

# Shoe me along

I look down at my oversized feet. They are large to start with, but in snowshoes, my feet have become two gigantic shelves of buoyancy. With this much powdery snow, I still sink with each step. Lift and step. Lift and step. And the snow keeps coming down. It's blowing into my face. I know how to handle a snowstorm. Sure. I've got a neck gaiter covering the lower half of my face and my wool hat pulled low on the front. My eyes are just about all that's exposed. I've even removed my earrings because the silver can conduct cold to my ears. I'm prepared for this. Yet it is a surprise when my eyelashes turn stiff with ice.

Lift and step. Lift and step.

I am making progress. I tell the dog to walk behind me since the snow is deeper than her hips. I tell her that it's easier to follow me than lead me, that I will make a trail for her. Oh, silly dog. She must lead me. She leaps like a deer, bounding as best she can, her hind legs moving in unison. I follow the dog, who appears undaunted despite her disadvantage in this two feet of new snow. She doesn't seem to mind the hard work of moving forward. She leaps ahead a few times and waits for me. I know she'll sleep well later. So will I.

Lift and step.

The trick in snow this deep, wind this strong and visibility this limited, is to focus on the short term, the immediate. I lift my foot and place it ahead of the other. I don't look ahead to the two miles yet to walk, but just the whiteness of the snow in front of me. I concentrate on the challenge of the next five steps. Then the five after them. I find a rhythm, a pattern to my breathing, feeling the shortage of breath as I slowly trudge.

Even as the snow falls harder, the metaphor



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doesn't elude me. Such is the pattern of life. Lifting my feet up so I can step over the challenges that face me. The wind of my life making it even harder, the wind we all have at times, the regular kind of gusts that comprise all of our challenges. No matter what, we wake up each day, ready to take on the world. Windy or snowy, the college tuition bills need to be paid, the mortgage ought not be late, and the illegal sump pump has to be fixed. And there are decisions to be made, both trivial and weighty – should I sell the house now or later, what would be good to cook for supper, am I truly ready to join AARP or not (don't laugh), and what to do about that chronic cough. Whatever the issues in my life – in all our lives – we need to keep moving forward. The snow may be deep and the wind strong. Lift and step.

I have to admit, when the storm blows hard and the snow is knee high (or in the case of the dog, belly high), my snowshoes make things a whole lot easier. And it doesn't hurt to have a friend take turns leading the way.

The snow beckons. The dog turns around to look at me and waits. Lift and step.

**Jody Russell is an Eden Prairie Web designer, photographer and writer. Her columns appear regularly in the *Eden Prairie News*.**