

Rising Out of the Miry Clay

Once, when I was a young teen, a line of thunderheads came through and belched enough rain on my street to float a Buick. Before the tornado sirens could wind down, my best friend Ray was at my stoop ranting about some six foot wall of rushing water he'd seen in the local drainage ditch. Apparently it'd thrown his epinephrine levels into a tizzy. I could tell he had one of his crazy plans brewing. Knowing Ray, he wouldn't be dissuaded. It didn't matter that the peak water sports season was long past, it being nigh onto February and all.

We snuck out and hit the streets under the cover of the barking thunder. The poor gutters gurgled and gulped what little they could before sending the rest rippling on down the street. We splashed along shivering in the cold, cringing with each new flash of lightning. Something was telling me I shouldn't be listening to Ray again, even before I heard the roar of the muddy torrent ahead.

One look at that overwhelmed concrete canal justified all my apprehension. My well honed macho exterior imploded into its gooey center. "I ain't for playing no frozen Tidy Bowl man!" I quipped from between clattering teeth.

"What's wrong," Ray retorted, "You scared?"

With that I bristled. He and I both knew those were fighting words in our neck of the woods. I was about to open up a can and fix him a knuckle sandwich when thankfully, for one of us, he changed the subject. Rattling off his idea, he finished by nodding towards a big log swirling around in a little eddy near a bridge pylon.

"Alright Duck lip," I jabbed back, "How are we going to get under that bridge with the waves scuffing its underside and all?"

"The shear speed of the rushing water will pop us right on out the backside dummy," he reasoned, adding under his breath, "One way or another."

I hoped he was right, because it was *on* now. I wasn't going to have anybody calling me a chicken. We scaled the chain link fence, and on the count of three, leapt onto the log. There was a splash and two loud gasp as we each contemplated the biting chill of that frothing water. Ray kicked us free of the swirl and immediately we were whisk underneath the bridge and spit out on the other side, just like he'd predicted!

We zipped on down that concrete tube at breakneck speed for miles, ducking one overpass after another. There were brief stints we might have actually enjoyed ourselves, if our legs wouldn't have been so painfully numb. All hopes of that suddenly ended when the concrete unceremoniously ended. We were flushed out into a deep mud pit, spun around backwards, and eased off into a creek where wild undergrowth lined the ragged shores.

By now the afternoon had grown increasingly dim. I could barely make out the soiled diaper that floated up against my neck, or the old tires and other assorted items strewn along the spooky banks. Everything seemed to be eerily veiled in dark shadows. Ray's eyes bugged as a rusty old washing machine bobbed by.

Soon our feet began to scrape the miry bottom and somehow we crawled out onto the bank, where we lay shivering for long minutes waiting for the feeling to return to our legs. Fueled by a strong desire to one day see our fourteenth birthdays, we hacked through the dense brush and clawed up the muddy levee. A quiet little neighborhood loomed above, oblivious to idiots in their midst. I didn't know where we were, but it had to be better than where we'd just been. Ray forced his trademark grin, but I knew deep down he was just as happy as me to be alive.

Maybe you've made some bad decisions too; taken some Duck lipped advice and leapt off into a ditch in your life? Maybe you're feeling helpless and cold, floating through the valley of the shadow of death, spiraling out of control into an ever increasing darkness? I want to encourage you today. There is a way home.

Jesus longs to pull you out of the miry clay and to set your feet upon solid ground. He offers you a warm robe of righteousness. Don't be content to just grow numb in those cold filthy rags you've clothed yourself in. Listen to me. Reach out to Jesus. (*He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.* **Psalms 40:2** KJV)

But anyway- There will always be thunderheads somewhere on the horizon, but if you'll trust the Lord and be determined to build your house upon the Rock, you'll stand strong. Ray was right about some things. Each of us will be spit out the backside of this bridge called life, one way or another. I hope when your day comes you'll find yourself in an eternally nice neighborhood.

-Guy Sheffield 6-01-07