

I have found my happy place, and it's in the bathtub

DONALEE MOULTON



ILLUSTRATION BY APRIL DELA NOCHE MILNE

I understand the appeal of showers. There is a functionality and practicality to stepping in, under and out. How efficient. How equally unimaginative and boring. In the shower, there is nothing to savour except getting the hell out from beneath 50 pounds per square inch of pulsating water. The fact that showers are measured in psi (as opposed to bubbles) speaks volumes.

But I am a splish-splash person. I relish the warm web of water that embraces you in the bathtub. I enjoy being able to put my head back, relax and wash away the day. I like taking my time, meandering in my mind and humidifying at my own pace.

Baths were a way of life in our house. Growing up, showers were simply something other people took, mostly people we did not know. I kept this tradition up even after I moved out of my parents' house, into a marriage and through the divorce that followed. But it wasn't until years later that I discovered my understanding of the bath and its possibilities had been severely limited.

It started with a gift of life-altering implications. Inside the present I discovered bubble bath, a bath bomb, exfoliating lotion and glove, and moisturizer. Two of these I'd heard of. The scent was lavender, which I associated with wrinkled aunts and my grandmother's underwear drawer.

Turns out, I couldn't have been more wrong.

I filled the tub with steaming water, poured in the bubble bath and the most wonderful scent filled the room. I smiled, bent down and breathed deeply. Not my smartest move. Inhaling bubbles is not recommended. But it didn't matter. I was happy. And about to get happier.

I stepped into the tub and unwrapped the bath bomb. This is never as easy as it sounds. They often come in a plastic sheath that has no identifiable opening and the tensile strength of tungsten. I persisted. The result was a round, heavenly little orb that exploded when it hit the water. Gently, of course, and with a colour infusion that filled the tub with a lovely glow. The exfoliating lotion and glove were next. I felt the resistance of the glove on my skin. Perhaps even a snag or two. Then, softness.

This time I spend with bubbles, bombs and bath salts is as much about ritual and reverence as it is about self-care and luxuriating. I realized this one blissful Saturday night as I was about to lower myself into a meringue of eucalyptus suds and my husband strolled into the bathroom, lifted the toilet lid, and got ready to whizz.

He won't do that again.

There is a rhythm to my bathing ritual. There is a pattern and a process. Nothing is rushed, there is room to inhale and time to exhale. The rhythm has become more sophisticated over time. I once received a candle but admitted to my husband that I was unlikely to use it. He suggested I light it in my bathing shrine (and all was forgiven).

Today, my bathing shrine includes 10 burning candles: five small, three medium, two large. There is also a tealight candle that burns inside a Himalayan salt holder, another gift from a good friend. (I am blessed with friends who indulge my bathroom bliss.) In addition, I discovered aromatherapy. And there is music, most recently with the chirps and tweets of birds in the background.

I doubled down on my commitment to ritual and reverence when my husband and I decided to do some redecorating. My bathroom tub is now no ordinary tub. Who knew paradise came in porcelain? This tub has jets that shoot heated streams of water at select body parts, LED lights infuse a delicate glow in the water and there is a heated backrest. An aromatherapy unit sends little fragrant clouds aloft every 20 seconds. Poof!

The bathroom, and the tub in particular, is an expense I no longer attempt to justify. But I have spent some time trying to understand it. Logically I know that self-care is important. Taking time for oneself is time well spent. I've read the books (okay, an article or two) about the benefits of finding space from the pressures of daily life. But that sounds clinical and what happens in my shrine is anything but. It's about connection – and distance. It's about finding oneself – and forgetting about the self for a few hours. It's about feeling pampered – and humbled.

One night, I turned on the tap, poured the juniper bubble bath and Epsom salts into the tub and waited to be enveloped in a fragrant mist.

And waited.

I did not have hot water.

Ultramar's message centre assured me help was on the way. I felt a nudge of joy.

That did not last. The repair guy wasn't ruining his Saturday night because some woman's bath water wasn't hot. He eventually showed up but he needed a new part. Bottom line: I had to wait several days.

I did not hide my disappointment. The repairman did not hide his indifference. I was not happy about the emergency call service fee that still left me without hot water. I think he flipped me the bird on his way out.

But Monday came, the water heater was fixed and the bath was full of hot, inviting H²O. But this time I breathed in more than the latest release from Bath and Body Works. I realized at that moment that my shrine, wrapped in relaxation and reverence, is really about gratitude. It's about being thankful to be here and thankful to be. Gratitude isn't just about being personally thankful and appreciative, though, it is about extending that thanks to the world around you. It's about grace.

I have taken that insight to heart. I remind myself now to smell the rose water before I speak out; to soak up the moment before rushing to the next task.

And I have apologized to the man from Ultramar.