

## Grief, Love, & Fear of Intimacy

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"It is necessary to own and honor the child who we were in order to Love the person we are. And the only way to do that is to own that child's experiences, honor that child's feelings, and release the emotional grief energy that we are still carrying around."

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Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls

I am not sure at exactly what point in my recovery that it took place - but it was probably around 2 and a half years. It was years later before I would understand its' huge significance in my life. At the time it was just a blessed relief.

I went to a meeting at my home group in Studio City. I was feeling a little crazy. Wound too tight and ready to explode. It was a familiar feeling. It was a feeling that I had drowned in alcohol or taken the edge off of with marijuana in the old days. But I couldn't do that anymore so I went to a meeting.

My friends name was Steve. He hadn't been my friend for very long although I had known him for years. He had been my agent years earlier and I had disliked him intensely. I was in the process of getting to know him, and like him, now that we were both in recovery.

He saw how up tight I was and asked me to go outside with him. He asked me one simple question: "How old do you feel?" "Eight," I said, and then I exploded. I cried in a way I didn't remember ever crying before - great heaving sobs wracked my body as I told him what happened when I was eight.

I had grown up on a farm in the Midwest. The summer that I turned eight I had my first 4-H calf. 4-H was to us rural kids kind of like boy scouts was to city kids - a club where farm kids had projects to learn things. I got a calf who weighed about 400 pounds and fed him all spring and summer until he weighed over a thousand pounds. I tamed him and taught him to allow me to lead him around on a halter so I could show him at the county fair. After the county fair there was another chance to show him at a town nearby and then sell him. Local business people would buy the calves for more than they were worth to give us kids incentive and teach us how to make money.

By the time I was eight, I was completely emotionally isolated and alone. I grew up in a pretty typical American family. My father had been trained to be John Wayne - anger was the only emotion he ever expressed - and my mother had

been trained to be a self-sacrificing martyr. Since my mother could get no emotional support from my father - she had very low self-esteem and no boundaries - she used her children to validate and define her. She emotionally incested me by using me emotionally - causing me to feel responsible for her emotions, and feel ashamed that I couldn't protect her from my father's verbal and emotional abuse. The shame and pain of my father's seeming inability to love me coupled with my mother loving me too much at the same time that she allowed herself and me to be abused by fathers anger and perfectionism - caused me to shut down to my mothers love and close down emotionally.

And then into the life of this little boy who was in such pain, and so isolated, came a shorthorn calf which he named Shorty. Shorty was the closest thing to a personal pet that I have ever had. On the farm, there were always dogs and cats and other animals - but they weren't mine alone. I developed an emotionally intimate relationship with that calf. I loved Shorty. He was so tame that I could sit on his back or crawl under his belly. I spent uncounted hours with that calf. I really loved him.

I took him to the county fair and got a Blue Ribbon. Then a few weeks later it was time for the show and sale. I got another Blue Ribbon. When it came time to sell him, I had to lead him into the sale ring while the auctioneer sang his mysterious selling chant. It was over in a moment and I led Shorty out of the ring to a pen where all the sold calves were put. I took off his halter and let him go. Somehow I knew that my father expected me not to cry, and that my mother expected me to cry. By that time, I was very clear from the role-modeling of my father that a man did not cry - ever. And I had so much suppressed rage at my mother for not protecting me from my fathers raging that I was passive - aggressively doing things the opposite of what I thought she wanted. So, I slipped his halter off, patted him on the shoulder, and closed the gate - consigning my best friend to the pen of calves that was going to the packing house to be slaughtered. No tears for this eight year old, no sirree, I knew how to be a man.

That poor little boy. It wasn't until almost 30 years later, leaning up against the side of the meeting room, that I got the chance to cry for that little boy. With great heaving sobs, tears pouring down my cheeks, and snot running out my nose, I had my first experience with deep grief work. I did not know anything about the process at the time - I just knew that somehow that wounded little boy was still alive inside of me. I also did not know at the time that part of my life's work was going to be helping other people to reclaim the wounded little boys and girls inside of them.

