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LUCIA CAPACCHIONE, PH. D.

Recovery of
Your
Inner Child

A FIRESIDE BOOK

Published by Simon & Schuster



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*Dedicated, with love, to Sri Bhagawan Nityananda, a great
Indian saint and master teacher of the Siddha lineage, whose
company was sought by sages and children alike.*

*And to my daughters Celia and Aleta, and my grandchildren,
for teaching me the way of the Child.*

Author's Note

WAIVER

The author of this book does not dispense medical or psychiatric advice, nor prescribe the use of any technique as a form of treatment for medical or psychiatric problems without the advice of a physician or therapist, either directly or indirectly. The intent of the author is only to offer information of a general nature to help you in your quest for emotional well-being. In the event you use any of the information in this book for yourself, you are prescribing for yourself, which is your constitutional right, but the author and publisher assume no responsibility for your actions.

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Introduction

I recommend this book to any adult child of a dysfunctional family who wants to strengthen or go deeper into the process of healing their Child Within.

Experiential recovery aids are an important part of recovery, and here Lucia Capachione provides numerous guidelines, exercises, and pearls of wisdom to help you access, know, and be your true self—your Child Within.

Alice Miller, a pioneer in the recovery field, said, “Only when I make room for the voice of the child within me do I feel myself to be genuine and creative.”¹ We have heard empowering messages such as these throughout history but didn’t know how to use them until now. The Old Testament prophets told us, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” (Isaiah 11:6). And Christ said it more clearly, “Unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matthew 11:25, 18:3; Luke 18:16-17).

¹ A. Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

INTRODUCTION

The kingdom is what we in the recovery movement call “serenity,” and what *A Course in Miracles*² describes as God’s Will for us: complete peace and joy. To become like a little child is to realize and live from our True Selves, the Child Within. And, there is a second meaning here: that we are each a child of God and are thus dependent on our Higher Power in a healthy way, as the *Course* describes. In this sense we are co-creators of our lives.

But growing up in a troubled, unhealthy, or dysfunctional family may have been very painful. So to survive, the True Self went into hiding deep within the unconscious part of itself. The Child went into hiding. To survive, we relied on the false or co-dependent self to take over and run our lives, even though it didn’t know how. We got so used to this false self that we now have a hard time letting it go and reclaiming our True Selves.

The absence of the Child Within leaves a painful feeling of emptiness, like something is missing in our lives. Have you ever felt that? Relying on the false self, we try to fill our emptiness with all kinds of people, places, things, behaviors, and experiences from outside of ourselves. It can take us a long time to realize that doing so doesn’t work; it doesn’t work because the absence of things from the outside didn’t cause the emptiness. What caused it was that the Child within us went into hiding. As a result, we lost our True Selves and thereby our ability to connect with others and with God in a meaningful way.

The only way to fill our emptiness is to realize the True Self within us and experientially connect it to God. When we do that and complete our unfinished business, we are healed. Then we are free to co-create a successful and enjoyable life for ourselves. Only recently have we known how to co-create our healing in this way. I have described it, as have others, and in this book Lucia Capacchione does so also, with an emphasis on the experiential methods of reading, reacting, writing, drawing, reacting some more, and sharing.

In recovery, a way we can begin to experience our powerful inner life more and more is to choose one or more experiential techniques that provide a safe and focused method for actually using our Real or True Selves. This book does just that. It provides a structure so that we can focus on being Real, and its messages and guidance are safe. It comes from one of the great teachers and therapists of our day.

Charles L. Whitfield, M.D.,
Baltimore, MD, October 1990

² *A Course in Miracles*. (Tiburon, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1976).

Finding My Inner Child

Turning fifty was a milestone for me, a time to stop and look in the rear-view mirror at five decades of global change. In that mirror I see three major wars, a cure for polio, the birth of television and computers, the rise and fall of dictators, the assassination of a U.S. president, man on the moon, and the creation and collapse of the Berlin Wall.

I first see myself as a beaming, apple-cheeked toddler sitting on my grandmother's lap, then as an excited youngster visiting the sound stages of MGM Studios with my film editor father, and as a uniformed schoolgirl enduring the rules and authority figures in parochial schools. Later, I see myself as a teenager living for Saturday art classes, where my talents were nurtured by an inspiring teacher and artist.

