absolutely no clue what this would look like. I only knew what I didn't want it to look like. I didn't want to give lessons or train other's horses for them.

I was taking dressage lessons at the time. Dressage is a fancy French word that means *to train*. I shared the epiphany I'd had with the riding instructor. She told me about an article she

read recently in the local paper about an organization that trained others to help people learn and grow while interacting with horses. The founders of this organization would be holding a demonstration in our town the following week. Experiences such as these are like bread crumbs for my soul. I follow them whenever I can to see where they lead.

"AHA" MOMENTS

Like a kid on Christmas morning, I could hardly sit still. I sat in the bleachers as the founders introduced me to the model. When they asked for volunteers to do an activity my hand shot up like a rocket. Selected, I pretty much bounced into the arena.

There was a local news station covering the demonstration and bleachers full of spectators. Until then, I'd never been much to put myself in a position of so much vulnerability. However, I was so immersed in the activity that I never once thought about the cameras or spectators. That, in itself, was amazing to me! I had never been more engaged in an activity. Some call it truly *being present*. Another word for what I experienced is called "flow" and was coined by the late happiness researcher and psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, who described flow as "...a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it." Not to be confused with addiction.

The facilitators gave us an invitation: work together to get one of the horses over a low jump set in the middle of the arena. Three horses. Five volunteers. Three rules: no talking, no touching the horses, and no bribing or simulated bribing.

We were given a few minutes to plan. I looked at the others to see who would take the lead. After, what felt to me, an awkward and failed attempt to agree on a plan together, the facilitators told us planning time was over. Out into the arena we went. The two men in the group began to work independently of the women. I split off from the two women after my attempts to get the group back together for more planning failed: my clapping like one of those cymbal-wielding monkeys turned out not to be effective in getting them to come together and draw a plan in the dirt.

The women, who I found out later were friends, stayed together the whole time. The horses were running around, responding or reacting to our fragmented attempts to get one of them over the jump. Finally, one of the women walked over to the jump and picked up one end. Her friend followed, picking up the other. Together, they moved the jump about a third of the way down and perpendicular to the arena fence. As the men and I realized the potential of the move, we positioned ourselves in order for one of the women to get behind one of the horses. She sent it between us and the fence. The horse went over the jump. The five of us cheered, along with some of the audience. We walked back to the waiting facilitators.

When asked about our experience, I blurted out, "This is just like my life!" I elaborated with my tendency to get frustrated when people don't communicate and how I'd perceived the ensuing struggle that invariably followed. The experience brought up all kinds of feelings in and potentially for me. Up until then, I thought I was a pretty patient person.

Needless to say, I was sold on the model. The style of facilitation turned out to be exactly what I needed for my own social, emotional, and spiritual growth. The more I studied it, the more I began to challenge the beliefs and assumptions of my *littles*, although I didn't have the concept or the language for them back then.

Interestingly enough, a year after all this transpired, I found myself exploring the possibility of past lives. I had a friend whose mother-in-law claimed to be psychic. After hiring her to conduct a reading party for a small group of friends, I did a private session with her. I asked her to tell me about some of my past lives. She told me that in the life I had prior to this one I worked as a seamstress in Boston. I lived above the sewing shop and never married or had children.

She told me that in the life prior to being a Boston seamstress, I was a Native American woman. That may explain my connection and deep appreciation for horses. The psychic told me my husband had been the tribe's chief. He and my son died in a horrible accident when I was 37 years old—the same age I had been in this life when I experienced the inciting incident that led me to study the psychotherapy model that incorporates horses. Coincidence? Perhaps. Memory of an unresolved traumatic experience two lives ago? Not a mainstream thought. I got goosebumps from head to toe when she said this. I still get them when I share the story, although they've lessened with each telling. I pay attention to goosebumps. Curious feedback indeed!

Could it be that if in a prior life one has experienced and died with unresolved trauma so significant that one may not choose to re-experience such a trauma? Did losing a husband and son in the prior life lend itself to the choice of my remaining unmarried and childless in the next?

