**My Search for Heaven**

**Finally this legendary TV interviewer gets the answers to a question she's wanted to ask.**

**When I left 20/20 I signed up to do four or five specials a year. I didn't want to just focus on show-business personalities or big newsmakers. I was looking for subjects with broader interests, ideas and concepts that were important to people on the deepest personal level. I read that 83 percent of Americans believe in heaven. *Wow,* I thought*, that would make a very interesting show.* To think that in a country as diverse as ours, 83 percent share this one powerful belief. I wanted to know more.**

**We spent a year on the project and I must say I learned a breathtaking amount of information. We spoke to people from many different religious backgrounds, everyone from Teed Haggard, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, to Maria Shriver, a Catholic, who's written a book about discussing heaven with your children. I learned about the Muslim view of heaven, which is surprisingly earthly -- luxurious banquets -- and the Buddhists' view that there are various stages of heaven. What almost every religion has in common is the need to feel that life doesn't end here. There is something beyond. Something better and beautiful.**

**Growing up, I had very little religious education. Our family was Jewish, but not particularly observant. And yet, in the public schools of Brookline, Massachusetts, I sang Christmas carols, which I still love (my favorite is "O, Holy Night," although I can't reach the high notes), and I knew the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." All these years later, those words have meaning to me. And, yes, I still pray. Especially on airplanes. And I'm on airplanes a lot.**

**But what about heaven? Father Theodore McCarrick, the cardinal from Washington, D.C., told me, "This life is not what we're made for. We're made for heaven. We're made for the future."**

**"Do you mean that all these years on earth are only to get to the next place?"**

**"Absolutely," he said.**

**Speaking for the Jewish faith, Rabbi Neil Gillman stated: "I think that the purpose of life is to live a decent life. You do it for its own sake, not to get a reward."**

**One of the most fascinating glimpses of heaven came from a woman who'd had a near-death experience. Deb Foster, a 42-year-old Californian, was clinically dead for four minutes. But she was somewhere else, somewhere utterly incredible and as real as any place she'd ever known. "I was on a staircase that went as high up into the sky as you can imagine. The sky was the most incredible color of blue. There were dogs and cats going up and down the staircase and they were gleeful. There was the light above, which I could look toward. I was in this place of incredible peace."**

**She brought up a very pressing issue for us pet owners (I can't imagine heaven without my dog, Cha Cha!): Are there pets in heaven? Anthony DeStefano, author of A Travel Guide to Heaven, was clear on that point. "Why not?" he said. "God can do anything he wants."**

**No matter what religion, people want to know that there is more to life than what's here on earth. That they will be reunited with their loved ones and that any suffering they've had here on earth is over. It is a place of peace and understanding that will last for all eternity, of union with God. That's what heaven is for. That's the promise of faith.**

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***(Written by Barbara Walters, as it appeared in the December, 2005 issue of Guideposts magazine, starting on page 70.)***