

Let's Make A Deal

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There are many different doors that we walk through in our lives. Some doors are held open by other people. Some doors require turning the knob yourself. And then there are doors that you cannot even see, the ones you have to search for until you can even begin to open them by yourself. One such door for me is the door to study abroad while I am still in high school.

Ever since my first trip out of the country I just KNEW I loved to travel. The feeling of being immersed in a new culture and learning about a different way of life makes my soul feel complete. Starting in sixth grade, I would research different study abroad organizations and where the best places to go were. I would have multiple tabs saved, from prices of airplane tickets to 10 best things to do in Cairo or Barcelona. But the thing was, I know I was just staring at a "door" by living my dream of studying abroad vicariously through the internet. I wasn't walking towards the door, let alone opening it. So, the summer before high school I decided to take my first step towards that door. I knew my mom has a friend living in England and I asked her if I could stay with them for a few months as a study abroad experience. And she agreed! I could see the door beginning to crack open for me. I spent literal HOURS researching and emailing schools in Cambridge, only one of which ever got back to me, saying it probably wasn't possible for me to go to their school.

We eventually came to the conclusion that foreign students were not able to attend public schools in the U.K., and it was far too expensive to attend a private school there. I clearly remember my mom explaining to me while we were driving in the car to orchestra rehearsal after a long day of school that we couldn't afford it and I wouldn't be able to go. I was devastated and tired. But AS my mother was telling me this, I went to the website of a study abroad organization I knew and started making an account. Even though the door to England has closed, I was determined to find another to somewhere else. Within less than two days I had the first part of my application completed on the AFS website and was actively looking for scholarships. I miraculously found a scholarship specific to central Pennsylvania. So I applied to go to Chile, and after months of balancing loads of homework with writing 4 essays and finding time to get medical forms filled out and two VERY long interviews, I received a call saying I got the scholarship!! I'm going to Chile, for an ENTIRE YEAR! I was so ecstatic, this door opened in front of me and I couldn't believe it. Honestly I still can't (haha).

My point is, is that there is never just one door. Although you will have to search for your doors and you will have to work hard to open them, if you truly want to walk through them, you will. Never stop walking towards your doors, wherever they may lead to. Walk towards them EVEN if you don't know what you may find on the other side. I have found that the biggest doors you

face, in my case living in a foreign country for a year, are the scariest ones. I KNOW that my Spanish skills are equivalent to a 5-year-old's. I KNOW I won't have any familiar faces from home with me. I know I may not agree with everything about Chilean culture, or be comfortable with it. I know there will be scary foods and intimidating situations. But I chose to walk through that door anyway. I always tell myself that anything that scares me is worth doing. By putting myself in situations where I don't know the language or the people very well, I will strengthen my skills of understanding other cultures, as well as being open about my own beliefs. By being scared in one situation, I won't be scared the next time because I have already been through scarier things. It's like stepping over a threshold into a whole new world of enlightenment. So, I encourage all of you to step over that threshold and through that door. I know it's terrifying. But it's not being fearless that makes you brave, it's when you overcome those fears that makes you a truly stronger person.

Wendy Shaver

My motto hasn't always been "Sure, just go through the door!" At age 15, I would have never been so brave as my daughter is now. I was raised in comfort by two loving college professors. Mom and Dad did things the right things the "right" way and expected my sister and me to do the same. Many doors were open wide and it was obvious that I would just pass through them. We went through the doors of the Baptist Church each week. Where of course my sister Melanie and I won 1st and 2nd place in the Bible Quiz Bowl. I eagerly went through the doors of the safe and well-funded public schools where I happily earned good grades and never got in trouble..... Well, except that one time that I got detention for playing poker during Physics class!

Friends came through our doors for cute birthday parties that my mom had carefully organized. They would have themes like circus or ballerina. In the 80's we passed through the doors of the shopping mall where we had our hair permed, drank Orange Julius and bought Forenza sweaters and pin striped jeans. And of course there was no question that I would go through the collegiate doors, and I had the privilege of attending Bucknell University which is like a country club of higher learning. Life was privileged and well scripted with neatly opened doors. I followed the rules and didn't make waves. As I graduated at the top of my chemistry class, the door to a high-paying job as a chemist would have been easy to pass through. But I didn't.

Along with learning all about quantum mechanics and organic synthesis, I had also learned about all the people who don't have open doors in their lives. Thanks to a liberal and diverse Religion Department, I learned about many injustices such as Navajo children being forced to give up their culture and language while attending government boarding schools. I learned about the ecological devastation caused by the pesticide DDT. I learned about the unequal distribution of the world food supply leading to malnutrition and starvation for many and gluttony for others. Most of all I learned how easy my life had been. I learned about my white privilege, my

economic privilege - the privilege of growing up with two loving parents. As I approached graduation, this was the first time that I even considered that there might be different doors.

Let's Make a Deal -- how about that wide open door to a solid, respectable chemist job -- or wait. I could exchange for a different door with a less predictable outcome. After studying about so much pain in the world, I decided that I needed some discomfort in my life. Things had been too easy. I didn't want to follow the script. I needed to find a way to connect with other parts of the world where injustice ran rampant. I decided to open the door to the Peace Corps. It wasn't an easy decision. My parents were discouraging. I'd never been across the ocean. And I was scared to death. I cried at night for a few days before my departure. But I finally went through that door, and soon I was teaching chemistry at a girl's boarding school in northern Tanzania - a short walk from Lake Victoria. As the motto says, it was truly the toughest job you'll ever love. Those two years were a roller coaster of emotion and definitely the hardest thing I had ever done.