Each decade after that seemed to have its own personal theme and flavor. The fifties were a time for completing college and a degree in art. For me the sixties were about marriage, family, and artistic achievement. On the larger level they were also about human rights, and I helped fight Johnson's War on Poverty as a Head Start director. By the decade's end, the Women's Movement was fully launched. Like many of my sisters, I was juggling a number of roles, i.e., wife, mother, artist, and educator.

Then, one day, the bottom dropped out as the seventies began. It was to become a decade of personal crises: the break-up of my marriage and business partnership,

FINDING MY INNER CHILD

the end of my parents' marriage, confrontation with a life-threatening disease, and a radical career and lifestyle change. When my ten-year marriage ended abruptly in January of 1970, I was totally unprepared. My fast-paced life had left precious little time for listening to the Vulnerable Child within my own heart. Success had pulled me outward. A public life is hard on the Inner Child—the feeling part of us that needs nurturing, that loves to play and explore, that loves naps, and that thrives on simply “being” instead of achieving. Within three years of my divorce, the pressures of professional work and single parenting threw me into a severe health crisis: a life-threatening disease affecting the collagen, or connective tissue in the body.

After a long series of mishaps at the medical clinic where I was receiving treatment, I went in search of an alternative approach to healing. Without realizing it, I had the most powerful healing tool right under my own nose. While writing and drawing in a personal journal that I had started keeping at the beginning of the illness, I realized that journaling my feelings was actually helping me feel better—physically and emotionally. That discovery was destined eventually to lead me into a new career as an art therapist and author. However, at the time I began keeping a journal, I was simply struggling for my own survival.

The insights I gained from this profoundly personal form of writing and drawing prompted me to seek therapy. It was in therapy that I first became conscious of my Inner Child: the vulnerable, feeling, spontaneous, creative self that was crying out to be heard. Imprisoned in my grown-up persona, she wanted out. The only way she could attract my attention was through an illness that forced me to go inside and listen to her needs. Through Gestalt role-playing in therapy and journal writing and drawing done with both hands, I came to know this very real Child who lives within me. She lives in my body, in my feelings and intuition, and she has brought me understanding and a new life.

It is the spirit of this Inner Child who speaks to you throughout the pages of this book. It is this same spirit who wants you to find and honor your own true Self, to become your own loving parent, and to heal every area of your life. For the Inner Child holds the key to intimacy in relationships, physical energy, and well-being, as well as enthusiasm and creativity in work. An active and healthy Inner Child is one of the best preventions for burn-out and disease. It is the source of humor, play, and rejuvenation—the spice of life. When the Inner Child is allowed to be itself and dwell in your heart, it can lead you to a wellspring of infinite wisdom and joy.

LUCIA CAPACCHIONE, Ph.D., ATR
Santa Monica, California
April 1990.

PART I

Discovering
Your
Inner Child

The Inner Child is a powerful presence. It dwells at the core of our being. Imagine a healthy, happy toddler. As you picture this child in your mind's eye, sense its aliveness. With great enthusiasm it constantly explores the environment. It knows its feelings and expresses them openly. When it is hurt it cries. When it is angry it screams. When it is happy it smiles and laughs from deep down inside. This child is also highly sensitive and instinctual. It knows who to trust and who not to trust. This little child loves to play and to discover. Every moment is new and full of wonder. From this playfulness comes an inexhaustible well of creativity and aliveness.

As time goes on the child runs head-on into the demands of the adult world. The voice of grown-ups, with their own needs and wants, begins to drown out the inner voice of feelings and instincts. In effect, parents and teachers say, "Don't trust yourself, don't feel your feelings. Don't say this, don't express that. Do as we say, we know best."

With time those very qualities that gave the child its aliveness—curiosity, spontaneity, ability to feel—are forced into hiding. In the process of raising, disciplining, and educating children, adults often turn the child into a predictable adult. By eradicating the child's vulnerability (along with its lack of control), they severely damage the essential self of the child. The baby is thrown out with the bathwater. The adult world is not a safe place for children. For survival's sake, the growing youngster sends its delightful child spirit underground and locks it away. But that *Inner* Child never grows up and never goes away. It remains buried alive, waiting to be set free.

