

Bill Rea ? Bears are more interesting

There are many things in this life I am able to explain, and a lot of others that I can't.

One of the things I can't explain is me ?never have been and probably never will.

I attended last Tuesday's Town council meeting. There was lots of talk about the Town's favoured route for the road through the GTA west corridor (unofficially known as Highway 413), and there was also discussion about the concerns over how students at St. Nicholas Elementary School in Bolton are supposed to get to and from class (crossing Coleraine Drive is understandably a major worry source). There were several other items of interest, although nothing terribly earth shattering.

I might have wondered why I was there in the first place.

One terrific reason was it's my job to be there, although there can always be exceptions, based on circumstances. One would think the fact that I was on vacation last week would qualify as one of those circumstances.

It is true that my wife and I were spending the week at a regular haunt of ours in Muskoka. But we also knew of the council meeting that was planned for the Tuesday we were to be away, and that I would have an obligation to attend. The real problem is this is the third year in a row (it actually might be the fourth) that Town council has scheduled a meeting for the week in the summer that Beth and I planned to be away. And it's a little inconvenient, but also true, that circumstances peculiar to our personal situation put restrictions on when we can schedule our annual getaways. What that all means is if the Town is going to schedule council meetings for our vacation time, there's not a lot either Beth or I can do about it. Yes, I've tried laying guilt trips on various municipal officials, but it has not done a bit of good.

The nice thing is Beth knew she was getting hitched to a workaholic when we got married 17 years ago, so situations such as this don't come as much of a surprise any more.

So we drove up north last Friday evening, arriving at our destination just as it was getting dark. We were a little late getting away, because I had been hoping it would still be light enough to get in a quick swim, but by the time we got the car unloaded and Ella the cat settled in her litter box, it was too dark for that. It really wasn't that big a deal. We knew that lake wasn't going anywhere, and the subsequent weekend provided lots of great swimming weather.

And the hour wasn't that big a deal. We both know the cottage at our disposal was well equipped with a barbecue that I could never afford, and we brought up an appropriate-sized steak to help us celebrate the start of our holiday. And there are lots of great eating places within a 15-minute drive of where we were staying, and we got to most of them over the week. The TV reception is good there, so we were able to keep an eye on how the Blue Jays were doing. The fact is we had to come home Friday so we could watch them lose.

And the wifi was good, so I was able to keep track on developments in the world, and even read my council agenda before last Tuesday's meeting.

That council meeting started at 9:30 a.m., meaning I was obliged to be on the road at about 7, allowing unforeseen situations, like emergency road closures and the like. Again, it was not a big adjustment for me. Even if I am on vacation, I'm usually awake by about 6 in the morning, and very seldom do I stay in bed after 7. So getting myself up early and hitting the road was not a major problem.

While there was a lot of construction activity on Highway 400, especially north of the split around Barrie (southbound traffic was frequently forced into one lane), I was able to make good time in what amounted to a commute of roughly 180 kilometres. I even had enough time to go and check the house Beth and I had just recently moved into, just to make sure all was well. The fact that council held a closed session at the start of the meeting that lasted the better part of an hour helped make the timelines work in the early part of the day.

So there was interesting stuff for me to work on from the council meeting, followed by a leisurely (?) 180-kilometre commute at the end.

Actually, the most interesting part of the whole day came at the end of the trip back north, when I saw what at first I thought was a rather large, black dog. It took a couple of fractions of a second to realize in fact I was looking at a bear, lumbering across the road, heading from my right to left, several hundred metres ahead of me.

It (I wasn't close enough to make any determinations regarding gender) made it to the other side of the road and disappeared into the woods.

I had my camera bag sitting right next to me, and I very briefly wondered about the possibilities of getting a picture, bearing (nice pun, eh?) in mind it would have involved getting the camera out and turned on, taking aim and getting a clear shot, while also driving an automobile in an 80 km-h zone (I don't want the cops to know exactly how fast I was going) with traffic behind me. Guys

in my line of work get such ideas sometimes. The fact the bear disappeared in the woods as quickly as it did kind of settled that question. The thought of parking the car and conducting a quick search of the area for a picture was dismissed even faster. I believe there are many words applied to such stunts, ?suicide? among them.

I did make a point of informing the innkeeper of the place at which we were staying of what I had seen. My sighting was only about five kilometres from the property, and bears can get around (officials in Newmarket learned that the hard way earlier this year, and bears have been reported in Caledon too). He informed me I wasn't the first person to have such an experience, adding the bears in the area seem more interested in dumpsters than anything else (one of the reasons there are rather strict rules where we were staying when it comes to disposal of garbage). In other words, he wasn't worried. I guess there was no reason for me to be worried.

But the place at which we were staying is rather spread out, meaning there was a bit of a walk from the cottage to other amenities, like the beach, parking area, pool, etc. Under such circumstances, I seldom give wildlife that much thought (chipmunks, I can deal with). But after the experience with the bear, I found myself looking around a lot more as I walked.

I guess the point is that when it comes to vacation time, bears are a lot more fun than municipal politics

