

An Organic Approach: Cultivate the Authentic You™ Lesson Six - When I Was Ten

"It is never too late to be what you might have been." - George Eliot

One of the things that my wonderful clients are often confused about is what their career path should be or what their purpose in life is. Many don't like their jobs and want something more fulfilling, more meaningful. Many women just feel like their life doesn't fit anymore. They're caught up in the roles they play and have forgotten their own essence. Or, the roles they have played, such as parent, have come to an end as their kids have grown up and started lives of their own, and they now feel at loose ends.

In my own life, I've faced confusion and frustration at not knowing what I should do for a career myself. I have many interests and pursued several directions in my twenties. And, even after completing my degree in exercise physiology at age 34 and being in my personal training practice for several years, I still had concerns that maybe this just wasn't what I was supposed to be doing. I'd done all the personality testing and career testing to figure out what I SHOULD do, but I still didn't feel like I had the answer.

I read about a study once that said that girls begin to lose their confidence around age ten. Up until then, girls and boys are equally confident. What happens around age ten to girls? In the book, *Reviving Ophelia*, author Mary Pipher, suggests that "girls become 'female impersonators' who fit their whole selves into small, crowded spaces." Many lose spark, interest, and even IQ points as a "girl-poisoning" society forces a choice between being shunned for staying true to oneself and struggling to stay within a narrow definition of female.

I know in my own life, much of this has been true. I was born in 1962, so my childhood was spent in the 60's and 70's, a time when women's roles were beginning to change. I grew up in a very traditional family - my mom stayed home with us and Dad worked outside the home. I was an extremely motivated student and looking back, a non-traditional girl, I think. But, the message I received was that careers and college are fine, but they're just until you find the right man and get married. Oh, yeah, and don't try anything really hard - it's too much work. By the time, I finished high school, I was pretty confused.

If you grew up in my era, this may have been or still be an issue for you. Did you feel there were expectations of what it meant to be a girl? Were there things that were okay to do or be and others that weren't?

From observing the young women who went to school with my son, the message seems entirely different for this generation - more opportunity and permission to do what they want. Young girls now are expected to follow a passion, go to college, get a degree, develop a career and the understanding is that marriage and babies are for

way down the road. If I had received that message 30 years ago, I might have been further down my career path at a younger age - either on this same path or perhaps a different one.

I used to laugh during these times of career frustration and confusion about my purpose and say that I probably knew myself better and what I wanted when I was a little girl! I now believe that that's probably true for everyone!

What I found when I explored my memories was a girl who, among many things, loved to read mysteries and biographies (still do). I loved to built stuff - you should have seen the two-story Barbie house, complete with wallpaper and carpet. Still love to do that - just renovated a house (actually, still renovating - does it ever end?!) with my husband. I remember going to church on my own, dragging my little sister along. I have always felt a connection to God and spirit - then, by attending church - now, on my own terms. And, I've always loved to learn and teach and share knowledge - I used to "teach school" to the neighborhood kids. When I remembered and re-embraced these childhood loves and interests and realized they ARE my gifts and talents and using them to serve others and myself IS my purpose, it finally felt RIGHT!

Answering these questions can bring to light what inspired you then and what may still inspire you - parts of your authenticity that have been buried for awhile. Maybe you don't want to pursue what you find as a career now, but it may uncover some hidden desires that can manifest as a side business or a hobby - a way to give yourself back to yourself.

My client, Allison D. gave me permission to share this letter she wrote to her ten-year-old self. She wrote this piece as a result of our conversations and as an assignment for a creative writing class she's taking:

* * * * *

*Allison D.
July 13, 2011
If I Knew Then....*

Dear Allison,

In a few weeks you will celebrate your tenth birthday. You were hoping that by now you would feel like you fit in. Nearly forty years later you will feel the same way. I imagine it will make you sad to hear that, so sad that you'll want to cry. Before I write anything else, I want you to pay very close attention to what I am about to say. It is okay for you to cry. This is how we were designed to respond when something causes us pain or sorrow. I wish you had permission to cry when you're heartbroken, to

scream when you are afraid and to raise your fist when you are angry. But you've been scolded for shedding tears and so you have learned hold them in.

When you are older your veins will pulse with unspent emotion. You won't understand how to express the feelings that overwhelm you. Years of binge eating and extreme dieting will become a way to control the chaos you feel inside. You can't remember a life without turmoil or a day when you didn't pray for just a little peace. You've watched your mother devote herself to the taming of your headstrong younger sister. You lie down at night listening to your sister's words reverberate through the room like a trapped moth beating its wings against the window screen – "I hate you!" "I hate you!" "I hate you!" And somewhere deep inside you wonder why this creature who seems hell-bent on destruction is so worthy of the attention you crave. Your fragile spirit will conclude that time equals love and, worse, will comprehend that there is no time for you. So go ahead and cry, little girl. Don't be afraid to cry.

As I said, soon it will be your birthday. Afterward you'll have a crisp \$10 bill to add to the allowance money you've been saving. Your granddaddy will take you to one of your favorite stores, World Bazaar, where you'll select a treasure out of their vast array of goods from faraway lands. You won't be sure what you're looking for but you'll know it when you see it. You still shop just the same way. You'll see the ring in the display case – sterling silver crafted into the shape of a bird. Its body lies flat while its outstretched wings encircle your finger to form the band. The center of the ring is decorated with five tiny round bells and with every wave of your hand you'll hear their delicate, whispery chime. It is unlike anything you've ever seen and you will be enchanted by this little trinket. You'll rarely remove it from your finger because it will make you feel happy every time you look at it or hear its tinkling bells.

