

Dr. Randie Gottlieb



What if you could be friends with everyone in the whole world, no matter what your culture or religion? As founder and executive director of the UnityWorks Foundation, Randie Gottlieb asks people to think about that question as she trains them to respect and appreciate diversity.

Growing up in California, U.S., Randie wanted to be an artist. But after learning about the Bahá'í Faith, she turned to teaching. She earned a master's degree from Harvard University and a doctorate in education from Boston University. Her family lived in Puerto Rico for 11 years, and for two of them she ran an elementary school that she founded. She started UnityWorks in 2000. Randie has worked or traveled in over 30 countries and written 10 books. She also co-founded the Mona Foundation, which supports kids' education around the world, with Mahnaz Javid in 1999.* She lives in Washington, U.S., with her husband, Steven.

Q: What's your favorite childhood memory?

A: When things got really bad, I would go and snuggle with my dog, Sugar . . . She would lay her head in my lap and wag her tail, and that made me feel that things would eventually be okay.

Q: What did you study in college, and how did it prepare you for your work?

A: I wanted to be an artist and live . . . in a log cabin . . . [But] I read the Bahá'í writings about the importance of education, and I felt called to become a teacher . . . I taught high school . . . [Then I] decided to . . . become a teacher educator . . . I could reach thousands of students by teaching their teachers.



Left: As a kid, Randie acted in TV shows and commercials.

Right: Randie, age 9, and her mom, at one of many swimming competitions.

Q: What is UnityWorks, and how did it get started?

A: UnityWorks is a nonprofit organization, and our mission is to promote understanding of the oneness of humanity, the value of diversity, and the need for unity, with a focus on education and schools . . . I started UnityWorks because of the Bahá'í teachings on the importance of unity, and especially race unity . . . I really had the good fortune of working and traveling . . . in over 30 countries including the 11 years in Puerto Rico, and those experiences . . . showed me the diversity of our human family, all the ways that we're different, but I also saw that . . . there's a lot of prejudice and a lot of hatred . . . I wanted to change that.

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Three generations enjoy a family gathering in California in 2017: Randie and her husband, Steven (center back); son Jonathan and his wife, Shaadi (left); and son Jordan and his wife, Kate, and their kids.



At the 2018 Unity-Works Annual Conference in Washington, U.S., Randie (center) consults with educators.

Q: What's one of your favorite experiences in your career?

A: [We have an] intensive, interactive, week-long training, and we do that once a year . . . The most exciting thing is working with those schoolteachers and principals and seeing the transformation that occurs . . . Almost every person comes into the room on the first day . . . believing that we're separate races . . . And by the last day . . . every single person leaves the room knowing for sure that we are one human race . . . That's a huge change in thinking . . . I line people up in rows to show how many ancestors we have . . . Every single person on the planet has over a million, billion ancestors. Well, the Earth can't hold that many people . . . the only way that that's possible is if we have a lot of overlapping ancestors . . . We are all related.

Q: What is one of the biggest reasons that people have difficulty getting along with each other?

A: I would say prejudice . . . We're taught that this is us, and that's them, and they are different . . . Maybe some of it is fear, and maybe some of it is just lack of familiarity with people from other groups. We also have the media . . . with all of the stereotypes . . . And the music we listen to, our schools, even our churches are promoting "us" as opposed to "them" . . . We don't yet know that we are one human race, which is what Bahá'u'lláh came to tell us . . . We don't make friends across those . . . human-made barriers that are reinforced from the day that we're born.

Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* is about kindness, empathy, and friendship. What are three things kids can do to build friendships?

A: A good way to start . . . is just by smiling and saying hello, especially to another kid who doesn't have a lot of friends. If they are sad, try to cheer them up. If they are lonely, sit with them during lunch at school, invite them over to your house . . . and probably most important is let them know that you care by listening when [they] have something to say . . . It's important to make friends with people who are different from you, and then you can talk about your differences, learn about them, and also find out what you have in common.