

# THE SELF-LED PATH

True North Counseling & Wellness, LLC



## *Looking Beneath the Surface*

It's easy to judge ourselves by what we can see.

We notice the inner critic, the anxiety, the overthinking, the people-pleasing, or the part of us that seems to get angry far too quickly.

We often assume these reactions are the problem. That they need to be fixed, quieted, or pushed away.

Internal Family Systems offers a different perspective. What if those reactions aren't the problem at all? What if they're the visible expression of something much deeper: parts of us that learned long ago how to protect what felt vulnerable?

This issue of The Self-Led Path is an invitation to look beneath the surface. Together we'll explore why our protectors often appear stronger than they really are, how curiosity can soften even our fiercest inner defenses, and why healing begins not by fighting ourselves, but by getting to know ourselves.

I'll also share a personal reflection about learning to let go of who I thought I should be, along with a simple self-inquiry practice you can try this month.

I'm so glad you're here.

Let's begin.

## WHAT'S NEW

### WOMEN'S IFS GROUP

Virtual | 8 weeks  
\$50 per session  
Insurance accepted  
Enrolling for September

Schedule a consultation  
to see if it's a good fit!

### IFS INTENSIVES

For Individuals and  
Couples

## MEDITATIONS & COURSES

The Inner Home Journey

Inner Home: Untangling  
Your Inner World With  
IFS

Free YouTube  
Meditations

## *Learning the Language of Parts*

When we first meet protector parts, and begin to see the jobs they do, many different reactions might well up in us. Some might be challenging reactions. Fear. Disgust. Anger. Trying to stop it. Pushing it away. Arguing with it. Shaming it. Hiding it away. Pretending it doesn't exist.

After all, some of the things our protectors do can really hurt ourselves or others. They might yell. Insult. Go for the jugular. Sabotage all your progress. Call you names. Distance you from others. Make you withdraw. Create chaos or even violence. It's natural that we might respond to these behaviors with something less than love.

***There are no bad parts.***

And yet... each and every one of them has a good intention.

They each love you and want the best for you.

Underneath the behaviors there is a part of you that is doing its best with limited information to keep you safe.

So much of what we do in IFS is about understanding these parts' intentions. And helping parts to see the intentions of other parts.

Then, suddenly, everything softens. What once seemed like a vicious growling tiger shrinks to become a frightened kitten who only wants to curl up on your lap. I've seen it happen hundreds of times, in my system and in my clients' systems, and it's always a moment of quiet wonder.