The Inner Child is constantly trying to get our attention, but many of us have forgotten how to listen. When we ignore our true feelings and gut instincts, we are ignoring the Inner Child. When we fail to nurture our body and soul, we neglect the Child Within. When we talk ourselves out of childlike needs with the excuse that they are not rational or practical—not the adult thing to do—we abandon the Inner Child. For instance, we may feel an impulse to skip for joy through the park, or to cry uninhibitedly over

Discovering Your Inner Child

the loss of a friend. That is the Inner Child wanting to come out. But when the serious grown-up in us says, “No, you can’t do that! Big boys don’t cry. You must appear to be in control,” the Inner Child gets locked in the closet.

When our Inner Child is blocked, we are robbed of our natural spontaneity and zest for life. Over time this may lead to low energy, chronic or serious illness. When our Inner Child is hidden we also separate ourselves from others. They never get to see our true feelings and wishes; they never see who we really are. This makes it impossible to experience true intimacy with others. We never get to truly know each other. What a tragedy and loss this is. **For us to be fully human, the Child Within must be embraced and expressed.**

ONE

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

*Inside every adult, there is a
child crying, “Let me out.”*

Who is this child living within? Why is it trapped inside? What does it have to offer? How can it be liberated? You will answer these questions for yourself as you do this book. I say *do* rather than *read* because this is a hands-on approach. Through a combination of words, pictures, and activities you will be guided in discovering, nurturing, and protecting your own Inner Child. My goal is to help you love your Inner Child and invite it to be a part of your life.

The concept of the Inner Child is not new. It actually has roots in ancient mythology and fairy tales. Virtually all religions have told stories of the child who becomes a savior or leader. The child is usually orphaned, abandoned, or its life is threatened. Moses was found abandoned in the bull rushes. Jesus was born in the humblest setting because “there was no room at the inn.” His life was threatened by King Herod’s slaughter of the infants. Similarly, Krishna’s birth was accompanied by great danger. King Kansa had been told that the man who would eventually kill him was about to be born, so he consequently decreed that all newborn males be slain.

In Greek mythology the child Zeus was in danger of being devoured by his father Chronos. And as the father of Dionysius, Zeus was absent when his son was being torn to pieces by the Titans. The twins in Roman mythological lore, Romulus and Remus, were abandoned and set adrift on the river Tiber. European fairy tales also abound with child heroes who are threatened by ogres and demons: Hansel and Gretel had their witch, Cinderella had her wicked step-mother and nasty step-sisters, Jack had his giant, and Little Red Riding Hood had the wolf.

In this century, psychologist C. G. Jung and mythologist Joseph Campbell have shown us that these myths and legends have widespread appeal because they illustrate universal human experiences. For instance, all human beings have one thing in common: we all start out as vulnerable, dependent infants. Therefore, we can all resonate with the helpless, misunderstood, and abused children in these stories. Who has not experienced some kind of physical or emotional mistreatment in childhood?

The very nature of childhood leaves the infant or youngster open to harm. Insensitive or violent adults can certainly appear as giants, witches, and ogres in the eyes of a child. That is why the classic fairy tales hold our rapt attention time and time again, whether they are told from memory, read from a picture book, or portrayed on the screen. Walt Disney was well aware of this when he chose the story of Snow White for his first feature-length animated film. Even though he was scoffed at by financiers, he would not be deterred. He knew that the public would respond to this classic story in a new medium. His success rested on his ability to speak to the child in us all.

In many cultures we find this theme: the endangered child who must remain in obscurity and undergo trials until his true heroic nature is revealed. Jung saw the child as an archetype, a universal symbol existing within the collective unconscious. In his essay "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," he wrote:

It is . . . not surprising that so many of the mythological saviours are child gods. This agrees exactly with our experience of the psychology of the individual, which shows that the "child" paves the way for a future change of personality. In the individuation process, it anticipates the

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality. It is therefore a symbol which unites the opposites; a mediator, bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole. Because it has this meaning, the child motif is capable of numerous transformations. . . . I have called this wholeness that transcends consciousness the “self.” The goal of the individuation process is the synthesis of the self.

