



DRBAGLEY

THE
FOUNTAIN
MIST

*A short story about a dry and dusty life
finding refreshing joy*

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THE FOUNTAIN MIST

A short story about a dry and dusty life finding refreshing joy

By

Dr. Steven D. Bagley

Written for the 5th Anniversary of Crown Valley Vineyard

THE FOUNTAIN MIST

Introduction

This is a 'trueish' story... I chose to use a made up word 'trueish' because you will soon realize the story will be told in a metaphor. It comes from my personal experience after years of being a Christian and then serving as a pastor in five churches the routine of obedience had dried up my soul, my passion had evaporated leaving me with a spirit of clay that crumbled because there was no moisture left to hold it together. I was questioning if I had had drunk from the spring of living water in the first place. I never noticed this dryness had occurred, never realized my soul needed to be hydrated or my heart would no longer be able to circulate the slug left in my arteries where the living water of love was suppose to combine with my blood to bring life and purpose to every part of me.

So if you keep reading you will understand I was in trouble but didn't know it. I needed to be brought back to life and rediscover God wanted me to recapture a simpler faith, that of a child, so I could put my faith into action.

This metaphor is really written for an adult male reader (if there are any of them left out there). Hopefully others might discover it and find it enjoyable, along with provoking a new perspective or thought.

So now it is time to enter into scene one; get ready here comes the fountain mist.

Chapter 1

Refreshing Moment

I had stayed at a distance, but a gentle breeze was still able to carry the fountain's mist to where I stood. It felt so refreshing on my face for a brief moment before the mist evaporated. My daily routine had the same effect on any joy that came my way. It only took seconds to evaporate and return me to the parched dryness that had become the ecological zone where I lived my life. I took a deep breath of freshly moistened air and walked back to my office.

My schedule took me by the fountain later in the week. The spray was dazzling in the sunlight. I caught myself mesmerized by the dancing droplets. As the wind shifted, the spray covered me. My skin and hair glistened. I took a deep breath of the air washed with dewdrops. My leather-like lungs seemed to soften. The drought in my life had hardened

my awareness. A thought ran through my mind: “Could just breathing in this moisture heal everything?” But thinking it was too late—the damage already done—I moved on to complete my scheduled plans.

I guess I was curious. There wasn't any other reason that took me back, but here I was walking around the fountain as if I were in search of the best observation point. That's when I noticed the children! They were splashing each other as they played in the pool at the base of the fountain. My first urge was to join them. My mind resisted the idea with its adult rationale. As I stood, keeping my distance, with the spray drifting in and out of my eyes, I thought I saw one of the children wading toward me. It seemed, through the cloudy mist, as he stepped out of the pool to stand with me, that he had become an adult. I was stunned and not sure I believed

my eyes. His words were gentle. His eyes caring. He greeted me and asked my name. We spoke for a few minutes, and then I noticed my watch. I excused myself, and after taking a final deep refreshing breath of moist air, I went back to face what was next expected of me.

I found myself replaying my mist experiences over and over, looking for a rational way to explain my feeling of refreshment in the context of my dry, dusty reality. My mind kept running into a wall of doubt. The mist must have blurred my perception of those events, or worse, I was hallucinating because I had reached that critical point where one's brain cells misfire due to dehydration. I would quickly jump to the same conclusion no matter which line of thinking I started with; I was being deceived one way or another. That triggered me into repeating my childhood vow that I had hoped would

protect me and provide a slight bit of personal comfort and security. The vow was really a pep talk with a mandate in defensive adult words: “You’re not stupid; figure it out! Don’t let them fool you again. You can only trust yourself!”

I stayed away from the fountain for weeks, but on an extremely dusty hot day, I found myself walking around the fountain watching my footprints as I walked close to the fountain’s wall. I was stepping in and out of the collected moisture on the ground. For a moment I said to myself almost out loud, “See there is evidence that I’m not crazy!” The volume of my inner voice dropped away as I watched my footprints disappear in the heat.

In my dejection I sat down on the wall surrounding the pool and looked in the other direction out over the desert

landscape I called home, my own reality. My mind drifted from one dried up memory to another.

I was startled back into the present as water hit the back of my head and neck, with more flying past my ears.

“If you’re going to sit there, you’re going to get wet!”

It was a child’s voice, playfully telling me the truth. I was sitting in the splash zone.

As I turned to face my gleeful opponent, it seemed like a wave of water hit me from head to waist. It took my breath away.

