

COLORS OF MY PAIN

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Understanding Yourself, Your Wounds, and the Way You Love

by

Jesse Salas

Colors of My Pain: Understanding Yourself, Your Wounds, and the Way You Love

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The information in this book is not intended to replace professional mental health, medical, or legal advice. The author shares personal experience and a framework for self-understanding. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, please seek qualified professional support.

Dedication

For every parent trying their hardest

to give their child what they need.

For every child who just wants to be heard,

whose feelings deserve to matter.

For families to find both the courage to be honest and the discipline to be truthful,

to learn to listen, to connect, and to love each other better.

For anyone who has ever felt different, overlooked, or invisible.

To those who feel broken but keep going anyway.

To those still hiding, still afraid to speak.

To those who were told they weren't enough –

and refused to believe it.

For my best friend, who is still with me.

— — —

To the one who has always been there — you chose to stay unnamed, and I respect that.

For more than sixteen years, you have stayed . . .

You believed in the framework before there was anything to believe in.

You believed in me when believing in me wasn't easy.

You kept everything alive when leaving would have been simpler.

Thank you.

The people who have shown up in my life

may not be who others would expect —

and I'm okay with that.

The colors that really matter are who we ALL are inside,

not what people see on the outside.

You know who you are.

You will read this, and you will know what you mean to me.

You always have.

— — —

And for everyone carrying something the world doesn't see —

You are NOT alone.

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September 1995

I was nineteen years old, locked in a solitary cell, days removed from the worst moment of my life.

Twenty-five years hung over my head. A man had been shot. A best friend was dead. A girl I loved was paralyzed from the neck down. And the kid the family called Chucho – the sweet one, the helper, the one who read every room to keep everybody else comfortable – was sitting on a concrete bunk with nothing left to read but himself.

Jail is not loud. Nobody tells you that. The noise is inside.

The same scenes played on a channel I could not turn off. The tree. The hospital room. The gun. The courtroom waiting for me. And underneath all of it, a question I did not have language for yet: how does a kid built to keep everybody else safe end up here?

I thought about ending it.

I am putting that sentence on the first page on purpose. Somebody is going to pick up this book carrying that same thought, and they need to see it written by a man who survived it. If that thought is in your head right now, put this book down and call or text 988. Then come back. I will be here. This whole book will be here.

I did not end it. I started asking a different question instead. Not how do I get out of this cell – the courts owned that answer. The question was why. Why do people do what they do? Why did I move first and think later? Why did she

feel everything out loud? Why did he go silent? Why did my whole family love each other and still leave marks?

It took me thirty years to answer it. The answer is four colors. Red. Blue. Green. Yellow.

I am a Red. This book is what it cost me to find that out – and what it can save you.

My name is Jesse Salas. It wasn't always.

Turn the page.

Author's Note

This book was not written to assign blame. It was written to foster understanding.

For most of my life, I believed that pain was something to be endured quietly – buried beneath responsibilities, anger, or relentless work. I thought strength meant staying silent, and that survival meant never slowing down long enough to ask why something hurt.

I was wrong.

Pain does not disappear when ignored. It reorganizes itself. It leaks into behavior, into relationships, into decisions, into identity. And if left unnamed, it gets inherited – passed silently from one generation to the next.

This book is my attempt to stop that inheritance.

I write as a man shaped by loss, contradiction, love, abandonment, faith, anger, and the slow work of becoming aware. I write as a son, a former inmate, a survivor, and someone who has spent decades watching people – first instinctively, later intentionally.

Out of that observation came a simple framework: four personality colors – Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow. These colors are not labels of worth. They are lenses. They help explain how people process control, emotion, logic, and care. They explain why two people can experience the same moment and walk away carrying entirely different wounds.

This is my version of a self-help book – carried by a true story. MINE. Because frameworks without proof are just theory. And theory doesn't heal anyone.

Some names have been changed. Some memories are vivid. Some chapters are heavy. But all of them are real. If you recognize yourself somewhere in these pages, know this: you are not broken. You adapted. And adaptation – once understood – can be changed.