Having explored the work of those who delve into topics like past lives and near-death experiences, I choose to believe that these occurrences are more than just coincidence. I also choose to believe that re-experiencing the memory of the loss of a husband and son in another life is what set me off in the direction of Self-development and assisting others with their own in this life. I find it interesting that I've never taken a sewing class in this life. Yet, somehow, I sewed Halloween costumes for my kiddos when they were little. I reupholstered a Lazy Boy recliner, then I went on to tackle two couches, each having two built in recliners. I also created a small business (a hobby really) where I would make custom, stuffed horses. People would send me pictures of their horse. I would sew them a toy replica based off the photos.

When I was in my twenties, I had a parrot named Lover who went just about everywhere with me. I chose to rehome him nine years before that psychic session. The psychic told me she could see a parrot sitting on my shoulder. She described him perfectly. I had never mentioned any of these things to my friend, her daughter-in-law. Needless to say, my mind was blown!

I notice hawks frequently. Very often this happens when I'm at a cross-roads in my life. Years after that psychic session, I was traveling with two of the equine assisted psychotherapy organization's trainers to attend a training in Montana. One of the trainers studied Shamanism. We got on the subject of spirituality while driving back to the hotel after the second day of

training. I noticed a hawk sitting high up in a tree and pointed it out. He said to me, "Your spirit animal is the hawk and your spirit name is Hawk Dance." "Why a hawk?" I asked. "You see everything, like a hawk." He explained. I thought for a moment and asked him about the name Dance. Mysteriously, he said, "That's for you to discover."

Of course, I don't always see everything. Like everybody else, I see what I pay attention to. He and I eventually collaborated on an article titled "In the Eye of the Beholder" and co-presented two years in a row at an international conference on the subject of personal perception and how it can affect clients, the horses we partner with, and session outcomes.

Many years have passed since he told me that my spirit name is Hawk Dance. I believe I've discovered the why of *Dance*, and I'm still learning how to optimally do it. Being in relationship with life is a dance. Dance is the exchange of energy. Give and take. Ebb and flow. Feel and timing. Nature leads. Willing partners follow where it leads, while also using great discernment.

WILD TEACHERS

Years later, I attended a different equine-assisted learning model training. This one was slightly different than the first one I studied, in that it focused our attention on the topic of relationships, with an emphasis on trauma reduction and brain science. We got to work with young wild mustangs from a nearby sanctuary. By this time, I had already adopted Kumu, a wild horse from the BLM (Bureau of Land Management). He has turned out to an incredible trail horse and work partner. As of this writing, he and I have been hanging out with each other for almost twenty years.

As the other students and I stood in front of these wonderful, four legged teachers, the facilitators invited us to observe the horses for a few minutes and choose the one we wanted to work with. I was immediately drawn to one, in particular. His warm, brown eyes stared back at me— inquisitive yet shy, complex yet simple; in the matter-of-fact way nature can be. He seemed stoic and vulnerable at the same time. I learned after we'd selected our horses, the one I chose was called Hawk.

The therapist I was partnered with and I got to learn from Hawk for three days. Working with him was like dancing. I led. He led. We were both very aware of where the other was in terms of space, energy, and trust. Hawk was an incredible dance partner. After the training was over, I yearned to spend more time with him.

Jill, the director of the wild horse sanctuary, had arranged to hold an adoption for the horses after the training was over. I fervently hoped Hawk would end up being fostered by the owner of the ranch where the training and adoption was being held. She's a friend of mine, and I knew she had the time and skills to work with a mustang. I was already employed at the ranch a few days a week, so I would get to visit and, hopefully, get the opportunity to continue learning from him.

Hawk was still there after the adoption ended. Another friend, Cindy, who had organized the training told me two horses would remain at the ranch. "Which two do you think would be best?" Cindy asked me. I laughed and said, "I'm biased, you know!" She informed me there was

another person that wanted to foster Hawk. I experienced a brief moment of disappointment. As a practitioner of being open to outcome, I replied, "It's up to you." I was trusting the process. In the very moment after letting go of trying to make sure Hawk stayed, something over Cindy's right shoulder caught my attention. A hawk had landed on the concrete about a hundred feet or so from where we stood. "Oh, my God!" I exclaimed. Chills covered my entire body. I grabbed her shoulders and spun her in the direction of the hawk. "Is that a hawk?" She asked with surprise.