As I drew in air to give voice to my protest for this injustice, I stood up and turned to face my enemy. Three smiling faces looked back at me. His playmates had come to join in the fun.

Before I could launch my protest, I was wet from head to toe. I was defenseless. Not having been caught off guard for over 30 years, I was like a deer in the headlights.

The waves of water keep coming. I finally lifted my arms in surrender. Their laughter turned to shrieks of joy!

As a smile broke across my wet, leathery lips, I honored the victory and slowly turned all the way around while the three made sure I was completely wet to the skin.

I didn't know what I was feeling, because I had never experienced such a complete drenching of playful attention in my life. Then one of my captors spoke, "Wanna splash with us?"

Before I could think of how to phrase a response to such an

inviting offer, the kid in the middle added, "There's only one rule." The third one chimed in, "Yea, you gotta take off your shoes." In a clear act of leadership, the first one stepped toward me and took on as serious a look and posture as a six year-old could. He even lowered his voice and said, as firmly as he could, "Absolutely, no shoes!"

His expression changed instantly into a joyous smile. With a twinkle in his eye, he tossed back his head and yelled as loud as he could, "THIS IS HOLY WATER!!!"

All three jumped up and down, splashing me some more with their childish exuberance and shouting in unison, "HOLY WATER! HOLY WATER! HOLY WATER!"

Then a round of splashing spontaneously began with others in the pool joining in. The sound and sight of joy vibrated

probably for miles as twelve or more children at full throttle moved in and around each other. There was no possible way for me to get an accurate count. Too much splashing, too much movement, too many voices. I wanted to freeze the picture before me, so I could capture all that was going on, but that would have been impossible. It had captured me.

That picture imprinted on my heart and mind. These children had found the freedom to be themselves, enjoy life together and, in a very literal fashion, shower each other with love. As I walked away from the pool, I listened to my feet making the wet squishy noise inside my shoes. It was refreshingly delightful.

THE FOUNTAIN MIST

Chapter 2

My Souls & Laces

My neighbor detected the odd sound being emitted as I squished my way, step by step, toward my house. The question on his face spoke so loudly that I stopped to answer it. "I got too close to the fountain and was drenched." My explanation didn't reduce the tension in his face; instead it sent his nervous system into overload. His forehead was now twitching, and it was obvious more questions were popping in his brain. It was like watching a silent movie with absolutely no sound. My past attempts at communication with this neighbor had always been labor some. I decided to put my energy into wringing out my socks and absorbing every drop of joy from my surprising experience.

Walking home from the fountain, one thought had caused me a lot of discomfort: "I'm sure my wingtips are ruined!"

The next morning I was totally expecting to find the leather of my shoes to be dried out, hard, and inflexible. I had placed them upside down on the air vent. As I picked up the first of my wingtips, I found it dry to the touch, but the leather was soft and supple. Disbelief drove my curiosity. How would my wingtips feel on my feet? Surely they would squeak with each step.

I tied the laces as quickly as I could. As I stood I rocked back and forth, heels and toes, heels and toes. No sound!

After years of wanting the best, I had gone all out by ordering my custommade shoes. It had taken me three trips to the store to get the fitting right. I waited over a month before they were delivered. Even though, when it was all over, I had paid 520% more than my previous pair of shoes, I still defended my purchase as one of my best.

Now I was overjoyed! My wingtips weren't ruined. They fit better than they ever did! It seemed like I was wearing house slippers or "foot gloves." I really couldn't believe my feet!

I danced around the room in celebration! Then my left shin found the corner of the coffee table and it was clear my coordination hadn't improved—only my shoes. I limped to the closest chair and sat down in pain, but I was still celebrating.

What no one else knew was the secret my wingtips concealed. These perfectly polished shoes never missed a night of being reshaped by the shoetrees, which had arrived in place when the shoes were delivered. My ritual included powdering the inside of each shoe thoroughly, polishing the left and then the right, placing the shoetrees in the right and then the left, and then finally setting them on a velvet cloth which could be

folded back over them. Of course, no one had ever witnessed this ceremony.

The reason this religious tradition took place only in private was because of the uncontrollable foot odor that had embarrassed me since my youth.

As a teen, I was forced to humiliate myself twice in front of medical doctors, and neither experience had provided any helpful solution. The second doctor, a specialist, had publicly declared that my problem was the most severe he had seen. Then, with a slight laugh, he corrected himself, "To be completely accurate, your problem is the worst case of foot odor I have ever smelled!" He never saw how deeply his attempt at humor had hurt me.

