

The Acorn Hunt

By Dianne Flinn

My daughter couldn't believe her good fortune when her eyes took in the abundant treasure covering the sidewalk in front of us; and it was all free for the taking! Every minute or so, the giant oak that hovered over us dropped another acorn, narrowly missing our heads, and bouncing off the pavement. She immediately started listing all the possible crafts that could be created from these perfectly smooth nuggets of wood. Dad could drill holes in them to make large beads for necklaces or bracelets. Hmm, I would love a pair of stylish wooden earrings! Or they could get sliced into mini panels to make a little house for stuffed animals or figurines. I suggested we could make them into little acorn people, drawing on faces and using the caps as, well, caps. "Mom, do you have any pockets? I want to collect a ton of these"! Once the small pockets in the front of my pants were uncomfortably full and lumpy, she made more storage by creating a sling with the front of her shirt, improvising for her own lack of pockets. Once we made it back to the house with the acorns, except for half a dozen or so that were accidentally dropped along the way, a home for them was found in a plastic food storage container with a red lid.

The following Saturday, while walking our loop around the neighborhood, we found ourselves once again underneath the large oak tree, with even more acorns randomly raining down around us than the previous weekend. My daughter was undeterred by the fact that I had no pockets this time. When her fists were full of the treasure, she used the front of her shirt, as before, to accommodate the addition to her collection. Delightfully feeling less like a middle-aged woman and more like a child, I bent down to examine both the acorns and the rough, spiky

caps that had separated from them. Some had cracks, which I quickly discarded as damaged. Picking up another one with a crack, I changed my mind and decided to take advantage of its weakness, sticking my nail in the crack to pull it apart and see what the inside looked like. The shell that peeled away was surprisingly thin, revealing a smooth yellow surface with small ridges making it look and feel like a tiny pumpkin. The soft inside was a sharp contrast from the hard wood exterior. My daughter added some of the cracked acorns to her bulging shirt, new ideas clearly already forming in her mind.

After I announced it was time to head home for lunch, my daughter reluctantly turned her back on the oak tree, not fully convinced she had collected enough treasure. The acorns that slipped out of her hands and dropped from her shirt proved otherwise. A man and a woman holding hands, who looked to be in their 60's, greeted us with inquisitive smiles as they passed us walking the opposite way on the sidewalk. The woman paused for a few seconds. "What are you looking for?" After we briefly exchanged pleasantries, the couple went on their way and we continued on toward home. "Hey, excuse me; I found a few!" My daughter and I turned around to see the woman smiling and waving her fists in the air as she hurried back toward us, her husband shyly staying behind underneath the oak tree. "Look, you can even juggle with them". We watched as she expertly threw an acorn from her hand into the air, followed by another one, and finally a third acorn. She then proceeded to juggle with a single hand, which I guessed was no easy feat, especially due to the small size and non-uniformity of the small wooden objects. The woman cheerily surrendered her finds to my daughter and joined her husband to resume their early afternoon walk below the warm early Fall sun. These new acorns were dropped on top of the other ones, untouched, in the red-lidded container, filling it almost to the top. Any time allocated for them was quickly

replaced by chapter books, paper crafts, and the myriad of other activities that occupy a 7-year old's afternoons and evenings.

Each weekend as fall progressed, we found less acorns underneath the big oak tree, their numbers rapidly depleted by hungry deer and squirrels, and collectors, young and old. The crunch of the acorns was replaced by the rustle of fallen leaves beneath our footsteps. Instead of the thud of acorns raining down, we delighted in the tie dyed green, yellow, and red leaves gently making their way to the ground to join the dry, mahogany ones. Like the acorns, each of these new treasures had potential. They were just waiting to be dipped in paint and used to stamp cards or decorations. Or, they could be gathered by the armful and piled into a shoulder-high mound to be jumped in again and again. And maybe in a few months, once the leaves were gone and the ground became a clean slate again, we would be lucky enough to delight in cold, glistening snowflakes collecting on our coats, hats and outstretched mittens!

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