

Cold as ice

The expression 'cold as ice' has recently taken on a whole new meaning to me.

For those of you blissfully unaware, I participated in my very first polar plunge over the Family Day long weekend. I've since been asked to describe my experience by various co-workers and community members. So far, all I've really been able to say was that it was? an experience.

Growing up in the north of England, I was never truly exposed to the level of coldness Canadians deal with on a daily basis during the winter. Well, at least not until I moved here. More than a decade on and I still haven't truly gotten to grips with it.

Imagine my reaction then when it was first suggested I jump in a pool of freezing water in the middle of February. Although I knew it was for a fantastic cause, there was slight apprehension. I wasn't sure I could do something like that to myself. After talking to a couple of recent participants, who assured me the plunge really wasn't all that bad, and reading into all the awesome things Special Olympics supports, I signed up for Shelburne's Polar Plunge.

That was back in December. With Christmas and the New Year still to come, Feb. 18 seemed a lifetime away. I put the plunge to the back of my mind. As the big day drew closer, I found myself getting more and more nervous. Then it arrived. The morning of the jump, I went out for breakfast with my wife and in-laws, who drove two hours to watch me complete the feat. Now, I'm a big guy who loves his food. On Monday morning I sat and stared at this wonderful menu promoting all kinds of incredible breakfast options. Nothing stood out. I wasn't hungry. Strange. Very strange.

As we all drove up Highway 10, I felt anxious. Again, very strange for me. I hadn't really prepared myself for the jump. When we arrived, I made a beeline for the registration table. I wanted to get this over and done with. After dropping off my forms and cash, I made my way over to the pool. I caught up with organizer Cst. Jeff McLean, who informed me the it was filled on Friday. On plunge day, volunteers had to chip away almost two-inches of surface ice. Long story short, it was cold. Very, very cold.

Embracing the spirit of the day, I dressed up like Fred Flintstone. If I was going to do something crazy, I might as well try and have a little fun doing it. As time ticked down, the plunge drew closer. Awaiting my fate, I found myself talking to an inspirational young man called Ryan. A long-time supporter of Special Olympics, this was Ryan's 12th polar plunge. He had a big smile on his face and couldn't wait to jump into the frigid water. After talking to him, something clicked in my mind and, suddenly, I wasn't worried anymore. I was even looking forward to it.

I remember making my way up the steps, reaching the plunge platform and staring at the water. The unmistakeable build-up of ice circled the calm water. Smiling, I went for it, launching myself from the pad. The shock was tangible. The water definitely was cold. Still, I savoured the moment, fully submerging myself and swimming to the other side.

I climbed out of the pool, high-fiving spectators along the way. My mother-in-law greeted me with a warm blanket and off I went to change and warm up. On reflection, the experience really wasn't that bad. Actually, let me correct that. It was fun. And it was worthwhile. 60 people came together to raise more than \$30,000 for Special Olympics.

It got me to thinking about all the amazing fundraisers we have in this community. This weekend the Orangeville Food Bank is hosting its Coldest Night of the Year event. Although I won't be participating, I will be supporting the fundraiser. After my experience with the Polar Plunge, witnessing first hand everything it had to offer, I can see myself participating in more fundraisers in the future. Yes, even if it involves jumping into freezing cold water.