

Inner child.

To get a good image of the how we start out and develop, please take a look at **Soul Circle**. It describes in a simple visual way how we process and integrate society, personality, culture, and other factors as we grow and live. Another way to understand and manage how our childhood affects us is the **Developmental Stages** section that focuses on the classical ideas of Erik Erikson. It serves as a powerful reminder of what we may have missed out on, and so where we may direct attention and further growth.

It seems the only way I can truly express my experience of inner child is to tell you my story. It's worth a listen . Please do. It seemed like I had a nice childhood as nothing horrible happened, and seemed to be fairly happy, but honestly it seemed to lack love, joy, beauty and many other important things a full, vital, and alive childhood should have. The perceived lack of attention, acceptance, affection, affirmation, and appreciation affected me deeply.

Instead I often describe it as being like a desert: empty, barren, lonely, and with a layer of snow, so cold and quiet too. In a word I didn't feel cherished. My heart froze up hard as a rock and cold as ice because I knew I wanted more, and deserved more. Being a car guy I also imagined this heart dipped in steel and chrome polished. Perhaps interesting to look at but even more cold, hard, and impenetrable.

I find it very interesting that your heart is about the size of your fist, as I can easily imagine the hearts of those that were actively abused becoming a tightly clenched fist. Yet facing such attack and abuse, their hearts could be hard and cold to withstand the abuse, or red hot in anger and rage. Some don't go cold or hot, but simply "check out" and disappear into their thoughts and fantasies.

It felt too uncomfortable for me to take so I moved out of my body and into my head. "Think is our drink" as a twelve step saying goes. Cut off from my body I was also cut off from the love, joy, authenticity, and happiness of my inner child, and the infinite love, wisdom, power, and presence of my Higher Power in my heart of hearts. Cut off from my body I was also cut off from my lungs and voice which hold my truth, so I couldn't speak my truth anymore.

I also often describe it as a dark cloud of disease, dysfunction, and on some level insanity over me and my family. In my later teens I knew there was something missing, so I started searching. I checked out and tried a lot of things. For instance I took all the psychology classes my local colleges had to offer trying to find answers. Nothing was really working until I started working with a 12 step recovery community and pursuing a spiritual mindset and experience.

I was talking with my three sisters about this recently and one of them said she couldn't understand because she thought we all had a pretty good childhood. I soon remembered our family has much divorce, bankruptcy, children born out of wedlock, lack of higher education, as well as alcoholism, addictions, and abuses I don't wish to go into, so I believe they missed out on many things too.

Unfortunately I carried this all into my relationships at work and home. The suffering inflicted on my wives and children gives me the greatest sorrow. This part of the story is very long and very sad but it is not the end it was only the beginning. Suffering is not enough! There are many aspects of my recovery

such as Higher Power, loving inner parent, nature, music, and prayer and meditation, but the inner child has been my greatest salvation.

Here is the other side, the recovery side of the story. I did have one saving grace right from the start, and that was nature. My family lived on a ridge between two canyons with streams, trees, birds, insects, and other animals on both sides. We would go for walks there and I fell in love with nature very early on. We also went on trips and vacations to the beach, desert, and mountains through-out my youth.

Also in my teen years we had a small trailer at a lakeside resort in the mountains we visited frequently spring to fall, so spending time out in nature has always been a homecoming for me. For this reason **Nature** is the first section of Cowboy Dharma, and one many people relate to. For me nature is the home of the infinite, and grander than any cathedral .

The next section concerns Higher Power and how I turned away from and then back to a belief and experience of a higher law and greater good through a loving Higher Power. This journey coincided with a return to love of nature as for me they are one and the same. This is evident in an exploration of Sacred Geometry and the Fibonacci Series often seen as the "Fingerprints of God." Here is a link to **Higher Power**, and another to a further exploration "**A God Centered Life.**"

Bicycles were perhaps my next saving grace as I have always found great joy, freedom, and friendship riding bikes. This has never changed. Motorcycles, cars, and the adventures they took me on to nature and other events was a natural progression. Once I got a one hundred dollar bonus at work and spent most of it on some fun toys, so apparently my inner child was still alive deep inside.

Playing with my son was a blessing as well, but his mother and I divorced when he was two, so this became a sad story also. Fast forward about ten years to when I was in a workshop at a twelve step retreat and something triggered me and I realized my son was a "lost boy." It broke my heart and the tears came pouring out. I then realized I was a lost boy too. This left me sobbing to myself in a room full of people.

