

END OF SKI SEASON

Minutes before.



My helmet bobbed against the snow. Sprawled lengthwise under a bright sun. It was a glorious, late spring ski day, still cool enough to keep the surface firm.

The wind was knocked out of me. I lay twisted on top of one pole, unable - it seemed - to move. And like a sunbather stretched on a tropical beach, I felt no urgency to try.

Passing skiers were now stopping to ask if I was okay. Did I want them to call for help?

(My left ski had dropped off, perhaps catching in a clump of ungroomed snow. As I made a final turn hoping to coast toward a soft landing, I'd felt a thin line pop in my right leg from thigh to calf - a new sensation that I knew couldn't be good - before my left shoulder crashed into the ground, and I skidded to a halt.)

Lying there, I kept saying "No". One kind passerby gathered up my lost ski. Another graciously released the other which my shoulder seemed in that moment to lack sufficient strength to accomplish.

It was a perfect day to ski until the lifts closed, and I wanted, I hoped, to get up and go on.

But raising my leg produced a shock of pain and a scream. As I flopped around, I felt like a downed horse. I recall having a bit of sardonic fear that the Ski Patrol would come to "put me out of my misery".



Finally, a one-time employee of the mountain stopped and just called it in; the Patrol appeared; my inability to rise was confirmed; and a toboggan shortly followed. Two patrolmen jiggled me off the snow and onto the sled; still rather drained, I wasn't much help.

Strapped to a toboggan! That's how my ski season ended - not to mention 70-degree temperatures in the mountains of New England the following week.

I'd gone sixty-five years of downhill skiing before "enjoying" a courtesy ride to First Aid.

Always one for new experiences, I'll report that it wasn't a comfortable ride. I'm sure if they thought I'd broken my neck, they'd have taken it slower. Having assessed my "injuries" otherwise, I was treated to a fast, jarring, bumpy ride on a stiff wooden board.



Pulled a hamstring. I'm okay. After completing the necessary paperwork from a gurney, the Ski Patrol got me upright enough to ease me to the car in a wheelchair before a week of limping around gingerly keeping the weight off my right leg.

Which was good, I guess, because two weeks earlier I'd exhausted my left leg into agony skiing out west and realized that I'd probably been favoring it since having back surgery. So, I was in need of an opportunity to strengthen my left leg anyway.

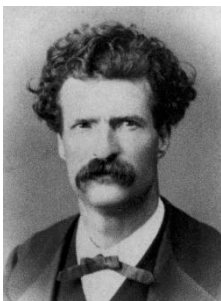
Never particularly fit, I'd always managed short term bursts of exercise – skiing, biking etc. – paying for it through the ache of out of shape muscles in the following days.

Time to face the reality of being 68.

No, I'm not giving up skiing. There are plenty of older, much older people, still enjoying skiing. One over seventy couple out west wanted us to join their mogul class. (And these days, we've all had something repaired or replaced.)

But I've hopefully learned that I can't expect to go on without getting in better shape.

Our travels have always been active. Even sightseeing requires physical stamina. Medieval castles seldom have elevators and museums demand standing for hours and walking the length of endless galleries. Tourism is its own sport. You have to work for the pleasure.



Mark Twain frequently commented in his 1869 travelogue, *The Innocents Abroad*, that he and his cruise mates to Europe and the Holy Land became "fatigued with sight seeing". They spent half the trip recuperating on board between stops. And he was only 31 at the time.

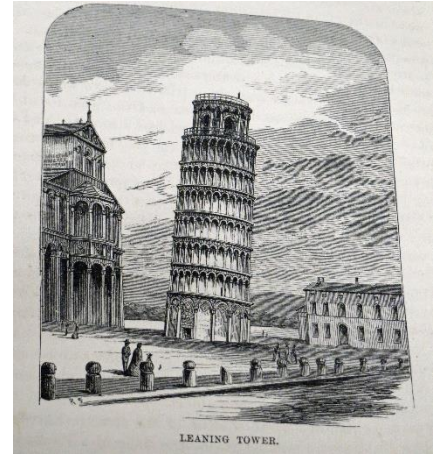


This year, we're following in Twain's footsteps through Italy. Starting in Milan – home of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, down to Genoa – the birthplace of Christopher Columbus, along the coast to Pisa – and the Leaning Tower, then across to Florence – for Michelangelo.

There's an elevator up the Duomo in Milan, but we'll have to climb 400 stairs to reach the top of Florence's Duomo, and about 300 tilted ones in the Tower of Pisa. Mark Twain did it; I want to. And I want to be able to.

Although hooked on great views, I can't take all day getting up and down. Before we go, I'll be climbing stairs to get ready – perhaps starting with a trip up Boston's Bunker Hill Monument.

And I just renewed my IKON ski pass for next season!



Steve Glovsky can be reached at TravelsWithTwain.com.

[Did you know that one of Mark Twain's fellow travelers on *The Innocents Abroad* cruise was from my hometown of Wayland, Massachusetts? Come hear about him at the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Wayland Historical Society on Wednesday, May 10th at 7:00 P.M. in the Wayland Free Public Library - (waylandmuseum.org).]