

1 PRIMAL LOVE

The heart breaks in so many different ways that when it heals, it will have faultlines.

John Geddes

As babies, our very survival depends on the fulfillment of a primal dream I call the ‘bliss dream’. It’s one of raw, sensual connection and soul-to-soul love where everything else is secondary.

When the dream is unrequited or simply imperfect, loss and disappointment can cut faultlines of anxiety, lack of self-worth or gaping emotional hunger in a developing heart. Even those who suffer little incur some losses as they grow – having to share parents with siblings, feeling pain, experiencing inevitable separations. Everyone has faultlines. It’s part of being human. Some faultlines are deeper, more far-reaching or jagged than others.

Over time our faultlines are made raw, broken and etched deeper by stormy emotional weather; in other seasons their edges are smoothed or even hardened by our various experiences. Our early experiences influence how we see the world. Our brains unconsciously start to map out the potential paths we will choose, the kinds of people we will be attracted to and the emotional lessons and reparations we will feel drawn to seek.

From birth to death we define and traverse our Lovelands – our inner landscape of intimacy, passions and losses. It’s through love that we pursue our most primal needs: the need to belong, the need for security, the need for a home, for sensual desires and the search for purpose and pleasure. All our reasons to exist live there.

Love is the pure elemental energy of life. Love is a sacred presence of mind, the highest quality of attention we need from ourselves and others. The fundamental goals of life are to realise that deepest energy and to embody it through the three great loves: compassion for our own soul, relationships and finding purpose.

This book started out as a memoir and a reflection on some of the most agonising and all-too-common causes of faultlines – loss, abuse and abandonment. I wanted to describe their effects on our unconscious mind, how this plays out in our relationships and how we can find

healing. It became a richer manifesto on the many faces of love and how to find passion in life, love other beings fully and nurture deep compassion and caring for yourself.

Essentially, my story is a testament to the starring role of love in our lives, from birth to the legacy we leave after death. Love, particularly self-love, plays a larger part than we may understand or care to acknowledge in defining our personality, our identity, our relationships and the paths we choose. We each decide which interpretation of our experiences becomes our defining reality.

Knowing your Lovelands, your intimate inner landscape, will help you avoid negative patterns by recognising them and becoming empowered to make different choices when determining the paths to take on your journey. Whether you're a parent to others, a lover to another or working on the care of your own soul, *Lovelands* will help you make sense of love, from birth to death.

Through reflection you'll learn to see the past differently, more *usefully*, even the difficult parts. You'll acknowledge where you might have done your best at the time, even when things went badly. You will find forgiveness, humour and freedom from the past and acknowledge what you've learned. You will see where you've suffered and triumphed, choose what to make of your experiences and decide where to go from here.

Your struggles reveal your worth, your character, your unique constellation of strengths. Moving from struggle to insight gives you a new foundation to create the life and relationships you desire, and allows you to like yourself more. Knowing your faultlines is the first step towards freeing yourself from the pain of loves gone wrong, childhood scars and other hurts that might otherwise pull you down; so that instead, you can choose the path of self-compassion, greater emotional freedom and following your bliss.

You are the sovereign of your kingdom, your Lovelands. You have the power to make your meaning, tell a new story, re-author your world and map your future.

I'm a therapist and teacher, and I was once also a patient. I hope that by offering a no-holds-barred account of my faultlines and tracing the extraordinary implications they had for my life and relationships, along with the stories and triumphs of some of my patients and friends, you will feel less alone with your faultlines, whatever they may be.

I offer myself as a teacher, a case-study *and* a friend to you on this journey.

Let's go.

2 LOST LOVE

Your absence has gone through me like thread through a needle. Everything I do is stitched with its colour.

W.S. Merwin

As a kid, when people asked about my father I said I didn't have one. It felt true, although I knew there was a man alive out there somewhere whose name I carried. He gave me three years of sporadic contact and nothing else – no goodbye, no explanation, no love.

Worse, I felt his abandonment as unspeakable shame. If I had been prettier, a better little girl, my own father would have chosen to stay rather than leave me, right? That question haunted my subconscious for decades.

