

Bill Rea ? High school ? done that

This job of mine requires me to work a lot of nights.

Not surprisingly, some of those assignments are more enjoyable than others.

But last Thursday had me having a fair amount of fun.

Humberview Secondary School in Bolton hosted its annual evening for Grade 8 students and their parents to stroll through the halls and experience something of what high school life is like. It's one of those events that puts everyone in a good mood. The younger folks looking ahead to their high school days get to look forward to how cool the place is (I didn't catch the opening orientation remarks, so I can't say if there was any mention of exams, essays, homework load, etc.) Parents are excited for what their kids are about to experience, if they can get over the natural regret that always accompanies the passage of time. The students already at the school who are on deck for the evening get a chance to show off all the swell stuff they have learned. Some of us outgrow the urge to show off, but I think at that age, everyone has it in abundance. The teachers get the satisfaction that some of their charges have actually learned something. And everyone's favourite local editor has lots of things to photograph. There are very few short ends at an event like that.

Not surprisingly, I bumped into several people I know as I roamed through the halls, and in a couple of cases, I asked (tongue in cheek, of course) if they were planning to enrol. One of the women to whom I put that question, surprised me by saying she would rather like to start high school all over again.

That one really surprised me. Although I can understand a certain natural desire to be young again (I personally get such feelings a couple of hundred times a day), I don't think I could go through an experience again, nor would I want to. I can't imagine anyone wishing to go through adolescence a second time, any more than they would want to go through teething or toilet training again. If my mother were still alive, she would not want me going through those things again either.

High school, like just about all experiences in life, had its good points as well as bad. It is true that some of the best moments of my life took place during those years, but also some of the worst.

I was bullied a lot in the early years, especially in Grade 10 ? property and books being stolen, some physical attacks, a couple of other things that most of us eventually are able to grow out of and get over, although I am very mindful that there are many who don't. It is also true that I did some bullying in my day, more verbal than anything else. I think it was more a case that I got tired of just being a target.

Grade 11 was the happiest of those years. In fact, for several years after, I was able to say it had been the happiest year of my life. The bullying had largely, but not entirely, stopped, both as far as my being a victim and perpetrator. I had known for a couple of years by that point that girls were not quite as yucky as I had once thought, and I was delighted to find there were some girls who found me a few percentage points above repulsive. And my grades, which hadn't been very good for a number of years, finally started to edge into the realm of respectability.

Now if all of my high school experiences had been like that, I might have understood a desire to repeat them.

But one does not make it far into the adult world without quickly learning that things are never that simple.

Anticipating Grade 12, for the first time since kindergarten, I was actually looking forward to the start of the school year, and things were going pretty well for the first couple of months.

And then the teachers went on strike in Toronto, so I spent the next couple of months doing little more than thumb-twiddling. By the time then Premier Bill Davis got serious and legislated an end to the strike, it was determined that the school year could still be salvaged, although a lot of the extra-curricular activities had to go onto the shelf.

Most of the students (myself included) were edgy because their academic year had been messed up, and a lot of the accompanying activities they had been looking forward to had been tossed. A lot of the teachers were angry and resentful that they had been forced back to work, and some clearly (from my vantage point at least) took it out on the kids. Several of them wore ?Teaching under protest? buttons.

To this day, I wonder if anyone really benefitted from that mess.

It basically burned my enthusiasm for school, and it was several years before I found myself getting enthused about anything.

I think of the current strife going on, between people who work in schools and those who employ them, and think of the innocent kids who are being impacted.

True, they go to school in a different world from what was around 40 years ago. There was no internet or social media in my day. There are many more entertaining and functional ways in which to learn now.

We also hear stories that things like bullying are taken a lot more seriously today than they were years ago. I suppose that's the case,

although I have to wonder if there's much of an effective difference. Most of the worst stuff happened when there were no adults around, and the events that they did learn about were easy to dismiss as cases of kids being kids. That's why I got away with a lot of the stuff I did.

The times were certainly not all bad, and even the unforeseen sorrows from strikes, etc., could not completely erase the good times. And I do confess there are times when I wish I could do some of the things I did with ease 40 years ago, like running or putting on a pair of skates without seriously wondering if my legs were up to it.

But I don't think I would want to try high school again.

About 20 years ago, when I was working in Toronto, the principal at one of the high schools in my coverage area was a guy who tried to teach me geography in Grade 9 for a couple of months before he was promoted to vice-principal at another school. I bumped into him in my guise as the local editor and reminded him of his last day trying to teach me. He confessed he had felt a bit guilty about leaving at such a time, but I told him it was nothing to worry about.

?They haven't repossessed my diploma yet,? I assured him.

I went through the grind to get the diploma once. There are other grinds to go through once that one's accomplished

