



The Acorn Theory

Each person bears a uniqueness that asks to be lived and that is already present before it can be lived.

The Acorn Theory was first postulated in the modern era, at least in the public domain by James Hillman, author and psychologist, in his bestselling book; *The Soul's Code*. It is Hillman's view that one of life's greatest mysteries is the question of character and ones destiny. In this theory he proposes that our calling is inborn and that it's our mission in life to realize its imperatives. He has called it the "acorn theory," the idea that our lives are formed by a particular image, just as the oak's destiny is contained in the tiny acorn.



The central theme behind Hillman's acorn theory is that some remarkable people including renowned artists and world leaders as well as even some serial killers are born and not made. This of course flies in the face of what we call conventional psychology which believes that early childhood conditioning or socialization is the greatest determinant of what a person will make of themselves later in life.

Hillman asserts and I quote; "neither nature nor nurture" (neither genetics nor environment) that dictates the outcome of a life. Rather, it is an innate quality possessed by each person, the spark of individuality that, like a master code for a person's life, determines the direction in which he will pursue his destiny."

Where it really gets complicated is when he discusses an over-arching intelligence that provides a road map for a person's life. In many religions this is referred to as guardian angles, spirit or soul. In other words the adult's true fate is already known to the child, and it is this knowledge that guides the child despite all the obstacles imposed by parental and societal norms, in the inevitable direction of its fate. In his book he refers to this as the "soul's code," hence the title.

So then the acorn theory broken down into its simplest terms proposes that each life is animated by a particular image that calls it to its **destiny**, yes, finally there is that word. Plant an acorn in a field of sunflowers and you get an oak tree, not a sunflower stalk. No matter what mom or dad do in the way of encouragement or discouragement, it makes no difference, the little "child-soul" knows where it is going and will find its way there in time. Their guardian angle will guide them!

Now what Hillman also says is that it is more of a myth than a theory. He

attributes this myth to Plato; "that you come into the world with a destiny, although he uses the word paradigm, instead of *destiny*."

So understand that he is not throwing out the baby with the bath water as it were but he is saying and over his many years has said it quite strongly, that sometimes you run into an individual who cannot be explained in terms of nature or nurture. There is of course a place for conventional psychology but it should entertain the possibility of the acorn theory when it confronts a puzzling individual and not try to search endlessly employing the status quo of conventional psychology.



Now me on the other hand, well I do not have the brain power to argue the merits of his argument against conventional psychology anywhere near his level but being the romantic that I am and steeped in Christian faith, love to entertain the notion and idea of it. But in saying that, my life experience and belief that "life is difficult," suggests something very different, something far more earth bound than the idea of **destiny** or



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some sort of **pre-ordained outcome** to ones life.

When I first came across the acorn theory many years ago, quite frankly I initially thought that it had been penned by some self-help guru in a book he/she had written and than took out on the road to sell on a speaking tour. You have to admit when reading it, especially for the first time, it does make you think! I know it did that for me. My initial thought(s) were that it meant that we all have uniqueness and a contribution to make and the power within to move out and realize our dreams. But pre-destined never entered the picture for me. Rather, if we were taught to believe in ourselves and to understand the value of hard work, we could find our way to our life purpose, to fulfillment and the realization of our dreams. At the time I never realized it meant something very different for James Hillman and the world of psychology. The thing is I still believe what I had originally thought but having now come to understand a little bit better that this theory (myth) actually came through a pretty reputable guy by the name of Plato to James Hillman, makes me want to approach it with considerably more respect for what it can teach.

I am sure that anyone who has ever had at least a passing interest in psychology has heard about the concept of **nature** (genetics) and **nurture** (conditioning or socialization) in reference to first family experiences

and the role that those experiences play in our formation leading to adulthood. In particular the influence that mom and dad have on our emotional, spiritual and for that matter intellectual and physical well-being growing up. During those formative years we develop our personality style or way of communicating, we develop our core values, our needs, and our interests grow out of the relationship and influence of family and school.



All of that early life experience inside the family translates, for better or for worse into the adult.

The idea that no matter what my first family experiences are, or what I try to do or control will turn out to be of little or no relevance is abhorrent to me. I am going to become something that was pre-determined by some force beyond my conscious awareness is just a bit to much to comprehend or for that matter believe. "What will be will be!" If that were the case than most of us would probably be "slugs." After all what would be the point of working hard toward a goal, getting out there and accomplishing something, anything?



Either inborn to us (nature) or socialized into us (nurture), take your pick, is a set or hierarchy of needs described by Abraham Maslow another psychologist. How then

would we have our ego-status needs met, where would we get our sense of belonging, of being a part of something from, our sense of worth? How would I derive meaning in my life, where would the validation and affirmation come from if it was all just going to happen, be handed to me without any effort on my part?