Of course I got to experience Africa from my place of privilege. Last week Ms. Amy told the kids a story about going on adventures with a magic frog -- the kids in the story could go on the adventure, but if they wanted to go home, they could just say "send me home" and that would happen. My journey was just like that -- all volunteers could leave whenever we wanted. There was more than once when I was tempted to do just that -- but I didn't. From those two challenging and rewarding years of my young adulthood, I learned the value of stepping into the unknown and taking a risk in order to experience the world more fully.

Twenty some years have passed since then. And with this attitude of "Why not go through the unknown door?" I've had the privilege of lots of fun experiences during that time. Training for my first half marathon, a trip to the beautiful country of Thailand with my daughter, a bike trip across the Navajo Reservation with the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg high school youth group. There are so many fun doors out there. I highly recommend trying as many as possible! Even if things go wrong and you get a "zonk", you will at the very least learn something new and never have to wonder what was behind the door. But then there are the doors we open that are much more challenging than they are fun.

About a year and a half ago, I attended the Women's March on Washington D.C. According to the organizers, the mission of the march was to harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to create transformative social change. Traveling to the march with my daughter, my "special friend" Steven, my UCH buddy, Chandra, and my work bestie, Krista, was uplifting and inspiring. That was just what I needed in that moment - - to be surrounded by hundreds of thousands of like-minded people who also believed in the inherent worth and dignity of all people. The door to the march was an obvious one to go through. But it couldn't stop there. After the march, there was a call to action by the organizers. 10 actions in the next 100 days to promote the principles of the Women's March. Action #1 - Write a postcard to your

senators about what matters to you. OK, that's easy. No problem stepping through that door. I thought it was fun to use the Christmas postcards that my mom had left behind.

Action #2 - host a "huddle" to organize the people in your community. Hmmmm. I'm not that knowledgeable about politics. I'm really busy with a full time job and a teenage daughter. Maybe I can just search for a huddle near me that someone else organized. Nope, Wendy. Nope. Not that door. With encouragement from a couple of friends from this church, I decided to look into forming a lay-led ministry that would take action to support the ideals of the women's march as well as provide emotional support for those who were stressed by the current times. I almost gave up as I struggled to figure out the logistics of forming a new group at church and self doubt about my lack of experience in this area. But I felt compelled to move forward through the door. I had learned what can happen when you set aside fear and step boldly into the unknown.

Pieces fell into place. Leta Beam stepped through the door as my co-facilitator. I am so thankful for her experience. Sixty-four people signed up for the Google Group email list. The first meeting of We March. We Act. was held on March 16, 2017. And ten people actually walked through the door of the Fuller Chapel for the meeting! We shared actions, joys, and concerns. And we have been meeting once a month since then -- and we haven't run over time yet! I am continually humbled by the passion, experience, knowledge, and leadership of the people who come to the meetings that I am "leading". I've learned a lot by surrounding myself with these activists.

And scary doors keep appearing before the group. Last summer, a few months after the birth of We March. We Act, we were asked, do you think you guys could lead a vigil at the Berks County Detention Center?

Well, first let me understand the issue of immigrant family detention. OK. Oh, and it needs to be a bilingual vigil. And far enough from the fenced yard that holds the immigrants that we don't upset the police. Oh ok. No panic and feelings of inadequacy there. But I have adopted the spiritual practice of accepting the unknown and the imperfections and knowing that doing something is better than doing nothing. And you know what? Anita Mentzer found a sound system. Karen Mallah stepped up and provided translation of everything into Spanish. Sara Palmer had the children and youth make signs. Libby Tisdell and Laura Edinger led songs in Spanish and English. Rev. Lyn provided spiritual guidance. Lots of people brought food for us to share beforehand, as well as donations requested by the center.

The families detained in the center felt our support as they played soccer in the yard and interacted with our chants. And the folks from Berks County who are deeply connected to the issue showed up to support - as they do week after week- and were happy to have a break from the leadership role. Unfortunately the detention center still has locked doors to hold families unjustly. And as you know the situation for those who seek asylum keeps getting worse. But we

were able to support in our small way. And we continue the calls to Governor Wolf to insist he shuts down the center.

And now We March. We Act. has heeded the call to mobilize disenfranchised voters. This is a scary door too! Again, I have no experience with voter registration and definitely no experience doing this in a neighborhood with a high poverty rate and a high diversity of ethnicities.

But organizers of the New Poor People's Campaign, as well as the leaders of the Women's March, herald this as the most important action for supporters to take locally. Maggie and I recently walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL, thinking about the 2000 voting rights activists who risked their lives to do the same thing in March of 1965. Certainly I can knock on doors in the church neighborhood and give people information about how to vote. For each election, our church opens its doors as a polling place for a voting precinct with historically low voter turnout and many marginalized citizens. So boldly we go forward knowing that our plan won't be perfect and mistakes will be made. We have made connections with groups such as the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania and Gather the Spirit. The League of Women Voters helped us to train a small group of people to help with registrations at community hours and the Common Ground Cafe breakfast.

We have had some success, but know that we must be bolder. At last week's We March. We Act. meeting, a plan was set for three Saturdays of door to door canvassing in the neighborhood. We will provide information about the upcoming November election, offer help with registering new voters, and invite people to a Voter Education dinner in September to learn more about the importance of voting and look at the positions of different candidates. As we continue to ask for support from people who live in Allison Hill, we also need the support of all of you. Consider if you can give us an hour or two to help the voices of the most marginalized be heard. Why not go through that door? I truly appreciate the support of this church and brave Unitarian Universalists throughout history. Going through the door is a UU spiritual practice for me. I look forward to walking with you as we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the goal of world community with peace liberty and justice for all. Thank you.