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– *Malcolm Duncan, speaker, pastor of Gold Hill Baptist Church, and author of Risk Takers*

By the same author

God Knows Your Name
Broken Works Best
Rainbows for Rainy Days

UNDER THE RAINBOW

A mother's experiences of
the promises of God

Catherine Campbell

MONARCH
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Dedicated to

the memory of Cheryl and Joy, who continue
to bless my life every day.

Also to my husband Philip and son Paul,
whose love and support are my constant
strength;

and to Susie, who is teaching me once more
the delights of daughters.

With special thanks to

Mrs Lillian Hill and the staff of Hillcroft School,
Dr E. Hicks, and the staff of Paul Ward and other
departments of the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick
Children, for your care of Cheryl and Joy over many years.

Always remember that *you* made a difference.

*I am leading my child to the heavenly land
I am guiding her day by day
And I ask her now, as I take her hand
To come home by a rugged way.
It's not the way she herself would choose
For its beauty she cannot see,
But she knows not what her soul would lose
If she trod not that path with me!*

Author unknown

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Author's Note

When I wrote the original version of *Under the Rainbow* back in 2008 I had no idea of the impact it would have on so many lives. To say it has been humbling would be an understatement. Sharing the years I had with our profoundly disabled daughters in an open and frank manner was not easy to do. Once the affairs of my heart, both emotional and spiritual, were seen in print, I could not take them back. I didn't realize then how vulnerable it would make me feel when I recognized that thousands of people would hold my heart in their hands.

However, the other side of exposing my inner wounds to all and sundry was the freedom it gave me to share how God worked in my pain, and also through the lives of our two remarkable little girls. In turn, that gave many readers the opportunity to share their own difficult situations with others and sometimes with me. Communications of all types have come my way over the years, explaining how this little book has touched lives, and confirming the step of faith I took in writing it.

Unfortunately, there was little opportunity for the book to be seen beyond Northern Ireland, and when the original publishers went out of business in 2010 it was no longer available anywhere. Saddened, I found it hard to accept that it had accomplished all that God had for it to do, but my hands were tied. It was simply out of print... until now.

My current publisher, Monarch, has given me the amazing privilege of revisiting, revising and expanding *Under the Rainbow*. If you have come to it again, the story is the same but with some new material that was not included in the first edition. If you have read *Broken Works Best* (Monarch, 2012) you may recognize some of the events that I used there to illustrate the teaching on how “God turns our pain into gain”. However, *Under the Rainbow* is a different book. It is simply the story of one young mother who discovered that in the storms of life God allows us to stand under the rainbow of His promises: promises that He always keeps.

What is especially exciting for me is that the message of *Under the Rainbow* will now be given the opportunity to reach far beyond the shores of the Emerald Isle. My prayer is that wherever it goes it will bring God’s grace into the lives of those who have been rocked by difficulty and disappointment.

My heartfelt thanks go to Tony Collins and the team at Monarch for making this possible. Thanks also go to my ever-patient proofreaders, my friend Liz Young and my husband Philip, my greatest encourager.

So whether you have launched into *Under the Rainbow* for the first time or the second time, I place my heart in your hands, remembering what God frequently whispers in my ear: “... the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). For that I bring Him praise.

Prologue

The changing room was unusually quiet that Sunday afternoon when I arrived for my shift. A quick glance at my watch confirmed that I wasn't late. Missing lunch may have made my tummy grumble but it ensured that I had plenty of time to change into my uniform. The absence of fellow nurses meant one of two things: either the hospital wasn't too busy or it was very short-staffed. I hoped the former was true as I headed down to the end of the main corridor where the Sick Baby Unit was housed.

Working with the babies was a delight, especially as the unit cared for babies of normal gestation, who usually needed only a few days of extra care before they were reunited with their mothers. It was the kind of work that set the old maternal instinct in motion. How different and much less stressful it was than working with the very tiny babies of the Premature Baby Unit, whose treatment was critical and life saving.

There was a lift in my step and a song in my heart as I pushed open the huge old oak door into the unit. Church had been particularly uplifting that morning, and everything in the world was good.

"Nurse, come with me!"

The words brought me sharply to attention as I looked over my shoulder to see if the command was really directed at me. The brusque, even angry manner of the midwife in charge sent my brain into overdrive.

Surely I wasn't late? What had I done wrong? The usually pleasant atmosphere of the unit was ice cold. No friendly hellos from the other staff, each obviously trying to get on with their own business. Only the occasional cry of a baby dared to break the silence.

