

Epic Transitions, dba TrekEpic, is a 501(c)(3)
non-profit public benefit organization



Photo by DJ McCauley



2995 Woodside Rd, Suite 400
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Upcoming Treks

April 2022
Portugal Trek
Ages 25-32

June 2022
Pembrokeshire Coast, Wales
Ages 18-24

September 2022
Normandy, France
Ages 18-24

Please inquire for specific dates.



The Kerry Camino

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. Gut it out in all the self-help sessions, I told myself, and you'll get yourself seven solid days of guided walks.

I have a deep aversion to “self-help.” If I couldn't get over whatever obstacle was in my way with sheer force of will and a dash of stubbornness, then perhaps it wasn't worth



Photo by DJ McCauley

doing. Happiness? Fulfillment? That comes with success, doesn't it?

The day before the Core Gift interviews, I asked Bruce: “Is this bullshit?” He laughed at me. Or at least, I think he did. He should have.

It isn't. I can't mark that time in Ireland as the exact moment my life “turned around,” or tell you it was the end of my struggles or that it gave me perfect clarity of mind.

I can tell you: walking along those gorgeous hills, past peat bogs, over small mountains dotted with beehive huts like fossilized unfinished igloos, I did find a sense of the numinous. I started to feel the nagging, abrasive points in my life, like pebbles in a shoe. The kind that morph into blisters if you don't soothe them and get rid of the rocks and rest for a while.

In the gift 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



Our 2021 newsletter is dedicated to the Memory of Stephen Lawton, St. David's, Wales. Your “Welcoming” will always remain in our hearts.

Gaining Perspective

What TrekEpic did for our daughter

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

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



Photo by Andrew Bryan

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

dragging behind and not always as participative as some of the others. She somehow survived a full month in Wales and then moved on to Spain, (UGH!), where she lasted for

Vision:

TrekEpic envisions a world in which young adults are inspired to discover and explore their gifts so that they and their communities will thrive.



Photo by DJ McCauley

another couple weeks. We did, in fact, end up bringing her home a week or so early. The whining and complaining wore us down. Please don't give up on Treks at this point...the story's not over.

A week doesn't go by where our daughter doesn't interject a story into our day-to-day conversations about something that happened at the Inn they stayed at in Wales,

or the Pub they had dinner at, or the rain and sloop they walked in. It started the day she got home and 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!" Huh?

As I said earlier, there are no silver bullets. She did not come home



Photo by Michael McCleod

Our Mission

TrekEpic supports young adults in discovering their authentic selves and learning to utilize their unique gifts as they move forward on the path of life.

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Visit TrekEpic.org to learn more about TrekEpic and how to be involved in our quest to support young adults as they journey forward. Engage with us on Facebook and Instagram—join the conversation and share your gifts with the world.



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, neither one wants to be joined with the other person, so they decide to fight to the death. Seems like a logical choice, right? They get so into the fight they don't realize they're tumbling down the path and end up in a lake, still fighting under the water. That's when the magic happens—they become one. Water has a way of doing that according to these old stories. The new boy, now whole, heads back to the village where he is welcomed and recognized as an adult.

There's a lot in this story to think about. But we at TrekEpic like the story because it gives us three very clear instructions about what to do when you're in a

difficult situation (Pandemic, anyone?) and trying to figure out what to do next, no matter who you are.

So here's the three TrekEpic ways for each of us to get through this time:

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



Photo by Andrew Bryan

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. 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 water, which has more wisdom in it that 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.

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?" Second, whatever your answer to the question you chose, pick a person or a place to give that strength or gift. For example, if you have gotten stronger at having compassion for yourself, who in your life needs, right now, to be listened to and shown compassion? If you have received a gift of speaking up for yourself, who in your life could you help to speak up and say what they need? If you have made a solid plan for moving forward, who do you know who is stuck that you could help make a plan for moving forward? The important thing



Photo by Andrew Bryan

is to give that new strength you found to another person. When you do that, guess what happens? Gratitude for our gifts creates even larger contentment pathways in our brain. That path is becoming more of a road.

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

like that. We may think others don't care what we're going through, or that they can't understand our situation. But in the story, the boy doesn't hold on to his 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—they 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?"

