

FOREWORD: BY MARTIN LUTHER KING III

“If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

My father had a great respect for Mahatma Gandhi. He considered Gandhi’s belief in nonviolent change a critical aspect of his vision for The Beloved Community – that place where everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, hunger and hate.

Like Gandhi, my father knew that the peace and enlightenment we strive for as a society begins not by confronting those with whom we take issue, but instead with an internal journey. It begins with thoughts untouched by hate and anger, thoughts left free to imagine what could be if our minds were stripped of the barriers and restrictions we place on ourselves.

Real change begins with reflection. It begins with an honest, bedrock belief that we can aspire to something bigger than all of us if we can only open ourselves up to the possibilities.

After all, how can you hope to understand and empathize with someone else’s condition until you take the time to truly understand your own condition? How can you hope to inspire change for the better until you yourself have changed for the better?

Or, as the great author Leo Tolstoy once so wisely challenged us: “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”

All great change begins by changing yourself.

But that’s not to say it isn’t difficult – and many don’t feel up to the task. Too many of us struggle with mental health challenges. We struggle to find the help we need – to find the compassion we crave. We struggle because we were not taught the skills we need to thrive, and because we can’t find the words to put to the emotions that we’ve bottled up. We struggle to find the resilience needed to continue our journey up the mountain.

Which brings me to this book. Socrates warned us that the unexamined life is not worth living – that it is our purpose as humans to find the meaning in what we do, to understand why we feel what we feel, and to find the reason for what we think. In Notes for the Children, Pat Priestner outlines his struggle to do just that – to understand the ‘why’ of his life.

His story begins with poverty, abuse and addiction, but that’s not how it ends. Pat asked the questions and, more often than not, found the answers. It helped him develop the resiliency he was looking for.

For Priestner, the tools he found most helpful were the words of the great musicians and thinkers who came before him. They inspired him. They helped give him clarity. They gave him reason and understanding and helped him rise above his circumstance.

Pat passes along all those lessons in this book – lessons about leadership, about how to be a better person, a better parent, a better husband and about how to take responsibility for your happiness and change when a change is required. We all come into the world imperfect. It is our lot to try to find a better way. That's the story Pat tells in *Notes for the Children*.

But I have to confess that I couldn't help but smile as I followed Pat on his journey through this book. As he heaps praise on the great minds that inspired him, he ignores the value of the inspiration he offers the next generation – the gift of his experience.

They say a society grows great when the old plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit, and if that's true, then we're lucky to share our journey with someone like Pat.

He is an example of how meaningful change begins – and where our path can lead if we are brave enough to keep asking why.