

LOST
and
FOUND

LOST *and* FOUND

*A story
of faith, love
and survival*

J.C. LAFLER



Lost And Found

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For the two Davids who have
had a significant impact on my life:
My father, David DuWayne Hewitt,
who is now in heaven but would have been so proud,
and my husband, David Lee Lafler,
who is simply my gift from God!

He didn't look like much in his dirty, tattered clothes
His fingernails were filthy and he had a runny nose

He missed two buttons on his shirt; his shoes were scuffed and
worn

With laces dragging in the dirt and pant legs soiled and torn

But what seemed hopeless at a glance, was a very special child
indeed

And given just a single chance, one other who would see his need
The "real him" might be born.

The possibilities were there, a mind and heart and soul intact
Beneath the shaggy, uncombed hair, if someone only knew that
fact

And whose responsibility, to wonder or to even care
Did anybody want to see the child who lingered there?

It would be so easy just to leave him standing there without
much hope

Pretending he would never grieve or someone else would help
him cope with rejection and despair...

Who would ever even try to reach this child, and find a clue...?
Responding to his soundless cry and sticking by to see him
through. Would you?

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PROLOGUE



At first glance, the bunched up clothing looked like a small, discarded scarecrow. A big, hairy rat crawled closer, sniffing along the body. He made his way to the scarecrow's head, partially concealed by a burlap bag, and crept closer, sensing warmth. The rat grabbed a potato peel from the garbage and nibbled, watching the movement that indicated shallow breathing. Without warning, the scarecrow sat up and jerked the bag away! The boy's eyes blinked open and slowly focused on the rat. When recognition finally registered, the startled boy sat up, pushed away the bags of garbage, and stood up, trembling on shaky legs. Tripping through the garbage, head and heart pounding out painful reminders of life, the boy put as much distance between him and the rat as he could manage.

He was stiff and sore, and he walked aimlessly at first, fighting the pain and feeling like he was watching himself move rather than doing it. Although late afternoon, the sun was still bright and he could see the water in the distance and skyscrapers shooting up against the blue sky. The area he walked in was filled with old buildings, crumbling side-

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walks and mounds of garbage similar to the one he had just crawled from. Lifting his hand, he felt dried blood at the base of his skull. Tears rolled silently down his cheeks. A fuzzy image wavered in the background of his mind, but he couldn't bring it into focus. He rounded the corner and was instantly spotted by a gang of boys who started yelling at him and running toward him. Without hesitation, his "flight" response kicked in and he turned and fled as quickly as he could in the opposite direction. Darting in and out of doorways, around trash, and through empty buildings, he stumbled... never questioning why, never looking back.



The young woman in the hospital lay weeping silently. "Please, God, please let him be okay," she prayed.

1



DISCARDED

Running down the first alley he came to, the frightened boy ducked into an old building, scurrying into a back corner. The back door had fallen in and he was small enough to get behind it where he couldn't be seen. He held his breath, occasionally peering through a crack in the door to make sure no one was coming in after him. A few minutes later he saw the gang of boys running past the building, yelling out threats, obviously trying to figure out where he had gone. He slumped down behind the door, slowly catching his breath and trying to make out his surroundings. Where was he? Did he live here? Why did his head ache? Why was he alone? The questions poured into his mind, overwhelming him and making his head hurt even more. He focused on his immediate surroundings instead. He was in an old garage of some sort, with two big doors in the front and a door in the back that had fallen to one side (which

he was currently hiding behind). One of the doors in the front was completely gone and the other one was hanging by some rusty framework that had broken away from the crumbling roof. Once enough time had passed that he didn't think the boys were coming back, he crept out from behind the door and over to the front of the building that overlooked the alley. It was windy outside, and it smelled awful! The alley looked run-down and seemed deserted to the boy, although he could hear traffic from a distance. Was it the police? Family? Friends? Should he try to make contact with someone who might help him? Suddenly he looked down at his own clothing. His shirt was ragged and he was missing a button or two in the middle. One elbow was worn almost through and there were holes in his jeans as well. His clothing was dirty from the trash pile, and the shoes he was wearing hurt his feet. He was pretty sure he smelled almost as bad as the alley! Would anyone be willing to help someone who looked like he did? The questions were pounding into his head like a hammer! He crept out the door and started tentatively down the alley. He kept a sharp lookout for the boys, glancing around constantly, heading toward the sound of faint music that he heard in the distance.

