

Boots on the ground (but not on a field trip)

It's the rainiest week of the rainiest month of the rainiest year. At least it feels that way.

And, wouldn't you know it, our fifth grader had an outdoor field trip scheduled for the day—a hiking trip through what I imagined would be the muddiest mud of the muddiest trail in the muddiest county.

His teacher emailed us yesterday to recommend that the children wear rain boots. It sounded like a sensible idea.

But we don't own rain boots. And if there's anything that I find daunting, it's the idea of hiking through mud and rain on a fifth grade field trip—which just might be why I disqualified myself from chaperoning.

So after we finished dinner, our younger son and I jumped into the car and searched every clothing store within our reach until we finally, finally remembered an outdoors store we have entered only once—the day he was looking for a stopwatch the store didn't have. But it seemed like a good place to try. And I didn't need a stopwatch to know we were running out of time.

After telling the shoe salesman there about the field trip that would be happening the next day, he managed to find one pair of rain boots that would maybe, just maybe fit our son who hadn't come along.

Don't ask me what we spent. But if you do ever decide to buy rain boots for your children, I don't recommend going in mid-September. And I recommend leaving more than an evening for your search.

We ran home, victorious. We had boots! Our field tripper tried them on, and they fit. I was so pleased with myself.

I set the boots carefully by the door, all ready for the field trip.

The next morning when we were getting ready, I said, “Isn’t it great we have the boots! Don’t forget to take your shoes to change into when you get back from the hike.”

Then, although I never saw this coming, this happened.

“Actually,” our hiker said. “I don’t really want to wear the boots. I just want to wear my old sneakers. Is that OK?”

I looked at the shiny black boots, the boots I had searched all over to find, the boots I was so very happy fit him, the boots that were going to make a field trip in the rain and the mud bearable.

“Oh,” I said. “Yes, of course. That’s fine.”

And he went happily off to school.



Throughout the day, now and then I would think of our son, trudging through the mud in his old sneakers, climbing over branches and skidding in the mud, while a pair of pristine brand-new rubber boots sat snug and dry at home.

At the end of the day, he was full of stories about the field trip—the spiders they saw, the classmate who picked up a red Daddy Long Legs, the wasps that were right where they had been planning to eat their lunches.

“Did you wish you had worn your boots?” I asked him.

“Not really,” he said.

I realized, as I have so many times, that children are resilient. They don’t need half as much as I think they do. Today, on a hike through the mud, a lunch in a paper sack and an old pair of shoes were enough.

And maybe that's true for me, too. Give us this day our daily bread. No fancy rubber boots required.

Now where did I put that receipt...?