I followed her meekly to a cubicle positioned right at the back of the ward. It was normally only used for babies with some kind of infectious illness: babies who needed to be nursed in strict isolation. I had never seen it used during my time in the unit. In fact I had never even seen the light on in it before.

As we entered the bleak room, a sudden movement underneath a pink baby blanket made me jump, an audible gasp escaping before I could stop it.

"This is Barbara," the midwife announced, ignoring my evident horror. "Born three hours ago, weighing nine pounds. Apgar score – low."

I was annoyed at displaying such obvious shock at the sight before me, especially as the midwife continued, "As you can see, this little one was born with gross hydrocephalus and spina bifida."

Not even her years of experience could hide how difficult this speech was for her to make.

"Your job is to look after Barbara until she dies. It shouldn't take long," she continued, "the surgeons can't help. It's just a matter of time. Her mother won't be visiting. She's much too upset. She just wants us to tell her when it's all over."

She went on to give me staccato instructions as to how I was to care for this pathetic little specimen of humanity. I could see now why she was cross, and why the unit was already mourning for the living dead. Barbara's head was not just big with the build-up of fluid around her brain, it was huge, making her features look squashed and

even, dare I say it, ugly. The open lesion on her spine was raw and seeping. Spinal fluid was trying to escape from the open wound, now covered by a dressing. Her two paralysed little legs lay limp, as if they didn't belong to the rest of her body.

Instructions over, the midwife looked at me with what seemed like accusatory disdain in her eyes.

"You're a Christian, aren't you?" she snapped. "How can you believe in a God who allows children to be born like that?"

Her words delivered what felt like a slap in the face. She turned and left the room quickly, and her disappearance was welcome, because in that instant I could not answer her question. I just didn't know why.

As I leaned over the cot I couldn't stop a tear falling onto Barbara's face. As I quickly brushed it off with my fingers, she rooted, just like any other baby looking for its mother's breast. She stretched her little arms, showing me all her tiny fingers, and started to cry.

"Feed her," the midwife had said. "She'll probably bring it all up again, but the sucking will bring her comfort."

Two minutes later Barbara was in my arms sucking away at a bottle of formula for dear life. Where on earth this very sick baby got such a strong suck from I don't know, but when she opened her big blue eyes as she finished her feed she stole the heart of this young student midwife.

"You are not ugly, baby, you are beautiful," I whispered in her ear. "God put me here with you for this little while so that I could love you until He takes you home."

The day was very difficult, consisting of a constant round of feeding and cleaning up, and of trying to make Barbara as comfortable as possible. Her heavy head was

uncomfortable to hold, but I counted it a privilege to care for her, and as I left at the end of my shift I committed her to God, believing she would die overnight.

Philip was waiting outside in the car to take me home at the end of a long day. As I belted up, the pain of the day overwhelmed me, and in a gush of emotions and words I poured out my heart to my totally unprepared husband.

“Why does God allow babies to be born like Barbara? What has she ever done to deserve it? Surely the midwife was right to be angry with God? She’s so bad, her own mother can’t even bear to look at her! It’s just not fair!”

Long into the night we tried to make sense of the theology of suffering. All the usual Scripture verses seemed weak and unconvincing in the light of the baby that I’d held in my arms that day. The fact that God is sovereign, or the truth that God’s ways are not our ways (see Isaiah 55:8), did not easily drop from knowledge to understanding. My heart seemed very far from my head as I tried to sleep.

When I arrived for work the next day I was amazed at the sight of night staff in the cubicle at the end of the ward. It could only mean one thing: Barbara had made it through the night! For the next five days we were together all of my working hours. In those precious days I would sing to her of Heaven, and tell her of the wonderful Saviour who would be waiting for her. And even if she hadn’t a clue what I was talking about, I went ahead and told her about the glorious new body she would receive. There were times I felt we were visited by Heaven in that room, especially as I rocked her when she was distressed. Peace would descend, and in those moments I knew God loved her, even if I couldn’t work out the theology.

The following Saturday my shift started at noon.

Prologue

“Quick! Hold Barbara while I change her sheet. Her mother has changed her mind and wants to see her, but she’s going fast. I hope they make it in time.”

The midwife carefully placed Barbara in my arms, and as I kissed her forehead I knew she really was dying this time. Before the sheet was tucked into the small cot, Barbara was in the place I had sung to her about so often on the previous days. She was so brave. So beautiful. And now – so perfect.

Unfortunately her mother only ever held her after she had died.

