

A Flock of Shoes

Sarah Tsiang

Qin Leng, Illustrator

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A small number of pages can occasionally pack a huge idea. So it is with Ontario natives Sarah Tsiang, who teaches college in Kingston, and Qin Leng, an award-winning animator and illustrator in Toronto, whose *Flock of Shoes* begins with an understanding of a child's natural reluctance to part with beloved possessions. Just as the infant fears to lose sight of his mother and a toddler finds it traumatic to give up a bottle or pacifier, Abby does not want to lose her treasured sandals. "They were pink and brown with lime-green trim. They made small heart tracks in the sand and followed her all around the beach."

Abby gives her sandals credit for a wonderful summer, and at the beginning of fall she becomes inconsolable when her mother tries to take them from her. "Your feet will be too cold! Your sandals are getting worn! You're starting to outgrow those shoes!" Abby disregards her mother's pleadings as nonsense. Yet time, as it sometimes will, provides a path to acceptance of inevitability. Abby's imagination takes over: she swings higher and higher on the park swing, and her shoes flip right off her feet; like birds, her sandals soar to the sky and join a group of other shoes flying in a V.

The charming parable evolves with a lesson that helps a child accept change, both in human nature, and in the cycle of life. At first Abby mourns the loss of her sandals and imagines postcards from them saying, "Wish you were here." The sandals tell her about soft sand and how they miss her and the straps ache to hug her. Wonder of wonders, Abby begins to love her winter boots. She likes to stomp, run, kick, and climb in them. As warm weather returns, the boots hop on a train and Abby sadly waves goodbye. But she is happy when she hears the sounds of her sandals swooping back in, fresh and new *and* grown bigger to fit her feet.

This whimsical story filled with charming watercolors will warm the hearts of small children while teaching them a valuable lesson. Items that we cling to can sometimes be replaced by something more useful for its time. The changing seasons we believe to be lost will return. This philosophical book will be remembered by adults, too, for its easy readability and priceless message. For ages four to seven.

MARY POPHAM (January 10, 2011)

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