The first morning we walked in earnest the bleeding hearts dangled from the bushes, dripping dew and glinting deep fuchsia in the soft light. The one-lane road wound out of the village, serpentine, up a hill and past a paddock. I stopped every few feet snapping photos: a line of blackbirds on a wire over a stone cottage; a spiderweb dotted with orbs of crystalline mist; a gate ajar to an emerald field.

It was the late summer of 2017 and our faithful guides had charted a course along the Dingle Peninsula on the western coast of Ireland. That morning I was thankful my shutter-clicking ways kept me firmly at the rear of our little crew. I wiped the tears that welled up and spilled over and nobody caught me out. It was so damp outside they probably wouldn’t have noticed.

I had just finished a biology degree and a summer job as a lab technician. For three months, I spent ten-hour days hand-feeding baby chickadees, wangling them into eating with ten-inch forceps and well-timed mealworm drops. I ran blood samples through centrifuges and pipetted until my hands were sore and my neck ached.

The lab job was a waypoint. For years I thought I wanted to be a doctor. The only way to give back is to help people heal, right? One small problem: it drained me. I couldn’t find a way to make it appealing, to bring out my light again. My advisor suggested science writing, but I was not convinced.

I heard about the trek while I was deep in the muck of all this indecision. Mostly, I wanted to get back to Ireland, but there was a new-age component—this concept of “gifts”—that I wasn’t thrilled about. Cut it out in all the self-help sessions, I told myself, and you’ll get yourself seven solid days of guided walks.

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The trek interview I saw a tiny glint of what could be good about all the things I’d been using against myself. I saw that the stories I told myself weren’t necessarily true. It was as if the trek found something both achingly fundamental and hidden in plain sight—like an old painting you inherited and shoved up in the attic—and held it up to the light.

“See? That’s what it could look like if you dust it off and bring it out in the sun.”

Then the restoration began.

— DJ McCauley  
Trekker
I went skiing over the Thanksgiving holidays. I love to ski, but, as an old guy, each year it hurts a little more than the last. This year turned out a little different though. As a way to fight back the aging process, I’ve been doing a strength building routine at home that turns many of my muscles into spaghetti for a few hours until they laughingly exact their revenge by hurting like hell until we do it again. It wasn’t until several hours into my skiing that it occurred to me that I felt pretty good, and even a little while longer for me to recognize that it was because of those workouts. I ask you to hold that thought.

A couple years ago our daughter was in a tough spot. She, and we, had just made the decision the ‘education’ a High-School diploma mandates wasn’t an education that was going to work for her. She, like countless other kids around the world, was clearly intelligent. She just didn’t have the square-peg smarts that the US education system, in its somewhat understandable desire to ensure kids are learning something, tests for.

Her situation, although probably a little unique, is indicative of what many, many kids are facing these days. Our kids, more than we did, see a future that is frighteningly undetermined, made more frightening because, as unqualified as they are, we’ve taught them that their opinions matter and that they should think for themselves. Whether it’s in High-School, mid way through college or after they’ve received their coveted diploma, at some point many kids crumble under that pressure.

Our daughter, facing the prospect of having to accept guidance from an adult (worse – a parent) regarding the rest of her life, she chose the lesser of two evils – accepting guidance about what to do for the next 2 months. She somewhat begrudgingly accepted the idea of going on a Trek to Wales and Spain. Here’s where, at the risk of upsetting Andrew, I’ll begin to point out what you most likely already know. There are few silver bullet “OMG, she was so excited and it changed their life!” moments in raising kids. Essentially, we made her go.

I won’t go into the details of the Trek itself other than to say that she called home almost daily complaining about the rain, the walking, the challenges of living with a small group of people, kids and adults, who all have their own personalities, and begging for us to fly her home. The emails and texts we were getting from Andrew told a similar story. Although she’s frequently the life of the party, and a burgeoning comedienne, she was also dragging behind and not always as participative as some of the others. She somehow survived a full month in Wales, walking through the rain and slop they walked in. It’s never stopped. Amusingly, we took a family vacation (rare at this age) to Mexico a couple months ago and she elected to fly home early, saying “Mexico just isn’t my vibe! I like Europe better!” Huft!

As I said earlier, there are no silver bullets. She did come home with a honed sense of clarity about what her life was going to look like. She did come home with a new perspective about who she is, what she likes, what she doesn’t like and how capable she is to work things out on her own. And this awareness did not show up on day one. Just like my skiing, it’s taken time and the repetitive usage of those ‘muscles’ for us, and her, to realize she has the capacity and reserves to dig deeper, and thus, as a result, the day is more enjoyable.

— Keith York
Parent
Going Through a Pandemic the TrekEpic Way

Oh no! I woke up today and realized I was trapped in the Half-Boy story! For those of you who have been on a TrekEpic walk, you’ve heard the Half-Boy story. It’s an old, old story that applies to all humans who are in any kind of difficult situation trying to figure out their next move. Pandemic, come to mind, anyone?