"Yes!" I laughed. Happy tears filled my eyes. I grabbed her and, jumping up and down, gave her the biggest hug ever. She began to laugh also and said, "I'll go talk to Jill."

All agreed. Hawk would stay.

I will never forget that moment with Cindy and the hawk. I call these types of occurrences Holy Shit or bread crumb moments because I see them as fertilizer or clues from beyond this realm. Of course, they're only useful if we notice them and put them to use to connect to who, how, or what we are, need, or want in life.

Hawk continued to be a fabulous teacher. In playing with him, I got to connect more deeply with my *littles* and expand my sense of Self. In being focused on Feel and timing in our relationship, I learned to be more present, patient, and persistent. Again, Feel being intuiting what is needed in the moment. Timing being responding in the moment. In choosing to work with Hawk, I became a better student and teacher. After our time together, he was still up for adoption. As I had 5 horses in my care already, Hawk went on to work with someone else who also appreciates him.

Connecting with animals can be perceived as safer for some *littles*, such can be the extent of unresolved trauma and mistrust for humans. Therapeutic models that are experiential in nature and incorporate symbolism— metaphor, simile, and analogy— invite characteristics and capacities of the right hemisphere. Spending time in such environments is especially valuable when a participant generalizes what they've experienced and applies that learning in other areas of their life.

If in need of assistance, being in the presence of those who show up in ways that are calm, confident, curious, compassionate, vulnerable, and who possess a great deal of courage and clarity, can be of optimal support. Along with awareness that *littles* and Self can co-exist peacefully, assistants who display and invite presence, persistence, perspective, playfulness, and patience will model, invite, and may inspire the same in those they assist. Opportunities involving physical movement and plenty of opportunity for symbolic interpretation will keep sessions action-oriented. Approaches are most effective when the process moves every *little* thing inside-out, to be acknowledged, accepted, and freed from limiting beliefs, stories, and behaviors. This is what it means to be unburdened so that creativity and connection are increased.

BEING PURPOSE-FULL

The grace I aim to give my *littles*, as well as those I'm in relationship with, is to remember that all are doing the best they can with the tools they have. I practice not shaming, blaming, or judging unconscious choices. When I am being on purpose, I am sharing tools and inspiring ways to live a life of Self-awareness, compassion, love, and connection. Not just for *littles* and Self— for other sentient beings, our planet, and beyond.

When I reflect back, the majority of relationships I've been in provided opportunities to assist me to better define what connectivity and love are— and what they aren't. For this, I am grateful. As I become more aware, I know I don't have to let anything or anyone dictate or determine why or how I show up. That's, ultimately, my Self-responsibility.

I get to spend the time I have on this planet doing my best better and my better best. As my aim is now to serve others, I will effectively achieve this by continuing the process of integrating my *littles* to serve my Self first. Call me Selfish, if you will. I'll take it as a compliment.

I aim to play an infinite game with life! The wonderful thing about playing an infinite game is that there's never nothing going on. There's also never nothing to learn. Why, who, how, and what we learn (and unlearn) depends on what we pay attention to.

What gifts those who choose to enter our lives potentially bless us with, in whatever role they play. Will you choose to increase awareness of *littles* and become more Selfish as well? As author Simon Sinek says, "Most of us live our lives by accident— we live it as it happens. Fulfillment comes when we live our lives on purpose." I'd rather have fulfillment and purpose than accidents any day of the week!

When I was eighteen, if someone told me that I'd spend twenty years of my life working as a floral designer, another twenty in the field of equine-assisted psychotherapy, go on to write a book, coach clients, and one day set my sights on assisting people using psilocybin for spiritual growth, I probably would have laughed and thought them crazy. I'm open to outcome on the psilocybin-assistant front. However, as it's been said, where there's a will, there's a way! I can be very willful indeed. Open to seeing where the river of life takes me, while being in flow.

