

Authenticity.

The man had been thinking about his authenticity for weeks. He was concerned about his own authenticity, of course, and worried that his actions were not accurately reflecting who he was.

The man, wanting only to be left alone, had reshaped his personality, attempting to avoid piquing the curiosity of those he met, thus ensuring they would delve no deeper into who he truly was.

Before he could continue today, he decided to back up from the present for a brief refresher course on his life.

He recalled never feeling comfortable when adults were present. His parents, who gave him to social workers after his birth because they did not want the responsibility of raising this creation of theirs, despite keeping their other five children, were the first to break him. Then the social workers who placed him with multiple, ruthless caretakers had broken him more. His caretakers became a years-long line of abusers and pedophiles, breaking him into remnants of himself.

Whose fault was it, and why did this happen? These should have been unanswered questions, except that the little boy blamed himself to make sense of that which made no sense. The child blamed himself for being only worth what he received from others.

His earliest memories flashed through his mind like clips from videos, yet the glimpses were vivid and clear. He saw himself screaming for help while lying naked under a man. Yet, his caretaker, the only person to hear him, rained fists onto his tiny body as he raped him, and until the boy was reduced to a whimpering, defeated child, finally accepting the fate his caretaker deemed appropriate. He was left alone after that, locked in a room, with a bowl of water and a cloth to clean himself.

Finally, the years and the pedophiles passed by, until one day he was reunited with his father and stepmother. The sexual abuse stopped instantly, but not the emotional and physical abuse. The

boy had never been safe, and once again, he found himself in an unsafe place. He was told the punishment and beatings would stop once he behaved, but he did not know what behaving meant.

The boy never talked about his past, and no one ever asked him about it. He had survived, but he didn't know it. The threats from his abusers, that if he ever told anyone, he would be killed, were always at the top of his thoughts and stopped him from ever telling on them.

The man knew he had learned much during his now long life; he had forgiven everyone who had harmed him, and by everyone, he meant everyone. He had loved and been loved, and afterwards he decided not to try again, lest he fail and lose the pristine memory of having known love once.

The man sighed aloud. He was drawn back to the theme of today, which was authenticity.

A long time ago, he remembered an attachment called a wringer on a washing machine he had bought. It consisted of two rigid rubber tubes, which he put his wet, washed clothes into, and, being careful not to catch his fingers, the clothes would be drawn in between the rollers, and water would be squeezed from the clothes, and they would then be hung on a clothesline to dry.

The analogy was a good one for him, and he knew that he had been through many wringers during his young life.

The man sighed aloud again, smiling wryly because he knew the definition of authenticity. He also knew that he had been, and had always been, striving for authenticity throughout his life.

His introspections, his forgiveness of those who had harmed him, and his connecting the dots between what he had and what he had not received during his early formative years became the wringers that expelled the negativity. He was placed on the clothesline of life. All the harm of his early life, and the aftermath, were now wrung out of him. He stood alone now, asking himself

about his authenticity, not anyone else's, not comparing himself, nor wishing he was anyone other than who he was.

He stood, asking himself how he truly felt about himself, his life, and his journey thus far. As he waited, he saw myriad emotions popping and falling, like different colored rubber bands popping off a ball, first one popping off, followed by another, until they lay in a heap, and the ball was gone. The rubber bands had merely resembled a ball, a ball of emotions.

That got him thinking that there might be no need to replace the emotions of abuse, beatings, rapes, and being unwanted. For once uncovered, those emotions turned out to be nothing more than distractions, and his authenticity was located deeper than them. His authenticity seemed to lie in the non-material, nebulous part of himself that he had always felt.

Feeling unworthy, he had fought against his feelings of self-care, nurturing himself, and even loving himself, because, as he now remembered, his self-worth had been based solely on the value he received from others.

Surrendering now, he smiled, eyes wide, because he knew, finally and for sure, that he had always been authentic. The acceptance he had offered to his predators, that he deserved what they did to him, fell off of him like colored, emotional rubber bands, and then the conflict over his value was gone.

The man felt priceless to himself, and in this moment, he was whole. He was who he was, and in that simplicity of being, he accepted his authenticity. He also understood that he had been constantly evolving towards now, and by living honestly, he learned that there was no way for him to be anything other than who he was. By finally accepting himself as he was, he became authentic.