

My new Wellingtons

As a kid, if you lived in the countryside of Ireland, especially on a farm, one's stable footwear include a pair of wellingtons. This possession was a necessary addition to one's wardrobe especially in winter time. The wet roads and muddy land could only be navigated by a sturdy and leak-proof pair of wellingtons. It didn't matter what color they were as long as they were functional.

After being ordained a priest and heading to the States, especially the balmy and humid Mississippi, there was no need to include a pair of wellingtons with my luggage. I traded them in for a pair of black slip-ons and sandals. It was only following the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, that I had to revert to a pair of wellingtons again. My suitcase then, as I returned to Mississippi from my August vacation that I included a pair of wellingtons and a flashlight as well as a few changes of clothes. The pair of wellingtons were useful in navigating through the hurricane rubble and stagnant waters.

I never really paid any attention to the inventor of the wellington boot until recently. I discovered that they were worn and popularised by Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington. This novel "Wellington" boot became a staple of hunting and outdoor wear for the British aristocracy in the early 19th century. Today, wellington boots are also known as rubber boots, wellies, wellingtons, topboots, billy-boots, gumboots, gumbies, gummies, rainboots, gavin's and Alaskan Sneakers.

Now, in retirement, and living near the family farm, I had no choice but to revert to start wearing wellingtons again. I resisted for almost a year, but the demands of becoming a "gentleman farmer" necessitated breaking down and buying a pair of wellingtons.

During the past few weeks, I did some "window shopping," not so much with the intention of buying a pair but as a conscience soother. While I knew that, inevitable, I had to purchase a pair, I wasn't in a hurry to cross that bridge. It was like, knowing that one needed to go to the dentist, but one was not ready to make that appointment.

Yearly, during my vacations from the States to home, my most precious cargo was hunting socks. I would purchase a consignment of these lifetime guaranteed from ProBass store and bring them home to neighbors who relished having such warm and comfortable socks in their wellingtons, especially during the winter months. Even some neighbors reverted to hiding their spare pairs in case some of their sons would steal them.

So, finally, after almost a year of "borrowing" a pair of wellingtons, I was forced to find some rubbers that fit perfectly. My brother forced my hand one day while shopping in the local Co. Op. with an invitation to try on some wellington boots. Not showing too much excitement, I consented to try on a few pairs and was encouraged to accept a pair with some nice, warm lining and plenty of toe room to compensate for any thickness of stocking.

Now, with my new found possession, I am ready for all kinds of weather and all kinds of farm tasks. Still, being a "gentleman farmer," I can still qualify for farm work because I now have the necessary tool of the trade to qualify, namely a pair of wellingtons.

Now, I need to don them and head out to feed my lambs and my sheep, not spiritually speaking, but physically speaking. When they see me coming, they will run excitedly to partake of some well-deserved nourishment.

Someday, in the near future, I will put on the same wellingtons and head out into the field to see if there is any new arrival during the night. Then, my wellingtons will continue to tell the unfolding story of a "gentleman farmer" in transition.