

My Perfect Boy

Parenthood is not for the faint-hearted. Nor the idealistic, or the dull-witted, or the slow-to-start-in-the-mornings.

No doubt that is why God thought up the idea of having two parents, so one can fill in when the other's biorhythms are sluggish. Thank you, God, for not making me an amoeba.

Faint-hearted I may be at times, but not having read the job description, I nonetheless became a mother. It was different for me because I KNEW that *my* children, unlike all those others you hear about, would be absolutely perfect. My maternal instinct, tempered with a little idealism and booted along no doubt by a dull wit, told me this.

Which is why the events that unfolded one time in our household came as such a terrible shock to me.

I was tearfully informed that those who know about these things know that running shoes are much more comfortable to wear to school than leather lace-ups. Plus,

they are much trendier.

I was told that (for reasons the teller could not explain) the laces on running shoes do not come undone as easily as those on leather school shoes.

And I was assured that for these and other highly practical and essential reasons, which included playing soccer at lunchtime, my eldest son must really, really have a pair of black running shoes instead of his (new) leather school shoes to wear to school.

And soon. In fact (sensing in my look the likelihood of success within his grasp) that very day.

Yes, I have always been a fairly soft touch. I was impressed with the practicality of the reasons delivered with such passion, and convinced that Sam's life at school would improve if he were to have more comfy shoes. So I tentatively agreed.

The child's father, however, was unimpressed.

At breakfast, the edict went up, not to be ignored. "There will be no black running shoes bought until the black leather ones are worn out." There was no arguing with the sense, practicality and finality of that. We bowed to the pressure, I with my head hung in shame at even contemplating such excess.

Then a strange thing happened. Although almost every day during the total chaos of our morning preparations we have last-minute frantic hunts for missing shoes, hats, lunch boxes and other vital paraphernalia, these are inevitably found, albeit in all kinds of strange places.

This day, however, the black leather shoes were not to be found anywhere.

Everyone joined in the hunt, which went high and low, inside and outside. But they were nowhere.

Poor Sam had absolutely no recollection of where he had taken them off.

The poor kid had to wear his white running shoes to school, and take a note for the teacher.

The father said, “I bet the sneaky little bugger’s hidden them!” and the mother replied, with passion, “What, your son—my son? Sneaky? He’s only six! Anyway, he wouldn’t be that smart. Absolutely no way, no way at all.”

It was really looking as if we would have to get him a new pair of shoes.



At lunchtime, I asked a friend who had been visiting the evening before, “Did you happen to see Sam’s shoes when you collected your son from our place yesterday?”

“Yes,” she said. “They were right there on the living room floor.”

I told her the circumstances of their mysterious disappearance and she threw back her head and laughed heartily. I was pretty annoyed. She obviously did not know that my child, if for no other reason than purely on the basis of nobility via genetics, was not capable of a devious act.

But just on spec, that evening we announced that there would be no black running shoes bought until the leather shoes were found; and that in the meantime, only slippers were to be worn to school instead.

The black leather shoes were found within nanoseconds. They had somehow fallen down the back of a cupboard.

Strange, that.