

Bill Rea ? I will get in the spirit

I write these words with a certain feeling of melancholy, along with the acceptance of the passage of time.

It's the last column I'm going to write for 2013. Another year is coming rapidly to a close, and many of us probably wonder where the last 12 months went.

As many of you probably know, next Thursday is Boxing Day, and the people responsible for running this company (and signing my pay cheque) have decided that we will not publish in the coming week. For what it's worth, I concurred with that decision. Everyone needs some down time over the holiday, and that includes we pests in the media.

I know in my case, the break is going to be welcome, as we come to the end of what has been a rather trying year for me and mine. We all have them. It is a fact that some years go better than others.

On a personal level, there has been much going on in 2013, and much of it took a lot of forbearance.

I am just wrapping up the annual task of composing Christmas letters to my relatives in Ireland; a responsibility I sort of inherited from my mother about nine years ago. I know it's bad form, but I've been opening these notes with apologies, because of both their tardiness and brevity, not to mention the bad news I've had to convey. But it has been an eventful time.

The year opened with my last surviving uncle dying unexpectedly in January. The guy had lost his wife of more than 50 years a couple of months previously. I had seen him over the holidays last year, and while he seemed a little down, he looked like he was coping. I think we all thought he had a couple more good years in him. But it is also true that none of us know how long we really have. There have been other problems over the year, culminating last month with the death of my mother-in-law, which I wrote about briefly in this spot. What I didn't mention at the time was our cat Sidney died the day before. Both my wife and I knew both passings were going to come eventually. We were just hoping there would be some separation, but again, there are some events into which you just don't get much input. I will say it was not fun taking time out from funeral arrangements to bury a cat.

And no, that has not been the extent of the problems. July's storms caused considerable damage to the home of one of my relatives. I've tried to help out, as time has permitted, but I've had the feeling my contributions haven't amounted to much, and things have still not been returned to normal.

Beth and I have also had to deal with the demands of work and all the other obligations that all of us have to address.

I'm trying hard not to sound too negative. There have, after all, been some positives, even if you forget that the Leafs, Argos and Jays spent much of the year letting us down.

I don't lament the fact that 2013 has been a rough year. I believe one must always be positive, and realize that it's the bad times that really make you appreciate the good times.

Such must be the case here.

However, I have to confess that getting into the holiday mood seems a little harder this year, although Beth and I are trying.

One of the great advantages of my job is all the celebrations that go on in the community at this time of year that I get to attend. I guess it shouldn't be too surprising that I find the mood I encounter at these events is contagious, rubbing off on me, and I hope I'm able to pass that on to others, especially Beth.

For all the festivities, it is a fact that this can be a stressful time of year, with a lot needing to be done. It's also a busy time of year for me at work.

Last Saturday was a classic demonstration of that. The day included a Breakfast with Santa, three Santa Claus Parades (granted, one was not in Caledon), two tree-lightings, a couple of crafts shows and one birthday party.

The Santa Claus Parade in Bolton was another successful, albeit tiring event. Geography played a big role. As usual, I parked in the Bolton valley, near my office, and left Beth there (she wouldn't miss it) while I walked up the south hill to the start of the parade at Queensgate Boulevard. My legs were done in by the time I got there.

Then I had to follow the parade as it moved north, running back and forth between floats to get pictures from various angles.

There I was, a 55-year-old man with a family history of heart issues, running after and through a parade like an idiot. If anyone asks why, it's because I wanted to.

As exhausting as it all was, there's a certain exhilaration in knowing that I can still do it, at least for now.

The best part is not only did Beth and I find time for a leisurely lunch in the midst of all the running around, we even got some Christmas shopping done.

So even with all the problems, we're finding ways to get in the spirit, even if it is a little forced.

Beth seems able to find the slurpy, tear-jerking, family-oriented movies that seem to dominate the TV stations this time of year, while I wait patiently for Alastair Sim. In fairness, she also found a station that was putting on a 12-day James Bond festival, so

things haven't been all bad. And she has set the radios in the house to the stations that play the Christmas music. We are now in the routine where I get home evenings to the sounds of the season filling the air.

But there is still lots to do, as of this writing (I actually wrote this piece last Thursday, while waiting for the Peel Regional council meeting to start). In terms of rotation, it's Beth and my turn to host Christmas dinner this year. Among other things, that means some major house cleaning is going to be on the agenda. And most of you who know me know that tidiness does not come to me naturally.

We'll have to come up with a turkey from somewhere and see if we remember how to cook one. I briefly toyed with the idea of trying to do a turkey on the barbecue. The big problem with that would be having to constantly run in and out of the house, dodging the spot where we traditionally put the Christmas tree. So Beth eventually vetoed that plan.

Oh yeah, that reminds me. We have to get a tree too. We'll get to it. I'm also still working on penciling in time to take care of Christmas cards.

No wonder I'm feeling a little stressed.

But I am also mindful that no matter how many problems I might have, there are a lot of people out there who are carrying heavier burdens. And I also know that things are going to get better as time goes on.

This is the time of year for things like giving, celebration, partying, etc. But it is also a time for reflection. That means thinking about what has gone on before and how things can be improved in the time to come; both through our efforts and through natural progression.

While this is the last column I'll write this year, there is still going to be a lot of events that I will be attending in the next couple of days.

To those of you I don't see or talk to in the coming days, please accept our best wishes for the season.

And remember, there are going to be a lot of great days in 2014

