

# The Art of Enough

## Episode 1 – Origins of Not Feeling Enough

### Transcript

Voice Over:	00:08	The Art of Enough with artist Jay Sullivan. Episode one, Origins of Not Feeling Enough.
Singing:		The man climbed over the mountain, the man climbed over the mountain, the man climbed over the mountain, and what do you think he saw?
Jay Sullivan:	00:24	I was four years old when, on a family vacation, I jumped into the deep end from the diving board at the hotel pool. There was a big blinding splash flailing like swimming motions and panic. The fear of going under kept me barely above the surface until I was able to grab onto the chrome handrails of the pool ladder. I dragged myself out onto the pool deck with the intent of heading back to the safety of my mother's chair. But over to my left, I heard an unseen voice. "Did you see that kid dive into the pool? That was amazing." It was- it was amazing? Did do something good?
Singing:		And what do you think he did? He went back and dove into the deep end. He went back and dove into the deep end. He went back and dove into the deep end for the next 50 years.
Jay Sullivan:	01:57	Are you always climbing the highest mountains? Always putting yourself into stressful situations that require all of your skill, all of your determination, all of your energy just to get over the top and back down onto level ground? And when you get back to level ground, do you quickly start the anxiety provoking climb all over again? Are you a perfectionist in some area of your life? You're parenting, your relationships, your work, your art? Where no matter how hard you try, no matter how much progress you make, it just doesn't feel like you've done enough?
Jay Sullivan:	02:44	Welcome to The Art of Enough, a podcast series that can help you understand the causes of not feeling enough and provides some guidance on how psychology, neuroscience and creative process can help you transcend this and other problematic emotions.
Jay Sullivan:	03:04	Hi, I'm artist Jay Sullivan. For me, being an obsessive mountain climber is a combination of being an overachiever, a workaholic,

a perfectionist, a compulsive problem solver. And these traits have benefits to be sure. I'm always learning new things and embarking on new experiences. I've traveled around the world, been a life-long competitive armature athlete. I've had career success as a producer and director, I've co-founded two successful companies which was financially rewarding. And I use that success to help others. But why? After all of this, did I not feel like I had done enough? Why was the feeling of accomplishment brief and unsatisfying?

Jay Sullivan: 03:57 I started this project well into my middle age, a time when most people would start to think about slowing down. But I found myself still needing to do more. Still needing to find another mountain to climb, still putting myself way outside of my comfort zone. All the good ideas in theory, but when do more means keep on doing more, and the next mountains get higher and higher and you're living your life way outside of your comfort zone all of the time. You may think you're achieving great things but you may not recognize that you're living your life in great stress.

Jay Sullivan: 04:37 The art of enough is a personal, transformational art making project. It's much like my previous projects where I used photography and video and self-portraiture in a physiologically driven art making process to become aware of and then transcend some limiting pattern of emotion or behavior that I've identified. Specifically, for this project, I created a series of photographic based artworks and these podcasts as a way to understand why I am doing what I'm doing and doing and doing when I would really like to slow down and enjoy the moment instead of always climbing the next large mountain.

Jay Sullivan: 05:19 And it's worked. During this project I've been able to dramatically slow down the pace of my life. I've reduced anxiety, and most importantly, I have learned to say "No" in situations where I automatically used to say "Yes". I can now say "No" to climbing more mountains. I can say "No" to putting myself way outside of my comfort zone. I can say "No" to solving the worlds problems. In many ways, it was about becoming more present and making more conscious choices. Instead of reacting to the situations around me based on some inner voice that commanded me to, "Do more," or, "Be better," I have done enough. And now, if I choose to do more, it's because I believe it will result in more pleasure or more happiness and more connection with those around me. And I still get things done, but seemingly, with a lot less effort without having to climb the highest mountains.

