



Yes, I know the title is a cliché, and clichés are no-no's for writers...that is, unless they work. As I'm sure you know, a cliché is a phrase or opinion that's overused and betrays a lack of original thought. That may well be true but this phrase fits the topic beautifully and I'm using it. That topic is exercise.

I'm talking about getting' the ol' bod moving. And not from the couch in front of the Final Four or a good movie to grab another cool beverage from the fridge. It's the kind that happens three times a week, or five days a week or whenever you participate in a routine that stretches and uses your muscles, makes you sweat and breathe a little hard, boosts your serotonin levels, and gets the oxygen sparking to your brain. All this is so the gray matter can provide you with information when you need it, as opposed to showing up at 3 am. Nobody really wants to hear from you then about a conversation you had with them over lunch.

Participating in sports is one thing – tippy-toeing on the tennis courts to set up a slam, whacking the tar out of a Titleist on the links, knocking a homer past the outfielders in a city park pick-up game, grinding out smooth, freestyle laps in a cool pool, or clicking across the floor in a lively tango. All give your muscles a charge and make your heart pump faster. Getting out in the fresh air – even to dance – is always a treat . . . okay, except maybe for some of us during pine pollen season. Not going there.

The exercise I'm focusing on is the regular routine either you create or a trainer at a gym or a fitness, yoga, or Pilates center helps you set up, one that exerts your whole body in beneficial ways that sports don't quite accomplish. One that takes into consideration body issues you may have that call for some sort of adaptation, be they temporary or permanent. A good yoga instructor will ask class participants to tell her about any specific joint issues or recent injuries that are not quite healed, and will then adapt your day's practice.

A routine is just that, something you do on a regular basis. Yes, even on those days you'd rather meet the guys after work for a beer instead of hitting the gym for your workout, or chill with a kitty on your lap and your feet up after a long day. If you can just make yourself follow your daily exercise schedule, once you've built up a sweat on the Elliptical, pumped that iron, rowed that stationery scull or charged up in a spinning class, your body will thank you, you'll feel good about yourself, and should you want to, you can gloat to your buddies.

If I'm preaching to the choir, you choir members know who you are. I see some of you at LifeFit regularly. You're the friendly man with glasses who's so fit he can chat up a storm while he's burning up a treadmill. You're the African-American woman with headphones that, if her body language is any indication, must be playing some rockin' line dance music while she works her arms on the water-mill. You're the caring surgeon keeping a steady pace on the treadmill, who volunteers for midnight duty in Charleston to give the city docs a break.

And you're one of the Grumpy Old Men who show up every week at Yoga One.

Y'all keep up the good work!

I may have mentioned this in a previous column, but as the experience was a life-changer for me, I'll reference it again. In 1983 I contracted an autoimmune illness, Guillain-Barre Syndrome. Though I had to learn to walk again, I was lucky, as folks can have numerous physical repercussions from it. Still today, I remain grateful for the experience. Recovery took a while, giving me time to reassess my day-to-days, to determine ways in which I was making life more difficult for my body stress-wise, food-wise and exercise-wise. During my recovery, a chiropractor helped me set up a half-hour morning combo of stretches, to which I've added a bit of yoga, strengthening exercises that include my core, a two-to-three-days-a-week type of walking an osteopath recommended, and gym time. I've been doing those fairly regularly ever since.

From time to time, I used to wonder how much good all this really did. Flash to winter 2003. While researching a Kentucky travel story on Carter Caves State Park, known for its natural wondrous underground tunnels, I was in awe at the beauty and quiet brought on by a heavy overnight snowfall, and decided to explore a cave. Carefully shuffling to my car, I sat to change from walking shoes to seemingly-safer, brand-new hiking boots.

The minute I stood up and took about three steps from the car, I discovered the asphalt lot was covered with black ice. Cartoon-like, both feet slipped from under me. In those few seconds when time slows before a crash, I saw my boots – securely tied on my feet – suspended in the air before me and thought, *Crap! This is really gonna hurt.* Quickly, I tightened my abs and belly before slamming onto the hard pavement. My head was the last body part to hit.

The ranger I'd just interviewed saw my spectacular "oops" and came running. Turned out I had only a small cut on the back of my head. Though my abdomen was quite sore for a few days, I thanked it for being strong enough to break my fall somewhat.

If my mom were still around, she'd no doubt have credited my lack of serious injury on my hard head. But I know better. Those ab exercises work!

As I write, a friend of mine walks briskly by, reminding me to mention her.

A retired nurse who lives in Canada, she fell and seriously injured her knee a few years ago, rendering her unable to bend it. Sitting was difficult, especially riding in a car. So she began walking. Everywhere, every day. Sometimes twice a day. She kept walking and got stronger. As socialized medicine in her home country dictated that she put her name in a queue to wait for a needed operation, she did that. For a couple of years. The procedure was successful . . . and she's still walking. For miles and miles.

Is she making lemonade out of lemons? Not crying over spilled milk? Thinking that it is what it is? Definitely not having a pity party.

I challenge you to choose the most relevant cliché. And while you're thinking, get yourself out and exercise. Remember, you only live once so make the best of it!

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One to Go: An Equine Thriller.

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