Jung’s words “the child paves the way for a future change of personality,” and his reference to the child as “bringer of healing . . . one who makes whole” echos the biblical prophecy, “And a little child shall lead them.”

Since the 1960s the Inner Child has become a popular theme in psychology. The Inner Child is that part of us who feels like a child and may cause us to behave in a childlike or childish way. Hugh Missildine wrote about it in his groundbreaking book, *Your Inner Child of the Past*. The Child state is also an important aspect of Transactional Analysis, which was developed by Eric Berne in the sixties and popularized in the seventies. Berne presented us with a picture of the inner world made up of a parent self, a child self, and an adult self. The parent self sets out the rules and regulations (the shoulds and the oughts). The child self feels and reacts. The adult thinks, makes decisions, and solves problems.

The 1980s saw the development of still another model in which the Inner Child plays an important role: Voice Dialogue. Developed by psychologists Hal Stone and Sidra Winkelman, Voice Dialogue demonstrates that the psyche is peopled by countless sub-personalities such as the Child, Critic, Pusher or Taskmaster, Protector, Beach Bum, Artist, Playboy or Playgirl, etc. The goal is to develop an *aware* ego at the center whose job is to be conscious of the sub-personalities. Like the director of a play, the aware ego decides which sub-personality will be allowed on stage at any given time. It must also be aware of which “actors” are lurking around backstage (the disowned or *shadow* selves, as Jung called them). In Voice Dialogue the goal is to be conscious of and accept all of our sub-personalities, allowing them appropriate expression. The Inner Child is often one of the disowned selves, one that we left behind as we grew to adulthood. As a trained Voice Dialogue facilitator, I have integrated this method into my work in art therapy and journal process. It provides an excellent framework for re-parenting the Inner Child.

The Inner Child also received recognition in the 1980s as part of the rapidly growing recovery movement. Treatment for addictive behavior is being addressed more and more in hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Much of this treatment includes work with the roots of addiction in childhood. Twelve-step programs applying the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon (for co-dependents affected by alcoholism) have now been extended to include the Adult Children of Alcoholics. This program has now been broadened to support Adult Children from any type of dysfunctional family. Experts have estimated that ninety-five percent of the population received inadequate parenting. This may explain why programs for Adult Children have gained such great popularity. Almost all of us have some Inner Child healing to do.

In recent years, one of the most articulate writers on the Inner Child has been Charles Whitfield, M.D. In his best-selling book, *Healing the Child Within*, Whitfield led the way toward acknowledging the role of the Inner Child in recovery from co-dependence and being an adult child of a dysfunctional family. At the same time, through media coverage, there has been a growing recognition of the rampant child abuse in our culture. For instance, it has been estimated that one out of every four adults suffered some kind of sexual abuse in childhood. Clinician Alice Miller has shed light on the childhood roots of dysfunctional adult behavior. Her deeply moving book *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, lays bare the shocking truth of widespread violence against children and how this affects them in later life.

Based on my experience as an early-childhood educator and art therapist, I have concluded that we cannot eradicate child abuse in our culture without healing the wounds of our own Inner Child. We will never cure the epidemic of child abuse in the *outer world* until we stop abusing the Child in our *inner world*.

But how does Inner Child healing pertain to someone who was not severely abused in childhood? I would propose that in order to survive in our world we have all denied the Child Within to one degree or another. And this is also abuse. It is virtually impossible to grow up in our era of addictions and crime, wars and threat of environmental devastation, without our Inner Child going underground. Our world is not safe for that sensitive, vulner-

able part of ourselves. But as you will see throughout this book, the Inner Child is at the core of our being. As our *feeling self*, it brings us enthusiasm and energy. None of us can be whole, happy adults without bringing the Inner Child into our lives and thereby healing it.