Jay Sullivan: 06:19 How did this happen? The quick answer is that I researched and created these podcasts while creating several bodies of art using a physiologically transformative creative process. It may sound a little complex but it's based on some fairly simple strategies that you can use in your art making process or in your life. And this brings up a good point, you do not have to be an artist to use some of these ideas and strategies. Many of them are well-known transformational psychological tools. Mediation, breathworks, psychotherapy and yoga, and they could be used on their own. What is a little different in my approach, is that I use these tools in a creative setting, integrating them with photography, video, voice, signing, movement and acting, with a goal of creating a body of artwork.

Jay Sullivan: 07:13 I do this because, A, it engages more of my mind and body, which improves my chances for a positive outcome. And, B, I love making art. So an emotional and psychological change process becomes embedded in my daily activities. Again, you don't have to consider yourself to be an artist or a performer to take advantage of these ideas or strategies. Just experiment, play, adapt and see what works for you.

Jay Sullivan: 07:41 These podcasts maybe helpful to you whether you're an overachiever who wants to learn how to slow down and feel like you've achieved enough in your life. Or if you're an artist or someone interested in psychology in art who want to learn about the transformative potential of creative process. Or you may be someone who just wants to say, "Enough" in any area of your life. Enough of trying to be the perfect parent, the perfect spouse, the perfect friend, the perfect employee. Dare I say it, good just might be good enough.

Jay Sullivan: 08:24 The last 30 years of my life has lead be to the psychological and creative focus. I'm a habitual self-improver and I've spent the last three decades exploring my personal history, psychology and issues (laughs). I'm lucky enough to have learned from some of the worlds most effective teachers and coaching, having spent thousands of hours in transformational workshops, creative classes and retreats and therapy sessions. I've also spent 30 years as a creative director for commercial films, videos, installations and stage shows. And experience that taught me how to use creative strategies to influence the emotions and actions of others.

Jay Sullivan: 09:12 These days, my work is a coalescence of these experiences, a place where I use the mediums of photography and video in a creative process that is not designed to influence the actions and emotions of others. But it's designed to influence my own

actions and emotions and make positive changes in my life. An art making practice is ideal for making psychological and emotional changes because it can be setup to have a repetitive element. Repetition is necessary because, most times, the behaviors that we want to change have been instilled in us over years of repeating the same limiting behaviors or emotions.

- Jay Sullivan: 09:53 So changing these behaviors requires repetition as well. It's the same strategy you would use if you wanted to get into shape. You would go to the gym regularly, not just once. It's also the same strategy that marketers and advertisers use to effect out behavior. They repeat the same commercial over and over again. The difference is, in my art making process, instead of being exposed to the same commercial over and over again, I am repeatedly exposed to imagines, sound and experiences that represent the behaviors and beliefs that I either want to avoid or adopt (singing).
- Jay Sullivan: 10:34 So if you're a compulsive mountain climber or overachiever like me, where does it come from? What does it originate? It's different for everyone, of course. But as with many behavioral traits, it often starts in early childhood. 90% of our brain is developed within the first five years of our life. So the experiences that we have in early childhood have long-term impact on our beliefs and behavior. One of my childhood experiences that contributed to my addiction to climb the highest mountains, first became clear while researching creative process for this project.
- Jay Sullivan: 11:17 It led me to a lecture hall in Palm Beach, Florida. I was at a talk about creative process given by documentary film maker, Rick Burns. During the Q&A, the discussion got around to his much more famous brother, Ken. Ken created the series about the Civil War, baseball, Vietnam, all for the U.S Public Broadcast System. Rick mentioned that he and his brother had a shitty upbringing. Their father was brilliant but mentally ill and their mother died from cancer when they were both adolescents. Rick noted that he thought his brother, Ken, had spent his life trying to outrun all that and channeled that energy into film after film after film. It should be noted that Ken Burns does not make the standard 90 minute or two hour documentaries, he makes series of documentaries, some lasting up to 18 hours.
- Jay Sullivan: 12:21 The Burns brothers story struck a chord. My father was also brilliant but mentally ill. When I was about four, he started to have violent psychotic episodes. He was dragged out of the house and taken to a psychiatric institution. After hearing about Ken Burns, I realized that I too had been running and running

and doing, trying to outrun that past. I also realized that as a young child, I thought it was my fault that my father had to leave the home. And I have subconsciously been trying to do more, trying to be good, trying to be better in the hope that it would make it all better again.

