

May 2003

I (Diane) woke up from a dream this morning, tears streaming down my cheeks. Only one of the "players" was someone I have known in my waking life, but they were all so real. We were at a type of reunion, maybe from some kind of boot camp experience we all endured together. Many years had passed since we'd seen one another. All of us had been changed by the inevitable experiences of life that had occurred in our lives. It was such a treat to see the people who had once shared day-to-day struggles and joys with me. The warmth and pleasure I felt from reestablishing contact with these dear life companions in the dream was tangible as I woke up.

It struck me how the years apart had seen not only the passage of time, but also each person had *continued* on their own individual journey. We all had shared the same path at one point in time. It brought back a flood of joy and satisfaction reliving, for a moment, that which had brought us together in the first place.

Initially, upon seeing the group as a whole, there was a euphoric feeling of nostalgia, of wanting to relive "the good ol' days". Yet one by one, as I spoke individually with different "characters", it was obvious that not all of their journeys had been on golden paths, lined with beautiful gardens.

From across the room, I saw the face of a fellow traveler I recognized in the dream. I immediately wanted to embrace her joyfully, ecstatic to be reunited with one whose life brought such delight to my heart. As I drew near to her, I saw in her eyes recognition of the closeness we once shared with one another, veiled by a cloudiness of pain and the sting of events in her life she couldn't undo. How I wanted to strip away the "now" in her life, the unknown inner torture that had so radically affected this once fresh and tender woman. And yet I couldn't violate her by denying her journey and the point to which it had brought her. Inevitably, **who she is** had been traumatically altered, and she would never see the world as she once did. She could never relate to anyone the way she once could. Whatever she had seen pass before her eyes, had not just passed by, but had also transformed the very fibers of her being; so much so that she no longer was the person I always thought I had known. Yes, we still shared that long ago moment in time when we walked alongside each other on our journeys; yet hers had shifted so radically from mine, I couldn't begin to understand the complex realities that had transformed who she was.

As I try to communicate this to you on paper, I'm struck with the notion that perhaps that woman is me, in your life. On the one hand, in my heart of hearts, I am a soul who longs to join you in light and laughter and finger paint, and skip free on a shimmering

beach of happiness. This is how I long to spend the days. And, perhaps, that's how you might remember me, as we once were.

Yet, I cannot betray my own consciousness and deny the fact that my soul has been irrevocably moved and my reality is undeniably altered forever by the path on which my feet have trod. The bliss I long for, and perhaps at one point thought was attainable here and now, is forever eluding me. I maintain the hope that **one day**, when I experience the fullness of Jesus, face to face ...

The other day in the car 9-year-old Alyssa asked me, "Mom, What is Bliss?" I had just picked her up from a birthday party and she was looking at a little spray bottle of Calgon Cool Sunshower body mist she received as a party favor. The words, "a feeling of bliss" circle around a picture of daisies in a hazy blue setting on the picture on the label. She told me later that in her third grade reader's circle, she had come across a story in which a girl bit into a hamburger and exclaimed, "Bliss". She was understandably confused by the two references.

As we go through our lives, we make choices and decisions and, sometimes, are so unaware that because of going south, for instance, instead of going east, we will never be the same again. Quite often, the events that shape our lives most dramatically aren't even welcome.

"They" say, "You can't go back." I guess that's true. And though it brings profound sadness at times, who we have become today wouldn't be the same, if we hadn't gone through the cliffs and rocky hard places in our lives that it took to get here.

Recently our family visited the Archway Museum in Kearney that you may have seen in the movie "About Schmidt". It shows the history of the pathways of the fiber optic network, intercontinental railway, first cross-country Interstate Highway, Pony Express, Mormon Trail, the California Gold Rush, Oregon Trail and the Lewis & Clark expedition. One of the amazing things is that there is only one point in the whole country that all these communications and transportation innovations went through, and that's Kearney, Nebraska.

As I looked at this portrayal of the precursor to settlement, I again was reminded of my nagging wondering: what made those pioneers keep going through places like Nebraska and Wyoming where there must have been such vast stretches of wasteland to trudge through? And yet they kept going. In some form, you and I aren't so unlike these travelers.

At some point, amazingly, our lives have crossed paths, albeit for a brief point in time. As we continue on in our journey, we are shaped, like the Grand Canyon, by the rivers that flow through our paths. We are works in progress, all at various stages of growth and development. The beauty is in the journey.

I'm so terrible at finishing things. I think when I started writing this I knew where I wanted it to go. But, just as life, this very document you're reading has gone places I didn't anticipate when I began.

Many of the people with whom I've been privileged to "cross paths" have chosen occupations or activities that I think I could never possibly do. A pastor, for instance, caring for and imparting vision to so many; or someone whose life is devoted to leading and molding the lives of large groups of children. Wow. There are other people whose ability to persevere and enjoy life despite physical or mental limitations ... it just floors me. *These are my heroes.*

Jeff and I are on a path that currently is at a crossroads. We know not where the next turn will lead us. Recently I was reading Psalm 25 from The Message Bible and I want to share some excerpts from it with you:

... "Show me how You work, God ... Take me by the hand; Lead me down the path of truth. ... Mark the milestones of Your mercy and love, God; ... Mark me with Your sign of love. Plan only the best for me, God! ... God is fair and just; He corrects the misdirected, sends them in the right direction. He gives the [outcasts] His hand, and leads them step-by-step. From now on every road you travel will take you to God. Follow the Covenant signs; Read the charted directions. ... What are God-worshipers like? ... They settle down in a promising place. ... If I keep my eyes on God, I won't trip over my own feet. ... Use all Your skill to put me together; I wait to see Your finished project."

If I learned anything from living in Costa Rica and Venezuela, it might be that more than being effective (and therefore "successful") in the world, my own life has been affected by the very experiences I've encountered as a result of seeing God in a much bigger context than ever before. I look forward not to the inevitable hardships of the next leg of the trip, as much as the end result of witnessing His Presence throughout.

This morning I finally answered Alyssa's question. Alyssa, Jesus is *Bliss*.