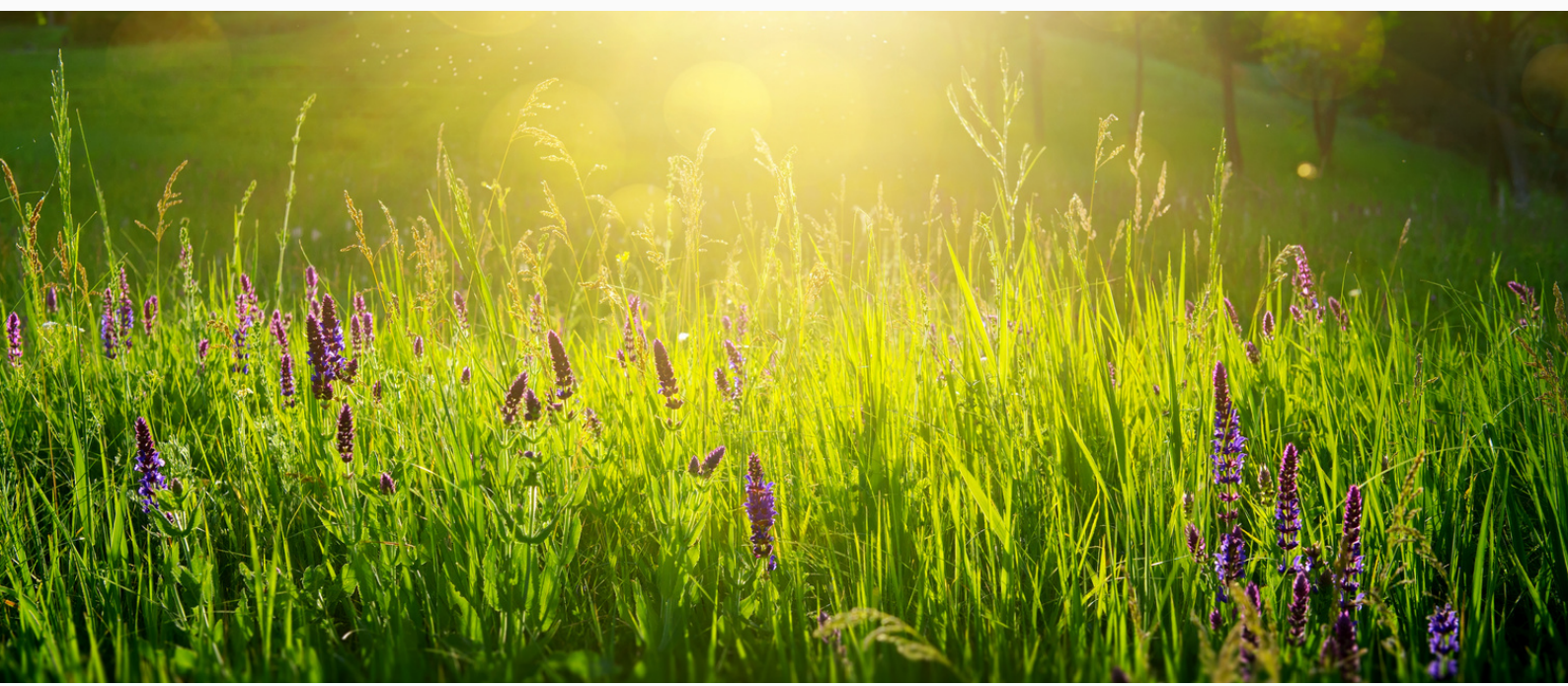
***A growling tiger is really  
a kitten in disguise.***

Could that part that seemed so horrible really have only been trying to keep me safe?

That moment of softening allows Self energy to begin to shine on protectors. They feel seen. Understood. Cared for. Appreciated. Not alone.

This process might take years to unfold. Protectors can be a suspicious lot! But the journey of the Self-led path is richly, deeply rewarding, and, if you choose to walk it, your whole system will thank you for the effort.

***“Protectors always want only the best for you. When we can see that, something softens. Then everything can change.”***



## *Living From Self - Reflections from Vanessa*

"I've got some ideas for my four day weekend," my husband told me, mid-week, and then proceeded to rattle off activities I would never survive in the superheated Florida summer.

Biking on South Beach.

Running the 15 mile loop at Shark Valley in the Everglades.

Lying on the beach baking in the sun.

"Hmm," I said. "Maybe this is a weekend to pretend you're single again, and go for those things on your own."

"What about snorkeling?" he said, and I froze.

I have a complicated relationship with boats and snorkeling. In a college Marine Science class, there was a mandatory snorkeling trip. I feigned sickness and didn't go. The idea of breathing through a pipe with a mask strapped to my face made me feel claustrophobic. And floating in the ocean? Sure, it isn't very deep, but there are ocean animals in there! Turtles, stingrays, barracudas!

Another time I took a glass bottom boat tour. Perfect way to avoid snorkeling, I thought, and still see the reef. When we reached it, the boat anchored and began bobbing with a motion so sickening I can still feel nausea rise in my stomach, spread through my jaw.

I don't know how long we stayed seesawing in that one spot, as I miserably stared down at the green ocean floor, wanting only to be docked to steady, dry land once again.

So when he brought up snorkeling, my entire body clenched and said NO!

"Maybe my son will go with you," I said. He's 19, easy going (sometimes), and often surprises me with what he says yes to. He agreed, and I offered to drive the hour south into the Florida Keys and to wait for them while they took the 2 ½ hour tour. They bought snorkel masks and a cheap underwater camera, and when the day came, we headed out.

What I appreciated most was the complete lack of pressure. No one asked me to change my mind, or tried to guilt me into saying yes, or even mentioned it again. My no was received with grace.

## *The world was no less beautiful because I experienced it in my own way.*

Once I went to take a scenic boat ride with my young daughter and son, and as I clambered into the boat with them in tow, the metal railing I was leaning on collapsed.

We all fell, skidding into the boat. Humiliated and hurting, I quickly found a seat and insisted we were all fine.