The fear that my flaws must be serious and obvious for him to just *leave* cut into the bedrock of me. My inherent unworthiness became an unquestioned 'given', as basic as the colour of my eyes. Other girls were Daddy's little one. I assumed I was some kind of 'anti-princess' and I would have to cover and compensate for it for the rest of my life.

How loved or unloved we feel as children deeply affects the formation of our self-esteem and self-acceptance. It shapes how we seek love and whether we feel part of life or more like an outsider. Why wouldn't it? Our caregivers' responses are the clearest and most consistent feedback we have as we develop our identity.

My dad ran from his blinding fear and rage at finding himself stuck with a wife and child at nineteen years of age. So, like countless fatherless kids, I wore the tattoo of a defining abandonment that I believed my defects had caused. When the dream of love dissolves and we don't know who to blame, we usually secretly become our own prime suspect. Over time my pain calcified into the anxiety and shame of a kid who can't understand how they failed but believes they must have.

The last time I saw my father during my childhood, he came to pick me up in a brightly painted station-wagon. We visited his girlfriend's mum. They were kind enough people, but Dad himself hardly gave me the time of day. He was already absent, but he hadn't told Mum or me how permanent and profound this absence was going to become. Although we hardly interacted, I remember feeling a sense of pride and childish ownership that day. I was proud to be in the same place as my dad, feeling accepted and valued by him, even after weeks apart. He took me back to Mum after a few hours, kissed my cheek and that was that.

The next weekend, Mum dressed me up in something special and told me Dad was coming soon. The time passed. I waited and waited and waited and waited. The time passed. I asked Mum why he didn't come. She told me the truth: she didn't know. He just stopped coming. It broke my heart.

That day was emotional Ground Zero for me. A deep faultline zagged through my inner landscape, obliterating the 'given' that parents *must* love you. My Lovelands were permanently scarred.

In the weeks following, there was no further information. Mum always seemed to be doing something else, something other than hanging out with me. I think she was trying to survive. She was twenty-two years old, alone with no support, broke and living in a tiny flat in a suburb where we knew no one.

Decades later, in therapy, I talked about that day. I remembered feeling the urge to go to the toilet and panicking that I wasn't going to get there quickly enough. I sat on the toilet for a long time, surprised that my undies were clean. It confounded my three-year-old brain to have clean pants because it meant there was no simple explanation for Dad's absence. If I had made some kind of obvious, dirty mistake I would have been able to justify Dad not coming to see me anymore.

Years later, I understood that I had formed a belief that day that I must have flaws only others could see. Those flaws, I believed, had led to this sudden and permanent rejection by my own father, my own blood. I felt shamed because Dad didn't value me enough to show up, enough to call, enough to even make up an excuse.

As young kids we unconsciously tend to assume our parents' failings must be about us because, for a while at least, our parents are godlike figures. We're hard-wired to idolise them for the first few years of life because we have to rely on them for *every* aspect of our survival. That's why we may blame ourselves rather than them for some of our disappointments, or for problems in the family that actually have little to do with us. It can be hard on our self-worth.

Our relationships with our parents or caregivers create an 'attachment style' – a blueprint for how we handle close relationships later. Attachment styles range from being secure and trusting to avoiding intimacy, or to experiencing mind-boggling ambivalence. Some people with an ambivalent attachment style become preoccupied with seeking love and attention and tend to feel powerless, needy and insecure in relationships. Others seek love vehemently, then run when it's returned or becomes intense because it feels dangerous to let someone get too close. Insecure or ambivalent attachment styles lend

themselves to self-defeating patterns of trying to love while defending a heart that feels vulnerable.

This conflict between wanting to love and be loved so much, but getting sidetracked and screwing it all up out of a deep unconscious fear of loss is at the base of so much relationship pain and struggle. Of course, the self-sabotaging behaviour is usually unconscious, meaning we don't understand why we're doing it. The patterns were formed before we had words to describe what was going on for us. That's why they can be so hard to identify and forestall.

In my case, I became ambivalent about intimacy as a child, losing confidence in myself as lovable. I longed for closeness with others but felt afraid of being rejected again. I often kept to myself rather than reaching out to others because there was less risk of humiliation that way. My unconscious tried hard to work out how to secure love, how to be 'better' and how to avoid any further abandonments along the way.