That was very, very unusual for me to cry let alone sobbing. I regularly hear people share they haven't cried for years or decades. I used to be that person. Many adult children describe being stuck in roles such as lost child, but also teacher's pet, mama's boy, or many others assigned to them by parents, siblings, and others that were limiting and oppressive. For an in-depth look see the section "**Who We Are.**"

But breaking through and releasing my grief also broke through to the love, joy, and happiness that were also frozen below the surface. From there I was able to grieve things as they occur like the shuttle disaster, the death of over a million trees in California from the drought, and most often when I see and hear people suffering from generational disease, abuse, and dysfunction

At the 12-step retreats people will sometimes carry a stuffed animal or figure around all weekend getting in touch with their inner child's joy and grief. We also usually have an inner child workshop

where we have boxes of toys we pour out on the floor to play with as we share our stories. It is at times a mad affair with balls, balloons, and laughter flying around. Some people bring their own toys such as Barbie dolls and others.

This gave me not only permission, but encouragement to play and have fun to access my inner child. We also can share from our inner child the experiences of our youth and family good or bad. This inspired me to start filling my own box of toys. Since then I often through the toy aisle in every store that has one as well as making trips into all the toy stores I can find.

Now I have kaleidoscopes, kazoos, frisbees, army men, Play-Doh, crayons and coloring books, yo-yos, spinning tops, bubble wands, sidewalk chalk, beach and juggling balls and many other fun things. Most of them stay in the box between spring and fall retreats but that's okay as they get plenty of use at camp. The bubble wands and sidewalk chalk get regular use. I also still bicycle every chance I get, and I like to do chalk and bubbles on our patio and around the neighborhood while I'm out walking the dogs.

I also take a bunch of bubble wands with me wherever I go for impromptu bubble sessions with like-minded people in fun places like the beach, on top of Morro rock in Sequoia Park, and at glacier point in Yosemite. Yeehaw! My life seems to be taking the term kidding around to a whole new level!

I have also collected 450 or so model cars and motorcycles so far, and I know it is hard to believe, but I have owned about 45 cars, 50 motorcycles, and dozens of bicycles. Unfortunately I had most of them prior to recovery, so many are sad stories of wanting the best just to look good in the eyes of friends and others, but then giving in to ones who talked me out of them, or selling them rather than having the self esteem to use and enjoy them.

Another area I found freedom and inspiration I call Super Powers. These are very simple but powerful things like love peace joy and beauty. It may seem odd to call them Super Powers but they can be keys to a full and complete life. Where did they get the superpower? From my Higher Power, the source of all wisdom, power, and presence in the universe. That's a lot of power, so if these are tools then they are certainly power tools!

Playing around with these concepts for a few years let me to a share in the meeting where I state that not only are we allowed to have fun in 12-step but we are encouraged to, so I whip off my jacket to expose a Superman shirt and brilliant red satin cape underneath. But I quickly explain I am not Superman, rather I am "Surrenderman," because acceptance and surrender is step one in the recovery process because it is one of the most powerful and transformative.

I started wearing my Surrenderman cape from time to time at camp, so when people kept asking where my cape was I started to wear it all weekend. This inspires me to have fun and tells others that it's okay, and in fact good to express their joyful and playful nature.

Once at the closing meeting a woman shared how when she was going through chemotherapy it helped her to think of Surrenderman. I was waiting for my turn and had a new big bright red cape

hidden for my share, but I ran up and put it on her! She was wearing white head to toe it so she really looked the part. It was a very fun and inspiring moment.

As a theme for the next retreat she suggested a "Twelve-Step guide to becoming your own Superhero," and it was approved. We each had the choice of getting a super hero cape instead of a t-shirt with our registration, and all of the workshops focused on developing our superpowers. It was awesome!

I now have other capes and costumes to inspire and empower me such as a magicians cape and wand and a wizard robe, hat, and wand to help me bring magic and wonder into my world. I also have a Star Wars Jedi Knight robe with light saber to inspire me to fight for justice truth and freedom, and a king's cape, crown, scepter, and sword to remind me to rule my world with wisdom, fairness, and strength.

Sometimes I will put on all of them to become a super wizard warrior king, and use my swords and sabers to imagine cutting through evil, injustice, and suffering, as well as generational disease, dysfunction, and insanity. For a look at a comprehensive list of both sides of the Super Power concepts, please **click here**.

In Workaholics Anonymous we learn to turn work into play, so what we once saw only as tools may also be seen as toys. So apart from the Super Powers, another set of "power tools" I have been "playing with" are slogans, mottos, and mantras. These are short, succinct, and yes, powerful phrases we can use to inspire and motivate ourselves and others anytime and anywhere. **Click here** for a look.

These example are some of our favorite quotes from famous people, many are song titles, and some are bumper stickers! It doesn't matter where they come from, as the point is to inspire your imagination, spark the fire in your soul, and empower you to face the challenges of the day and celebrate the joys and victories. As you can see we really have fun here, but some are deeply moving, and others are powerful reminders of important lessons learned.

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