

Bill Rea ? Election nights are fun - usually

The passage of time is often hard to deal with, and I'm getting a good lesson in that right now as I write this (Friday night), enduring a lot of aches and pains that I probably shouldn't describe in detail. It's my own fault, staying out as late as I did Thursday night. It was getting on to 1 in the morning before I walked in the front door of the house.

A man of my sort of advanced age out gallivanting at such an hour! I even drove to Orangeville, arriving there a couple of minutes after midnight. Dufferin-Caledon voters will be happy to know their newly re-elected MPP Sylvia Jones had gone home by the time I arrived (I wonder if she knew I was coming).

Oh all right, I had sort of an excuse for being out that late. It was election night, and I was working. Election nights are among the main reasons I enjoy my work so much.

One of the reasons I have so much trouble understanding why more people don't take an interest in the political process is the exhilaration that's involved. And it affects everyone. Certainly the candidates and those close to them, but also the people who have worked on the various campaigns, the people who follow such things and even media types like me. The reality is everyone has reason to get their adrenalin up at a time like that. By voting, the average person in the street takes a certain amount of ownership in the process, meaning they have a certain amount of interest in what transpires election night.

There are also implications that come after the election, especially when it involves provincial elections. I'm referring to things like how much taxes you pay, how your kids are taught, how the medical system deals with you if you become ill, what kind of highways you drive on, what sort of transit is available to you, whether there's a gas-fired energy plant across the street from you, etc., but I'll get on my soapbox later.

Election victory parties can be lots of fun. Granted, the mood is a lot better if the person hosting the victory party is actually the victor. But there is a certain thrill as one sits in the midst of massive anticipation.

I have worked many election nights over the years. They are generally events to which I look forward.

My first such victory party was the one thrown in the 1984 federal campaign, when Sinclair Stevens held his York-Peel seat and Brian Mulroney cruised to his first majority. I was very much a rookie then, having collected regular pay cheques in this business for less than six months, but there had been enough office conversations during the campaign that we all expected Sinc to make the cabinet (and he did, and stayed there until subsequent events intervened).

It is customary at such parties that the guest of honour is a little tardy in the getting to the festivities. It's generally a combination of being fashionably late, keeping them waiting and making sure whether one is a winner or also-ran. In that particular campaign, who was going to win was never an issue. Indeed, in the final days of the race, I was told by one of the higher-ups in the local NDP campaign where the candidate was going to be hosting his post-ballot booze-up, and when he was planning to excuse himself to go to congratulate Sinc on his victory.

Needless to say, I learned a lot about politics during that election.

But my strongest memory of that evening was the media scrum, which consisted of about half a dozen journalists (some rookies like me and others clearly veterans) following Stevens around the hall as he shook hands with his many supporters, barking questions at him, to which he replied in between acknowledgement of the accolades. And from the loudspeakers, I vividly remember hearing the theme song from the movie Flashdance.

?I've watched scenes like this on TV for years,? I remember thinking in the back of my mind. Could there have been a more genuine thought from a rookie?

Fast forward about eight years.

My father had recently died, and my mother's pretty-impressive widow's support group included her sister (my aunt), who was (and is) a devout Liberal, and Allan Rock was the rising Liberal star in my aunt's riding. He had already nailed down the Grit nomination in that riding, and was in need of volunteer assistance. My aunt knew she had a kid sister in need of activity that took her mind off of other stuff, so there was a pretty good match to be made. My mother put in a couple of hours every week for some months, helping out on the Rock campaign.

Do a bit more fast forwarding to the days leading up to the 1993 federal election.

By this point, it was pretty clear who was likely to form the next government, and Rock seemed sure to be elected and it was almost a foregone conclusion that he was going to be invited to sit at the Cabinet table (he eventually was).

I was talking to my mother a couple of days before the election, and she mentioned there was to be a party after the polls closed. She was thinking of giving it a miss, but I urged her to reconsider, citing my memories of the Stevens victory party eight years before. In the end, I sold her on the idea. I don't know if she had a good time (she was not one to have admitted one of her kids had been

inconveniently right). But I was glad I got her to go.

As I stated above, I have covered lots of elections. And there have been plenty of election-night surprises over the years ? some pleasant and some not. The nice thing is I have survived all of them, and so will you.

I spent last Thursday evening at Bobbie Daid's victory party in at Stewart McGuires in Bolton. Staff from the Orangeville Citizen office handled the other candidates, who were holding their festivities farther north.

There are a number of TVs around the establishment, meaning I was able to watch election coverage on Global and CBC. I was also able to watch the Blue Jays lose. I couldn't hear much (there was too much karaoke in the bar).

In terms of being a fun post-ballot party, the one last week didn't rank very high, largely because the guest of honour wasn't elected. Facts are facts ? I didn't think she would be.

The dynamics of the election in Dufferin-Caledon were, to say the least, interesting. To say that I knew Jones was going to win is probably accurate, but I have been through too many of these campaigns. I know to be cautious in my expectations. There have been too many surprises.

I also had expectations that Daid would finish third, behind Karren Wallace of the Green party. I was not alone. I'm in regular contact with a lot of people who follow the local scene, and several of them seemed to be thinking along the same lines as I. A lot of that was based on what went on in the 2011 federal campaign in Dufferin-Caledon, when Green candidate Ard Van Leeuwen was second behind Conservative David Tilson. Upon reflection after the polls had closed, I realized the example I had considered was somewhat flawed. For one thing, although he came in second, Van Leeuwen still got less than a quarter of the number of votes Tilson got. Liberal Bill Prout finished dead last in the local race. But history records the leader under whose banner Prout was running, Michael Ignatieff, left a hell of a lot to be desired. Daid, on the other hand, was running under the leadership of Kathleen Wynne. And she was the big winner last Thursday night.

That's the way it goes

