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Opening extract from

Where my Wellies Take Me

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MICHAEL AND CLARE
MORPURGO

Where My Wellies Take Me...

AN INTRODUCTION FROM

Clare & Michael Morpurgo

When you're older your mind goes back often to the best (yes, and to the worst) times of your childhood. For Clare and for me, some of the happiest years of our lives were spent growing up in the countryside. I used to wander the marshes and sea walls near my childhood home in Bradwell on the Essex coast, the haunt of hares and lapwings, of foxes and herons. Meanwhile Clare (unknown to me then) was out in her wellies, tramping the deep lanes of Devon around the village of Iddesleigh, riding the farmers' horses, searching the graveyard for lizards and slow worms, collecting birds' skulls and shells and stripy stones from the river. We had walked on the wild side, gone where our wellies had taken us, and loved it.

Later on – much later on – both of us teachers by now, we came up with an idea that we hoped would enable as many children as possible to do exactly what we had done: to walk up windswept hillsides, to stomp through snow, squelch through muddy gateways, save tadpoles from shrinking puddles, and watch salmon rising in the river. Along with friends, we set up a charity and called it Farms for City Children. In the last thirty years or more, over 100,000 city children have spent a week of their lives on the three farms – Nethercott, here in Devon where it all began; Treginnis in Wales, on the spectacular coast outside St Davids; and Wick Court by the River Severn in Gloucestershire. The children become farmers for a week – they feed the sheep and calves, muck out the horses, dig up potatoes. They wear wellies almost all the time, and in among their tasks they have the freedom to explore and enjoy the countryside around them, just as we did.

Clare is in her seventieth year now and I'm catching up fast. What better way to celebrate, we thought, than for the first time, to make a book together. So I, with a little help from Clare, would write a story about a young girl walking the lanes of Devon; and she, with a little bit of help from me, would choose some of her favourite poems. Both of us had a lot of help from our good friend Jane Feaver, who lives down the lane. And we found by the greatest good fortune a wonderful artist, Olivia Lomenech Gill, who has conceived the book as it now looks, produced the wonderful paintings and drawings, and written it all out, just as Pippa would have done, by hand.

Every copy of the book that is sold will help to support more children to come down to our farms. So, even if you didn't know it at the time, thank you for buying it. Now we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we have loved putting it all together.

Clare and Michael Morpurgo

1 February 2012





"Where are you off to, Pippa?"

It's what Aunty Peggy always asks me when I'm on my way out.

"Wherever," I tell her, with a shrug. "Where my wellies take me."

"Pippa!" she says, giving me a look. She thinks I'm trying to be funny, or a bit too 'poetic'. I'm not. Anyway, it's her fault I like poetry so much. Every night before bed, she reads me one of her favourite poems.

The other thing I love about staying with Aunty Peggy is going for walks. I never have any idea of where I'm going, I just go. ~~Proper~~ Proper, long walks. I don't care if it's raining, don't care if it's cold.

But it's sunshiney this morning, sitting on the front step in the sun, pulling on my wellies.

"Four o'clock, Pippa," Aunty Peggy calls after me. "Don't forget it's May Day. It all begins at four. Don't be late, dear. You don't want to miss the fun, do you?"

I'm not mad about games and I hate races, so yes, I want to miss the whole horrible thing if I can. But I know enough not to say it out loud. My wellies are off on a walk, and I'm going with them. So I just give her a wave...











Tewkesbury Road

It Is Good to be out on the road,
and going one knows not where,
Going through meadow and village,
one knows not whither or why;
Through the grey light drift of the dust,
in the keen cool rush of the air,
Under the flying white clouds,
and the broad blue lift of the sky.

And to halt at the chattering brook,
in a tall green fern at the brink
Where the harebell grows, and the gorse,
and the foxgloves purple and white;
Where the shifty-eyed delicate deer
troop down to the brook to drink
When the stars are mellow and large
at the coming on of the night.

O, to feel the beat of the rain,
and the homely smell of the earth,
Is a tune for the blood to jig to,
and joy past power of words;
And the blessed green comely meadows
are all a-ripple with mirth
At the noise of the lambs at play
and the dear wild cry of the birds.

John Masefield

The whole world smells new. There's no one else about except the swallows sitting on the telephone wire above the village green. Just them, seven of them and me – oh – and a beady-eyed blackbird singing from the cherry tree. I've never seen so much blossom on that tree before. It's as if it's been snowing, but only on that tree and on the grass below it. It's like a little bit of winter in summer. Maybe that's what he's singing about.





Loveliest of Trees, The Cherry Now

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

A. E. Housman

