

Bill Rea ? Adults can behave bad

No matter what progress we believe this world has made, people tend not to change very much.

In fact, they still have that wonderful capacity for making fools of themselves. They often do dumb things. They frequently do insane things. I'm not complaining. If everyone in this world started regularly using the common sense God gave them, there would be little need for newspapers, and I should find myself unemployed. As I have frequently said and written, I have a vested interest in stupidity.

But sometimes, the stupidity gets offensive, often in the extreme.

I took a phone call in the office the other day from a man who was angry with something we, as a company, had done. It is a fact that it had nothing to do with the way I was doing my job, but rather one of the people who works for this company. As it happens, I don't even know the employee in question. But the fellow on the phone had some harsh words to say about this person, then used a term that I think could best be described as offensive. It wasn't obscene or a sample of fowl language. In certain contexts, I think most of us have probably used the word. In the fashion this fellow was using the word, however, it would have been offensive to many people. I have at least one close friend who gets extremely angry when she hears that word used that way. For that reason alone, I'm not going to repeat it here.

The point is the guy came out with the word. I asked him to repeat it, and he obliged.

I very briefly toyed with the idea of hanging up on him (I've done it before, under similar circumstances). But I elected to just let it pass, and conclude the phone conversation as quickly as I could.

I accept the fact that this guy was angry and frustrated. And I do agree his beef was legitimate. But for a grown-up to channel that anger and frustration into lowering an adult conversation to words probably best suited to a schoolyard made me give my head a shake.

The problem is there are so many like that out there.

We see them all the time, and there is the occasional justification. All of us do tend to sometimes get in the way of someone else, and we don't always act at our best. Anyone who's ever experienced road rage should understand what that's all about. There are those of us who get huffy if someone butts in ahead of us in line.

And then there are sporting events.

My birthday was a couple of weeks ago. I remember my seventh birthday 51 years before that (I'll pause for a second while you all do the arithmetic), because it fell on a Saturday, and my father was able to score two tickets to the Leaf game that night, as the Buds entertained Chicago. It was the first time I had ever seen my hockey heroes other than on the TV screen. So I was watching the likes of Tim Horton, Red Kelly (my favourite player in those days), Bob Pulford, Eddie Shack (he drew cheers when he literally leapfrogged over a teammate early in the match) and Johnny Bower dealing with slap shots from Bobby Hull. The Leafs lost 6-3, but that took only a little off the experience.

The other big memory of the night was the lout who was sitting right behind me, who seemed to have a hate-on for referee Vern Buffey, who was something of a fixture in those days at Saturday night Leaf games.

Lining the teams up for the face off after one of the goals, Buffey was a little slow for this fellow's taste.

"Drop the puck, ya bum!?" he yelled at the ref, with my tender ears picking up every decibel. That was the first offering in an evening listening to this guy rant, and Buffey was his primary target.

My introduction to hooliganism.

It's probably a sign of the times that while this guy was obnoxious and annoying, his language was not offensive. The word "bum" was about as close as he came to being obscene (I was an impressionable seven-year-old kid, with a keen ear for profanity).

My dad's reaction was something I remember too, largely because of the lack of any reaction. I know he was annoyed. He told my mother as much the next morning at breakfast. I'm positive he was tempted to turn around and tell this guy to shut up. My father was not a man to back down in such situations. But he also knew he had his impressionable offspring there. So he bit his tongue, and I believe that went against his grain.

But it was an eye-opening experience into the world of adults not acting accordingly.

Now while he had to know (or should have known) that there was a little kid sitting right in front of him, the fact is this jerk was acting in an adult setting, meaning there might have been some excuse for his antics.

What's the excuse when people act like louts when kids are playing?

Many of us have seen such examples.

I played house-league hockey a couple of decades ago, and vividly remember there were times when some adults fell a lot short of

what society would normally have expected of them. Parents yelling catcalls at officials, who were young kids working part-time. Coaches getting into fistfights over God knows what.

In my time in this business, I have been to enough kids' hockey games to see a lot of parents and coaches check their adult instincts at the door and behave like complete jerks.

But it doesn't have to be that way.

My 12-year-old nephew plays rep hockey in the Caledon Hawks' organization, and we are into playoffs. My wife (his aunt) and I have attended a couple of games over the last few weeks, sitting among the Caledon cheering contingent, consisting mainly of parents. There's been lots of enthusiasm and energy. People have been cheering, banging on noise-makers, waving signs, ringing cowbells, etc. And if you're going to really get into the game, there are going to be moments of elation and frustration, and both emotions (along with a couple of others) have been expressed in abundance. But everyone seems to be able to keep things in perspective.

Beth and I usually join the throng of parents outside the dressing room after the game. Win or lose, everyone seems to be in a good mood.

It's only a game.

We attended one such game last week in Caledon East, and as Beth and I waited outside the dressing room for the family hero to emerge, I noticed a plaque on the wall inside the arena.

It reminds everyone that it's kids playing the game, coached by volunteers and officiated by young people. It simply asks people to bear all that in mind and act accordingly, meaning the way adults are supposed to behave, and not the way they often do.

Good, sensible words. No one can deny that.

What upsets me is there's a need for them to be posted like that.

Some people don't get the message.