My worst fear was realized. My utter humiliation was now

documented and public. I vowed never to allow myself to be exposed again in my life. I wouldn't allow anyone else to smell the infected, rotten dead skin I now hid in my wingtips. I had even kept my vow while going through the shoe fitting process by convincing the salesman that the wingtips were for my father who lived out of the country. The salesman showed me how to do the measuring and take the foot impressions. To make sure I measured my own feet correctly, I went back a second time and lied about losing the first molds so I could do it twice to reassure myself that I knew how to get it right. There was an extra charge for the second mold kit, but it was worth it to me. Keeping my vow secret was important, very important! After the anxiety of being discovered was over, I was proud of my deceptive accomplishment.

When I arrived at work wearing my “splashed and polished”

shoes, the receptionist commented, "You sure are in a good mood." I wanted to blurt out my both stories, the one about my shoes and the other describing my experience at the fountain, so she would understand why I was so happy, but I repressed my impulse. I recalled a poster I saw hanging on the wall at the medical specialist's office. I had noticed it because I thought it was totally sarcastic. Now I was hearing myself quote the poster out loud with enough emotion for the receptionist to mistake the words for my own. "Happy feet - happy face. Take care of your toes and they will help you cross the finish line." She bought it. I smiled, winked, clicking my heels together, and walked toward my office.

As I passed my coworkers in the hallway, I was sure they admired my supple, newly polished wingtips. I smiled again, very pleased with myself.

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Chapter 3

Taking the Plunge

It had been a full week since my last visit to the fountain, but this time I stood watching the spray dance with the sunlight as I teetered on a tight rope. A decision was facing me: When would I jump into the fun of splashing everyone with “Holy Water?” My fears about getting wet were gone. My past experience proved my shoes wouldn’t be ruined even if I jumped in all laced up. My vow was solidly in place. I wasn’t taking off my shoes for anybody. And now, I reasoned, I really didn’t have to. They would be fine, in fact, they may even get better, although I didn’t believe “better” was possible. Their shine and feel brought me so much pride it was hard to contain.

For a moment I stood swaying with the misty breeze listening to frolicking children playing near the center of the pool. It

was intoxicating. The refreshing touch of the mist only left me wanting more.

Three quick steps launched me into the air! As I leaped over the wall, I heard someone yell, “Incoming!!” Water went everywhere! Laughter joined it. Fifteen to twenty of my newfound playmates took the volume up a notch as they welcomed me with a continuous shower.

My joy was unspeakable! My enthusiasm was endless! I felt alive like never before! The sense of release, free to be, enjoy, and to be enjoyed was marvelous! In the middle of this delight we all heard the cry of pain. The children froze in their tracks as the painful cry faded in the air. In my exuberance I continued splashing and laughing, but only for a few seconds. It was clear that someone’s pain was more important than continuing to celebrate my arrival.

A tender small voice broke the silence. "Who was hurt?" An empathetic voice simply spoke the victim's name, "Sherry." The first voice spoke again, and this time I recognized it as belonging to the leader of the gang who first drenched me. Even more tenderly he asked, "What happened and how badly hurt is she?" With two others supporting her, Sherry lifted her left foot out of the water. The injury was obvious. There was an indented impression along the edge of her small foot running up and over her little toe. The leader knelt down to take a closer look. He shook his head and said, "It looks like it's broken." In an effort to prepare Sherry he continued, "It will probably be very swollen and turn black and blue. Don't be afraid; we'll take care of you." With one gesture, two of the bigger kids helped him pick her up and carry her to the fountain wall so she could sit down.

As he waded back through the water to the group, you could

hear him saying, "Shoes, someone is wearing shoes."

It was only then I realized I was still as tall as I had been on the other side of the wall. I was in the fountain, wet head to toe, but I hadn't shrunk to the height of all the others I stood with. The leader looked up at me with sadness in his eyes and asked the question he already knew the answer to, "Are you wearing shoes?" I managed a very faint but clear, "Yes." I felt so bad in that moment, but it was different from the ugly feelings of shame and guilt I had carried around for years. I was heartbroken that I caused Sherry so much pain. I lifted one shoe out of the water for all to see. Most looked at my wet wingtip, then into my eyes with compassionate disappointment. Then averting their eyes, they walked away in their own sense of sadness. Only the leader remained behind. We stood there together, in silence.

