

SPRING  
2014

# Families

## WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

Travel and  
Transformation

STORY FOR ALL AGES



## An American in Ghana

by Erik Mohn

**So, I'm back from my trip. When people ask, "How was it?" I usually start by saying, "Well ... it was amazing!" while secretly wishing I could teleport them to Ghana for a month or give them a pill to instantly transfer my experience into their soul.**

Erik with a local child in Jukwa, Ghana.

At times my trip feels like a dream. I can't believe I was actually there, bartering in the marketplace, roaming the jungle canopy, weighing babies in the Jukwa health clinic, and being chilled by the feeling of death in a slave dungeon. I ate fufu on a bench in a back alley, hand-washed my clothes, and debated same-sex marriage with the village chief. The list of wild, life-changing experiences is endless.

My perceptions of myself have changed. First and foremost, I now realize and accept the comforts and opportunities of American society I have enjoyed for 24 years, and, yes, I wish to continue to enjoy them. I am 100% more grateful for a working sink and toilet, hot showers, high-speed Internet, paved roads, and more. I will never

look at these the same way again.

With the advantages I've had growing up, I now believe there is no excuse for me personally not to pursue my dreams. My confidence in my ability to go anywhere, immerse myself in any situation, and still remain true to who I am grew immensely because of my trip. I will take this confidence into my relationships, jobs, and travels from here forward. As Kwame Apiah, my in-country host and now my great friend, always told me: "Those who give sunlight will never be deprived of the sun itself."

**E**rik Mohn, a former UUA staff member, visited Ghana in 2011 as a volunteer with Amizade, a nonprofit organization. A local friend took him to the village of Anhwiam, where

*continued on the next page*

The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

[www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)

©istockphoto.com/FrankRamsport/Africanway

continued from page 1

residents had to rely on contaminated river water for all their daily needs. After his return, Erik used social media to seek money to fix Anhwiam's broken water pipe. He raised the necessary \$2,500 in two months and the pipe was fixed in three.

His travel to Ghana changed Erik's view of himself...and more. It empowered him to change the world in a positive way for the 600 residents of Anhwiam who now, once again, have clean water and for others outside Ghana who wanted to help.

★ Have you ever taken a trip to someplace new, where you immersed yourself in another culture?

★ What did you learn about yourself or the needs of others?

★ How have you used the knowledge you gathered to help make the world a better place?

**The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page.**

— St. Augustine

## EXPLORING TOGETHER

What happens when you visit a different place with different people than the family, friends, neighbors, or classmates you see every day? If you are open, even a short trip can offer new perspectives, which, in turn, may inspire you to change yourself or the world.



### A Beautiful Day in [Someone Else's] Neighborhood!

What can you learn from a walk or ride to a neighborhood where you do not live? Even if it's close by, this time go as a traveler. Take what you will need. Prepare to respectfully experience someone else's place.

★ **Observe.** How are homes, stores, and public activity different than in your neighborhood? What seems the same? What ages of people do you see "out and about?" Where do people seem to be going? How are they dressed? What languages do you hear spoken?

★ **Talk to people.** Buy something in a store. Make eye contact when you say "Hello." If you feel comfortable, admit you have not explored the neighborhood before. You might ask, "What do you enjoy most about this neighborhood?" or "What does this neighborhood mean to you?"

## Science Experiment

A beam of light changes when it travels through water . . . just like we change when we visit a new environment.

■ Fill a clear container halfway with water and take it into a room you can darken.

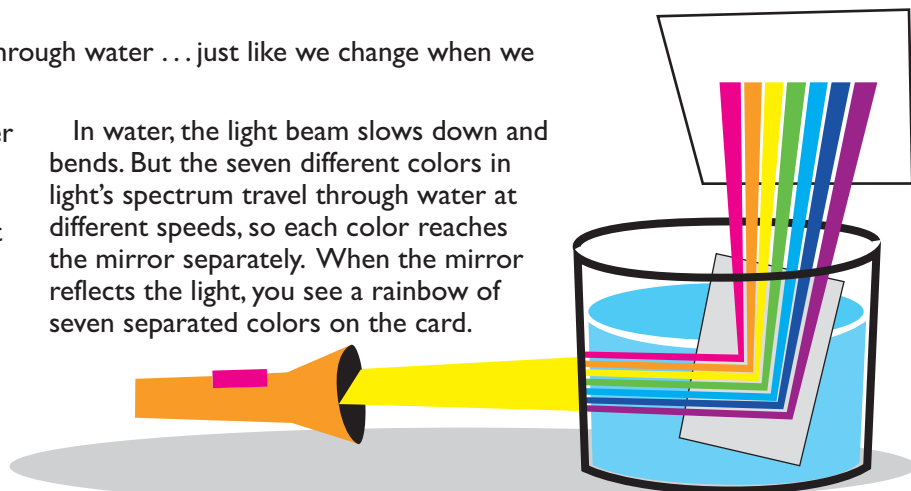
■ Cut a slit in a heavy sheet of black paper and tape the paper over a flashlight so light shines only through the slit.

■ Place a mirror in the water, leaning against one end of the container. Shine the flashlight on the mirror.

■ Hold up a white card to catch light reflecting off the mirror.

**What do you see?**

In water, the light beam slows down and bends. But the seven different colors in light's spectrum travel through water at different speeds, so each color reaches the mirror separately. When the mirror reflects the light, you see a rainbow of seven separated colors on the card.





