

The Boots by the Chair

Aoife M. Lynam

My Dad was a farmer. I say was because he died. This is my story about him. I want to tell you a little bit about who he was, and why I miss him, because remembering him helps me feel close to him.

My Dad always wore his shiny black wellington boots. They weren't just boots, they were part of him. He wore them absolutely everywhere, out in the fields, across the yard, even in the house (which we didn't always love!). When I was smaller, I wanted to have a pair of wellington boots just like my Dad and one day, he bought me my very own pair of bright blue ones. Dad used to say that one day, when I was big enough, I would have a shiny black pair just like his. I wasn't sure I ever could. His boots felt like they belonged to him.

You always heard Dad before you saw him. His boots made the same squelch, squelch, squerch sound every day, trudging through mud and puddles. Whenever I heard him coming back from the farm, I would race out to join him, trying to make my blue boots squelch and squerch just like his. Sometimes his boots were caked in sticky brown muck; other times they glistened like stars after the rain. On dry days, they came home crusted with yellow dust that crumbled across the kitchen floor (we didn't much like that either!).

But one day, my dad didn't come home. We knew he had been sick, we knew, in our minds, that the day would come. But when it did, it was still so hard to understand. So hard to believe. Mum sat me down with the saddest

look I had ever seen. She told me that my Dad had died. I had so many questions swirling inside me, but I didn't know how to ask them. I didn't want to make Mum feel even sadder than she already looked. So I kept the questions to myself. And the feelings too. I didn't know where to put them, so I tucked them away. Like putting a fizzy drink into a bottle and screwing the lid on so tight that nothing can get out. At first, it felt easier, quieter. But we all know that when you bottle things up, the pressure builds, and builds, and builds... and those feelings continue to fizz and bubble inside you... until one day, they have nowhere else to go. And they just EXPLODE.

That's what happened to me. I EXPLODED. All those feelings I had bottled up came rushing out at once, hot, messy, loud. I yelled. I cried. I slammed my door. It scared me a little. But it also made me feel... lighter. I learned that talking about how I feel is like loosening the lid on that fizzy bottle. It lets the pressure go, just a little bit at a time.

The day that I heard that my dad had died, I ran outside, straight to the yard. Even though I knew what Mum had said, that Dad had died, part of me still expected to hear the squelch of his boots, to see him appear through the gate. Maybe if I looked hard enough, he'd be there. I searched the whole farm. The farmyard. The pig pen. The hen hut. Even the far-off fields. But there was no sign of Dad. Then I had a thought: If I could find his boots, maybe I could find him too. I ran back, past the tyre swing, the muddy puddles, the squeaky gate that always stuck. And there they were. In the kitchen. Next to Dad's blue chair. His shiny black boots.

Still. Quiet. Empty. Like the space that he left behind.

Dad wasn't there.

What could I do to get him back? I decided that I would start wishing. I wished in the car.

I wished at school. I wished when no one was looking. I wished while brushing my teeth. I even wished in my dreams. But no matter how many wishes I made; I knew that Dad wasn't coming back. His wellington boots stayed right where they were, quietly gathering dust beside his blue chair.

After a while, the wishing slowed. And other feelings showed up instead.

I started to feel angry. Angry at my friends. Angry at Mum. Even angry at the hens.

Everything felt unfair. I felt different. Like people were watching me in a way I didn't like.

When I tried to play, I snapped and shouted. That got me into trouble. Which made me even angrier. And that made Mum sad. And that made me sad too. Eventually, I just stopped.

I stopped being angry. I stopped playing. I stopped talking. I just... stopped. I didn't know how to be me without Dad. Everything that used to feel fun now just felt... blue. I felt as blue as my brilliant blue boots, like the colour had drained from everything, and nothing would ever be okay again.

I knew the wishing hadn't worked, so then I had another idea. Maybe if I was good... so good that Dad would see me, wherever he was... maybe then he'd come back? It was worth a try; so that's what I did. I was kind at school. I

helped Mum with the animals on the farm. I did my homework before being asked. And helping out did feel kind of nice, like something I could actually do. But Dad still didn't come back. I knew he wouldn't, but it was worth a try.

One evening, I asked Mum a question that I had been bottling up. The one that scared me the most, "What if we forget him?" She looked at me for a long time. His boots were still sitting by the chair, no longer shiny. Just waiting, quiet, and dusty. "We don't forget the people we love," Mum said, "But sometimes we do need to find ways to remember them on purpose."

That night, we curled up in Dad's blue chair and started thinking, quietly, gently, about all the ways we could remember him. Together, we made a list called: "Ways to Remember Dad". Here is the list we made together; you might like to use it too if you have someone special that you want to remember:

Make a storybook about his life using old photos

Fill a memory box with his favourite things

Plant a tree for him, something strong that grows with us.

Keep a "Dad Journal" where I can write to him whenever I want to talk

Create a playlist of songs that remind me of him

Wear something of his when I miss him, like a jumper or a hat

Make a "Dad Day", a day every year to do something he would have loved

Press a flower or leaf from a place we visited together and keep it in a special book

Draw or paint pictures of places that remind me of him

Talk about him. A lot. Say his name out loud.

I looked at the list. Then I looked at Dad's wellington boots. I gently dusted them off. They weren't shiny anymore, but they still smelled like him, like the farm, and the fields, and warm hay. The boots didn't move. But standing next to them, I felt like maybe he hadn't gone completely. They held memories. They held stories. They held the echo of his footsteps.

I sat for a while in his blue chair. Just sat there. It was quiet, but not empty. Then Mum and I went out to the garden. We picked a sunny spot where the ground felt soft and ready. There, we planted a tree. Strong. Hopeful. Growing. Its bright green leaves danced in the breeze, just like Dad used to, singing silly songs in the kitchen, mud falling from his boots with every twirl and tap across the floor. And now, whenever I see that tree, I think of Dad. I remember the squelch of his boots, the mud on the kitchen tiles, the songs he used to sing. I remember how it felt to run beside him in my bright blue boots, trying to keep up.

And somehow, remembering him, really remembering, helps.