I discovered early that pleasing others won praise. Pleasing others is great, but only if you don't negate your own desires in the process. It's too often synonymous with neglecting your own heart and feeling afraid to risk putting yourself first in life. Change starts when we realise that by diminishing ourselves we please no one. Yet it takes time to 'own' these aspects about ourselves, and it takes courage. The first step is to cultivate self-awareness, leading to the possibility of self-compassion and the building of self-worth.

Low self-worth early in life can lead to inadvertently choosing paths that erode our self-worth even further as we get older. Inexperience combined with intense need is a volatile cocktail. As life coach and author Tony Robbins puts it, we become obsessed with what we did not have. Seeking love, yet without reliable indicators of what it feels like to be loved well, makes you vulnerable to quick and dirty fixes of love that end up making things worse. It's hard to know what you're looking for when you've never seen it or felt it. You may repeatedly find yourself perched on unstable precipices of desire that you know are bound to collapse and hurt you at any moment. Yet there you are again and again, falling, wondering, 'Why?'

Ideally, a girl finds a positive role model in her mother's self-esteem, assertiveness and self-awareness in life and relationships. Then she knows what she's looking for when it's her turn. Similarly, supporting his daughter's attractiveness as a person and loving her without 'seductive' undertones is one of the core tasks of fathering. It's one of the factors that helps a girl grow into a balanced sexuality where she values herself and doesn't settle for whoever pays her some attention; where she can both love and desire another person without

fighting through a wall of fear and insecurity every step of the way. It's the same for boys, only that being female adds a few extra cultural gender biases about sexuality and shame. It's still not the norm to call boys slutty when they experiment with sex and intimacy, but for girls sexual shaming remains at the front line of verbal abuse.

I've heard a comedian crack a joke about 'page-three girls' being 'girls who weren't loved by their dads'. (Page-three girls refers to young females who pose topless on the third page of UK tabloid newspapers.) Although there are exceptions to every generalisation, the joke isn't too far from identifying an extremely poignant truth. People who have never felt fully accepted and loved for just being themselves tend to turn to whatever fulfils their hunger to be seen and adored by *someone*. It's as if getting some attention will heal the self-doubt and generate some self-esteem. But of course, it doesn't work. Lust for attention at any cost just makes you vulnerable to exploitation and further damage.

Page-three girls are one manifestation of an emotionally doomed attempt to get some love. Showing your boobs will absolutely attract attention and might feel like a rush for a while as you imagine a life of Kardashian-esque fame and wealth. The trouble is, it's not the kind of attention that tends to develop into a deep and lasting sense of being appreciated, valued or even *seen* for who you are. Chasing quick and dirty hits of attention because you're hungry for love can get you hurt, and make you cynical and bitter after a while. You can only live off fast-food love for so long before your body and mind need real nutrition to keep going.

We go looking for love in all the wrong places because of fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of love, how it feels and how to go about giving and receiving it. Predators can more easily engage targets who are longing for attention and desperate to be seen and valued by someone for something ... anything. The best protection is to prioritise love, acceptance, quality attention and compassion when we raise our children and in the way we treat ourselves.

Not all parents realise that just being physically present isn't enough, although it's a fine start. Love is essentially a form of focused and generous presence – a special kind of authentic engagement. Love is highest-quality presence of heart and it's a gift that builds self-esteem. When, as a child, someone consistently indicates that you are worthy and good enough in yourself just how you are, this becomes a part of your reality as your sense of identity develops. While being physically present as much as you are able as a parent is important, it isn't enough without emotional presence, without engagement and an interested connection.

The consistent affirmation of your innate worthiness to be seen and heard serves as a platform on which to build your emerging impression of yourself. Unfortunately, many people don't receive sufficient or consistent engagement to help them feel acceptable and worthy in themselves as they reach adolescence and beyond. But regardless of the gifts you receive – or don't – from caregivers, eventually you have to take on the care of your own heart and soul, and determine what might need a bit of work.

Knowing yourself, building self-esteem and finding self-compassion are typically a few steps forward, a few steps back, but there are some steps that won't lead you astray. Keep developing the things you are already good at and the things you love so you spend more time in *flow*, or immersion, in a space author Gay Hendricks calls your 'zone of genius' where you're passionately living your strengths. It can take patience, I know, to stumble upon the things you love and the zone where you're brilliant, where time melts away into bliss. We don't always know our passions until we find ourselves doing them and realise we're totally in our element.

