



pathways through grief *beyond*

ACCORDING to a Cherokee Indian legend, in order to become a man, a young lad had to be blindfolded and spend an entire night in the forest, sitting on a stump alone. He must not cry out and could only remove this blindfold when the sun shone through.

It was probably frightening for a young man to sit in the dark and hear strange forest sounds—to believe that he was alone. But when he removed his blindfold, he saw his

father sitting on a stump right beside him. He had not been alone at all—his father had been watching over him the entire night!

If you have experienced a loss, perhaps you too have felt frightened. If you could see beyond your “blindfold,” you might realize that God has been right there beside you all the time, as well as friends and family who love you.

“When it is dark enough,
you can see the stars.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



GRIEF PATHWAY OUTLOOK

TERRAIN

Watch for falling rocks—travel with care

WEATHER

Thunderstorms 90%, then clearing

HEARTACHE INDEX:

High

TRAVEL TIPS:

- The first anniversary of a death can be difficult—make plans to get through the day.
- Grief does not end at one year, but the *ups* and *downs* are less frequent and gentler.
- Remember there is a purpose for your life.
- Be thankful for lessons you have learned. When the time is right, lend a hand to someone else who is grieving.
- Do not feel guilty for enjoying life again—laughter is good medicine!
- Dare to dream new dreams for your life, to make something good come from your loss.

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BEYOND THE HEDGE

I held my breath as my daughter Misty and I zipped down a narrow, two-lane highway near Cardiff, Wales. She was driving, and I was the passenger. In Wales the cars travel on the left side of the road which was scary and unfamiliar to me. After living in Wales for a year, Misty was accustomed to the treacherous roads, so she was calm. I was used to the straight wide roads of Kansas, so the curvy, hilly roads of Wales were frightening beyond belief!

The highway was extremely narrow, sandwiched between wide, high rock fences which formed thin corridors. The fences were sometimes higher than our car, built hundreds of years ago for horses and buggies, not for fast-moving trucks and cars! When the rock fence would end, it was usually replaced by thick hedges, making it impossible to see over the next hill or around the next curve. Sometimes trees overhung the highway like a canopy, shutting out the sunlight—a beautiful but almost eerie sight.

I squeezed my hand-grip and braced myself, fearing our car might crash into an immovable wall or an oncoming vehicle. Sometimes our car was so close to the left side of the road that the hedge actually slapped my side of the car, making me flinch or duck!

But in spite of the scariness of the trip, there were little breaks in the highway as a road jutted to the side, giving a quick glimpse at scenes which were too beautiful to properly describe. Hillsides shone golden in the bright sunlight, and lush green meadows were sprinkled with grazing sheep which were oblivious to the dangers that lay on our side of the hedge. The sheep were calm and peaceful, and life was good.

I began eagerly watching for those breaks in the hedge—those peaceful scenes. It was comforting to see the beauty concealed beyond the hedge, beyond the wall. When I focused on those little glimpses, I paid less attention to the oncoming traffic and the narrow roads, and I was less afraid.

I believe my frightful ride might be compared to life with its hills and valleys, the uncertainty of not knowing what is behind the

next curve. Perhaps the rock fences with their thick hedges are like death—that final unknown—the barrier between life and what comes next.

Many of us have been taught what the Hereafter may be like, but few of us have experienced it. But there is an exception—those who died, were resuscitated, and brought back to life. There are interesting similarities in the stories told by these people, regardless of their age, background, or country.



Many tell of leaving their bodies, of watching the scene below as doctors or nurses scurry around, working on their bodies. They report trying to let those in the room below know they are there. Many patients tell of traveling down a tunnel, then seeing a bright light, a light which does not blind or frighten them, and of seeing loved ones who had died. They tell of feeling peaceful and not wanting to return to their bodies, but are told that their work on earth is not finished, that they must go back.

It is hard to imagine what our loved ones may be experiencing on the “other side,” but it must be good! If we are still alive, our work on this side is not yet finished, so we must keep traveling, searching for those bright spots—those little glimpses of heaven while on our journeys. Perhaps death is like that rock fence covered by the hedge—that barrier separating us from the beauty that is to come—that world of peace and light where our loved ones are waiting for us—waiting for us somewhere *just beyond the hedge*.

J. Dawn Rountree

“While we are mourning the loss of our friend, others are rejoicing to meet him behind the veil.”

—John Taylor