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,

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



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.

a friend, somebody you met years ago, a grandparent. Anybody who comes to mind that you know you really want to stay connected with. Pick three people to start with.

When you've had a chance to name the three people you want to stay connected with, reach out. Most importantly, don't just say hello and chat about what's going on. Although it may feel weird, tell them how much they mean to you, and tell them a specific thing you really value about your friendship. Trust us, they're really going to want to hear what you have to say. Everybody loves to be respected and told why they matter to others. If you feel more comfortable writing than talking, send them a text or write them a note. Guess what happens? You've probably caught on by now. Your brain once again rides those very same contentment pathways, which are now becoming a freeway straight to the core of who you are!

Old stories give us comfort, they remind us others have been in difficult times and have gone on to live their lives. They also remind us that there are some essential truths that help humans get through difficult times. The Half-Boy story is one of those reminder stories. This isn't the first difficult time each of us has encountered, and it's likely not going to be the last. It's just life. But from the Half-Boy story we know that there are at least three benefits buried in the difficulties of a pandemic waiting for us to discover—as long as we don't hunker down and hide. We are, all of us, strong and capable. As long as we decide to be whole, not half! Just follow the TrekEpic way:



- Time to go outside?**
- Time to give your gifts to another?**
- Time to reconnect with others?**
- We hope to see you down the path!**

— Bruce Anderson
Core Gift Institute

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 aspect of the trek experience. This being our hosts, their unique gifts, and their welcoming nature which continues to bring hope to our individual worlds.

Connie, a fellow trekker who spent 12 days on the Camino De Santiago in Spain, says "We were blessed by many gracious hosts who welcomed us with local foods and a warm clean place to lay our heads. One of my fondest memories is the hospitality

we experienced everywhere we went. The innkeepers had great pride in their spaces and their food. When I think

about traveling abroad again, I would prefer to stay at inns vs. hotels because of these experiences." I often think of



Photo by Andrew Bryan

a woman named Teresa who drove Andrew and I to the grocery store in the pouring rain because she knew our group was starving and did not have a car, nor was there a restaurant nearby. She let us drape our wet gear all over the first floor upon arrival, no hesitations or questions asked! I vividly recall a Galician grandmother in Northern Spain who sounded like she was screaming at our group. I, speaking Spanish, had to continuously reassure the group it was just her way of speaking. She was kind and forward - although I will admit I was a bit scared of her at times as well! I remember the large farmhouse, Casa Norita, where a young couple from Northern Europe served homemade 'stew' from their own home country. The meal was incredible and a nice break from the Spanish (although delicious) food we had had for days straight.

I remember Nicky and George, a couple we stayed with in Wales, UK, who provided home cooked meals for us every night, including a delicious British sticky toffee pudding. Neither I or anyone else was embarrassed to go back for seconds. And then of course there was Steve, a former royal chef residing in St. David's, Wales. Steve was charismatic and unintentionally hilarious. He had a gift of bringing people together through his love and passion for food. Krystal Contreras, a participant on the 2018 Wales trek, remembers fondly on her time stating, "Steve embodied such humble hospitality that I had never experienced before and I feel so grateful to have met him." One time Steve picked our group up from lunch in the next town over. As we made our way 'home',



In memory of Stephen Lawton, St. David's, Wales, UK. Photo by Mariel Amador

Steve pulled into a fishing dock. He had seen a fisherman bringing his boat back in from a trip and wanted us to have fresh seafood for dinner. Then, there was the time he surprised us with fireworks on our group's last night in St. David's. Once, Steve put together 'fun' activities for us which incidentally included doing chores on his land. The group reluctantly volunteered, but out of love and respect for Steve obliged. We knew he had carefully curated an experience for us and we did not dare let him down. Steve never missed out on an adventure or the

chance to enjoy life's simple pleasures. He made everyone feel welcomed with his gracious smile and laugh. Steve was well-loved and he will be greatly missed by those who were lucky enough to have had the opportunity to know him.

In loving Memory of the ultimate TrekEpic host, Steve Lawton, d. July 11, 2020

— Mariel Amador
Trekker and Guide



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