

Bill Rea ? Changes to hat etiquette

In case you have any doubt, I can assure you that times have changed. I just made it official.

Some of the changes, of course, are clearly beneficial. I can remember, for example, a time when impaired driving was considered a sort of tolerable social ill. Today, it's a serious crime, and I personally know at least one person who has done time for it.

There are other changes that leave me wondering a bit.

Hats are a good example, especially on women.

I remember a time when ladies didn't go anywhere important without wearing a hat, and my mother was a prime example of that. True, in the days before I started school (long before anyone had ever heard of junior kindergarten and when most moms stayed home), if my mother had to go down the store at the corner in the west Toronto neighbourhood in which we lived, she wouldn't bother getting herself dolled up. Even better, she didn't bother getting me dressed up either. She would just put on her coat, throw a coat (probably one I hated) on me and dragged me to the store for the loaf of bread, or whatever else she might have needed. She wouldn't have gone for milk, because those were the days when milk was delivered.

But if the word shopping was mentioned, and I saw my mom put on a hat, I knew she meant business. There would have already been a couple of other indications. If my mom dressed me in knee socks, I knew I was in trouble. And then I'd see the hat on her head, and I knew that Eaton's and Simpsons would be on the day's agenda (if you're curious about Eaton's or Simpsons, try Googling). That meant I was in for a day from hell.

Of course, my mother would have been right in step in the fashion sense. This was, after all, the early 1960s, and the two dominant women setting fashion trends in those days were Queen Elizabeth and Jackie Kennedy, and seldom was either woman seen out of doors without head covering.

My mother used to find hats for me to wear, usually in keeping with what was expected for little boys in those days. Few of you guys out there who were ever little boys in the '60s will not be too surprised that I thought my mom's taste in hats for her offspring left an awful lot to be desired. I hated them all. They looked dorky, and when you're a kid and you think something is dorky, then it's dorky and no word from anyone is going to change that.

The memory of those hideous hats stuck with me for a lot of years. I was well into my 20s before I became comfortable wearing hats again, and that was only because I had endured too many cases of heat stroke.

In those days, my father usually wore a hat if the weather called for it; namely if it was cold. The hat was as much a part of his attire as his suit and tie, and my dad was always an impeccable dresser, at least when it came to work. For those of you who know me and are puzzled, the simple fact that standards of apparel are not inherited.

He wasn't fussy about his attire all the time. He liked to go fishing when he was on vacation, and for such occasions, he cared little about his appearance. My mom used to sarcastically use words of the 'essence of sartorial splendour' variety at times like that.

There was an incident, during the time I was in high school, that Dad had to attend a church service one wintery evening. He was late getting home because when he went to get his hat and coat from the cloak room, he found that someone had made off with his chapeau.

He naturally first thought that maybe some guy had grabbed the wrong hat, mistaken by a similarity. But those thoughts died by the time everyone else had left. He later told me there were two hats left in the room. 'I wouldn't have worn either one of them to go fishing!' he declared.

I remember some of the hats my old man wore fishing. My imagination still runs wild at the thought of what might have been left in that church cloak room.

The reason this topic popped into my head was what I heard several times during the recent hockey season of happy memory (that is if you happen to be a Chicago Blackhawks fan). I saw several games on TV, because my wife usually hogs the remote such evenings. I have been taken a bit aback before the games start, when the stadium announcers ask the spectators to rise and 'remove your hats' for the national anthem (or anthems).

Men have to be reminded to take their hats off for such occasions?

That's where the changing times come in.

I usually remove my hat when I go indoors. It was instilled in me as part of my upbringing, although there have been the occasional slips (I once attended a social function in a private home and forgot to remove the ball cap I was wearing. I did so when Beth advised me the hostess was giving me dirty looks).

That lesson was drilled into me when I was in Grade 2, heading home from school one wintery day. My teacher, being the attentive dame she was, made sure all her charges were appropriately bundled up before sending them out into the elements. In my case, that

meant making sure the hood of my winter coat was secured over my head (my seven-year old fingers were never able to do the job properly. On my way out the classroom, the teacher handed me an envelope and asked me to drop it off at the office before going home. I arrived at the office put the envelope on the counter, then noticed the principal was bawling some kid out for something. A teacher pointed to me and said, 'here's another boy with his hat on in school,?' as he left the office.

I got out of that mess by sneaking out of the office before the principal got around to reaming me.

Even then, I was smarter than I looked.

The rules governing hat etiquette seem to have changed a lot over the years.

About 20 years ago, when I was working away from Caledon, I was attending a Canada Day celebration, and the time had come for the singing of O Canada. The tune had progressed but a few bars when a man, standing a few metres away from me, barked 'Hats off!'

I looked to the dignitaries on the stage and noticed one man who was indeed still wearing his hat. He was one of the local MPs, and a member of the cabinet to boot.

A Minister of the Crown neglecting to doff his lid during the playing of the national anthem!

I wonder what the principal would have said

