

Bill Rea ? I don't do vacations well

I was on vacation last week.

I throw that in for the benefit of those of you who were wondering why I wasn't around as much as I usually am.

While I was on vacation (and so was my wife), I did do some work. I covered a few events in town, even if we were spending the bulk of our time in Muskoka.

Caledon's former heritage resource officer had a milestone birthday that I considered myself obligated to cover that Sunday, if for no other reason she's the one who introduced me to my wife (for reasons I have never completely understood, Beth has forgiven her).

There were a couple of other matters that required a bit of commuting back and forth.

I figure that just because I'm on vacation, that does not mean I have to set my workaholic tendencies on hold. I'm just not that kind of guy.

Despite my workaholism, I still manage to surprise myself when it comes to dealing with that most stressful time known as vacation. For one thing, it's impossible for me to completely relax. Even while on vacation, I'm constantly on my laptop, either checking various news websites, or checking my emails to see what needs to be acted upon, as if I can actually do a whole lot on the spot from Muskoka ? that's just the way my mind works.

But the stress starts long before that. Since I know I'm going to be away, I have to have stories and pictures ready to go into the paper. That means lots and lots of work in the days leading up to vacation time.

I was able to get a couple of pages of last week's Citizen put together before I headed north, and had stuff all organized and ready for the people who would filling in for me, all prepared for them to finish the job.

My thanks to Angela and Mark.

And of course I came home early. That's the way I handle vacations.

The last time I genuinely took a week off was in 2000, and that was only because the Maritimes (specifically New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island) was a bit too far to drive back and forth to cover birthday parties and public meetings on subdivisions in Alton, and the cost of chartering aircraft was quite a step out of my budget. Besides, that would have probably pushed Beth's easy-going nature a bit too far.

We haven't gone that far afield for vacation since.

So while I wasn't able to get completely away from work, we were still able to get away for a couple of days, up to the peaceful winter land that is Muskoka this time of year.

Beth and I go there a lot, even if it's only for a weekend (and often an abbreviated weekend). The place we went to is well equipped with entertainment stuff and a kitchen. We had to bring our own stock, and we did, meaning we were well provisioned in the event that we got snowed in.

We were temporarily spared the massive dumping of snow you folks had to deal with last Monday. As I stated above, I was keeping up with the news and had an idea of what was going on in these parts. I also called the office to keep up on what was going on there (would anyone expect any less from a self-confessed workaholic?)

Indeed, the day was mostly nice and sunny, although it was far too cold to do much more than sitting around indoors. It was no problem ? we both had books with us. The main problem was poor Beth was battling a cold the whole time we were up north.

Despite that, we did venture outside for a brief stroll during the day, and were struck by the peacefulness of the winter scene. There was no snow falling, and next to no wind. Despite what it might have been happening to folks in these parts, in Muskoka, it was a day meant to be enjoyed.

Don't get the wrong idea. It might have been peaceful in Muskoka last Monday, but the place got hammered by snow Tuesday.

There were no leisurely strolls in the winter weather that day. Beth was less than enthused when I proposed going into town for the day's newspapers, and to get something for dinner that evening, but I was eventually able to sell her on the idea. I've driven in worse conditions. It wasn't that big a deal. And being the jerk I sometimes am, I had no problem saying 'told you so?' at the end of the excursion.

The place was comfortable, and once inside, the snow caused no problems, and we had a great visual effect looking out the window. We would have loved to stay a couple more days.

But workaholics like my good self don't operate that way. There were things that needed doing closer to home, so that's where we headed the following day.

The drive down was somewhat easier than I had anticipated, and I got home with plenty of time at hand to deal with the roughly 50 centimetres of snow that placidly rested in my driveway, not to mention the windrow that the snowplow had created for me.

Guess what I spent the next 90 minutes doing. It wasn't that big a deal, you know. Remember, I was on vacation, so time was at something of a premium.

I pulled in front of a neighbour's driveway to let Beth out of the car (I'm far too gallant to let my wife try and jump over a windrow), then parked the car and unloaded the most essential cargo ? Ella the cat, who bellyached the whole drive north Friday night, and the whole drive south Wednesday (we didn't take her to the birthday party Sunday).

I had been shoveling for about half an hour when Beth poked her head out the door to assure me that Ella was happy to be home. Yabba-dabba do!

Beth did do some work with a shovel, but considering the aforementioned cold, she soon retreated to the house. No problem there. You see, there's one point I haven't yet raised ? that of my advancing age.

At the risk of sounding like I'm cruising for belated greetings, my birthday was Friday. I'm now 57, which probably means I shouldn't be out tilting at windrows. But I did it last Wednesday. It was a great way to kill a couple of hours before the meeting I had to cover in Alton that night, even if I was still on vacation. There was a certain amount of satisfaction in knowing my body is still up to such a task, although I had several very sore joints to keep me awake that night.

I can't wait for my next week of vacation, scheduled for August