After what seemed an eternity, he offered me his hand and led me over to the wall. We sat side by side. Leaning forward, hands folded, with his elbows resting on his knees while looking straight ahead, he began talking.

“Do you remember what I told you on the first day we met?”

Not waiting for my answer he continued, “I told you shoes weren’t allowed in the fountain, and now you know why. But there’s another reason. You’ve noticed by now that you’re still adult size. That’s because you wore your adult shoes into the pool. You see, people buy shoes with money they earn. You must have spent a lot on those wingtips. I bet you felt pretty good about yourself when you first put them on, kind of like getting a trophy for your accomplishments in being a responsible adult. In the pool we return to just being kids. It’s not what we bring to the pool; it’s what the water brings to

us. But in your case there's more, isn't there?" His question hung in the air. I wasn't sure where he was going, but I was sure I didn't want him to go any further.

His words were kind but firm and direct, "You're hiding something! I don't know what it is, but hiding it means it will only get worse and never have a chance of getting better."

Now I was mad. "Nobody can make it BETTER!" My parents gave up and the doctors didn't even try." My next words came through clenched teeth. "Do you have any idea how many painful remedies I used, always wishing the next one would work and being disappointed over and over?" He interrupted my ranting simply by lifting his hand and pointing down the wall at one of the children who was leaving the pool. All he said was, "Watch."

The girl he had pointed out skipped over to the wall and sat down. As she lifted her feet from the water, she started to spin around so she could slip into her shoes and be on her way in her adult life. As she rediscovered her mature body, the consequences of living with a crippling disease were evident. Slowly she found her leg brace. With painful contortions, she was able to secure it to her foot and leg. It took her some effort to locate her shoes and cane. She had to position herself just right before she made the heroic effort to stand up. Once upright and balanced, she slowly moved away from the pool. After a few steps she turned back and called out, "Goodbye!" The radiance of her smile stood out against the backdrop of her pain-filled existence. It was dazzling!

I was still looking in her direction when I heard the leader's voice. "Her pain is out there for everybody to see. She couldn't

hide it, even if she tried.” He reached out and put his small childlike hand on my knee as his words flowed out of years of wisdom. “I know I am asking you to be more vulnerable than you have ever thought of being. I know it frightens you. You’ve worked so hard to keep your secrets. But I also know it is time to stop hiding.”

I didn’t know what to say. How could he have known so much about me from our brief encounters? He let the silence amplify his words.

“If you want to, I will meet you here early tomorrow morning, when no one else will be around. It will just be you and me. If you want to untie your shoelaces and strip off your socks, we can wade a bit before the rest of the world wakes up.” He paused, then added, “I can be here at five thirty.” He got up and waded over to some of the other boys sitting in the water

quietly talking with their heads bowed, something I had never seen before.

I stood up, stepped over the fountain wall, and started to make my way home. Just before I turned the corner, I looked back to see the leader stand up and wave goodbye to me. I knew I wouldn't sleep tonight. I was facing an even bigger decision now I'd made that first jump.

THE FOUNTAIN MIST

Chapter 4

The Surrender Flag

If I slept that night it was only for brief moments, punctuated by my mind replaying video clips of my actions, feelings, and a new dilemma.

Even though I knew Billy was really an adult, his child persona was indelibly etched into my mind, so when I played back his explanation, it was as if a six year-old was the wisest person on the planet. He was telling me things I had never heard and never even thought to ask about. Now, because of Billy, I was faced with a life changing decision that I intuitively understood would be the most important of my life, no matter how long I would live.

All of a sudden I knew I had to be there at five thirty to meet Billy. My embarrassment and shame were overcome by the

childlike honesty and joy I had experienced. If removing my shoes and socks would give me a second chance at rediscovering that inexpressible childlike joy, then I couldn't say no—I had to surrender and say yes.

I think William was surprised to find me sitting on the fountain wall waiting for him to arrive rather than the other way around. Due to the pre-dawn light, I wasn't able to make out his facial expression until he was only 20 feet away. He was grinning from ear to ear. His excitement carried through in his voice, "I am really glad to see you here!" Then his voice and expression dropped to a very serious tone. His words were brief and went directly to the point of our early morning meeting, "Let's get to it."

He sat down next to me, patted my knee as if to offer reassurance and support, then leaned over and started

untying his shoes. I followed his lead. I removed my right shoe first, as my ritual pattern dictated. Then I removed my left shoe, followed by my right sock which I folded once and tucked inside my right shoe. Finally, I removed my left sock, and folding it once, tucked it inside my left shoe.