- Jay Sullivan: 13:04 It's well known in psychology circles that blaming ones self is common among children who have experienced a loss of a parent. Therapist Bob Szita has spent 30 years counseling individuals and families, he explains.
- Bob Szita: 13:19 It's almost universal that a child can believe that it's somehow their fault that a parent either dies or gets sick or leaves the family in some way. A child will then start to think, "I have to be good. I have to be better. I have to be whatever they want to be in order not to have them leave again."
- Jay Sullivan: 13:48 So, as a child, one might keep trying different things, different solutions or approaches in order to get it right. And that's what I did. And let me emphasis, I'm not complaining because this is a good skill to develop and has many practical uses. And ultimately, it's at the root and creativity which I define as being able to see multiple options for any given problem. But taken to far, you're constantly solving problems, solving your problems, solving other people's problems. Solving the worlds problems. And when there are no problems left to solve, you invent some problems to solve, all happening subconsciously based on childhood experiences and emotions.
- Jay Sullivan: 14:39 Jean Claude Van Itallie is a long time meditator, self-identified, self-improver, playwright of over 30 plays and author of the book, Tea With Demons. He refers to the problematic childhood emotions and experiences that are below the surface as demons. He spoke to me from Shantigar, a creative retreat center he founded in Western Massachusetts.
- Jean Claude Van Itallie: 15:05 The demon in my book, Tea With Demons, are inner demons. They are in the unconscious. I recognize them as being something that I learned in early childhood. I was born Jewish in Western Europe four years before the Nazi's invaded Belgium where I was living. That was my karma, that's what happened to me. So with my family, we fled Europe, that was being bombed, through France, through Spain, through Portugal. By great good luck, we came to America. But meanwhile, we were terrified. My parents never talked to me about it, they never said what was happening. How could you say that to a child who was four years old?

Jean Claude Van Itallie: 16:08 But fear, the demon fear, was infused into me. I picked it up from the fear of my family. I think frequently, demons are inherited unacknowledged from generation unto generation. The way in which your parents treat you when you're a child, the fear which they may instill in you, which they got from their parents, all unacknowledged demons.

Jay Sullivan: 16:47 Many times, we keep these subconscious, unacknowledged anxiety infused demons at bay by keeping busy. And hence, for many of us, this means being physically active in childhood and being an overachiever or workaholic in adulthood. Again, therapist Bob Szita.

Bob Szita: 17:05 Activity often helps us avoid, ignore or block the emotions. So children, for instance, sooth themselves by playing, by activity, by running, by doing sports or roughhousing. So adults do it by, you know, working or- or keeping ourselves occupied that we, uh, those- those feelings don't, uh, float to the surface.

Jay Sullivan: 17:40 Why not let these feelings stay below the surface (laughs)? Why not let sleeping dogs lie? And as we've seen, there are benefits to being driven. Well, emotions control you subconsciously and if you're not aware of how they are controlling you, then you can find yourself being whiplashed around by old emotionally charged memories. Again, Bob Szita.

Bob Szita: 18:07 The anxiety that we felt as children, I'm going to say the original anxiety or the original traumatic experiences, we often forget about them consciously. But the- but the, uh, feeling remains, you know, these lingering feelings within us that can be, uh, stirred up later. So even as an adult, you know, rationally doing things that are using good judgment, um, we can be- we can be thrown back to, um, a childhood feeling, uh, in an instant.

Jay Sullivan: 18:51 And when you get thrown back into those childhood feelings, you may respond as the child instead of the adult you are now. And these feelings and beliefs get reinforced as time goes on. And the demons become more and more a driver of your personality and behaviors. Again, Jean Claude Van Itallie.