Introduction: The Framework

Before the chapters begin, you need to understand the lens through which everything in this book is written.

Over thirty years of observing people – in relationships, in conflict, in love, and in collapse – I identified four consistent patterns in how human beings process the world. I call them colors. Not because people are simple, but because colors blend, shift under pressure, and look different depending on the light.

Each color represents a core orientation – a dominant way a person seeks safety, connection, and meaning.

● Red – The Direct Leader – Driven by control, responsibility, and directness. Reds move toward problems. They lead instinctively, protect fiercely, and struggle when their authority goes unrecognized or their intensity is labeled as aggression.

● Blue – The Emotional Connector – Driven by connection, expression, and emotional presence. Blues feel deeply and adapt fluidly. They struggle when they feel unseen, and may perform or shape-shift to maintain belonging.

● Green – The Logical Thinker – Driven by logic, stability, and precision. Greens observe before they act. They process internally and struggle when emotional demands override structure or when their calm is mistaken for indifference.

● Yellow – The Compassionate Caregiver – Driven by harmony, care, and reassurance. Yellows nurture, support, and prioritize peace. They struggle when their generosity is taken for granted and when boundaries feel cruel rather than necessary.

Most people carry a dominant color with secondary influences. I am a Red – raised in environments that punished my Red energy and rewarded silence. That mismatch is the origin of everything in this book.

You do not need to know your color before reading. It will become clear. But keep the framework in mind as my story unfolds – because the framework is the point. Every chapter of my life was shaped by colors I couldn't name yet.

Now I can name them. And so can you.

Prologue

Some families teach you how to love. Mine taught me how to survive.

I grew up in a house full of contradictions. The men put on pressed shirts and polished shoes before heading out into the night. The women built stories to explain where they went. Charm was a weapon in that house. Silence was a shield. "I love you" got said over tamales on Sunday and taken back by a slammed door on Tuesday.

My grandfather was called the most handsome man in Sacramento. Pressed shirt. Cologne. Shoes shined to a mirror. He did not dress like that for us. He dressed for a barstool in a dim bar where strangers forgot his name by last call.

My mother got pregnant young. Not by accident. With purpose. The man she chose was already married to somebody else. She got him out of that marriage, built a wedding from the wreckage, and called it a family.

My father never chose any of it. His life was a performance. One beer. One bar. One quiet escape at a time. A role in a play he never auditioned for.

And me? I was the kid in the corner, watching. Eighteen years of taking notes I did not know I was taking. Personalities. Patterns. The faces people made when they thought no one was looking. I was looking.

PART ONE

The Candy Kid

How Sensitive Children Learn to Survive

Chapter 1

The Candy Kid

Before I understood the colors, before I had language for any of it, I was a Candy Kid.

A Candy Kid is a child who learns early that sweetness is not about being happy. It is about staying safe. These kids use helpfulness, smiles, and a little sugar to cover what they actually feel. They become quiet observers. Careful helpers. They wear the smile even when nothing makes sense, and they jump in to help before anybody asks.

Do not mistake that for weakness. A Candy Kid reads emotional cues most adults miss. They notice a mood shift before it has words. They know how a person feels before that person knows.

For them, kindness becomes protection. Compliance becomes a safety strategy. Silence becomes a calibrated tool.

Nobody teaches a kid this directly. They learn it from experience – from love that comes and goes with conditions attached. When affection gets unpredictable, keeping people happy becomes self-defense. Being nice stops being a personality and starts being a lifeline. That is not weakness. That is not manipulation. That is adaptation.

A lot of Candy Kids grow into adults who give too much, apologize too often, and carry an emptiness they cannot explain – while everybody around them praises how sweet they are. The compliments keep coming. The hunger stays. The real self goes unfed.

Some kids fill a room with noise and confidence. The Candy Kid watches. They get good at reading people. The tone. The face. The timing. Who is safe. Who is sensitive. Who needs careful handling.

