

# BIG DEEDS

## WITH SMALL SHOVELS

by Seth Baum

Olivia and I rode the Orange Line back together. The night air was cool but not harsh, and light snowflakes dripped from the sky like glistening fairy dust enchanting the world. Outside Stony Brook station I tried persuading her to go sledding, but couldn't sufficiently prove that buffering the pain of waking up early with a full night's deep sleep was a totally unhealthy thing to do. So, I shrugged off her loss and began walking home through the powder.

Unlike Olivia I couldn't just go home to bed. This Boston night was too beautiful to abandon. I trudged down my little dead-end street's snow-draped sidewalks back to my building, and as I approached the entranceway I spotted the unassuming object that would fortuitously alter the course of my night: a single small shovel.

Without removing my backpack, I started shoveling a quick path from my building to the street—the perfect outlet for my untamed tap of energy. But as I got going, I thought, why not shovel the adjacent doorway too? Why not shovel the sidewalk in front of my house? “Maybe I should just shovel the whole walkway. Yeah, that’s the ticket.” I put down my backpack and continued shoveling. I would not be sledding that night.

Pushing further up the sidewalk, through the sidewalks of neighbors I've never even met, I felt the great thrill that comes only from partaking in clan-

destine operations. Usually, such missions are reserved for prank or personal gain. This however, was giddy obsessive compulsion.

As I reached about halfway down the street, a man emerged from across the street to check things out. I'd been found out. I gave him a simple greeting; he smiled and responded in Spanish. I shrugged, smiled back and resumed shoveling. He lingered briefly before returning to his apartment, leaving me alone with the night.

It was a lot of work, shoveling all that snow, especially with such a little shovel. But I had plenty of energy left after I finished my side of the street, at which point I stood back, scratching my head at my accomplishment. I had reached a logical place to return to the world of normal behavior, and as I started shoveling the sidewalk on the other side of the street, I kicked myself for being so crazy nice. Why couldn't I just go to bed like everyone else? Why couldn't I carve out a slice of sidewalk just wide enough for my own personal pair of slender ankles, and leave everyone

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else to deal with their own black-diamond drifts?

But I felt a certain pride in my street out there, toiling on its behalf. I was glad my deed would remain anonymous, that it may be attributed to the street itself. I imagined my neighbors the next morning, cold, tired, and bewildered, as they stood staring blank-faced at their cleared sidewalks, wondering how and where the powder went. **WU**

*Clearing other people's sidewalks is just one way in which Seth does his community good. Throwing killer Whats Up events is another. Check out his "Dinner and a Movie" event, March 20 @ Haley House, 23 Dartmouth St. in Boston, 6pm.*



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