

**The Shoe Pile**  
**by Stacia Yoon**

Ever defending floors from the world's debris, "Shoes off!" reverberates in my head when anyone crosses my threshold. I forewarn new guests about the policy, giving them the opportunity to choose clean, intact socks. I reprimand veterans who fail to automatically de-sole.

The tell-tale sign of a shoes-off house is the shoe pile, a mound created by layers of doffed footwear. While my husband suppresses his urge to tidy the jumble, I admire its organic form, reading it like tea leaves at the bottom of a cup, trying to divine the shoes' day. Where have they been? How long will they stay? Do they smell?

The shoe pile in my empty nest is small. But when celebrations bring family, it rises like Everest. During one particularly well-attended Thanksgiving weekend, I snapped a photo of the entryway alp and shared it with a few friends with the title "So happy." A friend responded, "So jealous."

The force of time has eroded the majesty of my holiday shoe pile. Adult children called to other places and aging relatives unable to travel leave the foyer a flatland. The desolation dampens my festive spirit and stokes a why-bother attitude. Each year fewer decorations emerge from boxes. The barrenness left after repacking them erases the prior enjoyment of their beauty.

Perhaps this year, I will drag all my shoes out and just pile them by the door, creating a mountainous image to guide me through a quiet holiday season.