

PORTAMI!

BY DOUGLAS HARRELL

Some years ago, my wife and I went to Lake Garda. One day, we took a cabin lift to the top of the snow-covered mountains.

We found ourselves a little protected spot where a family was frolicking in the snow—mom, dad, and a little boy about 3 years old. They pranced around laughing and throwing snow at each other.

After a time, the parents decided to leave and started walking back toward the cable car. The little boy started out strong, but faded after about 15 yards and called out, "Portami!" (Carry me!). They called back over their shoulders for him to come along. He soldiered on for another 10 yards getting further behind when he stopped altogether and called out more forcefully, "Portami!!!"

This time, his parents stopped and turned to face him. They explained that he was a big boy and would have to walk himself. Again, they turned and continued on their way. He stayed his ground, calling out to his parents an occasional, "Portami!" growing more agitated as the distance between them increased.

He waited until they had again turned to face him to start his performance. Heroically, he trudged forward with two labored steps. Raising his right arm in a desperate plea for mercy, he cried, "Portamiii!" finishing it off with a perfect operatic choke in his voice. His parents watched stoically as he took one last step

and, feigning utter exhaustion, fell over stiff as a plank, face first into the snow, his arm still outstretched over his head. As they stood there, he lifted his head and seemingly with his last ounce of strength, raised his arm, palm upward, shaking it three times for dramatic effect while he gasped forth for the last time, "Por...ta...mi..." before collapsing back into the snow.

Reluctant to give in, his parents stood and watched for a good minute, but he didn't move. Finally, probably fearing frostbite on the little guy's nose, his father strode back, slung him over his shoulder, gave him a halfhearted pat on the bottom, and trudged back to his wife. Peering over his father's shoulder, the little boy was doing his best silent snicker with an ear-to-ear grin on his face. My wife and I couldn't stifle our laughter, which drew a battleweary smile from the defeated father.