

## Bill Rea ? Get ready for winter

So, are we ready for winter?

I know some of you might think I'm jumping the proverbial gun, but go a hundred miles or so north of here, and it's a whole different situation.

My wife and I spent last Thursday in Muskoka. It was a trip we planned some months ago, and it was one we were not anxious to call off. I had to make a couple of excuses to some people for not being at certain events, but the experience has taught me the absolute power of the words ?I promised my wife.?

All of a sudden, I found myself facing tons of understanding.

Beth had warned me a couple of days before that they were calling for snow in Muskoka that day.

The news didn't upset me too much. It was still, after all, October. So how much snow could fall, even in October. I figured we were going to be dealing with a dusting, and even if there was some accumulation, it wouldn't be that big a deal. We didn't have a lot of travelling to do that day, and I've driven in snow enough times over the years to be able to handle myself in such situations.

On the other hand, I did take some precautions. Not only did I grab my winter coat before leaving home, I actually wore it. And Beth found my winter boots. I didn't initially put them on, but they were kept handy. I was glad I did that Thursday.

We drove north Wednesday night, arriving at about 9:30. We even took a brief stroll after our arrival. It was a cool night, befitting what one might expect in late October. But it wasn't bitterly cold, and there was next to no wind. Generally speaking, it was quite a pleasant evening, and a wonderful way to end what had been a very long and stressful day, capped by a 100-mile drive.

I am usually awake and on my feet at 7 every morning (weekends too). There was no pressing need for me to be on deck at such an hour last Thursday, so I got up at 7 because that's the kind of guy I am.

It was still dark outside, so it was kind of hard to tell if there was any snow on the ground, but I eventually concluded there wasn't.

I had other things, mainly work related, with which to busy myself, so I put snow out of my mind for the next little while.

She eventually materialized (it's very seldom she's up before me) and asked me if there was any snow. I honestly told her I didn't know because I hadn't checked for some time. She looked out the window and reported seeing a lot of green on the ground, and a nice variety of colour in the area trees. The fact is a lot of the leaves had already fallen from the trees, but there were still enough clinging to the branches to provide the colour befitting October.

But things didn't stay that way for long.

?It's snowing,? Beth announced at about 9 a.m.

I looked out the window, and realized that, by George, it was snowing.

It was not the first time I had ever seen snow in October. Indeed, I didn't have to go north to see it.

I think it was in the late '60s, as a kid in Toronto (living a 10-minute walk from Lake Ontario), when we were dealing with some seasonal weather one evening. The rain was coming down in buckets.

I remember my father sticking his head out the front door for some reason, then coming back into the house.

?It's a miserable night,? he dryly commented.

Fast forward to 7:30 the following morning when I was dragging my weary carcass into a vertical position (my early-rising tendencies were about two decades in the future). I stumbled downstairs, glanced out the window, and saw all sorts of white stuff on the ground. My mother, showing her typical efficiency that I seldom gave her credit for, had already found my winter coat and boots.

If memory serves, it wasn't a lot of snow, but the temperatures were unseasonably cold in the weeks that followed, so the snow stayed on the ground quite a while. The snowball fights at recess lasted quite sometime. And I think there was snow on the ground when all the kids in the neighbourhood went out for Halloween.

So a certain amount of snow in October, while rare, is not unheard of.

Besides, this is Canada, and I've lived here all my life. If I can't handle a certain amount of snow, then it's legitimate to ask how I've managed to get through the last half century.

Last Thursday in Muskoka saw the snow continue at a fairly steady clip. By mid-afternoon, we were obliged to go out.

Since it was still October, I hadn't thought seriously about getting the snow tires placed on my car. Beth was a little worried, but I reminded her that I had driven lots of times in snow without the appropriate tires. The missions have been successfully accomplished before and they would be again, I assured her.

I'm estimating that about five centimetres had already fallen, based on how much I had to brush from my car. Somewhat to my surprise, it was not light, fluffy snow, but heavy and well-packed. A really spirited snowball fight would have been possible. On the

other hand, had I been that anxious to make Beth mad at me, I would have found an excuse to skip the trip north and spent the day in the office. Remember ?I promised my wife.?

It was clear there had been plows along the local roads at some point during the day, but since the snow had been falling all day, conditions were a little on the greasy side. Again, not a big concern, at least for me. I've driven in adverse condition lots of times. Just take it easy and be aware of what kind of traction you have. And since we weren't going far, I wasn't too concerned about the traffic my extra caution might be holding up. I'm seldom inclined to feel guilty for showing appropriate caution.

We returned from our excursion unscathed. Beth expressed the desire to take a little walk. We were both intrigued to observe snow clinging to colourful leaves.

The snow kept falling until about 6 p.m.

I took a brief walk early Friday morning, strolling along a tree-lined path. I would watch a leaf fall majestically to the ground. When I saw it land, I would look up to see another gently falling, and the scene could have repeated itself. I could have stood there all day and watched it. But I had work to do.

Considering the forecast for the weekend we just had, I wasn't anticipating the snow would last, but I do know there's more to come. But I know I will be able to deal with it.

That's another thing I promised my wife