Csikszentmihalyi, mentioned earlier, who developed the term "flow state", described eight characteristics of being in flow. To add a *little* context, my translation in parenthesis:

1. Complete concentration on the task. (Team effort. Able to rein in *little* distractions.)
2. Clarity of goals and reward in mind and immediate feedback. (Self-present, *all* intentional and receptive.)
3. Transformation of time— speeding up/slowing down. (Time is a tool used to best fit the situation— think fast, slow, or not at all.)
4. The experience is intrinsically rewarding. (No *little* victims. Volunteers only, please!)
5. Effortlessness and ease. (Adequate skills and growth mindset required.)
6. There is a balance between challenge and skills. (Difficulty and hindrance will ensue if not.)
7. Actions and awareness are merged, losing self-conscious rumination. (Doing and being in unconscious competence. *Littles* resting peacefully.)

8. There is a feeling of control over the task. (Teamwork makes the dream work! Huddle as necessary and play on.)

We're in flow when we demonstrate most or all of the capacities above at the same time. Making realistic plans and taking the steps necessary to follow through requires awareness of *littles* that aim to keep one "safe." If not, they'll prevent forward movement. When a less than positive Self-concept exists, this equates to a *little* lack of confidence in Self's skills and abilities (especially communication and problem solving.) This just means ability to recognize strong impulses and feelings is still evolving. We benefit greatly from connecting with our capacity to consider several possibilities for action, then form an intention to pursue one of those possibilities. What's required is a strong belief that we have a choice in the matter of life— our own free will.

I can't say that I'm a full-time resident of flow-town yet. I get to visit once in a while. It's pure bliss when I do! Time doesn't exist. I'm energized. I forget to eat and go to the bathroom. Much like being in love, nothing else seems to matter when in flow. Never have I felt more alive than when in such a state of being. I aim to stay longer. In the meanwhile, I now know the types of relationships I'm willing to invest my time and energy in and why it's important for me to do so. My how is getting better and better as I grow through life. My aim is to love whatever is as just what's so for now.

What if all we come into contact with and experience assists in defining what love is? As human beings and energy in motion, what if we're evolving or devolving love through how we relate to each other, non-humans, and our planet? At the end of this life, each vote will have been cast. Each of us will have had the opportunity to be of service to love, however that is represented. If this is the case, it doesn't matter who or what we love. It matters how and that we love. I've taken the liberty to shorten a passage from *A Course in Miracles* I appreciate and have found helpful with recognizing *littles* and maintaining Self, and so leave you with this final invitation:

When you encounter another sentient being, remember, it is a sacred encounter.

As you see them, you will see yourself.

As you treat them, you will treat yourself.

As you think of them, you will think of yourself.

Always remember this, for in them you will find yourself or lose yourself.

EPILOGUE

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “We are now at a point where we must educate our children in what no one knew yesterday, and prepare our schools for what no one knows yet.” I’m not sure exactly when she said that. Though she died in 1978, her wisdom continues to resonate. Some of her more famous quotes, the first three of which transfer beautifully to *littles*, are:

“A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”

“There is no greater insight into the future than recognizing... when we save our children, we save ourselves.”

“Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.”

There are many of us advocating for trauma-informed systems of care. More advocates are needed. We still have a long way to go to ensure that all of our public schools, judicial systems, and work places engage in trauma-informed practices, policies, and procedures. When we take careful, compassionate action, we will continue to be influential. Collectively, we can create trauma-informed systems of care by completely showing up. I don’t claim to have all the answers. One thing I do know: there is power in collective wisdom.

Trauma-informed systems of care means understanding human behavior through a trauma-informed lens. With over eight billion humans on the planet, I doubt we’ll do this by collectively agreeing on what trauma means. I view trauma on a spectrum. It includes everything from shame to war. It can stem from impacts experienced before we’re born. Two views of trauma that resonate for me are Dr. Robert Scaer’s “Any negative life event that occurs in a position of relative helplessness” and Dr. Gabor Mate’s “Trauma is a psychic wound that hardens you psychologically that then interferes with your ability to grow and develop.”

