

## Sarah Smelly Boots

A Put It In Your  
Pocket Book



Conneaut Area Historical Society and  
Conneaut Railroad Museum

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Something that Ma and Pa called The Depression had come to Conneaut where Sarah lived. It swept through the coal docks where Pa worked and kept him there until the sun set over Lake Erie and the lights of Conneaut blinked like fireflies. It brought him home dangling his dinner pail in his fingers he was so tired. The Depression brought Pa home covered with black coal dust.

The Depression made Sarah and her sister Polly go barefoot all summer. Sarah swished through the damp green grass to pick a bouquet of flowers for Ma. She squished the grass between her toes. She felt the warm dirt tickle her feet. Sarah didn't want to wear shoes.



Then the leaves dancing in coats of many colors warned everyone in Conneaut that fall had arrived for its yearly visit. Ma looked at Sarah and said, "My, my, Sarah. We need to buy you a pair of shoes. Polly can wear a pair from your cousin Sally, but your feet are bigger."

Pa didn't say anything. He just looked worried. Sarah knew he was thinking about the Depression.

Sarah wanted to make Pa smile again, so she said, "Don't worry, Pa. I have an extra pair of shoes to wear."

She patted Pa on the shoulder. "I'll wear them tomorrow, Pa, so you and Ma won't have to worry anymore."

Later that day Sarah crept out to Pa's workshop in the shed. She had seen an old pair of boots behind the door. She would wear them to school so that Pa wouldn't worry about her bare feet.



The next morning Sarah slipped Pa's old boots on her feet and started off for the Broad Street School. As she walked along, she felt something sticking in her foot. She sat by the side of the street and pulled off the boot on her right foot. There was a lump of coal in the toe of her boot. Sarah took the lump of coal out of her boot and put it in the pocket of her dress. She pulled Pa's right work boot on her foot and ran to Broad Street School. She didn't want to be late!



Sarah thought that some of the kids would make fun of her for wearing Pa's boots to school, but she kept running!



"Something smells funny," Elmer the playground bully said as Sarah walked up to the swings. "Sarah's wearing smelly boots!" Elmer shouted. "They smell like coal and they look like coal!"

"Sarah's wearing smelly boots!" some of the other kids shouted. They all walked away from the swings and sat on the fence, laughing at Sarah.

Sarah played on the swings all by herself, and when the bell rang to go into school, she walked in by herself. No one wanted to get near Sarah and her smelly boots.

When Sarah sat down at her desk, everyone around her moved over a seat. Her teacher Mrs. Bertram called Sarah up to her desk.

“Sarah, I talked to the clerk at Thall’s Shoe Store the other day, and he told me they are using the barter system for people who need shoes. There is so little money around that many stores are using the barter system now. Why don’t you stop there after school? You can sit in your stocking feet just this once until the school day is over.” Sarah thanked Mrs. Bertram. Now everyone stayed in the seats around her. Sarah was so busy thinking of what she could barter for a new



pair of shoes that she missed the word “school” in the afternoon spelling bee, and she said that  $10 \times 2$  was 30. When Mrs. Bertram rang the closing bell, Sarah still had not thought of anything to barter for her new shoes.

Sarah hurried into the furnace room to get Pa’s boots. Mr. Egan was shoveling the ashes out of the coal furnace. “Got to get ready for the new fire tomorrow,” he said. “New day, new coal.” Sarah thought hard as she started to walk home down Broad Street to Buffalo Street where she lived. Her fingers touched the lump of coal in her pocket. Maybe she could barter it for a new pair of shoes from Thall’s Shoe Store. Would coal from Pa’s boots be enough or could she barter Pa’s boots for a new pair of shoes? “Sarah Smelly Boots!”



Elmer and Spike were running behind Sarah. Spike shouted, “Sarah smells like a pair of stinky socks.!”

Sarah watched Elmer run up behind Spike.

Elmer shouted, “Sarah smells like coal! Sarah, smelly boots!”

