

To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #21

Title: *Changes*

It has been one year since I have been in a Restorative Justice circle. I am often drawn to consider, where was I this time last year? Last month? Last week? So, I have been thinking about who I was last year, before and after participating in RJ and the things I knew and *all* of the things that I did not know then. It never fails to shock me how much can change in such a short time, often without my even realizing it. Sometimes this reflection leads me to spend time wishing I could return to that time. However, looking at how much has changed can provide hope for how our lives might look next week, next month, next year.

Many of us know how quickly life can change, some of us more than most. If change happens quickly, at best, we are startled and, at worst, we are shattered. After big change, we cannot conceive that there was a time when we did not feel the way we do now, good or bad. However, the knowledge that our past lives and selves can become unrecognizable to us over time, can also hold the promise that there are times coming that we cannot now imagine.

Small changes, growth, and healing also happen from moment to moment. Sometimes they are so subtle that looking back is the only way for us to see how far we have come. Like the question, "How many pieces of paper make a pile?", we may ask, "How many moments of change make us the person we are now, and how many more until we become the person we wish to be?" Often, we are unable to see real change caught between moments. Because of this, we should not be discouraged if we feel hopelessly stuck or stationary in our journey. It is the culmination of our choices and experiences that reveals to us the full extent of our growth. Growth that we are unable to see from too close. Many of our lives are unrecognizable from what they were one, five, ten, fifty years ago. The shock we feel when comparing our present selves and situations with our past versions should act as promise of what we can be in the future.

What steps have you taken in the past that have resulted in positive change in your life? What things have stopped you from growing? A way to think about this is; what are the different things written on each piece of paper in the stack of papers that makes up who you are today? Are there any you want to remove from the pile, are there any you want to add?

Furthermore, I am often surprised when I realize where moments of change have come from. Recognizing the small actions and words from others which have been influential for us should show us that we hold the same power. One of the most striking moments in the RJ circle that I was a part of last summer was one person extending kindness and support to another younger member of the group in a time of great need. The man's simple promise to be supportive in the circle and beyond the circle was one of the most touching moments I witnessed last summer. It showed me how much power I hold in my ability to simply express care. I have tried to be conscious of this power in all of my interactions. It is hard, but it is something to strive for. Just as we cannot know when and why we will experience change, we can be equally unaware as to when we will be the person who profoundly touches someone else's life. We, therefore, have a responsibility to wield our power carefully and thoughtfully, but also with proactive intention.

What has been an offhanded thing that someone has said to you that positively changed your perspective?

Restorative Justice is so powerful because it is a place where we can be supported in revisiting pivotal and influential moments in our lives. We can look back knowing that someone has a hold of our ankles to pull us out of the rabbit hole and help us to learn. We use our time in the circle to honestly express the places we have been, and part of the power of our own genuine reflection is that it creates a space for others to do the same. The most honest moments of reflection that I witnessed from men in the RJ circle were only possible because of the bravery of someone else. Even though we cannot currently meet in person, we each still hold that power.

What is something about your current self that you would be proud to tell your past self?

How have your relationships with your family changed and how would you like to see them change in the future?

I would like us to remember that recognizing our progress provides hope for where we are headed even if we are unable to see it as we live it. The growth you discover in yourself when you reflect should show you how limitless you can be when dreaming about what you can do and who you can become. Who will you be next year, when you reflect upon this present moment?

~ Ms. Kegler, Restorative Justice volunteer