You'll have that little bird ring for several months. Then one Sunday morning you will discover something even more precious. You will watch the grown-ups shake their heads and hear whispers about the poor Clanton family. They'll be lined up like raggedy stair steps across the front of the church as the preacher introduces these new members to the congregation. You will be fascinated by how much they look alike. All seven of them, from the mother to the youngest boy, have scrawny, angular bodies and skin the color of dust. Even the children seem old, beaten down by life. Their sky blue eyes might have looked beautiful in a different setting but were severely close-set on each unfortunate Clanton face. Other children will mock the family's ill-fitting clothes, their grimy skin and the foul smell of their stringy hair. The most humiliating taunts, however, will call attention to their father's abandonment. The response of the five Clanton boys will be to fight back, swinging fists at every insult hurled toward them. The oldest child, the only girl, will take a different approach.

Ruby Clanton was tall with spindly limbs and a conspicuous overbite. She had to have heard the cruel remarks but she never reacted. Instead, she would laugh with an infectious little giggle that made you feel like you had to join in. When she wasn't laughing, Ruby would sing with a steady, strong voice. One day soon, Allison, you'll be singing alongside her in Sunday school. You'll be clapping to the music and suddenly

you'll feel her eyes watching. She will be captivated by your ring, mesmerized by its bells. "That's the prettiest thing I've ever seen," she'll say it so quietly that you will wonder if she's talking to you or to herself. And without even thinking, without a moment of hesitation, you'll slip that ring off your finger and onto hers. "I want you to have it," you'll say quickly before you change your mind. But as soon as you look into her eyes, you will realize that you don't want it back. For as long as you live, you will never see anything more beautiful than Ruby Clanton's gratitude.

Afterward, your heart will be filled to overflowing. You'll be uncharacteristically chatty during lunch, unable to contain your excitement as you tell your family the story of Ruby's new ring. But even as your words linger over the table, you'll know you've made a mistake. Your mother will be furious with you for giving away your birthday ring. It will not be the last time she will chastise you for being generous, but you'll be so astonished, so crushed by her reaction that you will never forget it.

Listen to me, Allison. I have written some very sad words here and I've cried over these memories. Just as she should have never reprimanded you for crying, your mother was wrong to punish you for your generosity. And even though you would never have admitted it out loud, you knew that she was wrong. But now I want to give you some good news.

Despite the criticism and disapproval, you will never lose your giving spirit. You'll be the first to help where you can and the last to declare someone a lost cause. You will give without consideration, without analyzing whether or not you should. Your charity doesn't come from a desire for recognition or in hopes of receiving anything in return. You give simply because you know it's the right thing to do. So keep your eyes and ears and heart open to the needs around you. You will never regret it.

I wish I could tell you that your future holds nothing but happiness. But as the years unfold, they will reveal times of pure joy and periods of deep, nearly unbearable sadness. You have friends today who will remain true throughout your entire life and in another year or two, you'll meet your BFF – your "best friend forever" - that's what her daughter calls the two of you. When you are still too young to know better you'll give your heart to a man who, for reasons of his own, will not love you in return. His cruelty will catch you off guard and shock you into a state of trembling silence. But you will never, for even a single day, regret your marriage because it gave you three sons that you will love more than life itself.

When you become a mother you will experience a love so profound, so foreign that it will shake you to the core. You will find yourself wondering whether your parents ever felt for you the tremendous, life-altering affection you hold for your boys. For decades the question will flutter in and out of your mind. But gradually, over time you'll observe a pale anguish in your mother's eyes. Your father's once-astute mind will be given to occasional bouts of disorientation. And in what is perhaps an inevitable reversal of roles, you will recognize their frailty and vow to protect it. You will acknowledge their love for you and accept the terms on which it is given. You will make peace with your

Mama and your Daddy and yourself.

You will mercifully escape from the brutality of your children's father. You will find out that you are more courageous than you ever knew. Along the way, Allison, you will be told that you love too deeply. While it is true that you'll make your share of foolish choices, decisions born out of immaturity or passion or both, you will recover from those missteps. Loving too deeply is never a mistake. Promise me that you will continue to love with all your heart. Love will always find its way back to you.

I started this letter by telling you that even as a grown woman you will not feel like you fit in. But guess what? You don't have to fit in. No matter what you hear or see or believe right now, one day you will decide to stop trying to make yourself fit into someone else's idea of what your life should be. Instead, you will begin to make a life that fits you and it will be a perfect fit. Until then, I leave you with my sincere love and admiration.

*Always,
Allison*

For you parents out there, this age is a perfect time to help your child develop the interests that she/he naturally prefers and at which they excel. These interests may be the forerunner to a lifelong career or vocation or just as importantly, a lifelong avocation.

* * * * *

Questions for Pondering and/or Journaling

1. Get out your fourth-grade photo and admire that little girl (or boy) that was you. If you can't find the photo, then sit quietly and get back into the mind of that 10-year-old girl (or boy). Get to know her/him as an individual and appreciate her/his strengths and abilities. What did you love to do when you were ten? What were your passions? What were your favorite subjects in school? Did you love sports?

2. If you are the parent of a child in this age range, take some time to really observe your child to see what her/his natural gifts and talents are. What types of activities does she/he gravitate towards? What can you do to foster growth and confidence in these areas? Have a conversation with your child about her/his loves and what types of things excite them. What would she/he like to do to explore these interests? Perhaps space camp, chess club, a dance class, art or music classes, going to museums of art, science or history, hanging out with a family friend who works on cars/motorcycles, "shadowing" the farmer or veterinarian in your area - the ideas are endless! Also, make sure that your child takes the lead - you're nurturing THEIR interests/loves, not yours (even if you don't resonate with their interests...)!