Healthy, reasonably well-adjusted, neurotic individuals are naturally drawn or have developed a need to achieve something meaningful for themselves even sometimes without really being aware of what is driving them (need tension).

I remember once saying to my parents when quite young that I wanted to be a doctor not saying I was meant to be a doctor. Needless to say that did not work out. In fact after that there were a number of false starts and stops. Finding my way to my life purpose at the age of 59 (man for others), came about because of life experiences that I had little or no control over and experiences that I strategically had control over. I asked myself the question a lot!

In the end it took a near-death experience lasting better than four years to finally get me there. Am I to



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believe the acorn theory applied to me, that almost dying from failing lungs over the course of two years and at the 11th hour receiving a lung transplant was part of my destiny, part of the master plan for my life? That's a stretch even for a somewhat liberal thinker like me.

And let's not lose sight of how important **CONTROL** is in everyone's life. When left with little control we become terribly stressed and dysfunctional. Some are even prepared to fight to the death for control, particularly control of their lives. I believe we call that freedom which all of a sudden raises the whole spectrum of free will.

The acorn theory flies in the face of free will, something that Christianity teaches us we have. How could anyone believe in destiny and free will at the same time? They are not congruent if you believe that no matter what is going on out there and how it affects your life you are still being pulled or drawn to your destiny.

However, the dilemma and what makes it all so fascinating for James Hillman and others, me included, are the exceptions, those individuals who grow up in an unhealthy environment to become solid citizens, leaders, famous and accomplished people, and how about those who become serial killers in spite of what seems a normal, healthy upbringing? Could these individuals really have something else

going on in their lives? Clearly it's a mystery but what an intriguing notion!

So for all the parents in the audience and those soon to be parents or who eventually plan to be parents, besides the fascination of the question, if you come down on the side of nature-nurture, as most do, there is a pretty powerful message here don't you think.

As you work to find your way to your life purpose and reflect back upon the impact that your first family had upon your journey, and your struggles past and present, think about what will happen to your children under your care during their formative years? Will they get the quality time and attention they need from you to grow up healthy and balanced emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and physically? The demands of our world, makes it very difficult to differentiate between what our children need versus want and then be able to give it to them.

Hillman is credited with the following:

"I think we're miserable partly because we have only one god, and that's economics. Economics is a slave-driver. No one has free time; no one has any leisure. The whole culture is under terrible pressure and fraught with worry. It's hard to get out of that box. That's the dominant situation all over the world." James Hillman

My god is that living? I cannot believe the power in the truth of his statement for all of us. Are we letting economics rule our lives, so much so that we are compromising our mental and physical health and in turn our children's?

In reference to children, James Hillman's message can be summed up in the saying; *"we worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."* **Stacia Tauscher**

And please, please never forget; *"children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see."*

John W. Whitehead: The Stealing of America, 1983

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P.S. Make sure you get all those acorns raked up before the snow flies, otherwise destiny will be coming up all over your lawn next spring.

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A Journey of Grief

Lou Anna Roberts

Don't cringe at the title "A Journey of Grief" because it will assuredly be your experience and



journey, at some unknown time in your life. It is human nature to treat the grief associated with the loss of a loved one with avoidance until it personally enters our life. We shield our children from the harsh reality of it by waiting till they're old enough to understand. We encourage our young men to be stoic in its face, despite their inner torment. But "grief and loss" don't wait for an invitation and when they arrive at your door, how will you cope?

Only those who have lived the journey, begin to understand how unprepared we are for something that is inevitable. If we share our stories and put words to the unbearable feelings, support can be given in a small but significant way that can make another's journey easier.

"A Journey." A journey has a beginning. A journey has an end. Each step of the journey invokes growth. And with growth, comes hope. People are gifted with the ability to heal not only of the physical body, but of spirit and soul. Even a broken heart mends. We emerge from this journey as a different person and we learn to once again re-invest in life. The challenge at

the outset is to accept that *grief* is a totally individual experience. And for me that meant accepting that this was my path and accepting that each step of the journey would have life changing significance. I learned of the purpose of the "walk" and I grew in strength of character with each step of the journey. It's a story I wish to share.

From Wife to Widow – The Journey Begins

There was nothing special or extraordinary about me before late November, 2005. I was an average 49 year old woman with a husband, three children, a home and a fulfilling business partnership shared with my spouse. Well maybe just a bit on the lucky side as both of my parents were still alive and healthy. Bob and I had a shared passion for many activities and interests. We enjoyed our days in the office working on engineering projects together as much as time spent golfing, home renovations or painting in our studio. Whether he was engaged in watching "movie marathons" with the boys or tenderly playing with our daughter, he was as full of life as a person could be. Just like most of our neighbours and friends, our lives revolved around home and family. There were normal portions of happiness and sadness, with ample amounts of hopes and dreams for the future.

