

Train Ride into the Past

Twelve days ago – on Monday, Oct. 21 – Lola and I, along with others in Life Care leadership – rode on a train with our medical directors, full-time physicians, and their spouses through the mountains of North Georgia.

The Blue Ridge Scenic Railway took us winding along the beautiful Toccoa River from McCaysville to Blue Ridge, Ga. The trees in these highlands had not yet reached the full color of their typical dress, but the leaves of dogwood, sourwood and blackgum were beginning to show shades of deep red. Yellow poplar and hickories revealed splashes of yellow, while red maples were living up to their name, and sassafras was turning to orange.



As we rode along through lush meadows, by curving mountain roads, beside rocky mountain streams, and through thick woods, I thought of how the red man – the earliest settler of these parts – must have loved this land, too. In my mind's eye, I saw:



- A young Indian boy practicing with bow and arrow and pausing to admire the newfound flame of the leaves.
- An old man sitting on a log amid colorful trees as he shaped and sharpened arrowheads from stones.
- An Indian woman who had gone to the spring to fetch water, staring into the pool at her own face and the multicolored background fashioned by the treetops high above her head.
- An Indian man, stalking deer, reminded by the leaves that the summer of hunting is about to end, and winter's snares lay ahead.
- An Indian brave and his Cherokee princess, hand in hand, standing on a bluff, silhouetted against a harvest moon that cast an eerie glow across a quilt of colors in the valley far below them.
- A tribal wedding performed in a wooded glen, the striking ceremonial attire vying with the leaves in intensity of brilliance.
- The pledging of love under the spellbinding cover of oak, hickory and ash.

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- A year later, the birth of an Indian baby while autumn's leaves fall gently at the doorway.
- And as autumns pass, father and son walking along together in the woods, leaves crunching beneath their feet, as the youngster learns from the elder stories about the origins of the Indian nation, great feats of bravery, and how a boy becomes a man.
- The tears in the eyes of the Cherokees who were made to depart this beloved territory in 1838 – forced on what became known as the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma – to settle on dusty plains where mountains and rocky streams and colorful leaves are only memories.



I saw that in my mind's eye. While saddened at their loss, I rejoiced in the blessing of beauty that once belonged to them, and now found all around me.

And at Harvest on Main, the restaurant waiting for us, we feasted on the food, the wonder of our journey, and the sweet fellowship of a shared mission.

– Beecher Hunter