How do we do this? How do we heal our Inner Child? First of all by recognizing and experiencing it. That will be our task in Chapter 2. When we meet our Inner Child we often discover that our childhood needs were not met—needs for love, safety, trust, respect, and guidance. The absence of these basic conditions may have brought about a state of chronic anxiety, fear, shame, anger, and despair in our Inner Child. Recurring emotional and physical problems in adulthood are a sign that the Inner Child is trying to speak.

When basic human needs go unfulfilled, the individual is at high risk for developing abusive behavior toward self and others, creating problems in virtually all areas of life. It is also a well-known fact that family violence sets up a chain reaction. Parents violate their children. When those children grow up and become parents they often abuse their own children, and so on. Addicts who become parents frequently have children who become addicts. The brand of addiction may change—an alcoholic mother may have a drug-addicted son—but the pattern is the same. Violence and addiction are a tragic downward spiral. They get handed down from one generation to the next and have become epidemic in our society.

As individuals, how can we build our adult world on the shaky foundations of a frightened and isolated child who never got its basic needs met? It can't be done. Sooner or later a crisis hits—an illness, divorce, career upheaval, or financial disaster—and the structure crumbles. The mask of the adult persona begins to crack. At this point, some individuals look inward to examine and reevaluate their lives. They may seek assistance from therapists and self-help books, or join support groups where it is safe to acknowledge the damaged Child Within.

If you identify with this scenario, let me suggest that you use this book as part of your own personal program of healing. Complement this work with a support group, a 12-step program, therapy, or workshops. Inner Child healing cannot be done in isolation. After all, that little Child Within has

been alone long enough. It is essential that we all find companions along the way—other individuals who are committed to caring for their own Inner Child. A support system creates a foundation for truly loving relationships.

It is important to remember one thing, however. *Only you can re-parent your Inner Child.* No one can do it for you. Only you are responsible for knowing and meeting your Inner Child's needs. So if you have been looking for love in all the wrong places, for someone to take care of your Inner Child for you, this book can help. It can also help you stop rescuing other people's abandoned and abused Inner Children. *Re-parenting themselves is their responsibility.*

Experiencing the Inner Child

The term "Inner Child work" is used a great deal these days. Many therapists are including "Inner Child work" in their practice with groups and individuals. Workshops and books on the subject are plentiful. And yet in my lectures and seminars throughout North America, many people tell me they are struggling with Inner Child work. They have read countless books, written personal histories, and shared their childhood fears and traumas in therapy and support groups. Yet they are still confused and unable to *feel* their Inner Child and bring it into their everyday lives. Many have reported that they had their first true *experience* of the Inner Child at one of my workshops or while doing exercises in my earlier books. They are the ones who encouraged me to share these methods of Inner Child healing in a book.

It is one thing to *talk about* the Inner Child; it is another thing to consciously experience it as a real living presence. Unless we "become as little children," we will not be healed. Unless we enter into the Child state *in a safe setting*, the Child Within will remain isolated and alone. Unless we reclaim our childlike feelings, sensitivity, wonderment, and aliveness, our Inner Child will remain wounded.

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

How do we know that our Inner Child is present? When we have feelings. The Inner Child is the emotional self. It is where our feelings live. When you experience joy, sadness, anger, fear, or affection your Child Within is coming out. When you are truly feeling your feelings you are allowing your Inner Child to be. Your Child Within is also active when you are being playful, spontaneous, creative, intuitive, and surrendering to the spiritual self. The experience of these states is often referred to as “being in your Inner Child.” When you share this state with others it is referred to as “coming from your Inner Child.”

The activities in this book are designed to give you safe, *firsthand experiences of your Inner Child*. Through drawing, writing, creative arts, and play you will find the voice of the Child who lives within you. You will discover its needs and wishes. You will also learn to activate the loving Parent Within who can nurture and protect that Inner Child. For no child exists in a vacuum. Our Inner Child will automatically draw out either a positive, supportive Inner Parent or a negligent and critical one. Without awareness, we automatically repeat the kind of parenting we received as children. We parent ourselves the way we were parented. However, if we do not like the way we were parented, we do have a choice. We can change. We can create a loving connection between the members of our own Inner Family and heal the wounds of childhood. We can re-parent ourselves.

