

10th July 2020

Mud

“La nostalgie de la boue!”

“Longing to be back in the mud.”

Émile Augier, spoken by Montrichard in ‘Le Mariage d’Olympe’

Like Montrichard in Augier’s 19th century play, there are times when my “longing to be back in the mud” is quite overwhelming.

In 1972, before finishing my theology degree, I spent three months in the USA as a Camp Counsellor. The location was *Camp Vacamas*, a sprawling woodland site in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains, close to Bloomingdale, New Jersey. The camp had been running for several decades as an adjunct to on-going work with children from Newark NJ and New York’s Lower East Side. As part of these projects, they had the chance to go to camp for a three-week break, to build social skills and self-esteem, and have lots of fun. So, for three lots of three weeks, I was responsible for 7 children, aged 11 and 12, in one of the best summers of my life.

The Camp was built beside a lake which had a nature-trail round it. A co-counsellor and I had planned a nature walk with two groups of campers. But it had rained! When the day came, it was still raining heavily. So, we decided to abandon the walk ... and take 14 excited youngsters on a mud hike instead! The idea was to get as muddy as possible, not to bother about being careful – within H&S Guidelines, of course – but to look for as much mess as we could. We had a ball! Muddy pools and slippery slopes; rolling in dirt and plastering mud in our hair; a prize for the messiest T-shirt and muckiest boots. The kids *loved* it! There were no more worries about the familiar “Take care!”, “Stay clean!” and “Don’t go there!” instructions. They could be free to do what they wanted – mud and all.

And me? I was free too, being a child again, not worrying about presenting myself well, being responsible and acting as a mature adult. I got muddy too – much to the youngsters’ delight! And, oh, what fun it was!

Fifty years on, there are still times when I’m “longing to be back in the mud”, to find the freedom of the child in me that I hope I’ll never lose.

A prayer for today

Jesus said: “You will know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” Lord, help me to know the truth that I am a child of God, and that I can find freedom in you. Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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