

“GRACE”

by Harold Cooper

Everyone who knows me – and most who even see me for the first time – realize that I’m not the world’s most coordinated individual. Obviously, God, in his infinite wisdom, did NOT plan for me to don tights and entertain the world as a ballet dancer. In fact, I’m so uncoordinated, my friends facetiously call me “Grace.”

Because of my clumsiness, and usually at the request of the coaches, I never participated in the world’s biggest waste of time – organized sports. But P.E. is another matter! It has been, I’m convinced, a required course in every school’s curriculum since the fall of Satan, the world’s first tumbler. And tumbling still seems to be a major unit in every P.E. teacher’s repertoire!

Today I’d like to tell you about some of my tumbling escapades. On this particular day, the coach had just finished driving us through our calisthenics and laid down his black snake whip and his whistle.

“All right, you clowns, the first tumbling activity we’ll do is called a one-hand roll, or summersault in layman’s terms. Run up, slap the mat, shove off, and go on over. Carter, you’re an upperclassman. Show ‘em what I mean. Not that I can’t do it; I just don’t want to get my new gym uniform all dirty.”

Carter came running. Clippa, clippa, clippa, clippa, slap, on over. Beautiful!

“Okay, next guys in line. Come on.” Off they went. Clippa, clippa, clippa, slap, on over. Clippa, clippa, clippa, slap, on over. Not a hitch. Finally, it was my turn. I lumbered off, thumpa, thumpa, thumpa, bang, bounce, bounce, bounce. I was on my stomach, not on my back or feet as the others had been.

“What was that? A belly flopper? You looked like you were trying to catch a pig. Try again. Get some more speed.”

I took a long start. Thumpa, thumpa, thumpa. (Faster) Thumpa, thumpa, thumpa. (Faster) Thumpa, thumpa, thumpa. I was literally

running like the wind. Then the unexpected happened. Just as I made my move to slap the mat, the elastic in my pants broke. What a let down! Thumpa, slap, bang, bounce, crash. I was tied in such a knot that I was looking right down my back.

“Okay. Get up and just watch. And pull up your pants!”

I watched them go through a couple of other maneuvers. Then the coach said to me, “Hey, you, clumsy and uncoordinated! Come up here, lie down, and let them jump over you and roll. And pull up your pants! Okay, first man!”

Here he came pounding toward me. I said a little prayer and held my breath. Clippa, clippa, clippa, jump, slap, on over. Over and over they did this, and, though I could hear the air whistle and feel movement above, not one person touched me. I guess my prayers were answered. Then here came the instructor.

“Okay, you. Off your belly and on your back. Bend your knees and put your arms in the air, palms up. Now each man is going to run up and jump on you. You give him a push on the shoulders to help him on over. Got that? And pull up your pants and keep your fool eyes open! First man!”

I began hearing the pitter patter of big feet once again. Clippa, clippa, clippa, jump, push up, on over. Not too tough at all. As they started through the line the second time, I was beginning to coordinate my movements with theirs. And then came Big John, the football player – rather agile for his build, as he stood about five feet tall and weighed at least 300 pounds. The first time through I had pushed him on over with only a grunt, and his immense weight hadn’t bothered me. But this time it was different. As he was about to jump – he started to giggle, losing all control. He simply spread-eagled, landing with all his weight upon my chest. My bones all responded by snapping QUITE loudly.

The coach introduced the next activity.

“Okay, we’ll build a human pyramid. You on the mat, come here and be the base. And pull up your pants. Okay, Big John, climb on his shoulders.”

I cringed as he walked up my back, perched on my head, and then stood on my shoulders.

“Steady him, you fool. We don’t want to lose our star football player.”

I put both hands up to steady him and immediately my pants fell to the floor.

“Pull up your fool pants!”

I remedied that situation by holding up my pants with one hand, after the instructor had lifted them from the floor, and steadying John with the other. Finally it was over and everyone tumbled off.

And then the word I anxiously wait to hear every day in P.E.

“Showers!”

In conclusion, I’d like to give you some advice. If you’re clumsy and uncoordinated like me, stay away from tumbling in P.E. by hook or by crook. Especially if the instructor happens to have a scar on his upper lip inflicted by a piece of flying elastic.