

Building Bridges

By Joan Mish

A bridge to me means connecting with cultures and people. I learned this early from my mom who was not allowed to go to college for it was the early 30's, the Depression. She was one of five children and her dad sent her to Germany to look up our family relatives. She learned how important it was to connect with other cultures. Alex Haley said "In every conceivable matter, the family is a link to our past, bridge to our future." She learned how important it was to visit, find her link to another culture, and get acquainted.

So when I was just graduating from high school and thinking of becoming a French major in college she encouraged me to go on a biking adventure in France and stay with a family for a week. I began to learn the importance of bridging with other people. There was a Jewish student in our group, and he invited us all to attend a Jewish ceremony in Rome. How interesting. And then I studied in Switzerland for a year and spent a week or more with my roommate in Belgium. I have since seen her only once on a travel trip in Europe with my husband. We visited Hilde, my Belgian roommate. We brought her a pin from Wisconsin. Her husband took one look at it and burst out laughing. "I already have one of those. I received it from an American soldier near the end of World War II."

Another bridge for my children with other cultures was when we had a number of exchange students and my daughter became one also. Three of my children have also studied abroad.

We have learned how important bridges are in World Peace. I used to be part of Peace group in Wisconsin and we would float lanterns on the river. The event was called Lanterns for Peace. The gathering was held close to the day we bombed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. We always had a speaker who spoke about what it was like for the Japanese during the war and the bombing. To build a bridge, one needs to listen in order to learn from others.

Al Gore is trying to build a bridge to everyone to acknowledge Climate Change. We build bridges by learning. His new film bridges many cultures and he hopes to make a bridge with those who do not admit climate change.

Learning and accepting others is all about building bridges.