Both of us were sitting there barefoot with our backs to the fountain. I was sure William was probably holding his breath to protect his lungs from taking in a whiff of my foot odor. I was preparing to apologize to him, but he spoke first. I still was not used to hearing his baritone voice. He said, "Sorry about the smell. I have had a real problem with my feet since I was a teenager." I was so startled by his confession I almost laughed out loud. "Are you OK?" he asked. I nodded my head, which prompted him to give me a gentle nudge and say, "Let's go."

We both turned around and swung our feet over the wall. He went right. I went left. With a precision as if we had practiced it over and over, we lowered out feet in unison into the water. I didn't feel anything change, but when I looked over, it was Billy sitting beside me, not William. He had recaptured his six year-old voice and said, "Young looks good on you. Are you ready to explore a bit?" He was up and had already taken two or three steps. I bounced off the wall and caught up with him.

As we waded around, I investigated the new length of my arms and legs. Noticing, Billy said, "You can't walk as fast as you used to." And then, with the glee that only a six year-old has, he started jumping and splashing and yelling, "But who cares!"

Time wasn't an issue, and I have no idea how long we ran, jumped, splashed, fell backwards, crawled around, played like

motorboats and frogs. I was having the time of my life!

We were both laughing so hard we could hardly stand up when Billy gave me a big hug. I hugged him back. I wanted him to know how much I owed him and wanted to thank him. Still hugging me he whispered in my ear, "I'm glad you're a kid again. Because that means you are ready to be with someone who is really special." He let go of me and grabbed my hand and said, "He's the one who filled the fountain with 'Holy Water!'"

In his exuberance, Billy dragged me over to this adult man who was sitting on the wall with his feet in the water. We came to a stop right in front of him, where we could reach out and actually touch him. Billy was so excited that he was actually dancing around. With an outstretched arm the man gestured to Billy to come closer. Billy gave him a hug and

immediately relaxed and found a seat on the wall right next to him. The fact Billy was soaking wet didn't even faze him. Billy started to introduce me, "This is..." But the man interrupted him, "Hi, David, I have been waiting to talk to you for quite some time."

I was confused. How did he know my name? His voice and eyes were so warm and comforting that I wasn't scared. In fact, I was so comfortable being there with Billy and him, I just said what was on my mind. "If you're still adult size you must be wearing shoes!" Billy grinned and the man laughed and said, "So you think I am wearing shoes. I guess I will have to show you my feet, so you can see for yourself." With that, he pulled both of his feet out of the water.

Billy couldn't keep still. "See, no shoes!" he said. The man gently squeezed Billy's knee. "Come on, let David make his

own discoveries.” Then turning back to me, he asked, “Well, David, what do you see?” I put my hands on my hips and agreed with Billy. “He’s right; no shoes.” When I noticed he had two red marks, one on each foot, my childhood curiosity took over. I asked him, “Do those hurt? Did somebody step on your feet in the fountain?” He smiled slightly and his eyes showed he accepted my sense of compassion for his pain. “Why don’t you sit down on the other side of me, and I will tell you a whole story.” Billy broke in again “Cool, it’s a great story! I love hearing it!” The man looked right at me and paused. “David, this story is about the one who loves you most.”

What Jesus Said About

Being a Child

*At about the same time, the disciples came to Jesus asking,
“Who gets the highest rank in God’s kingdom?”*

*For an answer, Jesus called over a child, whom he stood in the
middle of the room and said, “I’m telling you, once and for all,
that unless you return to square one and start over like
children, you’re not even going to get a look at the kingdom,
let alone get in. Whoever becomes simple and elemental
again, like this child, will rank high in God’s kingdom.
What’s more, when you receive the childlike on my account,
it’s the same as receiving me.”*

Matthew 18:1-5

The Message

One day children were brought to Jesus in the hope that he would lay hands on them and pray over them. The disciples shooed them off. But Jesus intervened: “Let the children alone, don’t prevent them from coming to me. God’s kingdom is made up of people like these.”

Matthew 19:13-14

The Message

THE FOUNTAIN MIST

Playing in the fountain of

“Holy Water”

Is the purest form of worship

for

children rejoicing in

the presence of their Father God.

Written by

Dr. Steven D. Bagley

For the 5th Anniversary of

Crown Valley Vineyard

Steve@drbagley.com