Probably the greatest challenge in advocating for trauma-informed approaches are those *littles* that have the best of intentions but don’t have the skills yet to admit they are part of the trauma equation. I suppose that, in rare instances, some lack the will. *Littles* left unattended will continue to stick with what they think they know, much like the doctors that performed autopsies and delivered babies in the 1800s— those who inadvertently infected mothers. Left to their own devices, *littles* with burdens of shame and other potentially toxic feelings and emotions will affect life.

GO UPSTREAM

Understanding the impact of trauma on a brain is the first principle of all trauma-informed approaches. The latest research on the brain gives us a new lens through which to interpret and respond to the behavioral and cognitive challenges characteristic of those (whether human or not) displaying the effects of unresolved trauma.

The majority of zero-tolerance disciplinary policies in public schools do not always consider situational context or individual circumstances. Unaware of the effects of unresolved trauma, educational institutions with such policies tend to blame and punish, further exacerbating trauma. Unsafe plus unsafe equals unsafe.

By increasing our own Self-characteristics and capacities, we're all qualified and capable of being child welfare administrators and better stewards to the earth. We can advocate for more social and emotional learning, collaborative problem solving, and mindfulness in our public schools. Consider, if still available, programs such as Roots of Empathy, Ross Green's CPS model, and the Hahn Foundation's Mind Up curriculums. We can advocate to increase metaphoric thinking, intuition, positive psychology, and choice theory through experiential education and service-learning programs in our schools. In this age of technological connectivity, there is no adequate excuse for failing our children by not addressing unresolved traumas by investing in more effective interventions.

Perhaps the perspectives included here will inspire individuals and systems to incorporate knowledge and principles that promote environments that are responsive to those who have been affected by shame and other unresolved trauma. Hopefully, readers will take action and be better equipped to prevent re-traumatization and advocate for trauma informed systems of care and increased resilience. Humans are not the only species that employ maladaptive behaviors in response to stress and unresolved trauma. Many trauma-informed approaches can be implemented in the careful treatment and healing of animals.

The following page contains a resource guide gleaned from Chadwick Trauma-Informed Systems Project put out by the Chadwick Center for Children and Families, ctisp.wordpress.com. I encourage you to generalize and apply recommendations found in this guide to your own life. You may find it useful when interacting with any *littles* you encounter. For example, in the article below, we can replace the word *child* with "little" and the words *administrators* and *parent* with "Self." We can replace *child welfare workforce* with "personal support system."

CTISP Resource Guide

These essential elements [as described in the following paragraphs] are intended to provide a guiding framework for child welfare administrators striving to infuse trauma-informed knowledge and practice into their existing systems.

While child welfare has always had a focus on the physical safety of the child, a trauma-informed child welfare system must go further and recognize that psychological safety of both the child and their family is extraordinarily important to the child's and family's long-term recovery and social and emotional well-being. Psychological safety is a sense of safety, or the ability to feel safe, within one's self and safe from external harm. This type of safety has direct implications for physical safety and permanence, and is critical for functioning as well as physical and emotional growth. A lack of psychological safety can impact a child's and family's interactions with all other individuals, including those trying to help them, and can lead to a variety of maladaptive strategies for coping with the anxiety associated with feeling unsafe. These "survival strategies" may include high-risk behaviors, such as substance abuse and self-

mutilation. The child (and their siblings) may continue to feel psychologically unsafe long after the physical threat has been removed or they have been relocated to a physically safe environment, such as a relative's or foster parents' home. The child's parent(s) may feel psychologically unsafe for a number of reasons including their own possible history of trauma, or the uncertainty regarding their child's well-being that emerges following removal.