He saw old sheds and a couple of small, run-down houses, as well as a couple of empty lots where the houses were almost completely gone and the weeds grew taller than him. An old, wrinkled woman sat in a rickety rocker

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on the lopsided porch of one of the houses. She just stared straight ahead as the boy walked by. He saw an old gas station on the other side of the alley that was dirty and greasy-looking with a couple of old cars parked out back and several big, overflowing cans of garbage. After a couple of blocks, he could see that the music was coming out of a building up ahead covered in gaudy paint and neon lights. It was starting to get a bit darker now and the lights were beginning to stand out. He could also make out several people leaning up against the building smoking. They did not look like nice people at all, so the boy stayed away from that side of the alley. He was scared and getting tired again, so he ducked into the next empty building he came to, looking for a spot where he could rest. This building had been a tool shed at one time, as there were empty hooks and outlines where tools had been hanging on one wall. There was no door, but there were window frames stacked against one side of the building and an old rusty wheelbarrow leaning back in the corner. Empty crates and barrels were scattered around the shed. The boy found a crate and pulled it over in the corner behind the wheelbarrow. He could sit down out of sight there, and he could see the front opening through the rusty holes in the wheelbarrow. What was he supposed to do now?

His stomach was growling to the point of making him sick, and he had no idea when he had last had anything to eat or drink. Again the questions pounded inside his brain.

Who was he? Did he have a family? Was he lost? Why couldn't he remember anything! The boy suddenly heard someone coming and they were shouting. Were the boys coming back? No, this time one of the voices was a woman and she was yelling at a man! "You never get me anything nice," she screamed.

The man laughed and said rudely, "Well, I just bought you that bottle of water, didn't I? Maybe that's all you deserve!"

"Oh yeah," she yelled, "well, here's what I think about that!" She threw the water down the alley. It rolled right past the door of the shed where the boy was hiding. The woman huffed on down the alley with the man right on her heels, shouting about never buying her another thing. The boy waited, listening intently. As it got darker, he crept out from behind the wheelbarrow and peered out the door of the shed. He could just make out the bottle of water lying in the weeds along the alley. Slowly he walked over and picked up the bottle of water, looking both ways to make sure no one was around. He made his way back into the shed and stood in the corner gulping down the water. He knew he should probably save some, but he was so thirsty he drank it all! By now it was pretty dark, except for the trickles of light that came from the neon-sign building he had passed. He was afraid to stay outside, so he pushed a couple of crates together behind the wheelbarrow that he could lie down on and decided to stick it out there until morning.

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He woke up with a start and looked around trying to find something that looked familiar. He couldn't figure out where he was and why he felt so stiff and sore. Then it all came rushing in... the trash pile, the boys chasing him, the smelly alley. His stomach was grumbling so loud he could hear it. He had to find something to eat! His hunger took over and he left the tool shed, heading further down the alley. He passed a couple more run-down houses and an empty lot where someone had made a pitiful attempt at planting a garden. It looked like a mass of weeds. He plodded on, feeling a sense of hopelessness that was overwhelming. After another block or two, he turned around and decided to go back and check out the garden. Maybe there was something there he could eat, even if it was only roots. When he reached the garden area, he checked carefully to make sure there was no one around. He waded through the weeds and started digging around for any plants that he might recognize. He saw a bit of red through the weeds and carefully separated them to find a tomato plant, with an actual tomato still attached! It was not quite ripe, but he ate it anyway. He had to get something in his stomach to stop it from rumbling. He looked for more tomatoes, but the rest of the plants were dry and brittle. He dug around a bit more and found what looked like the top of carrots. He pulled up a couple of the plants and was rewarded with several dirty, wrinkled up carrots. He wiped the dirt off on his pants and took a tentative bite. Yuck! It was awful! This