There's a comfort that comes when the course of life follows the laws of

probability. Bob's mother had passed away a month before at the age of 94 and without any stretch of the imagination, I truly and wholeheartedly believed that Bob and I would grow old "together." It was sunny and cold on November 29th 2005. The ambulance dispatch sheet which I found many weeks later said 10:17 a.m. It was at that moment when my life changed in a heartbeat or rather a lack thereof. In the minutes and hours that followed the pain of sorrow filled my mind and my body. The weight of my aching heart alone felt like a suit of the heaviest armor.

It's four years later now and there are many significant visible differences in my life, my home and my family but the greatest changes have occurred in the essence of what I have become since beginning the path of my personal "Journey of Grief". I will admit that at times, I was a most unwilling participant.

"Widow" is a hard word to swallow at any point in one's life but especially difficult at an early age. It was less than 48 hours after the death of my husband, while making funeral arrangements that the priest looked at me and matter-of-factly addressed me as "The Widow". Then sternly added that I might as well begin to get used to it. Just another blow that I deflected with a staunch jaw clench and a strained smile that I had begun to perfect over the previous two days.



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The surreal existence enveloped me and swallowed any ounce of sense I was trying to make of my crumbling world. Most days were spent feigning the actions of living when really I felt like part of me had also died with my husband. "Drifting" was the only word I could find to describe the course of the day before sleep's reprieve. And on the eves that sleep did not come at all, I fought strongly to resist the temptation to be sucked into the abyss created by his death and departure from my world.

Acutely aware of the fact that life holds no guarantees but only half-accepting the odds that the face of adversity can be behind any door. And with no warnings signs what-so-ever, the door opened and my life changed.

The cause of his death was "fatal arrhythmia" or what is commonly-known as classic "Sudden Death". I was fully and utterly un-prepared for the harsh reality of a sudden, unexpected death, not that anticipated deaths are any easier to endure. In listening to the journeys of others, I heard stories of how one prepares for the anticipated deaths from cancer and other terminal illnesses and of how the grief journey begins long before the loved one's final breath. Sudden death is very different. No better no worse just different. It's like a "chop block" against a football player. He suddenly realizes his legs have been knocked out from under

him and he's down on the ground with very little recollection of how he got there. His teammates and the coach quickly ask him if he's OK and without even thinking he answers "yes" as they help him to the bench to recover.

That is exactly how a "sudden death" feels. I found myself down, frozen in time, with my breath knocked out of me. I could not imagine that there was ever going to be a future past that moment. And just like the fallen football player, my friends and family offered assistance and I instinctively stood up and steadied myself. My only sustaining thoughts on that day being that I have 3 children to be there for and that I needed to be strong.

So just like the felled football player, I said I was "OK".

The Obvious Effects

When you begin to look for it, one soon finds that there is an abundance of well-documented information on Death and Grief. People will freely give you well-intentioned advice on every aspect of recovering from the loss of a loved. It permeates your life like a river overflowing its banks. No facet of your existence remains untouched by the death. I quickly learned that there is much that is not said and to discover it alone is a formidable and lonely task. Every book I read was missing something and every person I spoke to seemed to be too quiet on the essence of the path I was walking.

Try as I might to accept the reality that life forward was going to be different, the process of become "one" again rather than one half of a "couple" was incredibly difficult. One less dinner plate at the table was easier to accept than going to bed and trying to allow myself to move to the centre of the bed, instead of still staying on "my side." Simple routines of the day became painful. Each daily task was now difficult because it was undertaken "alone." A full three weeks transpired before I could put on a morning pot of coffee without being driven to tears. I hugged his old clothes for a reminder of his presence and I re-read many times the cards and poems he had written over the years. I became acutely aware that I was "existing," not "living," but my faith never wavered that there was a willful purpose for this journey.

I never knew what small aspect of Bob's life might be discovered that day and I never knew how paralyzed I might become because of it. Some days my soul was ambushed by grief with a fear of future. And on others days the simple thought of the next moment could cause the same effect.

And the Not-So-Obvious

"The meeting of two people is like a chemical reaction, if there is any reaction at all, both are forever changed."— *Carl Gustav Jung*

"Alone in the soul" – is what death of a loved one feels like. I could not find a book to tell me how to soothe the

wound of the uniqueness of our relationship and I could not find a person who could describe for me the words to heal the "aching rock" inside me. The books for widows and how to go on after losing a loved one were words on paper that dealt with generalities of death rather than specifics. They told me the semantics of my existence but nothing to lift me above it. I needed to search within for relief of the tormenting ruminations. By being driven deep inside myself searching for answers, I soon realized that the healing starts from within and works its way to the surface. I was fiercely protecting the memories of our life together and needed to find a way to carry those thoughts without burden.

