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DECEMBER 18 2017, 12:01AM, THE TIMES

# The sheer joy of seeing others skate on thin ice

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Notebook



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**A** 46-second video entitled “Binman struggles on the ice”, went viral at the weekend — one of those clips that is cruelly, irresistibly funny, almost Chaplinesque; a great belly laugh at another human being’s expense. “No one was hurt in the making of this film”, you want to read at the end, just so you can laugh a bit harder.

I shouldn’t really be amused, though. Nothing separates the young from the old and infirm quite as much as ice. Rain falls on compacted snow, transforming large swathes of the UK into a skating rink, and instantly we are a population divided: one lot entertained, the other imprisoned and fearful.

It has been two weeks since I last left home. Those of us who are vulnerable have turned into hermits, peering mournfully out at a lethal landscape. Since the rain froze, I’ve cancelled everything and haven’t as much as put my head outside. There is too much risk of ending up like the wheelie bins in the video, waltzing others into danger, causing them to fall.

I have watched my husband, anxious-faced, waddling like a duck across to his car. I’ve had visitors shuffle in, tiny steps, arms spread like ballerinas, knees bent in anticipation of a slip. They look simultaneously comic and yet not remotely comic. We have put down salt, and ash, but the ice is pervasive and keeps refreezing — pavements, roads, ramps, paths.

Ice carries a sense of the arc of life: as children, we built slides for the thrill of it; as fragile adults, we cower inside, discuss the best treads on boots, and pray for a thaw. And, if we’re still young at heart, laugh at video clips.

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### **Taxing times**

Perhaps there should be some special badge of righteousness for those of us living in what will soon be the highest-taxed part of the UK. The Scottish government last week took the decision to raise taxes by 1p to 41p and 46p in the pound for higher earners, as well as introduce new 19p and 21p tax bands. Everyone is painfully aware of the plight of people doing the most vital jobs and being paid wages that are not at all commensurate — nurses, carers, teachers. Without decent pay, the centre cannot hold.

I would gladly pay even more if I knew it was going directly towards the recruitment of inspirational teachers, or to shore up the operating budgets for A&E departments, or to create more care beds. It's time to reopen the case for hypothecating tax. No argument I have heard against hypothecation for health and education has been convincing. Why doesn't it happen?

### **Bit of a brute**

May I have a final word on Roy Moore, the defeated Republican candidate in Alabama — still refusing to concede, incidentally — who was filmed riding to the polls on a benighted skewbald horse. A man who hauls a horse around by the bit as he did, using brute force on its mouth, reveals everything about himself. He's not just a loser, he's a low-calibre human being.

### **A foolish taboo**

The Institution of Mechanical Engineers has released a devastating report entitled *Incontinence: Engineering Innovation to Enhance Quality of Life*. It states that incontinence affects nearly one in three adults at some point and costs more than £2 billion a year, but there is little public awareness and it is overlooked by government. Current technology is inadequate, despite profound clinical needs, and there is a critical lack of engineers or technological innovation — in stark contrast to cancer or cardiology. These, the report points out, have mass-media appeal, and none of the taboo. The marginalisation of incontinence inhibits engineers from doing what they should be doing.

Funnily enough, I can't find a single mention of the report in the media. What fools we are.