

# The Forwards Story of Backwards Benjamin

By DAVID BAILLIE

Benjamin woke up on a long hard table, naked except for a thin white sheet of cloth covering his middle section.

As the pretty lady in the green gown replaced his internal organs and stitched him back up, she explained to him all about his miraculous rescue from the hole in the ground he'd been found in yesterday. It had taken his three brothers and favourite nephew, along with the local priest, to heave him out of the six-foot deep aperture. He'd also been inexplicably locked in a heavy wooden box by some unknown fiend.

His eyes welled as she told him how his darling wife had cried her eyes out at his reappearance.

She thought she'd *never* see him again.

Benjamin dressed in old, familiar clothes and thanked the green-gowned lady for all her help. He waited patiently outside to be picked up and taken home.

He watched as a stray dog dragged its hind along the pavement, ironically wiping away some mess that had been there.

He smiled at that.

He was feeling much better already - his ordeal almost forgotten.

Two hefty men, dressed in white, insisted that Benjamin take a seat as they put him into their van and drove him home to his loving family.

The next few weeks passed without event, and Benjamin was happier than he'd ever been. He couldn't help but get bored though, being in the house all day long with nothing but old books, crosswords and television to pass his time. He'd potted around in the garden for a while, but found that he had no knack for it. Everything he planted seemed to wither and die, shrinking into almost nothing in a very short time.

Benjamin decided he had to get himself a job.

He had heard from his friends that the job market was in a bad way. Most of the local companies were letting people go - especially people of his vintage - but oddly he found himself work without any great difficulty whatsoever. And it wasn't just any old job either; it was a very important, *managerial* job.

Things were looking up.

Benjamin felt like a very lucky guy.

Unfortunately the initial euphoria at landing such a plum position almost immediately gave way to disappointment. The job was incredibly stressful, and was making him quite unhappy. There was just *so* much responsibility. He felt like it was a job for a younger man and decided to ask for a demotion. He wasn't embarrassed at all asking for this, he'd tried his best after all, but his age was against him. His boss quite happily transferred him to a role with less responsibility, and Benjamin became far more relaxed.

It was worth the drop in salary just to forget about all the stress.

Money wasn't really an issue anyway as both of his daughters were grown up and married. In fact he'd somehow managed to make a large sum of money from the wedding of his eldest daughter. He couldn't quite figure it out, but he guessed that it was some sort of promotion from the hotel that served as venue for the event. They paid him monthly fees after the wedding and then finally a large lump sum. After this cash injection his quality of life increased vastly, and Benjamin decided to ask for another demotion. He wasn't unhappy, but he thought that now, with all this money, he could do with making his life even *simpler*. These were good times indeed.

He met with his manager over lunch and explained that he was happy for his salary to be decreased *again* in return for a less demanding job. His boss agreed that he'd certainly managed to forget enough experience since his last demotion that another downward movement in the corporate chain made sense. Benjamin coughed up some food from laughing so much at this that he almost choked! He then went home to tell his wife the good news.

Benjamin also found that with his new easier job he had a lot more free time, especially in the evenings, as he didn't have to work so late any more. He started playing squash and going to the gym more often. His fitness increased quickly, and he felt much better for it. He started *looking* better too, and everyone commented on how great he was looking. He started brushing his hair in a much younger style.

He started going out in the evenings with the younger guys in the office - he couldn't believe how much his life had changed over the last decade or so. He had felt so old, and now he felt so young.

His new increased self-esteem led to him flirting with all the girls in the office. They seemed very impressed with the way he'd skilfully negotiated an easier life for himself.

All of this seemed to concern his wife.

His daughters must have been worried too, as they both moved back home within months of each other.

Benjamin was beginning to feel tied down in his relationship with his wife and told her that he wanted a trial separation for a while. He felt bad about it, well how could he *not* - they'd been together for over twenty years, but it just didn't feel right any

more. His life was suddenly very different, and she simply hadn't been able to adapt to this change.

Benjamin moved into a small bachelor pad, closer to the city centre and soon forgot about his wife.

He loved his new image. He drove around the city in his fast sports car and spent a lot of time with different ladies. He enjoyed himself immensely and never again had thoughts of settling down with one woman.

All of this change from one simple lifestyle choice.

If only everyone knew about this!

Perhaps he'd write a book.

His boss offered him an even *more* junior role in the company, and Benjamin instantly accepted it. Of course the pay was lower again, so his bachelor pad became increasingly difficult to keep. He decided it might be best to move back in with his parents. His dad gladly accepted him home, but Benjamin suspected it had more to do with his flashy fast car than him. His dad was quite obviously jealous of his new youthful life and independence. Benjamin tried explaining that he didn't need to live his life the way he did - he *too* could do that same things, he'd just have to be as decisive. His dad tut-tutted him for saying such things - he loved Benjamin's mother and told him sternly that one doesn't shirk their responsibilities and run off. It just wasn't the done thing. It wasn't *mature*.