As well as patience, building self-esteem takes courage. Take some measured risks (nothing dangerous) but try things that push you out of your comfort zone. You'll feel proud of your courage and see that you are stronger and braver than you may have known.

Get physically strong because the process strengthens your head as well. Looking after yourself physically, giving attention to your wellness and self-care nurtures emotional strength and stability more than you might realise.

Building self-esteem and self-compassion requires deeper changes, too. If your self-talk, meaning the way you talk to yourself in your head, tends to be harsh and critical, it's essential to become aware of this and to start infusing some new ideas. If you're hard on yourself, ask yourself whether you'd speak to someone else that way. Would it help a child to grow in self-esteem if you spoke to them the way you speak to yourself in *your* head? If not, think about giving yourself the same level of kindness and compassion you'd give another, because feeling ashamed and criticised, for whatever reason, is hell.

Self-compassion is a vital ingredient in wellbeing. And, of course, it's a more palatable way of saying self-love. Before we go any further into exploring these common faultlines, I want to be very clear about the difference between *blaming* and unearthing insights that facilitate change. Blaming your parents or someone else for your sadness or low self-esteem is not what I'm on about here. Blame is disempowering and paralysing.

Insight, understanding and awareness generate acceptance and fuel your journey towards emotional freedom. Insight means realising why things worked out as they did, why

you are how you are, maybe why they were how they were. It's not about making excuses for anyone. It's about assessing the depths and locations of the faultlines so you don't keep falling into them for the rest of your life.

For some years I saw Colin, a patient who was racked by auditory hallucinations – a cruel, critical voice shouting venomous words at him in his mind. Despite the help of medication, he was sometimes driven to depression and desperate moments of grief that made him pull over his car and sob on the side of the road. He'd experienced scathing, relentless criticism and taunts from his father for as long as he could remember. His father had died many years ago, but the abuse had cracked deep faultlines in the boy, which still groaned and gaped in this now middle-aged man's internal 'badlands'.

It was vital to Colin to *never* regard his father as a 'bad person' – so much so that he held onto his pain and rage at his father's cruelty, thereby creating an emotional pressure-cooker within himself. He (unconsciously) preferred to believe in his own unworthiness rather than accept that his father had been verbally and emotionally abusive and, like all of us, was a less than perfect human.

When he was able to name what had happened and acknowledge the consequences for his life, yet give himself permission to still love and believe in other parts of his father, Colin could begin a slow, steady walk toward greater emotional freedom and peace. The voices lost some of their sting and were quieter when they were present. More importantly, Colin became less afraid of them, able to hear them on occasion without being driven into panic.

Insight and acceptance of the past are empowering, internally handing back accountability is liberating. But again, this is not about blame.

Let's take a brief tour of Blame City: a soul-sucking town lit up with neon billboards that offer various poisons to fill the hole inside us or numb the pain for a little while. For people who get addicted, it's a hard town to leave because it's lazy and cheap.

But blame slowly drains you of everything – your passion, your strength, your authentic personality, your compassion and free will.

It's OK to visit Blame City for a while. Take the tour. A well-travelled path in the Lovelands leads to it and it's worth knowing your way around there so you don't get stuck in its mean, seedy areas. Be angry, be clear that you've been hurt and there are no excuses; but also be ready to keep moving.

You can't create a different past no matter how much you would like to *but* you can find the power to keep growing beyond *any* experience. There is a time to rage, to hide, a time to grieve – then the rest of your life to re-engage. Sometimes freedom starts with

accepting that a horror really did happen but you aren't back there anymore. It's finished and it's time to decide where you want to go from here.

One of the most challenging things about the journey of healing from childhood losses is that our growth and development, even after achieving insights into what happened, is not linear. The faultlines that were cut into us can repeatedly intersect our path in many unexpected places. For example, the loss of a parent can be both physical and emotional; or perhaps your parents were physically present but emotionally unavailable or abusive. Whichever scenario, the loss of a parent or a significant carer during childhood causes multiple losses, not just at the moment of the carer's departure. I felt the loss of my father at every stage, at every special occasion he didn't mark, on every day he didn't turn up for the rest of my childhood and adolescence.

