

Editor's Note: Great lessons often come from ordinary moments. While preparing for a fishing trip, Grantland Rice (one of John Wooden's favorite poets) picked up an old pair of World War I army boots that had been resting in a corner of his den. The memories they awakened became this unforgettable poem—a reminder that everyday experiences can reconnect us with life's deepest lessons.

THE SPOTLIGHT

(N. Y. Tribune, August 1, 1919)

To a Pair of Demobilized Boots

**(Lifted from their nook in the den to
help round out a fishing jaunt.)**

You have gathered dust from the long white roads
That wind through the drifts of France;
You have known the mire of an Argonne trail
In the wake of an old advance;
You have known the hike of a blasted pike
As you floundered along the way,
As heavy as sin when the dawn brings in
The light of another day.

You've slogged your way through the bally mud
Where only the dust remained
Of an old French town that caught the blast
Where the Hun shells whirled and rained;
Floundering on through the slime and wreck—
And sometimes stepping high—
Where the roofless walls of Avicourt
Stared up to a sullen sky.

And you've quivered a bit—I'll say it now—
Around two shaking feet,
Two feet as cold as the Arctic snow,

Or a January sleet;
And more than once you have wished to be
Or hold your ancient sway
Along some friendly lane at home
Three thousand miles away.

And now, uncleaned, with ghostly mud
Long dried upon your hide,
Forgotten even by the gods
You stand there at my side;
And I wonder if ever it comes to you,
Here in your Harlem den,
The call to rise for another hike
And take to the road again?

Where the bugle calls at the edge of dawn
As reveille draws near—
Where ghostly pine trees sway again
In the haze of Camp Sevier?
Just one more oldtime slogging tramp
Beyond the city walls,
By battered roads and shattered towns
Where the Great Adventure calls?

Grantland Rice (1880–1954)