

Is Your Foot a Foot?

“Foot” is a strange word. On the one hand, I can jump on one foot. No, I am not jumping on my hands. When you want to compare two things you can say: on the one hand... but on the other hand....

So, on one hand I can jump on one foot, but on the other hand I have a ruler which is exactly 12 inches long and my dad said it is a foot long. Whose foot? I put the ruler on the floor and stepped on it – my foot is much shorter than the ruler’s foot. But the ruler does not have feet anyway. Astrid said that her teacher told them that people decided to call 12 inches “a foot” because this was the length of the foot of Henry I, who was the king of England from 1100 to 1135. So was it a ruler’s foot? I have to say this sounds like a nice legend, but I have my doubts. Have you ever seen a barefoot King? Who would ever dare to ask him to take his shoes off? Also, my mom says that modern people on average are taller than ancient ones. So unless he was a giant for his time, his foot would have to be shorter. Maybe his courtiers were just flattering him? I wish I were a king ...

I told Astrid that we should place the ruler against Dad’s foot when he would be sleeping. When he sleeps, his feet always stick out from under the blanket. But Astrid said it would be easier to measure the bottom of Dad’s shoe. I turned my dad’s shoe upside down and placed my ruler on top of it. I adjusted carefully to see 0 over the heel end, and looked at the toe – it was almost 12 inches! So I guess my dad’s foot is almost a real foot.

After I measured the shoe, I turned it back up and noticed that the number 13 was written inside it. Astrid said it was the size of the shoe. I am not sure she is right – 13 of what?

I looked around – my mom’s shoes are difficult to measure because they have high heels. I found her slippers that were flat, turned them upside down and placed my ruler on top, which was the bottom of the slipper. There was no number on the ruler – just a dash, which was exactly between 9 and 10. Astrid said that it was nine and a half inches long. Ok. I turned the slipper back over in order to see the number inside – the number was 8. I asked Astrid – do you still think it is a shoe size? She said: “Of course, it is, silly.” I do not know who is silly here, but it does not make any sense – Dad’s shoe is size 13, but the shoe itself is shorter than 13 inches, even shorter than 12 inches! Mom’s shoe has size 8 (if it is the size), but the shoe itself is longer than 8 inches, even longer than 9 inches!

One would think that was bad enough, but it got worse when I looked closely inside my own shoe. The number there was 13... You have got to be kidding! I placed my shoe next to my dad’s shoe – needless to say, my shoe was much shorter, but the two 13s inside the two different shoes looked exactly the same!

Astrid made that face expression as if she were talking to a baby – she always does it when she thinks she knows something better than I do. So with that face she said – those are different 13s.

Yours is a child's 13 and Dad's is an adult's 13. Then she pointed at her shoe, which was a little longer than mine, but the number inside was 5...

Next time we go to the shoe shop I will ask them what these numbers really mean. If you ask me, 13 is 13 and 5 is smaller than 13, no matter what.

One thing I can totally rely on is that my ruler is still exactly a foot, because 12 inches is as long as the foot – the other foot, I mean the ruler's foot. Not every ruler is a foot, though. Astrid has a smaller ruler – it is only 6 inches long. She said it is more convenient, as it fits in her school bag's pocket. Astrid says that her ruler is a "half-foot" because 6 inches is exactly half of 12 inches.

Does it make her ruler better than mine? I do not think so.