

Leinster House barrier claims another TD's car

By **Senan Molony**
Political Editor

THE wheels didn't quite come off for TD Robert Dowds yesterday in Leinster House, but his car was certainly left high and dry.

The Labour deputy had to clamber out of his motor and jump down eighteen inches when it got lifted up after a tangle with the security barrier. Mr Dowds was unhurt but said he was 'just a bit shocked'.

A year ago Fianna Fáil Senator Mary White's Mercedes was caught on the security barrier on the very day she got it back from the garage.

Mr Dowds said that he had driven over the barrier when it was flat, as he followed a car being driven by Fianna Fáil TD



Car mishap: TD Robert Dowds

Billy Kelleher. 'It lifted while I was driving over it,' the Dublin Mid West TD told the Irish Daily Mail yesterday. 'It seems to have caused some damage.' He said he

would be bringing his 2007 Toyota Prius to a garage 'to get it looked at,' adding that some plastic bits on the undercarriage appeared to have fallen off.

The barrier operates in response to a push-button system run by Leinster House staff, but because it is a hydraulic system there can be a lead-in time of a few seconds before it responds to commands.

'I feel sorry for the person at the desk,' Mr Dowds said.

'She had pressed the button, but it hadn't raised itself. When it did, it lifted the back of the car and stopped it from moving.'

He added: 'I suppose I will be more careful in future. I have always been more nervous when coming in the gate behind someone.'

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Strange how illness reveals us at our best

I AM physically and emotionally exhausted. For days, my wife and I have been warring against a virulent virus. Having infected our boys' school, it was only a matter of time before it made its way into our home.

Our youngest was the first to succumb. The following day, it overcame Mrs Dooley and then our eldest. That same evening, our middle boy joined the ranks of the defeated.

As the last one standing, I became something akin to a male version of Florence Nightingale. With supreme stoicism, I spent the evening tending to my care, cleansing and disinfecting as if battling the bubonic plague. Armed only with my rubber gloves, I ran from bed to bed furiously defending my little family from the ferocious onslaught.

Ostensibly, I was calm, collected and in control. Inside, I was nauseous, tender and barely able to cope. By some miracle, however, I managed to fight on until the house finally fell silent.

The next day, saw a slow recovery. Like the war-wounded, my patients did what they could to get through the hours without incident. By nightfall, it seemed as though we were out of the woods.

Internally, however, I was still very fragile. One side of me believed I could prevail, while the other suspected it was only a matter of time. I fell a day later.

As I write, my youngest is back in bed with a second dose. He has been joined by our middle son who, despite his woes, is keeping the best side out. This means that I am now reprising my role as nurse to the fallen.

Life in our household has certainly not been easy of late.

Since I started writing this, I have already been summoned five times to the aid of the suffering. Yet, even in times like this, the grandeur of the human spirit cannot be suppressed.

When tending the sick, you realise just how mutually dependent people are. You realise how vulnerable and fragile each of us is and how much we need each other when strength fails. It is then that you see true love in action.

Like most people, I have never found it easy dealing with sickness. Still, when faced with others who are suffering, you discover hidden within yourself reserves of strength. They call and you cannot but respond with compassion, care and kindness.

Similarly, when I was confined to bed, Mrs Dooley heroically held it all together. She did not do so out of suffering but because it is what true love demands. Strange to say but in

so many ways sickness brings out the best in us.

I know many people who are constant carers. With little respite, they care for sick children, spouses or relations. They are people with reservoirs of compassion, people who never cease to smile even in their darkest hours.

Sickness reminds us that we are ultimately bound up together. In the end, we are all susceptible to the same storms as age and decline take their toll. It is then that we need a caring heart, a strong shoulder and a loving touch.

Between bouts of disinfecting bathrooms, I collapsed in an effort to calm my nerves. It had been a long day and I was none the better for it. Quite suddenly, however, I got my reward.

His small pale face and black eyes had temporarily concealed his shining spirit. It must have taken all his remaining strength but then our middle son began to softly sing: 'Kum bay yah, my Lord, kum bay yah'. From a pit of gloom, rose the voice of an angel, a voice so pure it made the sun shine.

Little moments like that make days like these seem so worthwhile. As I say, they signal the sublime power of the human spirit to rise above sickness. They prove that, so long as we are loved, nothing can keep us down.

I saw this many years ago when, after having been diagnosed with brain cancer, my grandmother took her final journey to the hospice. Even though she looked shook when I visited her the next day, she had no intention of dying.

'Please God, I'll be home soon', she said with a smile.

THREE days later, she went home but not to the one she had in mind. To this hour, I vividly recall her smile, her hope and the beauty of that moment which she left me as her parting gift. In her moment of greatest weakness, she helped me much more than I could possibly help her.

Talking of which, I have just heard the pitter-patter of tiny feet outside my study. Someone has managed to crawl out of bed and is now lying on the floor playing with his little cars. For the first time in days, he is humming the theme tune from Star Wars.

Does this mean he is finally on the mend? Does it mean that, at last, the virus has been vanquished? I have seen enough these past few days to know that making such positive predictions is best avoided.

That said, the fact that I end this column with a smile is good enough for now. It alone will get me through the rest of the day.

It's time to go now - but not, for once, to grab the rubber gloves.

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