

# The Water Cycle

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**When I was twelve years old, my dad evaporated. He'd been** sitting in his ratty recliner reading the newspaper. I was across the living room, cross-legged on our old corduroy couch. I looked up from my Fantastic Four and he was—how do I put it? He was somehow even less present—less there—than usual.

It started with his thinning, bark-brown hair—the same hair that I inherited. It grew wispier still as it wafted away. And it continued until his plaid sweater vest, pleated khakis, pair of socks, were empty. They all just deflated, laid out flat on the still-reclined lounge. His newspaper slumped like a crumpled pup tent over top.

To be fair, my dad was always kind of airy. He was perpetually distracted. He was prone to daydream. But this was different.

A moment later, he regrouped—re-formed as a fog in the air above his chair. Then, slowly but steadily, he drifted downward, and disappeared: sucked into the belly of the dehumidifier that ran year-round to keep the house from molding.

Late that afternoon, my mom came home. Despite my loud and tearful protests, she pulled the bucket from the dehumidifier. She walked it, sloshing, out to the garage and then dumped it unceremoniously down the throat of the utility sink.

And so my dad became a fully-integrated part of the Odsburg Municipal Sanitary Water System. I had learned all about this from Mrs. Wilkins in Science class. My father would now be undergoing filtration, chlorination, and fluoridation. Then he would be pumped into a reservoir, from whence he could flow to who-knows-where within the county, to be drunk, bathed in, used for washing clothes or cars or dishes, or even to fill a toilet. In any case, he'd be washed back into one drain or another, to repeat the process all over again.

Of course, there was another possibility: that he would escape. That he would break free of the open circuit that is the municipal water system. That he would become instead a part of the greater

Water Cycle—the one Mother Nature put into motion billions of years ago. We had learned about this, too.

Ways to make the transition are many and varied. They include, but are not limited to: running out of a garden hose and into the ground; becoming an outdoor puddle (as a byproduct of car-washing, lawn sprinkling, etc.); becoming an indoor puddle near a door or window, and then evaporating into the open air; finding oneself in a dog dish, and managing to be escorted outside as a trail of slobber; and the list goes on—and on and on. There are frankly too many possibilities to mention. Ultimately, by one means or another, my dad did make it out. I know because he came back to see me.

The first time, he was a wave on Lake Ogannon. I was wading chest-deep in the shallows, splashing around. He rolled directly toward me and broke just a few feet short of my face. I knew it was him because it was just exactly his corny, dad-like sense of humor: to wave to me as a wave. I could almost hear his voice: “Son, look: I’m waving!” Mom was nearby on the shore, reading a book, but I didn’t bother to call out to her. She gave me the strangest looks, and talked about doctors, any time I talked about Dad.

The next time, he was a cloud. I couldn’t think of how to say hi to him, or to let him know I saw him there. He was so high up and I was all the way down on the ground. I got so sad about it that I started crying. That turned out to be pretty perfect, actually. My tears evaporated, and rose up to join him in the sky. Then I think neither of us felt quite as lonely or as sad.

The last time was just a few weeks ago. He must have found his way back into the city water system, because he turned up in my coffee. I think this might have been his idea of a practical joke. Once I spotted him, I couldn’t bring myself to drink the coffee. Not that I think he would have particularly minded, but it was just a little too weird. I mean, it’s one thing to slap a puddle high-five; it’s another thing entirely to cannibalize your father. So instead I ate the rest of my breakfast and left him sitting there in the mug. When I was done eating, I told him a little bit about my week. The wife and kids were

already gone, to work and to school, so it was only the two of us. It was nice to just sit and spend some time together—me and my dad.

Sometimes, I wonder if I should be angrier at him for disappearing. People have suggested it often enough—my mom, my friends, my therapist. But somehow, I don't blame him—or, rather, I don't see the use in holding a grudge. He probably lost as much as I did when he went away, maybe more. And anyway, how much choice did he have—how much say in the way he behaved? Maybe we're just slaves to our nature. Maybe I shouldn't make excuses for him, though. Maybe it's just easier to tell myself he didn't choose to leave us.

Before long, I had to leave. The GroceryPlus produce section was not going to stock and inventory itself. On my way out the door, I poured my dad into the flowerbed. That way he's free to go about his business, and I know he'll find his way back when he can. In the meantime, I thought, who would want to be stuck inside a coffee mug all day?

If it ever comes to it—and let's face it, maybe someday it will—I hope my kids will have the decency to do the same for me.