



## Letting go when teens don't want to travel

One of the hardest aspects of Unschooling is offering something that you think is wonderful/useful/educational to your child and they are not interested and refuse it. We recently had an opportunity to visit Washington DC and sight see for 4 days. We planned to see the beautiful monuments and all the museums of the Smithsonian. We stayed in a lovely Airbnb in the middle of an urban neighborhood so we could live like the locals, eat local food and participate in the community. Residents sat on their stoops in the hot summer evenings and people-watched as we did. We saw many families with teens and younger children explore the sights. We were excited to travel as a family...except, well, the kids did not want to go.

Our kids are between the ages of 17 and 20 and although we travel frequently, they had no desire to take this trip. Whether it was because of the timing, or the location, I don't know. But I do know that as an unschooling parent, I believe that one can't force them to go. We tried that once and the whole trip was miserable. One can't have a good time traveling if a child is homesick, defiant and unhappy. We had two big family discussions on why we thought this trip might be fun and interesting for them, but still they put their feet down and stayed home. So just my

partner and myself went. Although the kids were keen to see our daily photos and observations we posted on our family discord channel, the kids didn't express any regrets on not coming.

It was tough seeing all the families vacationing together. I thought of the kids as I read through all the museum exhibits and excitedly showed my partner tidbits that I found interesting and wished that my children were there to see and experience what I did. I came to realize that if some day in the future the kids want to see those things, they will make it happen. For whatever reason, now is not the right timing for them. I remembered that we had never taken our children to Disney and although I always felt like a bad parent for not giving our children "the classic trip", I consoled my guilt with the fact that they can go anytime they want as an adult and be willing to wait in those line-ups and deal with the crowds as a willing, consenting adult. Sure enough, one child actually did go to Disney as an adult.

Just because children don't want a particular experience at this point in time, doesn't mean that it won't happen and be more meaningful for them later. Forcing them to go would have made the trip bad for everyone. But leaving the decision with them will keep them open-minded to future possibilities.

Of course, it is more difficult to accept that children don't want to come along travelling when children are young. One just can't leave them at home without supervision. When the kids were young, I found that if I added some things to make the trip more enjoyable for them, and built in time and days that they didn't have to join us sightseeing, they would willingly come. However, the teens just put their foot down and said, NO! I had to respect that.

In fact, I've observed that when I truly let go of my agenda, the universe seems to speak to my children and they pick it up (a book, a museum, a trip, a learning experience) in their own time, taking in all the good educational things that I would have wished for them. They learn when they are ready to learn, and then the absorption is so much greater than if it was coerced. But sometimes the universe doesn't put things in their path, and that is okay too. They obviously didn't need it at that time and might not ever need it.

Acceptance is the hardest element of unschooling. Whether a child refuses to watch a documentary, or attend lessons, or refuses to travel, means that they truly own their education. They know what is best for their cognitive, social and emotional growth. When they say "No" to one experience, they are saying "Yes" to something else more meaningful for them at that time. Who am I to judge that one experience is better than another? We can't control what our learners take in; we can only offer and accept their response. Once I let it go, I had a great time in the Capital! And I'm looking forward to our family trip to Europe this Fall where everyone has agreed to go!