They do not speak fast. They pick the moment so nothing gets worse. Adults look at that and call it maturity. Patience. Wisdom beyond their years.

"You're so mature for your age." "You're so easy to be around." "You're so good."

And the adults miss what is underneath. Candy Kids are not quiet because they have nothing to say. They are quiet because saying it got them in trouble. They learned the cost of opening up one small experience at a time. So they watch the emotional weather, and they back off before the storm hits.

I was one of those kids. By elementary school I could read the mood in any room. I knew when to speak and when to disappear. I knew which adults were warm and which ones needed handling. That skill kept me out of trouble. It also took something I would not get back for years – the freedom of being completely myself.

Here is what the framework reveals about the Candy Kid pattern: it does not belong to one color. It shows up in every color. It just wears each color differently.

A Yellow goes quiet to keep the peace, because peace is what a Yellow protects. Conflict feels like a threat to everything they care about. They become the family peacemaker – smoothing things over, easing tension, putting everybody

else's needs first while their own come last.

A Blue buries feelings to protect connection. For a Blue, the bond is everything. Being "too much" – too emotional, too needy, too expressive – risks losing the people they love most. So they build a version of themselves that is easier to keep.

A Red buries intensity to survive. In a house where directness gets punished, a Red learns to silence the voice. Not because the feelings left. Because expressing them costs too much. The intensity does not disappear. It goes underground.

A Green digs into logic to feel control. When the emotions in the house get unpredictable, the Green pulls back and thinks. Logic becomes the safety net. Understanding replaces connection, because connection feels risky.

The color describes the personality. The Candy Kid describes what happens to that personality under the wrong conditions. Until someone names what happened, the pattern keeps running – long after the child who built it has grown up.

Chapter 2

The Cost of Being Good

They clean without being asked. They apologize without knowing why. They comfort everybody else and swallow what they need. Before they understand what is happening, they have become emotionally indispensable to the people around them. Praised for being good. Quietly building a life that never feels like theirs – because the version of them that earns approval is only a fragment of who they are.

That is not manipulation. That is survival. When love feels conditional, compliance becomes protection. When affection rises and falls with other people's moods, the Candy Kid learns to ask one question: "What keeps the peace?" The other question – "What do I need?" – gets asked less and less. Eventually it stops getting asked at all.

The lesson lands early. Behave, and you feel safe. Show your real feelings, and you pay for it. Nobody writes that rule down. The kid learns it from living it. Honesty makes people mad. Needing support pushes people away. Playing along gets smiles. Being real gets criticism.

So they become "good."

Good means agreeable. Flexible. Easy. The Candy Kid bends their personality to fit the room – not because they have no self, but because the real self does not feel safe to show. And here is the sad part: in working so hard to be good, they lose the chance to be known. Candy Kids get liked. They get admired. They rarely get understood. The real feelings stay behind the mask, because they learned to never let anyone too close.

Underneath all that giving is an ache. A desire to be seen without performing. To be chosen without earning it. To be loved without managing the relationship. They rarely say it out loud. Asking might cost them the connections they worked so hard to keep. So the sweetness continues, and the hunger gets quieter, until it fades into the background noise of a normal life.

And the price always comes due.

Being nice this way wrecks boundaries. It wrecks honesty. It wrecks self-trust. The grown-up Candy Kid struggles to stand up for themselves. They feel guilty for having needs. They apologize for taking up space.

And when the anger finally surfaces – and it will – it arrives with shame attached. The anger does not match the identity they built to survive. So it turns inward, gets buried again, or comes out sideways in ways that confuse everyone, including them.

Candy Kids seldom make dramatic exits. They fade. They withdraw in small ways, become shadows of who they were, and wonder why all that giving left them so empty.

Each color pays its own price.

A Yellow burns out. They spent so long securing everybody else's peace that their own reserves ran dry. The kindness that used to flow freely becomes obligation. And underneath it, a quiet resentment starts brewing that they cannot name.

