

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 62 – Josh Jacobson – Cultivating Community

Love is All You Need

And now a personal word,

Josh Jacobson shared these defining features of his life: He was an only child, loved by his parents. His family moved frequently. He felt displaced, always the new kid in class, learning to adjust, developing his social skills with the broad gestures that teenagers learn to do. He was sensitive and introspective. I can hear him listening to the Beatles because the Beatles were smart and complex and love is all you need.

These are the traits of someone who would be drawn to the liberal arts, to asking foundational questions about the meaning of things, to seeing connections across disciplines, to seeking patterns of cause and effect, to leading a life of service. Josh went to Flagler College, where he flourished. I imagine him making an impression in class, acting on stage, writing for the campus newspaper. I imagine his voice and command of language, faculty and administrators turning to him for his thoughts, the college presenting him with opportunities, the college recognizing him as a star. After graduation, what to do with those qualities? How might he contribute to community? How might he flourish again?

Josh worked in intergovernmental affairs in the state capital of Tallahassee, which meant lobbying politicians, which meant the toss and tumble of compromise. The worst of human impulses can show themselves: lying and greed when profit and politics mix. Josh pushed forward to the arts, to expression and making the world a better place, first in Jacksonville and then under the bright lights of New York City. I see him singing in Strawberry Fields two months after the towers fell on 9/11. I imagine him saying this was where he belonged, ready to launch his career, ready to create a new city arising from the ashes. Josh walked the streets of Manhattan, from Harlem to Battery Park, experiencing the highest highs, that in the center of all things he would make his mark. There is this attraction to possibility, to the hero's journey of entering a special land. I see Josh crossing thresholds and encountering marvels. I see him confronting fears and the lowest lows. For in a special land, we confront the depths of our psyches. We fall into the abyss. We experience a death of our egos. If we come through the ordeal, we are transformed, resurrected, awake to our gifts, rewarded for being who we truly are. Josh gained the insight to leave New York and pursue the love of the woman who would become his wife. Josh came to Charlotte, elixir in hand, ready to share what he gained from his ordeal with residents of a new land.

When Josh arrived in Charlotte, knowing no one other than his bride-to-be, a new quest began with new mentors, new trials, and new triumphs. The cycle of adventure and discernment repeats.

Josh Jacobson and I have had similar influences. I am one of five children, the last one in the lot, loved by my parents. I carry that with me: this profound sense that their love protects and ennobles me. Our family moved from country to country, from state to state, from city to city. I was never in the same school for very long. I learned how to be social but was privately sensitive and introspective. I loved the Beatles, first Paul then John then George. I went to Rollins College, where I flourished. After college, it was a journey to flourish again.

This is what I sense about Josh: he knows in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make.

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