Even after the child and/or parent gains some degree of security, a trauma reminder may unexpectedly occur when they see a person or a place or experience an event that draws their attention back to intense and disturbing memories that overwhelm their ability to cope again. Other times, a seemingly innocent event or maybe a smell, sound, touch, taste, or particular scene may act as a subconscious trauma reminder that produces a physical response due to the body's biochemical system reacting as if the trauma was happening again. A trauma-informed child welfare system understands that these pressures may help to explain a child's or parent's behavior and can use this knowledge to help them better manage trauma reminders and to feel safe.

The child welfare workforce should be educated on trauma and how it affects an individual at any stage of development and intersects with their culture. The system should screen everyone for traumatic history and traumatic stress responses which would assist the workers in understanding a child's and family's history and potential trauma reminders and in creating a trauma-informed case plan. For those who screen positive for trauma, a thorough trauma-focused assessment by a properly trained mental health provider can identify a child's or parent's reactions and how their behaviors are connected to the traumatic experience and help guide subsequent treatment and intervention efforts.

Most birth families with whom child welfare interacts have also experienced trauma; including past childhood trauma, community violence, and domestic violence that may still be ongoing. Providing trauma-informed education and services, including evidence-based or evidence-informed mental health interventions as needed, to birth parents enhances their protective capacities, thereby increasing the resilience, safety, permanency, and well-being of the child. In addition, both birth and resource parents should also be offered training and support to help them manage secondary trauma related to caring for a child who has experienced trauma and their siblings.

Working within the child welfare system can be a dangerous business and professionals in the workforce may be confronted with threats or violence in their daily work. Adding to these stressors, many workers experience secondary traumatic stress reactions, which are physical and emotional stress responses to working with a highly traumatized population. When working with children who have experienced maltreatment, parents who have acted in abusive or neglectful ways, and systems that do not always meet the needs of families, feelings of helplessness, anger, and fear are common. A trauma-informed system must acknowledge the impact of primary and secondary trauma on the workforce and develop organizational strategies to enhance resilience in the individual members of it.

Youth and family members who have experienced traumatic events often feel like powerless "pawns" in the system, reinforcing feelings of powerlessness felt at the time of the trauma. Treating youth and families as partners by providing them with choices and a voice in their care

plays a pivotal role in helping them to reclaim the power that was taken away from them during the trauma and tap into their own resilience.

Youth and family members who have been involved in the child welfare system have a unique perspective and can also serve as partners by providing valuable feedback on how the system can better address trauma among children and families. These partnerships should occur at all levels of the organization, as youth and families can help shape trauma-informed practices and policies.

No one agency can function alone, and in a trauma-informed system, child welfare must reach out and coordinate with other systems so they, too, can view and work with the child and family through a trauma lens. This partnering includes:

- *Teaming with law enforcement to minimize the number of front-end interviews a child must experience*
- *Working with mental health agencies to ensure therapists are trained in specialized trauma assessment and evidence-based or evidence-informed trauma treatments*
- *Coordinating with schools, the courts, and attorneys*

Such coordination is necessary to prevent one part of the system undoing the good trauma-informed work of another part of the system.

Please note: My including a resource doesn't automatically mean that I agree with all aspects of it. Keep what resonates for your Self. Leave what doesn't. Research and discern.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Listed in no particular order, this is certainly not an exhaustive list. No guarantee all resources mentioned are currently available. Authors mentioned may have other books and/or websites, podcasts, YouTube content, etc. Many books these days are available in audio format— bonus for those of us aiming to increase our listening skills.

BOOKS

What Happened to You by Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Perry

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog by Bruce Perry

Virus of the Mind by Richard Brodie

The Soul of Shame by Curt Thompson

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

Somatic Internal Family Systems by Susan McConnell and Richard Schwartz

Internal Family Systems Theory by Richard Swartz and Martha Sweeney

Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts by Richard Schwartz

In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts by Gabor Mate

When the Body Says No by Gabor Mate

The Myth of Normal by Gabor Mate and Daniel Mate

Think Again: The Power of Knowing What We Don't Know by Adam Grant

Waking the Tiger by Peter Levine

In an Unspoken Voice by Peter Levine

Trauma and Memory by Peter Levine

Burnout by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski

Whole Brain Living: The Anatomy of Choice and the Four Characters that Drive Our Life by Jill Bolte Taylor

