

over eight billion different lifelines, all searching, all drawing out one huge treasure map across its surface.

The arc of human history has been shaped by treasure hunts, both big and small. The conquests of Alexander the Great shaped culture in parts of Europe and Asia for over a thousand years. The nomadic journeys of the disciples of Jesus Christ evolved into the most popular religion in human history, influencing western economic and political policy for over two thousand years. The desert battle victories of Muhammad led to a similar effect in the Muslim Middle East. Later, the Spanish quest for riches created a great transformation in the Americas. And so it has continued. From the American Revolution to the women's suffrage movement to the civil rights movement, history has continually been written and rewritten by humans striving intensely for the things they cherish most.

Unfortunately, as we experience from time to time, pursuits sometimes clash. When two people value opposing outcomes, they may see one another as an obstacle to what they want. When they value the same goal, they might view each other as competition. As a small thing, these situations may lead to an argument. On a larger scale, these issues can escalate into violence and even war.

Yet in the darkness of conflict, a light reveals to us an elemental truth about our human condition. Treasure hunting is a universally shared human phenomenon. The experience of hunting for what we want connects every last one of us. Our hunts illuminate the common fabric we share. And an important truth gets far too often left unacknowledged: *the fundamental treasures every one of us seeks are all the same.*

You and I long to be loved. We want to experience loving others. You and I desire plentiful access to food, water, and shelter. We hope to feel as though we have some control over what happens to us and those we care about. You and I wish to have a purpose and share a sense of belonging. Each one of these treasures is sought universally. The desire for these treasures exists inside every person alive today.

The hunts we go on to meet these basic human longings make up much of our everyday experience. This is a reality we all experience. So, while it's *often en vogue to fixate on our differences, the truth is, you and I are way more similar than not.* And when we embrace what we have in common, sharing joy becomes easier.

This brings me closer to the point about what else, besides clues to a hidden treasure, this book has to offer. As I began putting my vision for this treasure hunt into motion, I soon started to realize that something larger seemed at play here. Unexpected surprises occurred. This project started to take on a life of its own.

I first became aware of this as I set about creating my wish list of treasure objects. You should know, I am not a professional collector. I had no experience in acquiring precious or unique items of any kind. Almost five years ago, when this project began, I was a full-time dad taking care of two toddlers at home during Covid while writing children's book manuscripts. I had no idea how to put together an interesting or valuable collection of treasures.