

Just Around the Bend

January in West Virginia can be cold, snow, icy, rainy, or warm sunshine – or all of the above on the same day. On a cold, clear, magical day in the late nineties, the West Virginia Turnpike to Beckley was clear and dry. God had created a spectacular winter wonderland. Mountains pulled snow from recent storms around them like shawls of finest ermine. Crowns of diamonds sparkled majestically on their peaks. Misty fog filled the air until every bit of creation had a sparkle of diamonds – a gingerbread world frosted dazzling white.

My mind wandered – a dangerous thing to do on winding roads. My eyes saw the beauty, but my brain didn't comprehend it. Beauty so special was incongruent with the mission of the day. My mother, suffering a stroke, waited for me – not even aware I was on the way. The effort to stay positive and optimistic struggled against the “what-ifs” that crept from the dark corners of my mind.

It doesn't take long for anyone driving any of the state's roads to realize that straight is not in the vocabulary of the West Virginia State Highway Department. Everything is *just around the bend*. The only straight line in the state is the one folks call “as the crow flies” – and I'm not even sure the crow stays on the straight and narrow.

Having grown up in that paradoxical world, I learned to always look for what's around the next bend of life not only with hope and anticipation but also with fear and anxiety concerning the unknown. I learned early on that God is around whatever bend in the road I choose to explore – wherever it leads. Life is full of mystery. We are all sleuths, looking for clues to solve mysteries that will make us better persons.

That particular January morning, I temporarily forgot that important lesson. Fear and anxiety

fought for the upper hand – trying to chase away the hope and pleasure of solving the mystery beyond the bend in my journey in life.

As much as I tried to convince myself that my fear was for the life of my mother, I knew better. Long ago she made her peace with her Creator God. No, the fear was selfishly for me. How would *I* live without her? *I* would miss her. *I* would be sad. *I* would... Well, you get the picture. Fear was all about *me*, not her.

Just around the next bend I was about to receive the perfect object lesson from the Author of all life's lessons. It would have been wonderfully observant of me, had I really seen that coming. However, stubborn creature that I am, I was more like the farmer's mule in an old, old story. The mule didn't want to work. To get any activity from him, the farmer had to hit him between the eyes with a two by four to get his attention first. Then, he could direct the animal – once the mule stopped blinking and shaking his head.

Around the next bend in the road, God hit me right between my eyes with his own form of a two by four – the beauty of his creation. Suddenly, in that ultra-white world where two mountains guarded the valley between them, a bridge of color – a brilliant rainbow of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, and all the blending tints in between – connected those two frosty, white mountains. The closer I got to it, the brighter it became, taking my breath away. For a split second, time stood still. Movement returned in slow motion – like that of running in a dream. As if waking from that dream, I swallowed a deep breath and blinked my eyes. Yes, I was awake. Yes, it was still there. Another bend – another mystery.

The rainbow faded, but the memory lingers decades later. I was still on my way to the hospital where I didn't know what I would find, but that rainbow had filled me with a new sense of hope. As the colors faded in brilliance, hope within me seemed to increase in power, as if

transferring from the beauty of God to my aching soul. The promise of God's presence became real in a way that no human logic could create. In that split second, my faith found renewed direction – just around that next bend.

Bends and curves in the journey we call life, hide the future. I am curious, and want to know what's around the next bend. However, I am also cautious and afraid of the unknown. Will there be an exciting adventure, a humdrum day, a disappointment, or a frightening experience? Just around the next bend is adventure, mystery, miracles, and hope – always hope because God is already there before us to celebrate joy, to make a humdrum day exciting, to comfort in the disappointments, and to replace fear with hope.

Aren't you just a wee bit curious about what is just around the bend in your journey of life?

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