Benjamin didn't understand his dad. He hadn't noticed the generation gap between them being so wide before, but his parents really *did* think quite differently to him.

Eventually Benjamin decided it was time to quit work altogether. He was hardly spending anything now he was back at home - and his mother had taken to cooking all his meals for him at home. He sold the car and his stereo system, and took some time off to put his feet up.

His father didn't like this at all, and they started to argue a lot. When had they started having such different outlooks on life? Benjamin couldn't remember, but just recently he'd had a lot of trouble communicating with his parents. After getting on perfectly well with them for *decades*!

Even his mother joined in - telling him off for not doing anything with his life. Why did he sit around all day getting under her feet? Couldn't he do something with himself? Benjamin started to regret moving in with them in the first place - this wasn't any fun at all. He'd have moved back out, but he no longer had enough money.

He got quite depressed and started spending more time on his own in his room.

He needed to find something to do - something to get him out of the house and out of the way of his parents and their incessant nagging!

He decided education was the answer. It was inexpensive and - who knows - he might even *learn* something from it.

School was more interesting than he thought it'd be. To his relief he found that most of the people he was studying with were his own age, and he had a lot in common with them. This was much better than hanging around at home arguing with his folks. He found some like-minded friends, who had very similar troubles, and they got together all the time and complained about the unfairness of it all. It was around then that he lost interest in girls. He'd discovered that it was companionship he'd been after all those years he'd spent chasing women. Now he'd found it he could stop putting so much effort into trying to impress the opposite sex! He thought girls were stupid anyway.

Stupid and smelly.

He played football at lunchtime and learned things during the day. His mum was so glad about all of this that she offered to pay for his lunches. He pocketed the money though, and saved it for the weekends. His dad was equally pleased with his schooling and started driving him there in the mornings and picking him up afterwards.

This was *great* - Benjamin couldn't imagine why he hadn't thought of it before!

The only downside of school was the teachers.

A few of them were very nice, but *some* of them were really bad. There was one - Mr Henderson - who gave him lines to write out a hundred times. That had taken him over an hour and he'd missed his favourite television program because of it. Mr Henderson made him stand in the corner for talking in class too. This really embarrassed Benjamin. Didn't he know how old he was? And here he was being treated like a baby! He wasn't in Mr Henderson's class for long though - they moved around to different teachers all the time, so they could learn lots of things. This made school much more interesting. It would've been really boring if they'd just learned one thing all day...

Like sums.

After what seemed like a long time, the school rewarded all the pupils for their efforts by giving them easier work to do. This was one of Benjamin's favourite... What was the word? Philasumphies?

So he liked the idea a lot.

The work got gradually easier and easier until one year, they were rewarded for all their hard study by being allowed to play all day and draw pictures with crayons and build houses with building bricks. They even had a sand pit.

Eventually school finished, and Benjamin was glad. The playing was fun but he was *so* exhausted from it all and really wanted to rest more. He was sad to say goodbye to lots of his friends, but he still saw the ones that lived very close to his house.

His parents looked after him very well in the intervening years, as Benjamin's life became even more idyllic. With every passing day he had less to worry about, and more time to play. His mother gradually took over more and more of the things he had done for himself.

Eventually she even *fed* him!.

He worried slightly that he was giving up too much of his freedom and becoming too dependent on his mother and father, but such worries were soon dispelled when it came to feeding time.

He loved feeding time. It made him giggle (and gurgle).

Benjamin slept a lot too.

Then there was suddenly a lot of fuss. More people came to visit the family than ever before. There was a new face every few hours. And everyone was so damn *happy*.

And then they wondered why he got grumpy. Didn't they know he liked to sleep?

They came in and fussed over him and made so much noise they'd wake him up.

Sometimes they annoyed him so much that he'd yell at them. This didn't seem to put them off at all though. They still kept coming.

Then Benjamin's mother had to go to hospital.

He knew there was nothing to worry about, as everyone around seemed so pleased about it. And she didn't seem sick.

When they got there everyone was happy and relaxed and not at all how he remembered people being at hospitals. He felt quite good and even giggled. Everyone laughed when he did this and one woman in a green gown touched his nose with her finger.

Then he snoozed.

When he woke up he was surprised to find himself naked. He was being held in the air by the green-gowned woman, who looked less happy than she did earlier. The woman smeared *goo* all over him with a rag. He was really confused and didn't know what was going on and so he cried. This seemed to upset her even more.

He hadn't noticed until now that his mother was lying in the bed nearby.

This made him quiet again (but he was still very upset).

Benjamin's mother looked like she'd had a hard morning, but he couldn't figure out what she'd been doing.

Then the green-gowned woman smacked Benjamin's arse and *threw* him *into* his mother.

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