

Bill Rea ? A fall for me

Before I get too into this, I want officials of the Region of Peel to be assured there were no injuries in the events soon to be reported, and no legal action is anticipated, at least not at this time.

I took a flip at the Regional offices last Thursday, but the only thing that was seriously injured was my dignity.

Regional council met last Thursday, and you will recall that was a very wet and rainy morning. I arrived at about 8:30, arriving an hour early in the hope, which proved to be forlorn, that I would get a spot in the visitors' parking area (the Region needs more visitors' parking) and went into the Tim Horton outlet in the office complex to get a coffee before going to the Council Chambers. I was walking to the counter when it happened. It might have been the wet floor, or the wet soles of my shoes, or both. But I felt my left foot starting to slide, and down I went.

It wasn't a very hard fall. The shock was absorbed by the right portion of my fanny and the heel of my right hand. Both were a little sore in the aftermath, but I've had a lot worse. As I stated above, the worst damage was to my dignity.

Fortunately, things were a little quiet at the time in the outlet named after the legendary Leaf defenceman, so there weren't many people around. There was one woman standing about five feet away from me.

?Are you all right sir?? she asked as I got back to my feet.

?Yup,? I replied as I gave her a rueful grin. ?Please hold your applause.?

She grinned back.

Now I'm not trying to make light of falls, because I know they can be a serious matter, especially as one gets older. And since I'm now counting the months until I turn 60, it's part of a reality that's looking me right in the face.

There are cases in which falls can result from some medical condition. Such was certainly not the case with what happened to me last week, at least I don't think it was. When one slips or trips, be they six or 60, they are likely to end up on the ground. And sometimes a quick recovery is a clear indication that there's nothing wrong at all.

You might recall a little more than 40 years ago when then American president Gerald Ford was getting off an airplane in Austria. According to accounts I later read, the heel of his shoe apparently caught on something on one of the steps near the bottom of the gangway, causing him to stumble.

There were articles at the time wondering if there was some medical condition that caused him to take a flop. I recall he got a bit huffy, arguing that his quick recovery should have indicated he was in pretty good shape. The man was well into his 60s by this point, yet he sprang right back up and went about his business.

Again, I think the most serious injury in that case was to the President's dignity.

There is a problem with the fact that we live in a society that seems obsessed with taking legal action, and my awareness of that was what prompted the opening paragraph this column.

About 20 years ago, in the days when I was living in a high-rise, I stepped in a patch of something slippery in the underground parking garage, and promptly found myself flat on my back. Since there were no witnesses, my dignity took only a minor beating. Yet I realized I had run into a hazard, so I made sure the authorities knew about it.

I went to the super's office and reported what had happened, specifying the location, and urging the issue be addressed ASAP.

A couple of days later, I received a phone call from a woman identifying herself as a representative of the owners of the building. She asked me about the fall, any possible injuries and whether I had needed medical attention. It was abundantly obvious her delivery was coming from a prepared text. They didn't give a damn if I had been injured. They were just getting their guard up against a possible lawsuit. And who could blame them?

But there are other cases when falls can be a lot more serious.

My late mother had a fall on a Toronto street about 13 years ago, when she was 78. It was in winter, so the conditions were probably a factor (she believed that to be the case). But it is true she was older and getting frailer. She was already dealing with the cancer that would claim her life later in the year. Her fall was a lot more awkward than the one I experienced last week. But fortunately, there were two Toronto Police officers who witnessed it, and they took charge, quickly calling for medical assistance. My mom had a couple of bad bruises and a few other minor injuries, but they were treatable at the scene, and she was able to go on her way. She was so impressed that she sent a letter to the Police Chief, praising the two officers (that was something my mom would have done as a matter of course).

And I know there are a lot of cases in which the consequences of falls can be a lot more serious. I think most of us have known someone who died, and later learned there had been a bad fall not too long before that. I don't believe that was the case with my mom, and I don't think she believed it either.

I got through my incident too.

I do know that falls are no laughing matter, but they do happen, and when they happen to me, I try to make as light of it as possible.

When my sense of humour leaves me, then I'll know I'm in real trouble.