Later, when the family left that sad little room, the midwife explained that they never let a baby go to the morgue accompanied only by porters. The last act of care for any dead baby was for the little one to be carried from the unit by a member of the nursing staff. Her tone was now very different to that of the previous Sunday, as she had watched me care for Barbara all week.

“I think it’s too much to ask of a student midwife,” she said, “but it should be for you to decide. I will go if you prefer.”

There was no decision to make. It would be my last demonstration of love for this brave little girl.

I sat in the passenger seat of the porter’s van as we crossed the large hospital site to the morgue. Barbara was all wrapped up in my arms, just as if she was sleeping. There was no conversation. I wondered if maybe the porter was a daddy, and this would undoubtedly be the worst job he would have to do that day. The mortuary attendant was waiting for us, his hand holding open a large door.

“Middle shelf,” he said, with no apparent hint of feeling. “Take your blanket back with you.”

“Oh, no,” I replied quickly, as I carefully placed her

deformed little body on the metal shelf, "it's much too cold in here."

Neither man responded to the foolish suggestion of the young nurse. Perhaps it didn't sound so foolish after all, as the door clanked shut.

Back in the unit I threw myself into the busyness of my work, my life forever touched by the six-day struggle of one little girl. As I settled down to sleep that night I gently stroked my tummy. "Well, little one, at least I know *you* will never be born like Barbara. God will take care of you. Your mummy and daddy love God and He would never let anything bad happen to you. Of that I am sure."

1

Cheryl

“What’s this? Are we going home the long way?”

I asked, as our bright orange Volkswagen beetle turned left out of the church car park instead of right.

“I think it’s about time we showed this baby who is boss!” my husband chuckled. “Perhaps a long walk will help the little miss or master to make a speedier entrance.”

Philip, usually much more patient than I, had started to tire of hearing those annoying words: “No sign of that baby yet?” As if we could do anything about it! Besides which, our own excitement was also hard to contain. This welcome addition to our lives couldn’t come soon enough, especially as my due date had already passed one week earlier.

The Antrim coast road looked particularly beautiful that evening. The sun was still high and the clear blue sky merged seamlessly into the glassy sea, obscuring the distant horizon. The sight of sailing boats moving on the water was a surprising treat, as there didn’t appear to be even a breeze. The drive was lovely and our time together was intimate as we shared the inmost things of our hearts. Soon our lives would change with the arrival of a longed-for baby. For this little time left we could enjoy each other’s company undisturbed.

We walked far into the forest before an alarming thought hit me. What if this long walk *did* have the desired

effect? What if I went into labour here? How would Philip get me back to the car, never mind the extra miles to the hospital? I don't know if it was the descending chill in the air, or the slight concern about being in the wrong place at the wrong time that turned us back to the car, but turn we did and home we headed. The long walk in the beautiful forest proved enjoyable, but nothing more, and as we retired for the night our precious bundle was still secure in her comfortable hidey-hole. Sleep came easily as we rested happy in the knowledge that our lives and our baby were in the centre of God's will. After all, not a day had passed but we had placed both into the Lord's hands.

Our next car journey together was only two days later. The scenery on the way was completely different from the beautiful coast road. This time we travelled through a rather bleak and battered Belfast, in the days when armed soldiers still patrolled our streets. The maternity hospital was on the then infamous Falls Road, and while many still feared that notorious area, I was used to its environs, having worked at the "Royal" site since I was only seventeen.

Anyway, I was just glad that at last the obstetrician had decided to intervene, as this baby was oblivious to the fact that she was keeping a lot of people waiting! Philip was entering the unknown. I, on the other hand, as a now-qualified midwife, knew exactly what lay ahead. I sometimes wonder who was better off.

After seven and a half hours' labour, on 2 August 1979 at 1.26 a.m., a small dark-haired midwife announced in her broad Scottish accent: "It's a little lassie! You have a bonnie wee daughter!"

Our hearts seemed to explode with joy as our little girl was lifted into the air for us to catch our first glimpse.

As I held her close, my heart flooded with praise to the Saviour who had brought such happiness into our lives.

A couple of minutes later she was handed over to Philip, all wrapped up in a warm green towel, her little face wrinkled and her hair still matted. Surely there could not have been a more beautiful sight as she lay quietly in her proud daddy's arms with her tiny, still-blue hands clasped under her chin.

Trying out her name for the first time, Philip softly kissed her cheek.

"Cheryl," he whispered, "it suits you so well, for you are surely our little 'darling'."