However, the greatest losses went far deeper than the loss of the man. It was the loss of *belief* that I was worthy, that I was lovable, that I was good enough. There was the loss of the *dream*, the bliss-dream of being unconditionally loved by a father and sharing an unquestionable bond with a man. Then there was the *loss of the opportunity* to form an emotional map of what it felt like to be loved by a man, as a child, without sex or having to *perform* in any way.

Finally, there was the loss of safety. It's dangerous to go into the world and relationships with no map, no preparation, no safe place inside yourself to fall. The Lovelands are vast, the terrain so varied and the weather unpredictable. Every soul needs a map.

Each of us has unique circumstances, a different landscape, but our Lovelands are always made of stars, beauty, pain and humanity. Our inner maps depict many of the same core features, they're just arranged differently. Each of us can be the hero of our own inner journey.

We're all born from the Sea of Bliss Dreams, hitting the physical reality of human frailty hard as we emerge from a warm, watery realm. The transition to earth and air isn't without challenge. We carve our inner landscape as the experience of being human unfolds.

Right from the start, relationships with others don't always match the bliss dream of perfect love we once wordlessly imagined. Losses and hurts become faultlines in the bedrock of our Lovelands. Some faultlines are tiny cracks, disappointments that cause a tremor but are quickly forgotten. Other experiences, such as abuses or losses, slice out a chasm that dominates the landscape. They become permanent and perilous unless we learn to map and navigate them with awareness.

Some of us get lost, repeating relationship mistakes; or we find ourselves going in circles, wandering inner badlands that feel like soulless wastelands, not understanding why we're so far from the dream.

Disappointed, we may find ourselves attracted to Blame City, broke, lost or addicted to something or someone we hope will ease our pain or ennui. You've got to grab your stuff and make a break for the River of Flow.

At the river you can immerse yourself in authentic pleasures that soothe you and allow you to leave dead-eyed distraction and compulsions behind. You'll feel your mind, soul and body being replenished on the river's beaches. At the River of Flow time disappears and life force comes alive. Flow feeds resilience – it's a lifelong source of soul nourishment. It's a haven to return to again and again, so explore it and identify your sources of flow so you can always return to them.

Life demands that we keep growing, finding our people, our work and passions. When your faultlines are deep and perilous, they block your progress, trip you repeatedly or keep you trekking round in circles in arid, desolate badlands. Look for the Oases – support that is there in hard times, not only good. Find a guide or travel companion if you can; look for the well of your strengths and drink deeply.

A pinnacle will rise on the horizon, a place that's important to your own power and intrinsic wisdom. This is Mindfulness Mountain. We'll go there together.

The view over the Lake of Self-compassion is breathtaking and a path leads right down to its lotus-covered waters. Here you'll find a new equilibrium.

With wisdom and mindful awareness, you'll better manage the Mirages – the distortions, dead-ends and mistakes that are an inevitable part of any journey. Sometimes things turn out to be other than what you hoped they might be when you find yourself stuck in Projection Pass. Revisit the Lake of Self-compassion often, return always to the River of Flow for comfort and pleasure. Drop your bucket into the Oasis wells and drink again. Then journey on.

Encountering the Plains of Uncertainty at some stage is a certainty in the Lovelands. The weather, the topography, the behaviour of others, random chance – these are things you cannot control no matter how well you prepare. It's likely in relationships and other areas you'll sometimes take a wrong path; your compass might be damaged or those damn faultlines will block your way.

Take heart, adventures must have challenges – it's part of being human and building resilience. In the end, how we respond to what happens matters more than what happens to us.

There's every chance the River of Life will wash you up on Broken Heart Beach at some point, sunburned and thirsty. You might find yourself there a few times. There are cliffs of grief and hurt, twisted driftwood and countless shipwrecks on the rocks. It's a jagged and desolate place with thorns in the sand.

You just have to get up at those times, even if you don't feel strong enough. Remember what you're good at, remember what lights you up, remember the River, the Lake and the Oasis and start the trek back into the interior.