A Blue loses touch with their own feelings. They spent so long reading how others saw them that their own emotions went blurry. They can describe everybody else's heart in detail. Their own is a stranger.

A Red holds it in until nobody can tell anything is wrong. The silence is not peace. The feelings stack, one on top of another, behind a calm face. Every crossed boundary. Every swallowed thought. Every hidden feeling. The pressure builds. Then one day it pours out all at once – and the Red everybody called "so good" suddenly looks like a different person, and the room is left trying to make sense of the change.

A Green fades almost invisibly. They pull back into their own head and become someone who is always around and never quite there. What started as protection becomes a permanent gap nobody can cross.

No outcome on that list was chosen. All of them were learned. And what is learned can be unlearned – but only once it has been named.

Chapter 3

When the Candy Runs Out

One of the deepest imprints a Candy Kid carries into adulthood is the belief that love must be earned. Affection ties to performance. Attention depends on behavior. Approval feels temporary and needs constant renewal. The result is a quiet, persistent anxiety around intimacy that the Candy Kid cannot quite explain. They just know, somewhere deep, that love hangs by a thread.

That anxiety shows up as fear of letting people down. It keeps them in relationships long after the relationships have gone bad. They tolerate the ups and downs and hold on to what they know – even when it hurts – because being alone scares them more than the mess they are already in. Familiar pain beats unknown abandonment.

Candy Kids do not chase love. They accommodate it. They bend and mold themselves to fit other people's needs, hoping that being useful enough will make them worth keeping. The strategy fails for one brutal reason. The love they actually crave – the unconditional kind – cannot be earned. It can only be received. And receiving it requires a real self. The Candy Kid buried that self years ago to keep the peace.

That is where the fracture begins.

At some point in every Candy Kid's life, the sweetness stops working. For some, it happens in the chaos of middle school and high school. For others, it waits

until adulthood gets messy. A breakup that leaves them hollow. A betrayal from someone they trusted. A mentor who fails them in a way they cannot explain. The tools that kept them safe lose their power, and the Candy Kid stands there exposed.

And in some quiet moment nobody else notices, they ask themselves the question they have been avoiding:

"If being good didn't shield me from pain, what will?"

That question is the sound of their whole survival system breaking down. The only strategy they ever trusted just failed. The ground that felt solid is moving.

What happens next follows the color.

A Red hardens. They decide the softness was the liability. Gave too much. Trusted too easy. Showed too many soft spots. So they close off, get guarded, get strategic. Walls go up. The warmth retreats somewhere deep, replaced by a capability with no connection in it.

A Blue performs harder. Lost connection triggers a Blue's oldest fear – invisibility. So they reach for what used to work. More expressive. More entertaining. More available. Bright on the outside. Hollow underneath.

A Green retreats into analysis. If they can figure out exactly what went wrong – if they can trace every misstep back to its source – maybe they can prevent the next heartbreak. They become experts at diagnosing relationships from a distance. Thinking crowds out feeling. Understanding replaces healing.

A Yellow doubles down on giving. If love failed, they must not have given enough. So they pour out more sweetness, more patience, more generosity – hoping that this time, being good enough will finally be enough.

None of those paths leads out. They are four versions of the same loop. The patterns do not fall away on their own.

The only way out is through. Name the experiences that built the strategies. Understand why they formed. Then choose differently – on purpose, again and again. That work is not easy, and it is not fast. But it is possible.

That is what this book is built for.

Everything that follows – the memoir, the framework, the relationships, the colors – serves one idea: the survival patterns that once protected us do not get to run our lives forever. They made sense once. They kept us safe when we had nothing else. We have something else now. Seeing the pattern is the first step to breaking it.

PART TWO

Colors of My Pain

What Happened When the Framework Had No Name

Chapter 4

Before the Colors Had Names

My name is Jesse Salas.

You just met the Candy Kid.

The rest of the story - the crucible, the colors, and the way out -
is waiting in the full 39-chapter book.

Get the full book at
colorsofmypain.com

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