We weren't fine; aside from my scraped knee and my son's cut on the bridge of his nose, I now had a memory that has yet to fade in intensity over the years.

As we drove south I thought, sometimes it's right to push forward and sometimes it's right to simply say you know what? That's just not for me. You have fun.

I saw them off on the boat and wandered the Keys. I had a beautiful day on my own, and when we looked at the underwater pictures later that night, I felt at peace. The world of the reef was so beautiful, with delicate fans sprouting off coral rock, a stingray gliding on the ocean floor, beams of light refracting and whirling.

And yet, I knew it was perfectly okay that the way I was viewing it was not through a snorkel mask but through the lens of an underwater camera.

## Sharpening Skills

### Meeting the Tiger

This month, I'd like to invite you to experiment with seeing one of your protectors through a different lens.

Think of a recent moment when you reacted in a way you wish you hadn't. Maybe you became defensive. Shut down. Snapped at someone. Avoided an important conversation. Numbed out. Worked late. Scrolled your phone.

Before trying to change that part, become curious about it.

### Ask yourself:

- What was this part trying to protect me from?
- What did it fear would happen if it didn't step in?
- How old does this part seem to think I am?
- What might this part need from me right now?

If the answers don't come immediately, that's okay. Protectors often take time to trust our curiosity.

Rather than asking, *"How do I get rid of this part?"* try asking,

*"What has this part been carrying for me all these years?"*

You may discover that beneath the growl is something much softer than you expected.

## Self-Inquiry

Are there times when I've said no, even if someone might be disappointed? What was that like?

Are there things I'm saying yes to that I'd rather not?

Have there been times when I needed to experience things differently than others - and that was okay?



*When protectors feel Self energy, they suddenly feel seen, understood and appreciated for all they've faithfully carried.*

## *Go Deeper*

### THE INNER HOME JOURNEY

If you've been longing for a deeper relationship with yourself, The Inner Home Journey was created to guide you there.

This self-paced course includes 10 lessons, each paired with a guided meditation and reflective journaling prompts to help you gently explore your inner world through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS).

Rather than simply learning about parts, you'll begin experiencing them, cultivating curiosity, compassion, and greater access to your Self along the way.

Whether you're brand new to IFS or looking to deepen your personal practice, this course offers a structured path to help you feel more at home within yourself.

[Learn more here](#)

### MEDITATIONS

If you're simply looking for a place to begin, I've created several free guided meditations. Whether you have five minutes or twenty, I hope these practices offer a gentle place to slow down, connect with yourself, and experience a little more calm and curiosity.

[You Tube](#) | [Spotify](#) | [iTunes](#)

### SUBSTACK REFLECTIONS

If you enjoy these newsletter reflections, I'd love to stay connected between issues. On Substack I share stories from everyday life, reflections on IFS, and thoughts about living from Self. It's a quieter space to keep exploring together.

[Read the reflections here](#)

### INSIGHT TIMER COURSE

If you're an Insight Timer user, you'll also find guided IFS offerings there.

These shorter courses and meditations are designed to support your practice wherever you are in your journey and can be a wonderful complement to therapy or personal reflection.

[Learn more here](#)

### WOMEN'S IFS GROUP

Healing often happens in the presence of others. IFS groups offer a chance to explore your own inner system while learning alongside people who are walking a similar path. Many people find that witnessing someone else's work helps them understand themselves with greater compassion.

**Now enrolling for September!**

Insurance may be accepted.

[Find out more here](#)

### INTENSIVES

IFS Intensives offer extended, focused time to explore your inner world and work through long-standing patterns with depth and intention. Whether you're navigating a specific challenge or seeking meaningful personal growth, intensives create space for lasting change.

[Learn more here](#)

## *Thank you for spending some time with me*

It means so much to know you're reading these reflections.

Therapy sessions are one way I connect with people, but this newsletter has become another. I love having a place to share ideas, stories, and the small moments that remind me how healing often happens in everyday life.

I hope something in these pages stayed with you. And if it did, I'd love to continue the conversation—whether through a future newsletter, a Substack reflection, a meditation, or simply knowing we're walking this Self-led path together.

*Take good care of yourself until next time!*



Vanessa Leon-Gonzalez, LCSW

