

## I Don't Like Spiders or Snakes

Adults often act merely kidlike, only much older. Ignoring their life's earned wisdom, in nonwork moments, they revert back to immature actions which make them feel comfortable. Those aren't my people.

Nor am I fan of group think. So many of us go along to get along without giving much thought into why. I've never understood why we become meek sheep in moments requiring courage, or lemmings to sea, avoiding life's adventure in self-learning.

We all have our quirks. The people to whom I am drawn or those who see the humor in their failings, willing to laugh at themselves, while endeavoring not to make the same mistake again. These are people willing to share their foibles while accepting mine, because I know I am no different.

Through the ceaseless, never-ending oppressively-high heat of each summer day passing to the next day, and the day after that, the week after week of the reality of breathing in summer air wet from skin-soaking, throat-searing humidity, all leading to the downfall in running speed and strength, runners like me trudge through the overheated oven that is each day. Living and running in the eastern states, the southern states, the northern states, bring on this sunny gloom. These elements take my running shoes on forays through these elements, never to return.

Debating how many miles can be run in a pair of running shoes is not the bright, shiny object of focus. The miles consumed running in those shoes from the beginning of baseball season through the fall kickoff is the focus. Runs in the rain, runs in the mud, runs in the early morning humidity, runs just before the calm of summer night dusk, each layer those shoes with the scent of effort, the sweat from the extended heat, the aroma built from perspiration from clothing down through socks and into the shoes' lining.

By Mid-July, those shoes may be comfortable, having been broken in and wrapping nicely around the feet, but they remain shoes, shoes susceptible to . . . odor. Smart runners, the ones who care enough to remove unnecessary stink, will take out the inner liner, washing the shoes with a load of running clothing wash, letting the shoes air dry, before allowing the . . . odor to cause fainting. But when the fix is so temporary

that in the awfulness of August running, the shoes are again being washed, the . . . odor having raised again its ugliness, the time has come.

Of course, with rotting, beaten down, disgusting smelling running shoes reaching the height of ickiness in August, remember that this is August, with its endless, oppressive, the in the face heat, and that the running in August is seemingly never going to improve because of those elements. The shoes are as equal to blame as the dog days.

Yes, there are those chosen few early mornings where the hint of a cooler month may descend. The early morning dawn start doesn't feel oppressive when the temperature is in the low 60's as compared to the usual mid-70's, and, the dew point starting with a 6 means it will be below a dew point in the 70's. Combining the two equates to a chance of actually breathing decent air during the run. Come the finish of that run, the clothing is still sopping wet, the energy still sucked out, the day's high temperature coming quickly, and the running shoes worn for that run still have the . . . odor.

Those pair of running shoes can no longer be kept in the usual running shoe location and the garage is no better a location to distance the . . . odor from the confines of the house. More to the point, the shoes no longer have that bounce, that comfort, that gravitas enjoyed for all those prior runs through the spring and the summer, and now, with the hint of a possible fall, further measures are required. The reckoning has come. That is where to start.

They are in a box, a smallish but not too small cardboard box, visually colorful, with a running shoe logo on the top, the sides, inside, and on the bottom of the box, not forgetting to mention the contents themselves. The box is located in the small area of the abode set aside for running schtuff. In that area are the clean running clothing used in warmer months, as in shorts, socks, thin short-sleeved shirts and singlets, and running hats (this is different than what is put out for the running in the colder months, with long, thick running socks, half tights, running pants, base layer tops with outer layer tops, woolen running caps, and lots and lots of finger coverings) there is this box.

Filled with new shoes.

Reaching for and opening that box, recalling that the shoes contained within the box were purchased approximately half way through the odiferous current pair being worn, a mental note is made to purchase a replacement pair for this new pair, soon. Soon is a nebulous term, but it will be done, soon. Once opened, the new shoe smell aroma wafts quickly into the nostrils. The aroma is not the . . . odor that has been dragging along on the summer's runs. The aroma is fresh, clean, crisp, offering hope for future runs. No matter that the aroma is most likely a mixture of chemicals used to make the shoes, it is so much better than the . . . odor.

The new shoes are clean. Smooth to the touch, soft along the shoe's upper. The soles are clean, refined in the grooves, not a mark on them, waiting for the first run combining pavement, asphalt, dirt, gravel, and those other things that may be on the running route that will be touched by the new shoes. Lifting a shoe demonstrates how light are the new shoes, not yet weighed down by the grime, the perspiration to come, or broken down by the elements. Making certain that all eyelets are used, the feet placed inside each shoe, the shoestrings are properly tightened and tied. The bright coloring of the shoe's upper invites a run. That run is for the next day. Oh, wait . . .

Looking outside, clouds are forming for the first time in weeks. Looking at the weather app on the cellphone, those clouds will be bringing lots and lots of cloud friends and cloud food in the way of precipitation. That can only mean that the next run, done in the new shoes, will be in the rain. And the mud. And the puddles. The deep puddles that cannot be run around. Rainwater will drip down from the bill of the running cap, over the wet weather clothing, over and into the socks, settling into the inner parts of the new shoes. Happens every time a new pair of running shoes are broken in, fresh out of the shoebox. Every time.

Five decades of running has clinically shown that new running shoes bring foul weather. Testing over those many years confirms that there is no cure nor means of avoiding this phenomenon. New shoes will seek out as much filth as color-tarnishing earth elements as may be found on that first or second run. Rain-influenced dirt, balling up to attack the new shoe's color; dirt turned to mud for those repeated splatters; falling raindrops bringing dirty air particles from above. All combining to take away the newness and the excitement of running in the new shoes. This is the destiny of new shoes, that is, to become ordinary. This is why white-dominant running shoes are to be avoided. Black is too dark and white is too tenuous.

Not only does the weather takes out the shine from new shoes, running companions are equally as bad. The first run. The first run with at least one other running partner leads to the demise of new shoes. “Ooh! New shoes?” They will say, edging just a bit closer, ostensibly to examine the new shoes.

“How long were they in the closet?” That’s a throwaway question.

“Were they just purchased?” Not even relevant, as we know.

“Why that color?” They care nothing about the color.

Whereupon, a foot not your own, covered in a disgusting running shoe, also not your own, places itself, with the assistance of your diabolical running friend, onto the top of one the new shows. If the weather elements don’t make the new shoes plain, the running “friends” assistance will do the trick. Every time.

Labor Day has passed, leading into the eventual start of fall. The new running shoe box with the new running shoes inside has been opened, inspected, replaced, and prepared for that first run. But the weather has been angling to adverse, knowing those new shoes will soon appear. Because of this, the pair to be replaced, the ones with the . . . odor, have been the running shoes of choice. And circumstance. A more current review of the weather over the next week shows the potential for dry, slightly warm air, with few clouds. Right.

Testing the weather forecasting, the new shoes were placed outside on the back porch. As certain as little green apples, clouds quickly amassed over the covered porch, darkening the longer the new shoes remained on the porch, spitting out tiny rain droplets, just to see. The new shoes were whisked inside, the rain clouds departed. The new shoes were put back outside on the porch, the rain clouds came back vigorously. The new shoes returned inside. Farmers should know this effect on weather. That knowledge could come in handy.

Tomorrow, the new shoes will be worn, the old ones having been sent to an outfit that refurbishes shoes for people in need. Tomorrow, the weather forecast now shows periods of heavy rain, the timing moving only when the run’s start time changes. Those new shoes were purchased to be used on runs. The new shoes are stronger and tougher mentally than the wearer. If only the new shoes came with little umbrellas or shoe rain jackets or the weather ignored that first run in the new shoes.

How do those clouds know?