

Bill Rea ? Another place you can?t smoke

There was an item on last Thursday's Peel Regional council agenda that caught my eye.

It was yet another indication that it's getting harder to smoke anywhere.

The staff report to council stated that the corporate Smoking in the Workplace policy was being amended to ban outdoor smoking at Regional worksites, and that includes parking lots.

There was a time that would have upset me, but times change, do they not? Enhanced smoking restrictions now raise my eyebrows, if anything. Not my dander.

There was a time I used to smoke, but I don't any more. But thinking back to the days of my youth, it's a little scary to think of how restrictions have increased over the years.

I started smoking in high school. The main reason I started was most of the kids with whom I hung around were already smoking. I spent too much time as a kid feeling like a fifth wheel, so anything that would buck that trend seemed to be a benefit.

In those days smoking was permitted on the school grounds, and the administration was accommodating enough to even permit it just inside the doors so we didn't have to step into inclement weather to satisfy our nic fits. We weren't allowed to smoke in the classrooms or halls of course. But as long as there was a door within easy reach, it was okay.

Now I have to wonder where I would be allowed to smoke. The question is not likely to keep me awake at night. As I stated above, I no longer smoke, and I am not likely to take it up again. I was able to quit. It actually proved to be a lot easier than I thought it would be.

At the risk of sounding excessively uppity, I have to wonder why there are still people who start smoking in the first place. I guess I have to just remind myself that if I can get hooked, so can anyone.

And there is no question that smoking is addictive.

I once worked for a guy who had never smoked in his life. Out of curiosity, he once asked me how long after I had quit did it take for the cravings to stop.

?They haven't stopped,? I assured him.

Even writing this piece has given me the desire for a smoke. Not to worry ? it's easy to resist, after having not smoked for more than 20 years (okay, I smoked a cigar about 12 years ago, which I received from the proud new father of twin boys).

There were the health considerations, although they seem to be a bit reversed in my family history, especially on my mother's side. She often used to say, usually tongue-in-cheek, that her father quite smoking when he was 80, and he died six years later. So she argued that it was the lack of tobacco that killed him.

My mother maybe had a grand total of five cigarets during the last 50 years of her life, yet she died at 78 of cancer. Her sister, on the other hand, who smoked right up until the last week of her life (the main reason she didn't smoke during that period is it's frowned upon in hospitals), died just weeks before her 93rd birthday.

But the evidence is clear that smoking is bad for most people, despite the odd exception.

I know of one guy I used to see a lot, but not lately. He's now in his mid 60s, and I've been told he's been having serious health issues that are largely based on the fact he was never able to quit smoking. We all have heard plenty of stories like that.

Another reason for quitting is smoking is expensive.

That was something my father used to berate me about, his words usually coming as he removed his pipe from his mouth.

Okay, he was a successful man who had enough disposable income to handle the expense of pipe tobacco and I was a kid, buying my smokes from allowance and whatever I was able to make cutting lawns or shovelling snow. But there was also some hypocrisy there that I dared not speak about. He was also bigger than me.

I went to a local store the other day and asked what a large pack of king-size Rothmans would set me back, and was told \$16.

Throughout my 20s, I was smoking about 30 cigarets per day. I think back and wonder how I could ever have afforded it. I certainly could not today.

But one of the main reasons I quit was the one I alluded to above. The places where one could smoke were becoming more and more scarce.

When I got my first job in this business, the fact that everyone in the office smoked was used almost as a recruiting tool. Yet a couple of years later, the smokers were in a clear minority. Then the word came down from above that the office was a smoke-free zone. I had just about quit smoking by that point.

The next place I worked was in an office building in the big city, and there was no smoking within. There were even large ?No Smoking? signs on the walls outside. Needless to say, the area outside the staff door was littered with cigaret butts.

I worked in the Big Smoke (pun fully intended) during the days when the City of Toronto was discussing whether to ban tobacco in eating establishments. The council debates were heated, bitter, acrimonious and lots of fun to take in from the media table. This was before municipal amalgamation, so one of the arguments against the ban was people could find a municipal boundary and smoke in bars and restaurants in East York, North York, Scarborough, etc. The business people in Toronto were afraid they were getting the short end, and being a capitalist, I had lots of sympathy for them. But for all my sympathy and despite the fun I was having, I knew the ban was inevitable, and would eventually be universal, no matter what municipality one was in.

There was a time when one was allowed to smoke in municipal council chambers and during school board meetings. One by one, motions were passed to change all that.

The place my wife and I frequently go for vacation is strictly no-smoking. We don't object.

I bought a new car at the start of the year. It doesn't have an ashtray, not that I miss it.

With the exception of that cigar mentioned above, I have not smoked in more than 22 years. The fact that smoking is not allowed in Regional parking lots doesn't bother me because I'm not planning to start again. It poses too much of a risk to my health, it's a habit I can't afford and the number of places where one can smoke is dwindling.

Besides, my wife won't let me