was not what he needed. He climbed out of the weedy garden, sticking the wrinkled carrots in one of his pockets just in case that was all he could find. He headed back in the direction of the old gas station, thinking about the barrels of trash he had seen. As he walked along, he looked at the litter in the alley, hoping for something that was edible. He kicked at an old lunch bag and suddenly realized that there was something inside. He ran over and picked up the bag, feeling excited. Inside was the crust of a sandwich, a partially eaten bag of chips and a beat up apple. He wadded the bag shut and took off at a run, heading back to the shed. He hurried behind the wheelbarrow and opened his treasure. He gobbled down the bread crusts and chips and finished up with the battered apple. Nothing had ever tasted so good!

The boy realized he had to get help, or at least find a better area to hang out in. He left the shed and began walking toward what he thought sounded like traffic noise. He wound his way from alley to alley, keeping a lookout for danger. Sometimes he saw a stray cat or dog, and sometimes he spotted people here or there. The people he saw looked as bad as he did and some of them were even creepy-looking. He had to find something better than this! He walked for what seemed like hours and hours. As the daylight started to fade again, he started looking for a place to hide for the night. He found another deserted building that actually had a door this time! But when he opened the

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door, he saw several people huddled in a corner. They glared at him and he quickly backed outside, shut the door, and ran! He was so hungry and thirsty and afraid! Up ahead he saw a building that said "JOE'S Tavern" in big, red letters and he slowed to a normal pace. Behind the bar was a trash container and he crept toward it. As he got near it, he saw something on the ground that looked like wrapped up food. In a hurry to see what it was, he didn't notice the man coming around the opposite corner. "Hey, get out of here, you punk," screamed the man. The boy snatched up the wrapper and ran. He ran for two more blocks before he stopped in a parking lot of beat-up, run-down cars. It looked like the lot had been abandoned, cars and all. Spotting a van with the front door hanging open, he crawled inside. The front seats of the van were ripped open and the sliding door of the van had been smashed in. The boy crawled further into the van and noticed that the very backseat was still intact. He crawled back and pulled himself up onto the seat. He hurriedly opened the wrapper he had snatched. Inside was a hamburger with only a bite or two out of it! It was cold and greasy, but it was something! The boy gobbled up the burger and decided this was going to be the best he could do for the night. He stretched out on the seat and fell into an exhausted sleep.

He was startled awake by someone screaming, "Alex, no!" He was disoriented, as it was still dark outside. Was someone out there? He crept over to the window and peered out,

but all he could see was the junky cars. No movement and very little light made things look weird, but he didn't think the scream had come from outside. He realized he must have been dreaming, but hard as he tried couldn't bring the dream back. Still, he must have been dreaming about something that had happened in the past, right? Was he Alex? He lay back down on the seat and tried to go back to sleep. He decided that he must be Alex, and felt a bit better about at least knowing his own name.

In the morning he began another day like the others... searching for scraps of food, something to drink, somewhere to hide. One day he spotted an outside restroom at a run-down gas station and was able to sneak inside and actually use the facilities. He was able to wash his hands and scoop enough water in them to get a drink. It wasn't the cleanest place, but Alex tried to remember where it was located so he could come back if he needed to. Days and nights passed, and Alex was wearing blisters on his feet due to the tight sneakers. Still he wandered, not knowing what else to do. He looked like the dirty, ragged street urchin he was. If people noticed him, they ignored him, even looked at him disgustedly. No one he saw was friendly or even questioned why a boy his age would be wandering the streets.