

## ESSAY

# Summer: Happy feet, happy days

BY KAY MACDONALD

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For some people, June is the time for perch to bite off all the piers along the Great Lakes or the Lilac Festival on Mackinac Island or getting the tomato plants set out. Those are all worthy early summer events but for me, June is New Shoes.

I wasn't raised in a needy family. We had plenty to eat and a nice house with a big yard and a station wagon in the driveway. Shoes, though, were a different thing entirely. We wore shoes to cover our feet, but vanity shoes were out of the question.

Every June we all got new tennis shoes, always Keds. I loved those Keds, which made my feet light and fast. I thought I could run like an Olympian in them and they signified summer. They were nice neat navy blue canvas shoes with white laces that were always tied or your mother reminded you and they were worn with white socks. Bare feet in Keds made them smell like old dog coops and besides, civilized people wore socks. I know that because my mother told us often enough.

So they were the summer shoes, either them or bare feet. I loved going barefoot and rarely put shoes on after May 1, which is why, my mother says, I wear size 10s today. If I had been allowed to go to school barefoot I would have and I think I could have begun in April and lasted through October. But Keds were for summer and when we put them on we knew we were going someplace, to the amusement park at the lake,



into town to see the rainbow colored fountain lights, to for an ice cream sundae, to a church picnic.

In September, we got our new school shoes. There wasn't any Wal-Mart then so we went right into town to the shoe store, wearing our Keds, which were showing a lot of wear by then. We sat politely in a row, our right shoes off, and waited for the salesman to come and measure our feet. This was always humiliating as, though I was the youngest, I had the biggest feet.

Then out came the shoes. Hightops for the boys, which I envied because there was a neat pocket on the side to carry a jackknife. They wore them to school with those knives too, something they'd be arrested for today. In any case I wanted those high tops myself, but my sister's

and my choice was one of two: black or brown, both equally thick, clunky, heavy-soled.

These were shoes to make a girl's heart soar, if she happened to be a coal miner or a cop walking a beat. Their saving grace was that every other girl wore them as well. If you were rich, you could own a pair of Mary Janes, also to wear for special occasions. One hated girl in my grade wore them to school sometimes, being an only child and privileged. The rest of us wore our clunkers for school, church, parties.

Over these lovelies all winter long, we wore rubber boots. If luck was with you, they might be red and calf high with a zipper up the side, but mine were always the four-buckle type passed down from my brothers. In

either case, they rarely kept your feet warm or dry and they sat in front of the heat a great deal to dry their insides out.

By May, the school shoes were scuffed and the heels run over and they were beginning to pinch, but we polished them on Saturday nights and wore them grimly until school was out.

There was an improvement in shoes when loafers and saddle shoes appeared. I could never have loafers, as my mother said they didn't have "good support," but I did, at age 12, get a pair of black and white saddle shoes. I loved them until I realized how hard it was to keep them reputable until the end of the school year.

Now here's where June and frivolous shoes come together. By 13, I was baby-sitting and had a little pock-

et money of my own. On those sunny days in spring, my friends and I, on our lunch hour from junior high, would walk downtown and look in the store windows. There were these perfectly beautiful ballerina-style flats in red and navy and black and white and even pink. They were \$3.98.

So we saved our money and by summer, we all had at least two pairs of the wonderful shoes, in every color if we baby-sat enough. I felt like a princess in mine and I was sure they made my feet look two sizes smaller, which they probably did, considering the effect the aforementioned clodhoppers had on our femininity.

Since then, when the snow begins to melt I am drawn helplessly to the store shoe displays. My feet itch in heavy winter boots and if I cannot go barefoot (can't risk the chance that my feet will get bigger than their size 10), I can at least buy a pair or two of lightweight, pastel, thin, totally unsensible shoes to celebrate the arrival of summer.

Over the years I have bought pink shoes with high heels, red shoes with cute buckles, black velvet shoes with satin ties, gold shoes, silver shoes...and never once have I had a pair that felt as comfortable as those old Keds or those heavy-duty brown beauties.

I have already chosen my new pair for this year — tan, sort of stylishly chunky, lace-ups with sturdy soles. They look suspiciously like those brown horrors I faced as a 10-year-old. But size 10 feet seek their own, summer or not.

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