Jean Claude Van Itallie: 19:14 If you ignore your demons, they just get stronger and louder. Ignoring them gives them power. If you don't- if you don't that they're there, they take over. They're- they're like- they're an illness, they're a cancer, if you'd like. If you don't pay attention to it ... if you don't pay attention when you have a little illness, you'll get a bigger illness.

Jay Sullivan: 19:44 And just as there is science to explain why cancer becomes a worse illness if you ignore it, there is science to explain why the demons become a bigger psychological and emotional illness if you ignore them.

Jay Sullivan: 19:57 In my case, the onset of my father's bipolar disorder was traumatic for me. I developed behaviors with the thought that these behaviors would prevent my father from leaving again. Mostly resulting in my addiction to climbing the highest mountains. I got rewarded for my addiction and this is how the illness gets bigger. I was rewarded by my parents, and by society for being the good boy, for doing more than people expected of me. I was rewarded emotionally and psychologically. But I was also rewarded biologically.

Jay Sullivan: 20:32 Dr. John Arden, psychologist and author or co-author of 13 books on psychotherapy and neuroscience, explains how experiences that are initially pleasurable, like climbing the highest mountains, can, over time, change our brains and become addictions. He spoke to me from his home outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Dr. John Arden: 20:54 There are these pleasure centers in your brain that, um, uh, involve many different neurotransmitters and areas of that, uh, kind of register it. And, uh, one neurotransmitter in- in particular, called dopamine, and, uh, there are these whole bunch of different types of dopamine receptors. There are the dopamine D1 receptors, this heavy, driven, gotta do it and then you get this surge and this big drop off. And the other one that gives you the far more complicated nuancey, creative, subtleties, ambiguity, we can call that the D2 receptor.

Dr. John Arden: 21:33 And so the moderated effort seems to hit the D2 receptors much more. And so if you can moderate your excitement or your interest in your novelty, you can hit these D2 receptors that grow. And in many ways, it- it accentuates your ability to see all the various shades of gray, all the, uh, the variations which is, of course, more creative. Interestingly, for people that are addicted to certain types of behaviors, they don't necessarily have to be drug behaviors, but they can be anything, you know, gambling, whatever. They have a tendency to hit the D1 receptors and shrink the D2 receptors.

Dr. John Arden: 22:22 Recovery actually is expanding the D2 receptors. And what does that mean? Well, that means expanding your number of potential opportunities for subtle and, uh, unique experience. Which means, you can't have the accelerator down to the floorboard.

Jay Sullivan: 22:41 Well my accelerator has been down to the floorboard for most of my adult life. So a large part of the creative and art making process I designed for this project has been about taking my foot off the accelerator and expanding my opportunities for subtle experiences. And, at the end of this podcast, I'll detail one of the ways I did this.

Jay Sullivan: 23:04 The goal has been to grow the D2 receptor so they can attract the feel-good chemical dopamine and shrink the D1 receptor so they get less dopamine. This decreases my attraction to intense experiences and increases my attraction to subtle experiences, putting my brain into some sort of balance. And, in the process, slowing me down, reducing anxiety and decreasing my automatic response to always climb the highest mountain or solve the worlds problems.

Jay Sullivan: 23:36 Dr. Arden pointed out that my attraction to the extremes and climbing the highest mountains, most likely was also affected by the nature of my father's mental illness.

Dr. John Arden: 23:47 You had a bipolar dad. I mean, he's- he's, uh, inviting you to look at the experience.

Jay Sullivan: 23:53 So my attraction to the extreme started at an early age. It caused me to seek extreme experiences and apparently also effected my art aesthetic.

