

A Letter to Eve: My Childhood Therapist

by Jocelyn Weiss

Dear Eve,

I know it's been years since we last spoke. In fact, it's probably been around a decade. So, I don't expect you to remember me, a random 7 year old girl whom you worked with, but just know that I definitely remember you.

I want to start off by saying thank you. Thank you for being the woman who agreed to take on my 7-year-old, basket case self. I was just about the most oppositional, stubborn, energetic (yet lazy), opinionated, and difficult child to deal with, but you said "yes". You agreed to help my parents, and to help me.

I'm writing this letter now to not only tell you what I, a 20-year-old, still hold with me from what you taught me, but to show others that (1) therapy can make a lasting impact on children and adults and (2) certain lessons I learned as a young girl continue to be the most important ones I use today.

According to my mother, there were quite a few reasons why she came to you for help. For example, I didn't listen to rules or instructions, nothing seemed to be "fair" to me, and everything felt uncomfortable, causing me to throw tantrums.

I can fully attest to the validity of that first reason; I remember that about myself. Whether it was a rule made by a teacher in school or by my mother at home, I didn't feel the need to listen. No matter how valid, simple, or easy that rule was to follow, I didn't feel compelled to abide and even felt angered by the rule even existing. Given this mindset, I did whatever I wanted. Sitting on that brown leather couch in front of you, with nothing better to do than to listen to what you had to say, you helped me understand something important about life in general, not just as a child. Sure, I could go through life doing whatever I wanted- there's not always going to be someone there to stop me, but after doing whatever I want (and ignoring rules or instructions), there will always be consequences. You showed me that the consequences I often faced, like being sent to the dress-up corner in class for a time out, were not imposed by cruel people who want to do cruel things to me. They were there to show me that actions occur in a ripple effect. What I do and say, how I choose to act or not to act, will always lead to a response. I have the power to control what that response might be.

The second reason my mom sent me to you, me thinking everything was "unfair", was an issue that led to a great realization. I remember saying to you over and over

throughout sessions “But Eve, it really wasn’t fair. Can’t you see how that wasn’t fair to me?”. And I remember you saying back sometimes “Yes. You’re right. That wasn’t fair.” You started by acknowledging that life can be unfair... a lot of the time, actually. You helped me face the reality that the world doesn’t revolve around my wants, my hunger, my mood, or my agenda. I must accept that determining the “fairness” of something is not the right mindset to have. You taught me that I must first determine how a situation made me feel, why I felt that way, and then choose what the smartest way to respond is (no matter “the fairness”).

The third reason I came to you was a big one; everything felt uncomfortable. Every morning before pre-school, my mom would struggle to get my socks on because I claimed the seams felt uncomfortable on my toes; it would lead to yelling and explosive tantrums. Sometimes she would carry me into school barefoot, socks in hand, passing the task onto my teacher to complete. Although I came in thinking this was a physical issue, you showed me how uncomfortability that feels physical, can often be fixed mentally. You also introduced the principle that a lot of situations in life can and will be uncomfortable, but yelling won’t get me anywhere. One tool you gave me to use was the “count to ten method”. You told me that whenever something begins to feel uncomfortable, unsettling, angering, or upsetting, I should close my eyes, take a deep breath, and count to ten in my head. It was such a simple task and idea, but at the time, it worked wonders, and I still use that trick today. Today, however, I wouldn’t break out into hysterics without using the method, but it’s something that brings me a little bit of calm.

Now, one of the most valuable things you taught me throughout our years working together came from one single instant. I was sitting on that brown, leather couch, my mom beside me, and you were respectfully scolding me about something very wrong I had done a day or two before. My head was buried in a pillow laying on top of my mom’s lap as I listened. After you had finished explaining what I had done wrong, you asked, “are you listening to me?” I said, “yes”. However, I didn’t lift my head off of the pillow, so you responded, “you need to look me in the eye”. So I lifted myself upright and repeated “yes”, but this time, maintaining eye-contact.

I’ll have you know, that since seeing you, I have gone on to win state championships and national titles for public speaking- and the strength of my eye contact that the judges always comment on is something that reminds me of you.

Lastly, I want to bring up one of my favorite parts of our sessions. Sometimes in the middle and sometimes in the end, you would let me pick a board game for us to play

together. After a few sessions, you knew that I'd always pick my favorite game "Sorry". I actually looked forward to coming to therapy most days because I knew I would get to play that game with you. I would lay on my stomach and you would sit criss-cross applesauce on the floor; I was always the yellow pawn. This fun tradition was a reminder to me that difficult and serious conversations from authority were not always a "bad" thing, I'm not ever going to "permanently" be in trouble. I learned that working out my problems after admitting to my faults may have consequences, but that process will ultimately work to my benefit (a type of reward in a way). You showed me that expressing my emotions, my rationale, and my thought processes would not only help me grow, but was greatly appreciated by those who cared about and for me.

I think it's funny that out of all the board games you had for me to choose from, I always chose "Sorry". As I said before, I was just about the most oppositional, stubborn, energetic (yet lazy), opinionated, and difficult child to deal with. But I wanted to change inside, I really did, I remember that feeling of wanting to be better, act better. It's almost like I found a nonverbal way of saying "Sorry".

Anyway, I am forever grateful for the knowledge you brought to me and the wisdom I continue to utilize today.

I'll finish off with the same way I started, by saying, "thank you".

Sincerely,
Your former basket case,

Jocelyn