Like everything in life, preparation is the key. How do you prepare for an exam? Learn your material in advance. Gain the necessary knowledge and practice the material till it's almost innate. How should we prepare for life, in much the same way? With all life's relationships of births and marriages and new loves and new friends, we need to talk to each other not only of the life lived but to be aware of the impact when a life is stilled.

Choices to be Made

The most natural reaction to the feelings is pain and an aching in the soul. Tears flow freely like they will wishfully be able to wash away the hurt. But they didn't. And only when I

realized and accepted that I had a path to follow on my Journey of Grief did the unknown course become charted before me.

I put the "*feelings*" into words in a journal so they would leave my mind and allow me to live again. And I took a brush to canvas capturing "*heartache*" and "*drifting aimlessly*" into paintings. I transformed our years together as "walking with another for a portion of our journey" rather than dwelling on the fact that there would be no new shared time.



Driftaway 2006

And I travelled to the oceans and sat on the beach to let go of the "aching rock" I was carrying around in my chest. The burden on my soul lifted as I felt the "rock" being carried away on the wings of the breeze. I made a conscious effort to be thankful for the sunrise that heralds the new day.

And slowly but surely, my *Lust for Life* returned. My life changed the moment I changed my mindset from I have lost

my "everything" to realizing that I really still had "everything."

Healing

I've learned that there are no words to express the feeling of seeing a photo of someone you love and remembering the sound of their voice, their laughter, their presence and then to realize they have been forever silenced in this world.

I have learned that even though we may feel stagnated in progress, there is always more to learn and discover. Nothing stays the same and that the road to change has pitfalls along the way. Many have walked the journey and have learned how to heal. One cannot always tell who has a story to tell. So I have learned to stop and listen. A few extra minutes out of my day to listen to a new friend or acquaintance is always worth the time. And invariably, I have been educated.

I've learned that living in the day is a coping skill that sustains, but to live past today and truly look forward to a future is a gift that will soon return. In a strange but comforting way, I look forward to that day but waste not one moment of today's blessings in wait. I feel like there is so much living to do in only 24 hours per day.

I have accepted my Journey of Grief as a natural roadway in the Journey of Life. There are so many times in our life when we go through painful events and at the time cannot see further than our momentary despair. When

time has passed and the pain has healed, we marvel at the gains we have made. I can leap out of bed in the morning with eager anticipation of what the day will bring. Knowing that the events are with intents and purpose and I will grow with each experience, despite the "Loss Lived".

"Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you." *Aldous Huxley*

Lou Anna Roberts currently works as a Project Manager for a local Consulting Engineering Firm. She started her own Contract Design firm when her first son was born 26 years ago and then partnered in a Consulting Engineering firm with her late husband until the time of his passing in 2005.

Although her working career has always been in Building Systems design and operations, her passions out of work are house remodelling, writing, poetry and acrylic on canvas paintings. Lou Anna has always valued the gift of creativity and continually seeks outlets for sharing creative expression.

SPECIAL



Picture: Wayne Glowacki

Words of Remembrance for Brandon Smith (Kid Courageous)

About two months ago old friend Gord Sinclair over at the Winnipeg Free Press wrote a story about a courageous and remarkable little boy named Brandon Smith and his family. As many of Gord's stories have done in the past, I was moved by this family's courageous story.

Brandon was born eight years ago with infantile Batten's disease, a rare inherited neurological disorder that affects nerve cells in the brain and progressively reverses physical and mental skills. It was not diagnosed until he was about 18 months old.

Gord reported recently that Brandon died in his mothers arms on Sunday, November 1st.

During his all to short life and as much as they could the family treated Brandon much like any other little boy and at the same time fought to give

him the best medical help available hoping for a cure to be found. Alas that was not to be the case.

As reported by Gord; Brandon's dad Doug Smith wanted everyone to know what a "fighter Brandon was," that he "kept going and going and going. All he knew was to constantly fight." Doug went on to say; "how very thankful we are he came into our lives and how thankful we are for all those who did anything for us."

Mom Cindy said that Brandon "taught us to dance in the rain. Life is not waiting for the storm to pass. It's learning to dance in the rain."

Quoting Gord toward the end of his article; "his little life spoke to people in a profound way. There was something about his spirit, the way Brandon battled to live, and the way his family fought for him, that inspired people who were privileged to meet the Smiths."

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