## Bringing the Spirit Back Home: Water Communion

Many UU congregations have a ritual for all ages to share “living waters” they collected away from home and routine. Those who journeyed far might bring salt water from a distant ocean; someone who relaxed at a local pond might bring a few of its drops. When you share your travels in water communion, you enrich your community. What are some other ways to connect a trip with your “real life” back home? Have you gained a skill to teach others? An understanding of what makes people alike, or different? Even a short trip can create a “New You” who can act in new ways. What will the New You do to help make the world a better place? How can you inspire others?



## UU Camp for All Ages

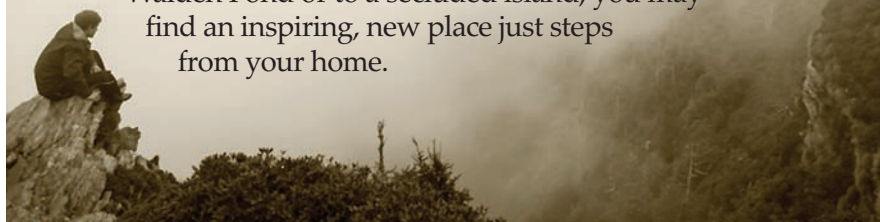
Sharing favorite stories and songs, trying new sports, and discovering everyday ways to live your UU faith—this is how new friends become a community at a UU camp or retreat center. The Council of Unitarian Camps and Conferences ([www.cu2c2.org](http://www.cu2c2.org)) lists family camps, weeklong institutes, and other live-away programs for adults, youth, and children from Ferry Beach in southern Maine to Camp de Benneville Pines in southern California, from The Mountain in North Carolina to Camp UniStar in northern Michigan. “Where are you renewing your spirit this year?”



## Transformative Travel Diaries

In the 1850s, Henry David Thoreau’s travel destination Walden Pond was walking distance from his home. Yet his journal, *Walden*, is famous. Thoreau spent his time at Walden reflecting on ideas like nonconformity, peaceful resistance, and living simply, which, in turn, influenced many, including Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., whose leadership helped millions of people transform their lives.

Have you ever taken a trip with the intention of spending time in quiet reflection? Though we can’t all go to Walden Pond or to a secluded island, you may find an inspiring, new place just steps from your home.



**Postcards remind us** of the people, ideas, and experiences we encounter while traveling. Think of a trip that meant a lot to you. What can you draw on the front of a postcard? Use a photo, or make a collage. You can also look for postcards in gift shops and grocery stores wherever you go—even in your hometown!

**On the back, share:**

*I just came back from*

*Since my return, I’ve really noticed*

*the*

*here at home. Now I am doing*

*as much as I can!*



Send your card to tell someone where you went, how you’ve changed, and how you plan to share what you learned. Or send it to yourself!

Give your address to friends and family. Ask them to send you a postcard when their travels take them in surprising directions. Do you have a wall you can cover with a world map and postcards? If not, use large mural paper you can roll up. Or, make a scrapbook.



# Mother/Daughter Road Trip

By the Rev. Suzelle Lynch and Grace Haelan Lynch Kim

**Suzelle:** About twice a year my daughter Grace and I hop in the car and head east, driving 330 miles from our home near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to Ann Arbor, Michigan. Grace is 14 now and we've been traveling this road together for the past ten years.

**Grace:** We go to Ann Arbor to visit my grandparents, and now, since my grandma died, we see my grandfather and my Aunt Eileen.

**Suzelle:** When I was growing up, my sisters and I rarely saw my grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins. It always seemed strange to me that I didn't know my extended family! I wanted Grace to know hers.

**Grace:** I'm biracial—Korean American on my dad's side and a mix of European American nationalities on my mom's. Because I look more Asian than Caucasian to your standard Wisconsinite, it's easy to emphasize

that part of who I am, but getting to know my mom's family has shown me where a lot of my traits come from. Even more, I see myself connected to a whole line of strong women who lived and struggled and succeeded in the Midwest. I like visiting my grandparents' church, too, and feeling the history of being a third-generation Unitarian Universalist.

**Suzelle:** When we started taking these road trips Grace was a little kid. My challenge was to keep her entertained. Now she's my co-pilot, managing the GPS and road snacks, helping keep me entertained. As the miles spin by under our tires, we have deep, powerful conversations about life, the universe, and everything.

**Grace:** One of these days, not so far in the future, it'll be me taking the wheel and driving my mom to Ann Arbor.



Have you been part of a parent/child journey?

Where did you go? Why?

How did being with your parent, or your child, make this trip special?

©Stockphoto.com/FrankRampert

Wherever you go, go  
with all your heart.

— Confucius

## FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

Provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association's Faith Development Office

Susan Dana Lawrence, Editor

Monica Cummings, Alicia LeBlanc, and Jessica York, Contributors

Ann Casady, Graphic Design

## FIND OUT MORE

■ Through the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice ([www.uucs.org](http://www.uucs.org)), the UUA and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee offer hands-on service trips for youth and adults. Haiti, Mexico, and New Orleans are 2014 destinations. If you can afford the cost but not the time for a service trip, consider donating to a UU organization that subsidizes youth who seek a life-changing travel experience.

■ Families with children as young as eight can travel for service opportunities with an established nonprofit such as Cross-Cultural Solutions, which facilitates volunteer trips with home-stays in Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Morocco, South Africa, and more. Access YouTube videos of families' experiences via the website, [www.crossculturalsolutions.org](http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org).

■ The Tapestry of Faith Toolkit book *Journeys of the Spirit* (Skinner House, 2010) guides UU leaders to plan, implement, and follow up a transformational youth mission trip. Many of the suggestions and guidelines are useful for UU families doing service work together.

[www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)