

Bill Rea ? We don't need trophies

One of the nice things about having Donald Trump as President of the United States is one can be confident that he will say and do something controversial with a certain amount of regularity.

He obliged recently, and his opponents have also obliged by taking him on.

According to published reports, a coalition of environmental and animal-welfare groups have launched a suit to challenge the Trump administration's moves toward allowing the importation of the heads, hides and tusks of African elephants as hunting trophies.

Like a lot of people, I don't approve of the idea of hunting trophies, although I would be lying if I stated I was always of that opinion. I was raised in house which contained a trophy which a living being had to die to create.

According to the story I was told, not long after I was born, my father was on a fishing trip, and successfully landed a five-pound large-mouth bass. Being the fisherman and sportsman he was, he was naturally proud of the accomplishment, and elected to have it immortalized by having the carcass of the fish stuffed and mounted. I did hear him lament a couple of times in the years that followed that he thought the taxidermist did a lousy job. But it hung on the wall on the rec room until the day he died, and some time after.

That fish died about 60 years ago, during a time when it was deemed appropriate that such hunting and fishing achievements be preserved for posterity.

So when I say I don't approve of such trophies, those words are coming from a man writing in 2018, and aware of certain realities of which my dad might not have been.

Actually, the thought of taking the lives of other living creatures as a source of amusement has bothered me for some years.

I fished a lot as a kid. When I was eight, I caught a six-and-a-half pound pike in Lake Nipissing, and bragged my butt off about it for many of the years that followed. But it has been more than a quarter of a century since I was fishing, and I have no desire to get back into it. The thought of making sport out of forcing a fellow creature to fight for its life, while all I have on the line is bragging rights, is something my conscience won't let me get away with.

But now hunting trophies are back in the news. And in some cases, they involve species of animals that might not be as plentiful as they once were.

In the last week, the world has mourned the death of the last male northern white rhinoceros. The news saddened me too. It is a magnificent beast, that alas will probably soon be extinct. Hunters and poachers probably had a lot to do with the species' demise, although other factors probably came into play too.

People hunt and fish for food to sustain themselves. That is the way of some people on this planet, and I would submit there are few among us who would oppose that.

There are others who hunt and fish for sport. There are many who would, with compelling arguments, oppose such acts. Although I would choose not to take part in activities like this myself, I am well aware that I have never been appointed to a position from which I could sit in judgement. These activities are, in many cases, perfectly legal and respectable. I just choose not to take part. I have never been hunting, and have no plans to ever change that.

I have been on a rifle range three times in my life and have fired off a grand total of exactly 60 bullets. But that was more than 45 years ago, when I was a Boy Scout. I don't regret the experience. Indeed, I found it rather intriguing. But I was shooting at paper targets, not living beings.

It is sometimes necessary.

A farmer wants to protect his livestock from predators like wolves and coyotes, so I can therefore see why he might have an interest in getting aggressive. It's not a matter of sport ? it's a matter of livelihood.

But I have seen too much of nature not to be impressed with it.

Here in Caledon, I have had deer cross my path, and have been thrilled at the site each and every time (I've been lucky not to have driving too fast on these occasions, so I have been able to stop in plenty of time). Beyond, I have seen bears in similar circumstances elsewhere in Ontario. The splendour of nature is all around us.

I have never been to Africa, but I know something of the beautiful animals to be found there.

There was a time when people hunted those creatures for sport, but those were in days when that was expected of a certain calibre of man at a certain time in history. Those were also the days when they was probably an assumption that such game was unlimited.

I have been to the local Toronto Zoo a couple of times, although not for several years. I was 30 the first time I went there, with a group of friends. It was the first time I had ever seen a rhinoceros, and I will never forget the awe I felt as I just stood there and gazed at these magnificent beasts.

These creatures are no longer part of an inexhaustible supply. Their numbers are limited, which means they must be protected. The world does not need trophies of animals that have been killed. If we humans like to consider ourselves really superior to the other animals that inhabit this planet, let us prove it with the number of animals we can keep alive.