Now I know that emotions are energy which if not released in a healthy grieving process gets stuck in the body. The only way for me to start healing my wounds is to go back to that little boy and cry the tears or own the rage that he had no permission to own back then.

I also know that there are layers of grief from the emotional trauma I experienced. There is not only trauma about what happened back then - there is also grief about the effect those experiences had on me later in life. I get to cry once again for that little boy as I write this. I have been sobbing for that little boy and the emotional trauma he experienced - but I am also sobbing for the man that I became.

I learned in childhood, and carried into adulthood, the belief that I am not lovable. It felt like I was not lovable to my mother and father. It felt like the God I was taught about didn't love me - because I was a sinful human. It felt like anyone who loved me would eventually be disappointed, would learn the truth of my shameful being. I spent most of my life alone because I felt less lonely alone. When I was around people I would feel my need to connect with them - and feel my incredible loneliness for human relationships - but I did not know how to connect in a healthy way. I have had a great terror of the pain of abandonment and betrayal - but even more than that, the feeling that I could not be trusted because I am not good enough to love and be loved. At the core of my being, at the foundation of my relationship with myself, I feel unworthy and unlovable.

And now I know that the little boy, that I was, felt like he betrayed and abandoned the calf that he loved. Proof of his unworthiness. And not only did he betray his best friend - he did it for money. Another piece of the puzzle of why money has been such a big issues in my life. In recovery I had learned that because of the power my father and society gave to money I had spent much of my life saying that money wasn't important to me at the same time that I was always focused on it because I never had enough. I have definitely had a dysfunctional relationship with money in my life and 8 year old Robby gave me a glimpse at another facet of that relationship.

Robby has also helped me to understand another piece of my fear of intimacy issues. I have been going through a transformation one more time in my recovery. Each time that I need to grow some more - need to surrender some more of who I thought I was in order to become who I am - I get to peel another layer of the onion. Each time this happens I get to reach a deeper level of honesty and see things clearer than I ever have before. Each time, I also get to release some of the emotional energy through crying and raging.

Through clearer eyes, and with deeper emotional honesty, I get to look at all of my major issues again to heal them some more. I used to think that I could deal with an issue and be done with it - but now I know that is not the way the healing process works. So recently I have gotten the opportunity to revisit my issues of abandonment and betrayal, of deprivation and discounting. My issues with my mother and father, with my gender and sexuality, with money and success. My issues with the God I was taught about and the God-Force that I choose to believe in. My patterns of self-abusive behavior that are driven by my emotional wounds - and the attempts that I make to forgive myself for behavior that I have been powerless over. And they all lead me back to the core issue. I am not worthy. I am not good enough. Something is wrong with me.

At the core of my relationship is the little boy who feels unworthy and unlovable. And my relationship with myself was built on that foundation. The original wounding caused me to adapt attitudes and behavior patterns which caused me to be further traumatized and wounded - which caused me to adapt different attitudes and behavior patterns which caused me to be further traumatized and wounded in different ways. Layer upon layer the wounds were laid - multifaceted, incredibly complex and convoluted is the disease of Codependence. Truly insidious, baffling and powerful.

Through revisiting the eight year old who I was I get to understand on a new level why I have always been attracted to unavailable people - because the pain of feeling abandoned and betrayed is the lesser of two evils. The worst possible thing, to my shame-based inner children, is to have revealed how unworthy and unlovable I am - so unworthy that I abandoned and betrayed my best friend, Shorty the shorthorn calf that I loved and who seemed to love me back. It is no wonder that at my core I am terrified of loving someone who is capable of loving me back.

By owning and honoring the feelings of the child who I was, I can do some more work on letting him know that it wasn't his fault and that he deserves forgiveness. That he deserves to be Loved.

So today, I am grieving once more for the eight year old who was trapped, and for the man he became. I am grieving because if I don't own that child and his feelings - then the man will never get past his terror of allowing himself to be loved. By owning and cherishing that child, I am healing the broken heart of both the child and the man - and giving that man the opportunity to one day trust himself enough to love someone as much as he loved Shorty.

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