Sarah slipped into Pa’s workshop and put the boots back where she had found them that morning.



“Sarah hurried into the kitchen to help Ma bake biscuits for supper.

“What’s Elmer yelling about?” Ma asked. “I could hear him all of the way in here. It sounds like he’s saying Sarah Smelly Boots!”

“He’s just being a mean boy, Ma. Let’s get supper.”

Pa and Ma and Polly and Sarah sat at the table eating supper. Polly sneezed. “I smell coal dust!”

Ma sniffed. “I smell coffee.”

Sarah sniffed. “I don’t smell anything.”



Pa sneezed and he smiled at Sarah. “Coal dust always makes me sneeze,” he said.

Sarah knew that Pa knew she had borrowed his boots.

After dinner, Sarah followed Pa out to his shop. The boots were sitting on his work bench, and he was rubbing something that looked like soap into them.

“These boots are black with coal dust,” Pa said. They are an old pair and if you had told me you were going to wear them to school, I would have cleaned them up a little. ”They even smell like coal dust and my dirty socks!”

“I don’t mind the coal dust, Pa. I’ll wear them to school every day.”

“Here, Sarah, help me rub some of this Redwing Oil into the boots. That will clean them up and make them soft .”

Sarah helped Pa rub the oil into his boots. Then they polished them with some boot polish that Pa had in his storage cupboard.

“What are you doing to do with the boots when we get them cleaned up?” Sarah asked Pa.

“What would you do with them?” Pa asked. “I don’t use them anymore because I have a new pair and I can only wear one pair of boots at a time.”

“I’d barter them for something,” Sarah said. “Mrs. Bertram said that people are using the barter system a lot now because there’s not much money around.”



“That’s true,” Pa said. “What would you barter them for?”

“I have to stop somewhere after school, Pa. I won’t be very late.”

Sarah and Pa cleaned and polished the smelly boots, which didn’t smell at all by the time they finished. The next morning Sarah wore the boots to school again.

Oh my, “Mrs. Bertram said. “You have cleaned those boots up enough so you can barter them.” She stared at Sarah’s feet. “They look rather nice, and they don’t smell a bit.”



At recess, Elmer and his friend Oscar came over to Sarah his nose wrinkled for a smell.

Oscar yelled, “Sarah Smelly Boots!”

Elmer looked surprised and walked away.

After school Sarah hurried over to Thall’s Shoe Store. She held out the lump of coal and Pa’s Smelly boots to the clerk. “I want to barter these for a pair of crocheted sandals please,” she said. She handed the lump of coal and Pa’s Smelly Boots to the clerk.

The clerk looked surprised. He talked to Mr. Thall and Mr. Thall walked over to Sarah. He smiled.

“You made a good barter,” he told her, handing her a pair of white crocheted sandals.

She was almost home when she heard Elmer running behind her.



Elmer ran in front of her and sniffed. “I don’t smell your boots.”

“That’s because I don’t have them on. I’m wearing my new sandals.”

“Didn’t you put on the smelly boots after school?” Elmer asked her.

“No, I bartered the boots for these sandals.

“Bartered? What do you mean bartered?”

You need to listen in class a lot better,” Sarah said, sticking out her tongue at Elmer. “I mean Bartered! I traded the boots that don’t smell anymore.”

“Oh yeah, who bartered with you?” Elmer asked her.

“I traded my Pa’s Smelly boots!”

Sarah stuck her tongue out at Elmer again and ran to the swings. Her new sandals were easier to run in than Pa’s old boots.



The next morning Sarah got to school early because her new sandals ran so fast. She jumped on the swings and climbed into the sky. She watched all the way across the street from the school to Elmer’s house.

The red door of Elmer’s house opened, and Elmer ran out onto the sidewalk carrying his book bag. He tripped over a crack in the sidewalk and fell flat on top of his bag. Sarah ran over to Elmer and helped him get up from the sidewalk. She picked up his bookbag and handed it to him.

“Elmer Slippery boots,” she said. “Want me to show you how to barter?”