Dr. John Arden: 24:04 One of the- the famous painters around here is Fritz Scholder, he was a student of Francis Bacon so his- his art looks very much that. It's very macabre, and it's gotta grab you at that viseral level rather than much more sort of complex subtleties. And we're kind of talking about the difference between that. So, uh, so if you're- if you have a piece of art in your house that's sort of a Francis Bacon or Fritz Scholder, it's kind of a little disturbing and grabs you. It's either intense or northing versus, "Wow, this is much more complex. Look at these variations here." And- and, uh, I- if I can use another painter, maybe Paul Clave, you know. And so in many ways, we're talking about the difference between, uh, black and white and, uh, many variations, many complexities.

Jay Sullivan: 24:57 That explained a lot. My art has been described as going right to the core or grabs ahold and doesn't let me go. I have known for a long time that a lot of my behaviors and beliefs have the roots in childhood. But apparently, so does my preferred art aesthetics, it's one of intensity with very little subtly.



Jay Sullivan: 25:19 So, in this slowing down, in having more subtle experiences, I would expect the quality of art to change, the aesthetics. Not only because I'm aware of this concept, but in fact, the parts in my brain which determine what I like, should biologically change as well. I should start to like more complex work with more subtle variations because my brain will have been rewired to release dopamine to receptors that reward me for subtle experiences. And I do think this has been the case in the work I have created during this project. It's still high on the Francis Bacon end of the spectrum but, certainly, it's much more complex visually and conceptually.

Jay Sullivan: 26:12 This project resulted in three series of artworks. One of them emerged specifically from a creative process that I started as a way to slow down and try to experience life from a more subtle perspective and get dopamine flowing to the D2 receptors. It started when Jean Claude Van Itallie gave me this guidance. "I think you should seek to have pleasurable moments during ordinary experiences." Seek to have pleasurable moments during ordinary experiences. This is essentially the concept of mindfulness, which has become part of popular culture over the last few years. It's a process to stop feeding the D1 receptors so much and start feeding the D2 receptors.

Jay Sullivan: 27:02 So, I designed a process where I pick a different sense, seeing, hearing, taste, touch and smell, on any given day and try to focus on experiencing the world primarily through that sense. For example, on touch day, when I'm not immersed in some other activity, I just touch things or allow things to touch me. Sitting at a restaurant and exploring under the table with my fingertips, putting my hand into the sand at the beach or feeling the wind against my face.

Jay Sullivan: 27:34 I recently had this experience on a baseball field. I lay on my back looking at the blue sky. I put my hand down to touch the earth and notice that there's a coarseness to the grass on Florida baseball fields. Small surprise. I could've been just in my head thinking about the next problem I had to solve. But instead, I made a conscious choice to shift my focus to the sensation of touch. I enjoy this so much now, that I continued to do it some seven months after I started.

Jay Sullivan: 28:10 And again, I know that repetition is the key to making psychological and emotional changes. So to solidify this pattern in my brain even more, I started to document these small surprises online. The response was very positive so I decided to use the documentation as a starting point for a new body of work called Small Surprises. Surprise (laughs). Again, much of

the success of the project psychologically for me is that I found a way to keep repeating the same creative and neurological process over and over again. First, by getting into the habit of recognizing small surprises on a daily basis. Second, by posting them online. Third, by making a formal project out of it. And fourth, by talking about it to you in this podcast.

- Jay Sullivan: 29:02 Over time I've become addicted to small surprises and it's curbed my addiction to climb the highest mountains. It's an example of how creative process can result in both a meaningful body of work and personal psychological change (singing).
- Jay Sullivan: 29:32 In this podcast, we learned that the origins of feeling not enough can be rooted in childhood experiences and beliefs. And if ignored, like any emotional or psychological wound, it will get worse and become more a driver of your emotions, beliefs and behaviors. In my case, it caused me to be a compulsive overachiever, always climbing the highest mountain. Small Surprises is one example of a creative and art making process that I developed to curb this compulsive behavior and start slowing down to experience more subtly and less stress in my life.
- Jay Sullivan: 30:09 In the next few podcasts, I will detail the four main steps of my current creative process, awareness, research, art making and conversations (singing). Well, that's enough for this podcast. I'm Jay Sullivan and may your day be filled with small surprises