If ever a man looked besotted by a baby, it was that man, that day!

By 3 a.m., with Daddy packed off home, Cheryl and I settled down for a short but peaceful sleep after our tiring labour experience. As I looked across the room I could hardly believe she was mine. The little kicks I had felt for the past months now had a face, and for sure my life would never be the same again. Never before had I felt so complete. Drifting off to sleep I was oblivious to what lay ahead.

Those days in hospital were a lovely time of "getting-to-know-you" that preceded a wonderful homecoming. The flat appeared brighter than usual that day, and a large bouquet of summer flowers filled the room with their fresh fragrance. It was Granny's way of welcoming home her own daughter and her first grandchild. The fuss that one tiny little baby could bring to a home was enormous, and we were only too pleased to involve all the family. Presents seemed to flood in, and I felt that Cheryl must surely have the biggest wardrobe in Ulster, incorporating every frill and flounce imaginable. The hallway to our flat

constantly echoed to the sound of happy conversation as night after night friends made their way to welcome the most beautiful addition to our family.

What is it about a newborn baby that creates such emotion? Perhaps it is the sight of perfection in miniature: the tiny toes and fingers displaying even smaller nails; the little pug nose shadowing the sweetest of rosebud lips; too much wrinkled skin, so soft that you can't stop yourself from caressing it. Or maybe it is the matchless expressions of innocence that cross her beautiful face as she sleeps, yawns, or stretches in readiness for another feed. Maybe the smell of baby powder mixed with their utter dependence on you for their every need acts as some kind of a catalyst deep within your being. I don't know. I only know that she brought out something in me that I could never have imagined, and am not eloquent enough to describe.

The huge privilege of delivering around forty babies had been a tremendous experience, mixing anxiety, skill and sheer delight. To participate in such a special moment in the lives of others was indeed precious – yet it paled into insignificance when compared to having this one baby of my own.

In a moment of time she had captured my heart.

My midwifery experience allowed me to avoid many of the concerns of a new mother. Handling Cheryl for whatever reason, be it bathing, dressing or feeding, was never fraught with anxiety. It was pure delight. And so I quickly relaxed into the role of motherhood. Or so I thought.

Cheryl being an August baby allowed us to enjoy sunny days and long summer evenings. They were the perfect opportunity for getting out the rather large and

grand pram for leisurely walks, and for showing baby off. On one such day I decided Cheryl and I would walk the mile or so to our local bank to open a savings account for her, as people had been so generous with their gifts. Cheryl had just finished feeding and I knew we would have plenty of time to get there and back before she woke up. So up the long hilly road we headed on a beautiful sunny afternoon. Cheryl was still sleeping when we reached the bank, and I parked her pram right outside the door and joined the long queue.

The time passed fairly quickly as I chatted with some of the people I knew. After handing over the completed form and money, I placed the new savings passbook into my handbag and set off for home. The return journey was all the quicker because it was downhill. Then, as I put my hand on the door of the entrance hallway, I suddenly identified the nagging little doubt that had bothered me all the way home.

I had left the baby outside the bank!

Sheer panic engulfed me as I turned on my heel to run all the way back. All kinds of thoughts rushed across my mind. How could I have been so stupid? Would she still be there? Maybe someone had kidnapped her. Or she might be crying and someone would have called the police. Social services would take her away from me. I wasn't fit to be a mother! Why, oh why, did Philip have to be out? The car could get me there quicker.

By this time sweat was mingled with my tears as I sobbed in time with my frantic paces. Only once had I been called upon to make up the cross-country team in school, but on this day I think I could have been picked for the Olympics! What a sight I must have looked and sounded: by the time I reached the half-way point I was wheezing like the asthmatic I was. Barely able to take

another breath, there was no time to stop to look for a hankie or an inhaler.

"Please, God, please let her be safe!" I cried, all the way to the bank.

Before crossing the road at the shops I could see her brown pram in the distance, but it brought me no comfort. What if the pram were empty? How could I tell Philip I had left his little daughter all on her own among strangers? I was a sobbing mess, bumping into people as I tried one last sprint to reach the pram. Momentarily, I was afraid to look inside, but in an instant the fear was replaced by relief.

Cheryl was still fast asleep.

Our beautiful little daughter was totally unaware of the dreadful mistake her mother had just made. With a very wet hankie in one hand and holding tightly to my precious cargo with the other I made my way home yet again... exhausted.

It was an important lesson in the folly of over-confidence, and a realization that this little one was going to need more than me to look out for her.

"Thank you, God."