The Anatomy of the Spirit by Caroline Myss

Sacred Contracts by Caroline Myss

Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others by Laura Van der Moot Lipsky with Connie Burk

Emotional Alchemy by Tara Bennet-Goleman

Intra Connected by Daniel Siegel

Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Already Free by Bruce Tift

Thank You for the Feedback by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen

Nonviolent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg

The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz

Finite and Infinite Games by James Carse

Untamed by Glennon Doyle

The Way of Integrity by Martha Beck

Dante's Divine Comedy by Mark Vernon

Conscious Uncoupling by Katherine Woodward Thomas

Freely Determined by Kennon M. Sheldon

The Ego Tunnel by Thomas Metzinger

Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself by Joe Dispenza

Trust Your Vibes by Sonia Choquette

The Anatomy of a Calling by Lissa Rankin

Finite and Infinite Games by James P. Carse*

Choice Theory by William Glasser*

Presence by Amy Cuddy*

Blind Spots by Madeleine L. Van*

Blink by Malcolm Gladwell*

Upstream: The Quest to Solve Problems Before They Happen by Dan Heath*

Atomic Habits: An Easy and Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones by James Clear*

The Three Laws of Performance by Dave Logan and Steve Zaffron

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi

Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche by Bill Plotkin, PhD

Radical Compassion by Tara Brach*

Soul Story by Tim Freke*

Plays Well with Others by Eric Barker

A Course in Miracles Experiment by Pam Grout*

The Power of Meaning by Emily Esfahani Smith*

The Ultimate David Hawkins Library by David Hawkins*

Emotional Agility by Susan David*

* These authors also have TED Talks and/or are on YouTube. Additional authors cited may as well. Speaking of TED talks, here's one that I found quite delightful: Being your Own Life Coach by John Muldoon

PODCASTS

Insights from the Edge with Tammy Simon

Inner Cosmos with David Eagleman

Good Life Project with Jonathan Fields

Hidden Brain with Shankar Vedantam

Mind Love with Melissa Monte

The Freke Show with Tim Freke

Unlocking Us & Dare to Lead with Brené Brown*

A Bit of Optimism with Simon Sinek

Huberman Lab with Andrew D. Huberman

The One Inside: An Internal Family Systems with Tammy Sollenberger

Sounds of SAND (science and non-duality) hosted by Zara and Maurizio Bennazzo

*Shame researcher Brené Brown has written a plethora of books, podcasts, a Netflix special, an HBO show, and multiple YouTube videos.

WEBSITES

www.acesconnection.com

www.ifsguide.com

www.ifs-institute.com

www.traumainformedcare.chcs.org

www.ted.org

<http://eicnetwork.tv/Events/SAMHSA— Trauma— and— Peer— Engagement— 2017/VideoId/2665/the— power— of— language— and— portrayals— what— we— hear— what— we— see>

www.thebestbrainpossible.com

www.drdansiegel.com

www.trackyourhappiness.org

www.servicelearning.org

www.soundstrue.com

www.gaia.com

Resiliency Now, an interactive Facebook group, is a clearinghouse of sorts that shares trauma-informed and resilience development resources.

For those inclined to share their own stories of transformation, resilience, and related resources, consider joining the Grow Playfully Facebook community.

JOURNALLING PROMPTS

The prompts below aim to increase one's awareness of *littles*, Self, and purpose. I hope that as you focus attention on the ways you aim to show up in this world, that you'll celebrate successful changes. Be patient and compassionate with *littles*. They're young and don't know better yet.

How might someone close to you describe how or who you're being?

What do you believe you are in this moment?

How would you describe the Self you aim to be?

How do you currently spend your time and attention?

What were the three most positive events in your childhood?

Why were they significant to you?

What changed inside of you, as a result of those events?

What beliefs did you adopt as a result?

How do those events affect you today?

What were the three most negative events in your childhood?

Why were those three significant? What changed inside you as a result of those events?

What beliefs did you adopt as a result?

