



The Great Divide

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In North and South America, the Great Divide, or Continental Divide, follows an imaginary line at the top peaks along the mountain ranges of the Rockies and the Andes. This line is the geographic and hydrological divide of the Americas. These mountains divide our continents. West of the Great Divide, streams and rivers all run west to the Pacific Ocean. As a child, I learned I could drop a rubber toy into any river or stream west of the Great Divide and the current would carry it all the way to the Pacific. This seemed right then and the way it should always be.

When I travel east over the Great Divide, hydrological currents of rivers and streams no longer run west to the Pacific Ocean but in a different direction. They run east to the Atlantic Ocean, via the Gulf of Mexico. In crossing the Great Divide, the rivers on the east side of the divide have a different *destination*.

The grief process, if honored, takes us through raging rivers and meandering streams with ebbs and flows of “back and forth” between the pain of memories and loss, to moments of restoration and rest. There are opportunities to grow and even flourish. On the “other” side of the Great Divide, we take on lives with our loved ones no longer physically in our presence; instead, we carry them with us. Memories of the past become integrated with the realities of the present.

Fighting the current or opting out of the grief process altogether would be an exhausting and fruitless uphill challenge, leaving us “stuck” in acceptable and familiar pain. Traveling toward the sunset in the west because it is the familiar way is like trying to conquer the current across the Divide. But as we don’t conquer the current, we don’t conquer our grief.

There is another option. Turning from the sunset toward the sunrise invites new meaning and fresh purpose. We are carried by the current to a different destination. A new peace brings previously unperceived depth. Significance is found in new ways. We are guided through a new sense of identity and a shift in our life stories. We travel waters we never wanted to know and didn’t sign up to tour. This journey of loss was one that none of us volunteered for. But it is our story. A new direction emerges and each story of loss is different. Someday I hope to hear about yours.

