



A-Mazing

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SUNDAY AFTERNOON, halfway through October. Fall had officially begun, but the weather was typical of the season, dancing back and forth across that line of demarcation between summer and autumn, not quite sure where it was going to land. Though the sky was a brilliant shade of blue, absolutely void of any clouds, the air was crisp and the wind brought a slight chill with it. As I stepped out of the car, I zipped my fleece jacket and slipped a down-filled vest over it, deeming it to be the perfect balance of weight and warmth for the outing.

After paying my entrance fee and bypassing the Brats-and-Beer tent, I made my way to where my sister Shannon was standing, waving to her family and yelling last minute instructions to them as they sped off in different directions. "Come with me," she said, extending a piece of paper with a map printed on it, halfway between us.

We clutched the map between us, heads tilted down and leaning in, as we scanned the page, considering the different routes. After a minute Shannon lifted her head and gazed at the options in front of us. "Let's start there," she said swinging her arm toward an entrance marked "Route Four." One last glance back at the map, and I agreed. Route four seemed as good as any of them. Folding the map and slipping it into my pocket, I fell into step behind Shannon, approaching the entrance to the corn maze.

"This is fun!" I said a few steps in, taken by the novelty of the corn stalks towering over us, and the fun festive fall feel in the air. I'd never been in a corn maze before; however, they had always sounded like fun and had been lingering on a somewhat formed to-do list that was floating around in the back of my mind. What better way to enjoy the outdoors and celebrate the season than to get out in nature and surround yourself – literally surround yourself – with reminders of what fall is all about: crops, abundance and nature's bounty?

We turned left at the first corner, and then right at the second, confident of our route. This was a breeze, I thought to myself, as we walked and chatted, immersing ourselves

further into the heart of the maze. Considering our quick clip, I estimated we'd be out of the maze before my niece, who had gone with my brother-in-law and my mom on a different route.

As we came around the next corner, I noticed the clear-cut path between the stalks had narrowed a bit, lessening the ease of our navigation. We walked farther down the path and deeper into the maze. I furrowed my brow a bit as I really took in the surroundings. There were some stalks with large gaps between them, and I couldn't tell if it was where we should turn, if it was simply nature's spacing of the stalks, or if it was one of those sneaky paths that looped back on itself, leading you to where you started. Shannon and I had both slowed our walk and came to a complete stop, looking around, not sure where to go. We were completely lost.

"I thought this was supposed to be easy," I said. How could we be so lost—and how could we be lost so quickly? I realized I had been expecting a wide, well marked path with perfect, ninety-degree corners, and solid walls that wouldn't allow the distractions to shine through. (I realize now, that would be a hay bale maze!) I thought the path would be easy to follow, with no threat of getting sidetracked, backtracking or veering off course onto paths that lead us away from our destination and ultimate goal. I thought the journey would be an easy, enjoyable jaunt that would not take much concentration, decision-making or hard work. How did this adventure get so difficult?

Life can be just like that corn maze. We expect that it will be filled with nothing but delights and fun. In our minds, the path shouldn't be difficult; rather, we think it will be an easy walk, with no confusion about which turns to take, which paths to avoid and when to stop and ask for help. We often naively expect the road to be straightforward, with a journey as mildly taxing as a light stroll, and goals and rewards easily achievable.

In reality, there are always roadblocks in life, confusing options and enticing yet dangerous paths that look like a good choice to travel down, when really they only lead you to dead ends. And the time it takes to find your way—oh the great amount of time! So much of our time in the maze of life is time spent wandering, struggling to find the right path and to get somewhere, sometimes not even knowing what exactly it is that we are working toward. It can feel overwhelming, as though you will be adrift forever. And then, something beautiful happens: beacons of hope and help are found.

For us, it came when we rounded a corner to find my brother-in-law, niece and mom clustered in an open clearing, consulting their own map, trying to find their way out. Together, we were able to discern the best route and we trudged forward, finally emerging victoriously from the stalks, back into the bright sunlight.

Life throws a lot at us, yet when our paths cross with those who can help us—and to whom we can offer help—when we work together, and when we persevere, there is always a path to victory. Yes, life can throw a lot at us, but when we work through it, and come out the other side, sometimes it is simply a-mazing!

Blythe