

## The Core of Life.

The man was older now. He never thought about himself getting this old; that is to say, he had vaguely thought about it, but he had not experienced it yet.

As a child, his ability to cope with people, especially adults, grew tumultuously from the decadent treatment raining down on him, which he had no control over. Finally, the now molten turmoil within him erupted and flowed into a mould he had inadvertently created for survival. As the mould cooled and hardened, it formed his core identity. This identity formed so early that he didn't even know it had happened. His core was formed as an intuitive need born out of his desire to physically survive his caretakers, the majority of whom used him for their sordid sexual pleasures. The man, then only a boy, was mistreated in ways that were inhumane and illegal. The perpetrators suffered no consequences that he ever saw. While still two years shy of five, he was deemed too old and too sexually used by his caretakers, so, now wanting to discard him, they sent him back to Social Services, where a husband and wife picked him to foster. He would later learn they only wanted him for the monthly check they would receive.

His core cast a protective shield made up of these five basic elements: fear, optimism, happiness, intolerance, and curiosity. He did not love, nor did he know the meaning of caring. He was never taught those attributes, nor was he asked how he was, or if he needed anything, so he didn't learn to ask others those things. He only knew what he had learned, and he hadn't been taught much that was positive. After his molten core cooled and hardened, peace and happiness emanated from within, but he could not find people who shared his substance.

He lived with the people he found himself with, since he had no say in who they were. He survived his return to his father and stepmother, although his arrests and being deemed an incorrigible delinquent by a Juvenile Court at 13 made his stay precarious. Finally, they demanded he leave at 17. He found being on his own wasn't difficult at all. He found it easier than anything he'd done before.

The man learned that living a life void of substance was fruitless for him. He got bored easily, and, because he could, he would walk away, not look back, and he had great, exciting adventures which lasted for decades. During those times, he found his core was excited and curious about this earth and its peoples. He was a free man.

Settling down and living in a single place for extended periods required what he called responsibility. He still didn't know what love was because love is a learned emotion, and he had not been privy to learning that. The people who raised him until he was five taught him many things, but not what the majority of the people he now met had learned. His education didn't include the learned emotions of love, caring, communication, or being at peace with others. He knew nothing about social etiquette, yet he managed to fit in until people wanted emotions he had never learned.

He tried to learn love, caring, trust, and even loyalty, but his new caregivers betrayed him too; they were supposed to love and care for him, but he couldn't reciprocate, and he didn't understand when they beat him for what they deemed was his disobedience. His parents kept yelling that he needed to obey, but he didn't know what that meant.

The man, now having lived for three decades, was experienced, and he could do, and time and again he did do, anything his survival required. The man found that part easy. He was only poor when he wanted to be, and when he wanted more, the transformation was easy. So, what he didn't understand was why he wasn't good enough just as he was.

He met a woman whom he got pregnant, and somehow he chose to be responsible; it seemed a natural decision.

The man was shocked to learn that in this marriage, too, there was no substance. After the first of two children was born, there was still no core; no meaning, no plan, no commitment, and the thing called love wasn't standing up to the test of time.

The man was loyal, yet his wife left them all for another man.

The man was a survivor, so the task before him didn't daunt him. Again, he found it easy to know what to do to survive and to do it to the best of his ability.

The lack of core substance that he encountered in others time and again, plus the heavy load of responsibility that he could not leave, because they were his children, didn't stop him from doing the next right thing.

The man had weathered every negativity in his life by himself. He didn't know otherwise because that's the way it had always been for him. He was used to being alone and doing things on his own.

His children left him, too, and on their way out, they didn't thank him for having provided and protected them. Instead, both his children broke the bond of loyalty he thought they had. With that bond broken, he was again set free to be the core person he was. The man set out to undo all his responsibilities. Eventually, he prevailed, and, as he settled into himself once more, he liked it. The man liked it a lot. He often wished his children had treated him better, in part so he could now enjoy them without responsibility. His children, now adults, decided what the nature of their relationship would be, and he was turned away.

The man came to accept his core, and he watched as the five elements—fear, optimism, happiness, tolerance, and curiosity—grew. Finally, he outgrew the needs that required responsibility, and he had learned how to say no, or so he thought.

His question now was, what were his boundaries? Oh, he knew his core, containing the five elements he had been born with, but he still didn't have personal knowledge of the plethora of learned emotions that he saw in others.

He had confused lust with love, so he lived a lustful life, thinking he was loving women, but when the lust stopped with one, he learned he could find it again easily. Without realising it, he was finding others who shared his core beliefs, yet they were unaware of the motivation behind their choices, too. He told women he loved them, so he didn't understand their tears or anger when their relationship ended. He thought his lust that he mistook for love, and doing his best, was showing love, because love was a thing he had not learned.

He shared his life's story with a few, not for pity or to gain an advantage, but hoping those hearing it would connect the dots. He was saddened and bewildered when no one did.

As his path forward grew shorter than the one he had taken to get where he was, he closed the lane that was the onramp to himself. He erected barriers and learned how to ghost people. Despite wanting people, including his children, in his life, he chose against it, as he found life was okay when he was alone.

Finally, he acquiesced and allowed his son access. He gave what he wanted to give within the guardrails he had installed, and that seemed to smooth out their relationship. Their bond was the DNA they shared, and the man hoped that was enough.

He had decided he never wanted to be surprised by disloyalty again, and the only way to achieve that was to expect disloyalty yet be surprised when it didn't happen.

The most significant outcome of all this was that he became happy. He became happy, optimistic, and creative again. It was as if he couldn't help himself; his life became his life again. He wasn't responsible for anything that he didn't want to be responsible for. And the times he drifted into depression or anxiety, he would be wound back to his new state of being: happiness, optimism, and creativity.

He wasn't angry or upset by the times he was pulled into the problem-solving of life that took away from his peace. And when a friend asked him what he does for fun, he replied, "Everything I do is for fun!"

Written by Peter Skeels © 6-20-2025