



**Trail Blazer:**  
Playing dress-up in her mother's shoes was a common experience for Ms. Bea. Today, she fills her own with confidence.

## Step One

Ms. Bea argues that filling another's shoes might just help you find your own

// illustration by Alice Ratterree

**“Y**ou have some big shoes to fill.” I cannot hear this expression without having an immediate flashback to a cherished childhood memory. I was probably about five years old, slipping, sliding, clipping, clapping in my mother's high-heeled shoes, when I found her in the kitchen. With her pocketbook on my arm, I introduced myself as Mrs. Jones. My mother invited me to sit with her and to enjoy some tea and cookies as we discussed my make-believe children, my Mr. Jones, and life as a stylish, happy young lady.

Through the years my mother and I talked often of this sweet, shared memory and how much it meant to both of us. When I was a freshman in college, I received a letter addressed to Mrs. Jones. The letter begins with a recapping of the oft told details of my entrance and exit, tottering in and out with sureness, despite my ill-fitting shoes. The letter concludes as follows:

*So Mrs. Jones—go with swiftness and honesty toward your destiny—shape your destiny with God and accept only the very best, for only the very best will do for you.*

*Put on your shoes of courage, stride the pathway with confidence, be filled with exultation and rejoice in yourself! Rejoice with others! Go in beauty and kindness.*

*And I will rejoice in you!*

*Love, Mrs. Jones' Mother*

When I hear someone opine about “big shoes to fill,” I am reminded of these encouraging words and feel empowered. My days of wearing someone else's shoes are bygone. Now my feet slide into my own shoes of courage as I tackle the latest challenge.

Fresh ventures and responsibilities are exciting. More often than not, you are going to be filling a position or starting something new, following someone who achieved success before you. Rather than feel threatened, as if you can't “fill another's shoes,” see the experience as a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow as you discover your predecessor's (or perhaps competitor's) secrets to success. Study carefully what worked for her and then infuse your efforts with your own style, knowledge, and experience to make your unique mark—in shoes that are just the right size.

I'm here if you need me. Until then, y'all behave.   
*In loving memory of Mrs. Jones' mother,  
March 1934–April 2013.*