ENGL 105 Script

[mountain wind noise] [birds chirping] [leaves rustling] [slightly heavy breathing] - create ambiance of being on top of a mountain pass

[breathe in and out] In. Out. In. Out. The view before you and the hike behind you leave you breathless. The forest full of sharp branches and dim light has opened to reveal a magnificent expanse of blue sky. A lake below sparkles, reflecting the cloudless atmosphere and the bright sun above. Wildflowers cascade in sheets down the valley, blowing softly in the wind.

What [pause] a [pause] view. Like something from a childhood storybook. Only better because it’s real. It’s here. You can feel the dirt crunch [add sound] beneath your boots, keeping you grounded in this spectacular moment.

[end ambiance]

Keeping \*me\* grounded in all moments, in fact… for 4 weeks this last summer. They guided me along trails and across rough terrain. They were my truest companions on this wilderness adventure. And I have a feeling they will accompany me on future journeys as well.

[cue soft background music] [slow fade in]

[quote from TBD person with preferably deep voice] “You can’t truly know someone until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.”

While many recognize this adage and its meaning, I offer a different explanation for the relationship between shoes and interpersonal connection. Or rather, a specific type of shoe: hiking boots.

When I first learned I was headed to the wilderness of Wyoming for 28 days and would be needing a sturdy pair of boots, I had no idea where to start. Thanks to a packing list and REI’s experts, I came to learn a few things about hiking boots:

* There are quite a variety of reputable brands who all offer different hiking experiences.
* Quality boots are far more expensive than you’d think.
* They’re supposed to fit tightly enough to avoid sliding, but loosely enough to allow for comfort.
* They take time and effort to break in.

With this information, and after lots of trying-on and deliberation, I wound up with a pair of smooth, brown leather Vasque’s. A pair of shoes that came to mean more to me than any others in my closet.

These boots came to represent the journey of life companionship.

[change music or stop it]

For one, true life companions are few and far between. You don’t typically run across one every day, and there is a certain balance required to develop the friendship. You have to fit each other.

[insert clip about boots not being one size fits all]

Though there may be an intrinsic sense of comfort, the fit takes time to secure. Anyone whose worn hiking boots before will tell you they take time to break in. Time, repetition, and a whole lot of blisters.

[hiking boot noise]

When you’re getting used to being with someone for extended periods of time, friction occurs. They rub you the wrong way… it’s a natural result of increased contact. Blisters form. But they also heal. Once again, it takes time.

In the breaking-in process, experts will also advise you to wear layers of socks as extra protection against the heavy boots. It is only after you’re used to the weight around your ankle and steel toe cap that you can peel away a layer.

It’s often only after you experience something heavy together that you can be vulnerable with someone. Allowing another to see beneath the walls you build up takes trust and practice. But peeling away the layers offers incredible freedom and comfort.

And you’ll come to discover over time that the protection and support from your boots will far surpass any your own socks could offer.

But hiking boots do require sacrifice-- of time, of comfort, and of being barefoot. You have to spend time hiking in the rigid structure to allow the boots the flexibility to mold around your foot. Development only comes from time together. And you have to give up the temptation to go without them.

There were days when all I wanted was to hike in my lightweight sneakers. I craved days without having to spend tedious time lacing up my boots and precious energy lugging them up mountains. But sneakers wouldn’t have done me any good in the wilderness.

The trip required heavy-duty boots for a reason. Though clunky and obnoxious at times, these boots saved my life quite a few times. They provided a grip on slippery boulders. [slipping noise] They rooted my ankles when a fallen branch could’ve broken them. [cracking branch] They kept me warm through frigid river crossings [water rushing] and protected against sharp rocks and prickly bushes [bushes rustling]. They offered comfort to my aching feet on 11-mile days. They helped me to climb mountains, ford streams, traverse boulder fields-- they aided not only in my survival, but in the joy of my journey.

As good life companions should.

[add music]

These boots have been with me through their fare share of mud and grime, but each layer of dirt only adds to the strength of their character. Life, like any good wilderness adventure, is messy.

The truth of the matter is: life companions don’t make it any cleaner. Rather, they’re the ones willing to get down in the mud with you, to support you through the storm, and to help you up the mountain when you’re grip is slipping. To ground you through the ups and downs, and walk through this adventure we call life.

[fade out with music]

Ideas:

* Music: “These boots were made for walking”
* Add another sound byte from podcast