Psychologically, the Child is indeed “father to the man.” *Recovery of your Inner Child is the way to begin anew and to heal your life*. As the often quoted phrase promises, “It’s never too late to have a happy childhood.” I know this from my own personal experience and from observing others who have successfully re-parented themselves.

Discovering My Own Inner Child

Before I had ever heard of “the child within,” my Inner Child began crying out to me through a physical illness. She had been abandoned so long that the only way she could get my attention was through a condition that made

it impossible for me to function at all. The symptoms were extreme exhaustion and disorientation. This was aggravated by a series of medical mistakes that began when my condition was incorrectly diagnosed. As a result, the pharmaceutical drugs that were prescribed led to a chain reaction of side-effects.

All along my Inner Child knew that I had a serious disease. But as is so often the case with children, she did not have the words to express what she knew deep down inside. When the doctors used long Latin names, treated me with clinical coldness, and prescribed still another drug, my Inner Child felt intimidated and went further underground. Secretly she was panicked. For a while I tried to ignore her promptings. I rationalized and excused the inadequate medical treatment I was receiving, trying to believe that the doctors knew what they were doing (even though the facts showed otherwise).

Meanwhile, I had begun keeping a journal. I also read some books that had a profound impact on me. The diary of Anaïs Nin showed me that writing out the inner world of feelings could actually affect one's outer life. At the same time, Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbols* inspired me to draw my feelings out in the journal. The art that poured forth at this time was clearly coming from the unconscious. It had a strangely mysterious quality, as though I was writing in a foreign tongue. It was filled with symbols that I did not understand intellectually, but which spoke directly to my soul. After these drawings I always felt better physically and emotionally.

In this early drawing, a child appears underground crouching in a fetal position. Her tears of sorrow are watering the roots of a tree in which a heart has been split in half by storms. But up high in the sky is a butterfly, a harbinger of new beginnings. When I did this drawing I had no idea what I was doing or why. The images appeared mysteriously on the page, as if my hand had done the drawing on its own, much like automatic writing. The symbols came from a very deep corner of the unconscious.

This self-reflective journal process led me into therapy. In my first session with therapist Bond Wright, I was formally introduced to my Inner Child in the context of Transactional Analysis. In role-playing I discovered that my Inner Child was filled with rage at the doctors who had misdiagnosed my

"A Little Child Shall Lead Them"



condition and almost medicated me to death. In another role-play I became a Nurturing Parent with my arms holding an imaginary baby. As I crooned a lullaby, I realized that the infant in my arms was me: a new self being born. This experience was deeply empowering! I knew that I would no longer submit myself to medical negligence and mistreatment. So when my therapist recommended a truly caring woman physician who practiced preventive medicine, I contacted her immediately. This was a major step forward in my healing.

In the next therapy session my Inner Child was encouraged to speak again, this time in writing. Bond sat me on the floor in front of a large pad of

newsprint paper and put a fat kindergarten crayon in my non-dominant (left) hand. She instructed me to write a contract with myself on how to apply what I was learning in therapy to everyday life. As soon as I began printing with my awkward, unschooled left hand, I regressed to about age four or five. I felt like a very young child just learning to write. This is what my Inner Child scrawled:

GIVE MYSELF
PERMISSION
TO LET MY CHILD OUT
AND FEEL MY
FEELINGS AND
SAY I'M O.K.!!

I left the session feeling lighter and more energetic than I had in years. My Inner Child had finally been liberated and allowed to speak. It felt as if a huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders. After four years of personal crisis and the stress of juggling family, career, and everyone else's needs, I finally turned inward and embraced my own Inner Child. The cloud of heaviness and low energy I had been struggling with for months suddenly seemed to lift.

Getting in touch with my Inner Child in that session had a profound effect on my physical health. During the session my therapist recommended a physician, Dr. Louise Light, who she said practiced preventive medicine and educated her patients in self-care. Upon leaving the therapy session a child-like inner voice insisted that I call Dr. Light immediately. I stopped at a telephone booth and made an appointment to see Dr. Light on her first available opening. At my appointment with her a few days later, I found that she paid attention to my *feelings* as well as my physical condition, something that the other physicians had never done. She treated me with compassion and respect. My Inner Child could finally relax and feel safe.