



Shoes

by Suzann Dwyer

Upon waking, I slip on the nearest pair of shoes. Old brown, scuffed, swayed clogs have become house slippers. Peering into the closest for an alternative, I realize I can see parts of my life through my shoes.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Knee-High Blue Rubber Boots - mine

Brown Suede Uggs - my daughter Courtney's

Courtney is visiting me on Cape Cod from Rochester, New York. It's been a long time since just the two of us spent time together, making this holiday visit even more precious. Picasso, our little shih tzu, is happy to prance by her side again. It was 10 years ago when she chose this runt of the litter. She'd scooped him up in her arms, dismissing our appointments to view other puppies. We'd headed for the pet store for any and ALL puppy provisions. A chill had hung in the Rochester air so Courtney had swaddled him in her coat. Here on the Cape, it's 17 degrees. We go to the beach. Picasso remains in the warm, cozy cottage. Courtney wears brown, soft, fur-lined boots. I'm in knee high, blue rubber ones.

The entire beach is ours. She draws a heart in the sand, and I write LOVE with the heel of my boot. A sandy, wet clam shell smiles for its photo. She turns to take a snapshot of me, her back to the sea. As the tide moves in, the waves lap closer. I call out, as one is about to cover her soft, brown Uggs. Too late, Courtney laughs at the cold surprise.

I snap some shots with a new digital camera, a gift from my son. It appears to have frozen in the chilled wind, now around zero, and I'm afraid the photographs are lost.



Nailed to the lifeguard stand is a KEEP-OFF sign. Trespassing, Courtney climbs to the top and poses in a spread eagle posture. The weather releases her long, black, curly locks from her fur lined hood, and spread them on the wind, like wings.

The sound of surf blends with her contagious laughter. With icy, unbendable fingers, I manage to capture the image using her cell phone. It comes out crooked, and beautiful. Her boots are wet, my nose drips, and freezes. We yell with laughter above the surf and race for the car, mission accomplished.

Black Leather, Ankle High Barn Boots - mine

Wet Brown Suede Uggs - Courtney's

I suggest Courtney choose from a selection of dry, warm boots in my closet: tall English equestrian boots; ankle-high, round-toed, brown leather ones with two-inch heels; soft-ribbed suede brown mukluks; or well worn, pointed-toe red cowgirl boots.

I rush to polish them, hoping one pair may meet her wearable standards, and keep her feet warm, and dry. Maybe the new shine will add some glamour. She looks them over then removes her still damp Uggs from the heat vent where I'd left them, and puts them on.



We drive to Provincetown, at the tip of the Cape, and stroll down Commercial Street. Courtney's Uggs build up speed to take an intentional slide on the slushy ice. I slip and slide unintentionally in my barn boots. They are the same boots I'd worn years earlier, while saddling a horse in a Rochester summer.

I push the button for the small umbrella to pop up. Courtney is not at all interested in being shielded from the icy drizzle. Her damp brown boots earn the Ugg name. They get soppiest before we have our New Year's Eve toast at Governor Bradford's Tavern.

Under the large outdoor eave, I push hard, and fast several times to make the small umbrella snap close. A young man, smoking under the eave, studies us. He tells me to slow down. He suggests various establishments we might like to visit. Is it that obvious we're not locals? He warns us of a likely encounter we'll have with a fellow named Shane.

Almost disappointed, we don't encounter anyone fitting Shane's description, until we find an establishment full of 'townies'. The floor has a twenty-degree slant. I joke about this being a good place to come back and tie one on. We spot Shane. We were not disappointed.

Black Barn Boots, wiped free of white streaky salt watermarks – mine

Brown Uggs, now worn with my lime green ski socks - hug my daughter's feet

Our boots are left by the door on a soft warm rug at my sister's house, in Nauset Heights. When no one is looking, I slip Courtney's boots onto the heat vent. She and I lock smiles as my sister admires the lime green socks on my daughter's feet. During this warm, short visit, Courtney meets her cousin's husband, and their son for the first time.

Wellfleet is on our agenda so we head out. A home-cooked dinner of lobster and the world's best oysters (only hours old) await us at a kind friend's home. Upon arrival, I glance around for a heat vent, but the boots stay on. No opportunity to warm them this time.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Old Brown Clogs, back on in a hurry - mine

Uggs, back on – Courtney's

No time for breakfast, we race to Logan airport for Courtney's departing flight, coffee in hand. No time to make a more appropriate footwear selection. My daughter had removed her now stiff brown boots from the heat vent and slipped them on, without socks. I drive with instant slip-on clogs.

We talk about airport security. I picture her walking through the metal detector barefoot. I offer her my blue and pink striped knee-high socks from my feet. "No thanks Mom." She easily finds a pair of purple ones I packed near the top of her bag.

What was my bag now engulfed her original travel bag, and was stuffed with more things, including extra socks. Maybe the enclosed, newly acquired handbags will match a pair of her shoes? It didn't matter. I was happy she took it. A visual recall of leaving my mother's home with more than I'd arrived with leaps into my mind.

I drop Courtney off at the departing terminal, and scoot to short-term parking, wondering how fast I can run in loose clogs, to meet her inside. I make a conscious effort not to watch too long before she is completely out of sight. My heart sags.

On the way home, already missing her, I'm lost in a reverie of recent memories. At the "10 miles to Interstate 495" sign, I realize I'm on the Massachusetts Turnpike. I'm lost, spending more on gas and tolls than needed. I'm ticked. I'm glad at feeling ticked. It takes away some of the bittersweet parting.

Nike Sneakers - mine

No Brown Suede Boots of my daughter's

The parting is fresh, and I am home. It's been days since I've taken my daily walk. I'd been determined not to lose precious time with Courtney so I'd skipped the walk.

My sneakers have a nylon mesh of diamond shapes, and I realize they are summery, and will most likely get wet. It has warmed to a dizzily, flakey 23 degrees as I lace them up to head out for a brisk walk through the neighborhood. I avoid the beach with its bitter

winds.

Upon return, I kick off my sneakers covered in slushy snow and some sand, regardless of the beach-less walk. I set them by the heat vent. There are no brown boots; just a wrinkly, dried-up pair of summer socks. A tear falls beside them. I pace back and forth, in my old brown clogs.

There's an unusually large amount of food in my fridge, in anticipation of overfeeding my daughter. I'm not hungry. I make a cup of tea. I make another. I forget that I made the first one. Picasso wanders into the guestroom and gazes at the empty bed. He'd slept there, with Courtnay, for the pass four nights. Two reluctant New Year's Eve Advils remain on the nightstand.

JANUARY 2ND

Three-Inch Spiked Summer Sandals with Rhinestones.

I had to put the spiked sandals on, if only for a little while. No brown clogs. I feel better. The sleet hasn't let up, but it will.

I lace up the Nikes, do my brisk walk, and wonder if the Uggs are dry.



Suzann Dwyer washed ashore from Honeoye Falls, south of Rochester, N.Y. She has two children, Ryan and Courtnay, and has six siblings.

A former educator, Suzann holds a BS in Education from SUNY Geneseo, and a Masters in Education from Nazareth College of Rochester. Her teaching experience ranges from Early Intervention through college level.

Her interests and hobbies have always been in the creative realm, and her stories began in Manhattan and the Bronx, long before she found a home in Orleans.

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