

## Bill Rea ? I'm in better shape than I thought

Although I was never much of an athlete, I think I do possess a certain amount of physical prowess.

Like most boys growing up in this country, I had my dreams of being a great professional hockey player. I played a lot of the game myself, both in organized leagues on ice, on school teams and I killed hours and hours on the street in front of my house (I was lucky enough to live on a cul-de-sac). The fact is the only hockey position I'd be fit to play at any advanced level would be the puck.

And my play at other sports wasn't that much better. I was never very good at baseball or football. I hated basketball (I still do). I could sort of hold my own playing soccer, mainly because I had a certain knack of getting in the way of opponents' shots (the ability to be a pest has served me rather well in my professional life).

At my age, of course, I'm well beyond anything like that. An arthritic back and pains in my legs have sort of permanently relegated me to the sidelines, where my ability to cheer can be well-utilized (as long as I keep my mouth shut).

It is true that, as I'm learning the hard way, that when a man reaches a certain age, there are some things he used to be able to do that he's just not capable of any more ? or at least they don't come as easy as they once did.

A couple of weekends ago, my wife and I were busy doing some general cleaning of our house. I was concentrating on one room, and it basically involved an hour or so of rearranging. There was no heavy lifting or lugging involved. It was mainly a matter of bending over to pick stuff up and then straightening up again. I should also mention this hour came after a previous hour I had spend cutting the lawn.

The result was at the end of those two hours of manual labour, I was a big, sweat-soaked mess. At that point, I wanted nothing more than to fill the bathtub and completely immerse my carcass; head and all.

We're into the fall fair season. As of this writing (last week), I'm nerving myself for the fair in Brampton, and that's going to be followed by Bolton's offering. That's going to mean walking, and lots of it. That's nothing new in my job, and things are going to get heavier between now and Christmas. I firmly believe one of the most entertaining aspects of the annual Bolton Santa Claus Parade is the site of me running after it (Beth is seldom amused).

Last Sunday involved a lot of walking around covering various events, and I was exhausted when I got home. I almost was in bed by 6 p.m. that night.

But despite my aging and failing bod, every now and then I manage to impress myself.

I attended the meeting of Peel Regional council last Thursday, and those meetings, as you may know, are held at the Regional administrative offices, which are just north of Bramalea City Centre.

I was running a little late when I arrived and found a long lineup at the three elevators in the lobby. Worse, the indicators told me all three were on the upper floors. I could either wait around for a spot on the elevator, doing nothing in the process, or I could walk up four flights of stairs to the fifth-floor council chambers.

Thoughts of the physical exertion and my bum legs and back hardly entered my head. The only issue was the fact I had better things to do with my time. Besides, I hate standing in lines.

So up the stairs I went.

Was it a problem? It sure was. There were a bunch of other people who opted to take the stairs, and they were presenting quite a bottleneck. I might hate standing in line, but I hate being stuck behind slowpokes more.

Fortunately, the whole gang was just going to the second floor, so I was able to make it to the fifth at my own speed, which was pretty fast, if I do say so myself.

It also had the advantage of complying with Regional policy, which encourages people like me to make similar choices. Indeed, there are signs by the elevators in the building, advocating that ?simple changes, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator, save energy and put you on course for healthier living.? Since my tax dollars went to the production of those signs, I was happy to give them a bit of justification.

And the physical activity had me feeling pretty good when it was completed. I made it to the fifth floor without breaking a sweat. I wasn't even breathing heavily. Not only did I feel great, I even felt like bragging, which I guess explains why I wrote about it.

It might also be the case that I'm in better shape than maybe I give myself credit for.

My doctor sent me for a stress test a couple of months ago (seeing how my heart reacted to stress), and I think I really impressed all concerned.

Remember the ice storm we had just before Christmas (as if anyone could forget it). I took a couple of falls during that time, including one particularly spectacular topple one night. There was one second, when I was gingerly making my way across a big hunk of ice (such hunks were very easy to find at the time). The next second, I was horizontal in mid-air, about three or four feet off

the ground. The following second, I was flat on my back on the ground, trying to take inventory of which bones I had busted. Actually, I hadn't broken anything, and was able to get right back up and go about my business. No pain ? not even a bruise. I don't that's an example to be shrugged off, because once one reaches a certain age, falls can be serious. But a lot depends on what kind of shape the faller is in.

Some of you might remember former American president Gerald Ford. He had a reputation of being something of a klutz, although this admittedly amateur student of history believes he was one of the most under-rated presidents of recent memory. He also had a habit of falling down at inopportune moments, like when there were cameras on him. There was the memorable occasion when he fell down part of the stairway while getting off a plane in Austria. The main point, which a lot of commentators missed, was Ford got right back up and went about the rest of his day. Media and critics were speculating about whether there was something physically wrong with the man. But I recall watching the news coverage when Ford died about eight years ago, seeing an interview with him in which that fall was brought up. I thought he made an interesting point. Ford was in his 60s by that point, and he said the fact he got up so quick must have been an indicator that he was in pretty good shape.

Although I'm not an expert, I have to believe there might be something to that. Some of you might doubt that.

All I can say is if you're a 50-something man, let's see you take the stairs to the Regional council chambers on the fifth floor without breaking a sweat