How do those events affect you today?

What period of your life did you like the most?

What was it about that time that you enjoyed so much?

What period of your life did you like the least?

What was it about that time that you disliked so much?

What are five of your greatest strengths?

Are you using all five of those strengths in your life today? If so, when? If not, why not?

What are three of your weaknesses?

Which of those three weaknesses are causing the most trouble in your life today?

Do your weaknesses cause problems for you or for others?

In what specific ways would your life change if your weaknesses didn't exist?

If you were to receive an award, what would you want that award to represent and why?

Who are two people you admire?

What three characteristics do they each possess that you admire?

Do you have any of those characteristics?

What two personal accomplishments fill you with the greatest sense of pride?

How often do you think about these accomplishments?

Which of your skills or talents give you the greatest sense of pride?

What are two potential life situations that cause you to feel the most fear?

Why are those situations particularly troubling?

What might it mean if they actually happened?

Do you believe you would be capable of handling either of the situations if they happened? Why or why not?

When put under pressure, you tend to feel... because the story is...

You would tell a white lie if...

Your hardest decisions concern...

When someone criticizes you at work you often feel... because the story is...

You are not the best listener when...

You feel the most motivated when...

You avoid challenges when...

You're open about your *littles* with those you're around if...

When you are put in charge, you...
Your greatest dissatisfactions center around...
You behave stubbornly when...
Changing your behavior requires...
You might be understood better...
You create the best results in your life when...
If you knew you could not fail, you would...
The amount of work you do is influenced by...
You show significant courage when...
You missed a significant opportunity in your life when...
You feel most joy in your life when...
Littles get their own way when...
Your Self easily rises to the occasion when...
You are insensitive to others when...
You have a difficult time being emotionally present when...
The kind of support you need more in your life is...
One of the most important things you learned from your parents is...
If someone mistreats you...
If you didn't need to earn money...
If you had no fear...
Littles sabotage your Self when...
You release stress by...
You enjoy life best...
You do the following to look after your Self on a regular basis...
Your weak points are...
Your strong points are...
You learn best by...
What have you given up on in life?
You were the happiest in your life when...

You were the unhappiest in your life when...

If you could do anything in the world, it would be...

You want the rest of your life to be about...

Are there any themes or patterns in your answers to the above questions?

Are there any *little* thoughts and behaviors you choose to acknowledge, accept, and abolish?

Who have you inherited shame from?

Who and how perpetuates shame in your life now?

What if there was nothing wrong with asking for what you want?

What if there was nothing wrong with expressing wants?

What if there was nothing wrong with sharing what you have? What if it was just a matter of learning how to do so skillfully?

What if it actually felt better to be direct in some matters than indirect?

What if we're all craving candor and directness?

What if we believed that those who shame are actually saying, "I'm acting like a needy homunculus. I have perceived needs, and I'm projecting them onto you."?

What if the reason someone's comments feel off is because we're ashamed of doing whatever we've done and not because it's inherently shameful to do it?

What if shaming wasn't about trying to change anyone but having a human conversation about whether or not something was a fit for us?

What if our attention was more focused on the truth of the moment rather than our goal of what we think we want or need?

What might our families, schools, communities, and world look like if shame wasn't prevalent?

A WEE BIT MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I currently live in Northeast Ohio with three horses and pup Falkor.

If you ask me who I am, I may share my name, one or more of the roles I play, such as woman, mom, animal lover, vegetarian, Purpose Amplifier or Positive Self-Directed Neuroplasticity Junkie.

Asked how I am?

Honestly, that just depends on the moment.

Hopefully though, you can find me being calm, confident, curious, compassionate, optimistic, Self-aware, willing to be vulnerable, courageous and striving for clarity.

My current claim as to what I am?

I am a spiritual being having a human experience.

If I'm doing this optimally, it will be with a great deal of all of the above plus integrity, empathy, presence, perseverance, persistence, perspective, playfulness, and patience.

Until I can't, I can be contacted at connect@growplayfully.com

Until we meet again— play, grow, and thrive!