For those of you who may not have heard the story, here’s the short version:

A boy is born. As he grows, he wants to be an adult and do adult things, but everyone is treating him like a little kid. It makes him so mad he starts disrespecting his family and other villagers. Pretty soon everybody is tired of his attitude and they kick him out of the village and tell him not to come back until he figures out who he is and can stop being so angry all the time. He leaves the village, not sure where to go, but keeps walking. The next morning he sees the weirdest thing—it’s a boy who looks exactly like him coming towards him. Both wary of each other, they dance all night and celebrate discovering it was all a dream. But that’s what happens to both the half-boys when they see each other. And rather than meet-up and figure out how to blend together and be more powerful than either of them can be alone, they decide to fight. Good thing they ended up in the Half-Boy story! You know what happens? Gratitude for our gifts creates even larger contentment. So, to get through difficult events in our lives, Hard times, hope, and happiness aren’t mutually exclusive. They are often all bound up together in a messy thing called life. So, to get through difficult times, having a vision of how we’ve grown is essential so we can balance the difficulty with the goodness that can come out of it—we have something to be grateful for rather than just cope and survive. Some cultures call these new strengths “gifts.” Having a vision of how we’re stronger activates the same brain pathways as being in nature. Now we’ve got a one-two punch of positive energy and contentment.

So do it: First, pick one of these two questions that you like the best: “How am I stronger as a result of being in this pandemic?” “What is the gift I have received from being in this pandemic?”

1. When you get in a difficult situation, go to nature instead of your couch. The Elders kick the boy out of the village into nature. He thinks he’s being punished, but that’s not why the Elders do it. They know the boy gets two advantages from leaving the village. First, have you ever stared at a lake and felt a calmness coming over you? Have you ever noticed how people walking in a park or on a trail seem to always be smiling when you pass them? Current brain research shows that nature is viral, just like the Coronavirus. But it infects us in a different way. It activates the “contentment” brain pathways in our body and calms us down. Plus, there’s another bonus. When we are calm, our brain can come up with more and better ideas than when we’re discouraged and stressed out. So making solid plans that actually might work is easier.

So do it: Get outside. Take a walk or stare at a lake. Then do it again tomorrow, even if you don’t feel like it. Focus on taking deep breaths and feel yourself connecting with the awesomeness around you. Get that woo-woo thing going. It won’t fix everything, but it increases the chances you’re going to feel much better and think clearer. It may sound too good to be true, but you’re body has never lied to you and never will. Ask it how it feels after being outside.

2. When you get in a difficult situation, you can see new parts of yourself that are worth “becoming.” We’ve all seen people who ‘sorta’ look like us. But what if you saw somebody that actually looks EXACTLY like you? And then you realized not only did they look exactly like you but they ARE you? Tell me that wouldn’t make you want to go right to bed so you can wake up again and discover it was all a dream. That’s what happens to both the half-boys when they see each other. And rather than meet-up and figure out how to blend together and be more powerful than either of them can be alone, they decide to fight. Good thing they ended up in the water, which has more wisdom in it than either of the boys had in that moment. Older cultures tell us that water calms us down, unifies things, and heals us. And, most importantly, helps us to have a vision of how we are “more” as a result of encountering difficult events in our lives.

So do it: Since we’ve all been more isolated than usual, we’ve all had a chance to slow down, and have had a lot of time to think about our lives and our relationships. It gives us the opportunity to check-in with our hearts and minds and ask ourselves: “Who matters to me the most?” “Who do I really want to make sure I’m more connected to after we all come through this pandemic time?” It could be a parent, a teacher, or someone you met online. If you can picture who that is, ask yourself: What is something you could do to reconnect with them? Maybe it’s a video call or a text message. If you can’t think of anyone to reconnect with, try sending a thank-you note to someone who has helped you out or just been there for you. It’s a small thing, but it can make a big difference in your life.

3. When you get in a difficult situation, do things that join you with others, not pull you away. Humans have a tendency to hunker down and be alone when we encounter difficult times. We’ve all felt resentment or hide in embarrassment from being kicked out of the village. He discovers more of himself and goes back to share it with his people right away. He’s eager to reconnect and contribute. For those of you who have heard the full version of the Half-Boy story, you know that the village welcomed the boy back—danced all night and celebrated his return. Although he didn’t know it, they were waiting for him to return. The question for you is, “Who is waiting for you to return?”
Core Gift Discovery

Gifts are part of both western and non-western cultures, meaning they are part of the core of what is to be human. Understanding how gifts impact people and groups can be applied to all types of organizations, whether they be businesses, churches, social service societies, classes or teams. The training has taken me a step closer to help others identify their gifts.

— John Foley

Sun Ranch Camp

Welcoming, Gifts, and Hosts

If you have had the opportunity to embark on an adventure with TrekEpic, then you understand the excitement of arriving at a new accommodation each night. This is especially true after a long rewarding day of walking in rain or shine led by Andrew, Bruce, and Leslie. Today, we celebrate this wonderful story led by Andrew, Bruce, and Leslie. The training has taken me a step closer to help others identify their gifts.

TrekEpic facilitator Bruce Anderson offers a unique training for those interested in pursuing a deeper understanding of the Core Gift Discovery Process. Participants may also attain certification as an interview practitioner. Cost for this dynamic training is $249. Visit CoreGift.org website for details.

Photo by Andrew Bryan

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