

Calendar and Stories

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(North Shore Writers Association Fiction Contest)

Try: My First Race on Snowshoes

By Mary Chang

My conversation with my 8-year old son, Dylan prior to my race day: "As long as I complete the race, it doesn't matter what place I finish, even if it's last. I need to make a good effort—by trying—that's what's important."

I asked Dylan what place he thought I would finish in the Grouse Mountain Snowshoe Run Race. He tilted his head, blinked, and said, "One-hundred ninety-nine, Mom."

"Oh, out of how many people?" I asked. "Two hundred!" Dylan replied.

No matter how anxious, nervous, and scared I was, I needed to try. I was terrified of getting lost on the trail, stranded overnight or getting trapped ▶



in an avalanche. What if I don't finish? What if I *can't* finish? My voice of reason whispered, "This isn't rational, Mary. It's a 5km snowshoe race in daylight, with markers and volunteers on route. You will NOT die."

I realized I was overdressed and over-prepared after I stepped off the gondola ride Sunday morning. Other racers were wearing dry-fit long sleeves, leggings, and runners with nothing to carry. I wore three layers of shirts plus a ski jacket, leggings underneath my snow pants, gloves, wool socks, knee-high snow boots, and a toque. My hydration

backpack was filled with a litre of water, cell phone, extra gloves, hat, foil emergency blanket, head lamp, pistachios, fruit bar, fig bar, raisins, and a photograph of Dylan.

I was prepared for race day—and an onset of hypothermia. I participated in three 90-minute evening snowshoe-training sessions prior to the race, but our group never made it to the top of Grouse peak turnaround. It was the first of any type of race I've attempted in eleven years.

At the start line, radio music was blaring, adrenaline was running high

and the JACK-FM deejay announced, "Go!" I ran alongside the athletic racers in my Sorels and snowshoes for the first two minutes on the flat then slowed down to a brisk walk, watching the racers pass by me in dozens.

As I climbed, I heard my amplified breathing and repetitive thoughts racing through my mind, "This is tough. These hills are killing me! I want to quit. What the? Racers are descending the mountain and I just started. You got this, Mary—I can do it. I can't breathe—I'm going to die! I hate Grouse Mountain."



When I ascended to the top and saw the Snowshoe Grind Turnaround sign, I shouted, "Finally, I made it. It's downhill from here!" I was geared to make snow angels to celebrate my feat. The volunteer replied, "Good job—keep it up, but yeah, there's more uphill climbing ahead. You're almost half-way."

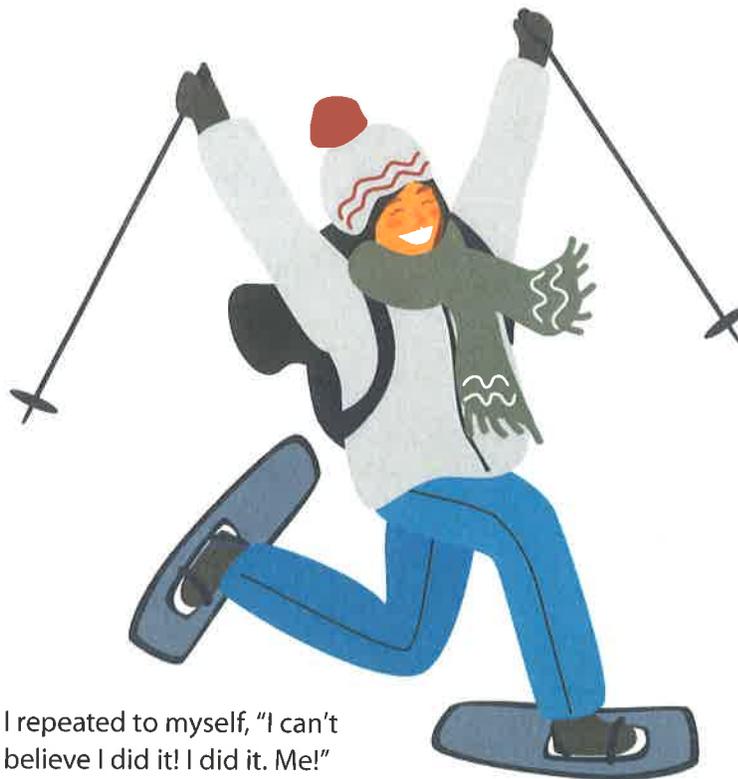
I unzipped my jacket, removed my gloves, sweat dribbled onto my salty lips. I was ready to drop down to my knees, set out my foil blanket, eat my fruit bar, and hydrate. But this was a race not a picnic, I reminded myself.

The rewarding moment of climbing uphill is discovering that within seconds after starting the descent, my pain, anxiety, and fear vanish. A sense of utopian relief overwhelms mind and body and breathing returns to normal. Whenever there was a good stretch of downhill, I plopped down onto my butt, raised my snowshoes and snow-slid down screaming "woo-hoo" to the forest.

During the trek, there were sections of the trail I found myself alone on. My fear returned. My mind raced, "Where are the pink ribbon markers? This isn't the way. Where the heck is the trail?"

I stopped to breathe and closed my eyes. I listened to the mountain, opened my eyes and appreciated the silence, snow, blue sky, and being alive. I drank several sips of water, spotted the pink markers across the terrain and found my way back to the trail.

When I was twenty feet away from the finish line, the Jack FM deejay announced, "Here comes racer number 51—Mary Chang!" I raised my arms above my head as I crossed the line and the crowd cheered.



I repeated to myself, "I can't believe I did it! I did it. Me!"

My official race time was 1:16:39. I placed 51st overall out of 77 racers, 18th out of 36 females, and 7th out of 12 racers in the 40–49 years age group. First place was awarded to a male (19–29 years age group) who finished in 27:06 and fastest female finished 37:36.

When I came home that morning after race day, Dylan gave me a big hug and said, "You did it—you came in number 51. Good trying, Mom!"

It was my personal journey, persistence and striving that surpassed my diffidence, self-doubt, and fear, which empowered me to keep going. The mountain climb led me to experience every blissful second of bum-sliding my way down the slope!

My pride and victory in finishing 51st, not 1st place, was a feat of "good trying." Next year, maybe Dylan will be bum-sliding his way down the mountain with me.

Word of the Month:

diffidence

[dif-i-duhns]

NOUN

1. the quality or state of lacking confidence in one's ability, worth or fitness; timidity.

My success that Sunday morning was overcoming my own **diffidence** by taking on the Grouse Snowshoe Race challenge. I learned that if you're scared or feeling diffident about starting or dealing with whatever life challenges that come your way—try anyways!