

Bill Rea ? Interesting and stressful times

?May you live in interesting times.?

I think we have all heard this quote from the past. I did some quick googling, and found frustratingly conflicting details as to its origin.

There are some sources that say it's a Chinese proverb, and other sources that emphatically deny that.

I have always thought it was meant as sort of a blessing ? expressing the wish that the recipient never be bored. But I have also heard accounts that it was meant as something of a curse.

Whatever was the intention of the whoever it was who came up with the quote, I have always accepted that if it were addressed to me, it would be meant positively.

It is a fact that I have lived in interesting times, and believe I have benefitted. True, I have lived through some terrible days, such as 9-11 and numerous other disasters. But there have also been wonderful achievements I've been able to see, which people living 100 years ago would have marveled at, such as men walking on the moon, or doctors finding ways to keep people alive by transplanting organs. In my younger days, I saw things happen that would make people today shake their heads in wonder, like the Toronto Maple Leafs winning the Stanley Cup.

No matter, I once got a loud laugh from a group at a party when that quote came up, and I asked, part facetiously and part seriously, ?Has anyone ever lived in boring times??

Frankly, I would think I was cursed if I lived in uninteresting times. I would hate to think I was going through life bored. But there are also lots of tales of people who seem to lead uninteresting lives, but who get rather good at finding things in which to be interested nevertheless. I've read accounts that people in prisons, including prisoners of war, have been able to deal with the boredom by coming up with seemingly mundane things to hold their attention.

My ability to do things like that has come in handy during more council meetings than I could count.

It is a fact of life that we all have to deal with boredom. Indeed, I doubt many of us could survive to old age if we were in a constant state of excitement.

All periods of history have been interesting. The fact that not much might be known about certain times doesn't mean there wasn't anything interesting to hold people's attention. It could simply mean that historians couldn't think of anything interesting to write about.

And some of us find certain periods of our past more interesting than others. Personally, thinking about the 20th century, I have always been intrigued by the 1940s, probably because of that major war that took place during that decade. The ?60s will always hold my attention, partly because it was such a turbulent time, but mainly because I came to awareness during that period. I also have very vivid memories of the space program of those days, as well the tragic assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King. I will always remember the August evening in 1968 I spent at a fishing camp on Lake Nipissing. I had made friends with some kids from Ohio and was in their cottage, and their parents had brought a portable TV. We all watched the riots at the Democratic convention. On the other hand, reruns of I Love Lucy notwithstanding, I have seldom found much of interest in the ?50s.

Since humans have been walking around, they have been very good at finding ways to keep themselves interested in their times, right from the days when the main motivation was to try and avoid being devoured by some wild animal.

Now, just about all of us go through our respective days obsessed with the idea of trying to get through them, maybe considering the down time that comes with weekends as the reward for the times of stress we subject ourselves to. And who among us does not eagerly look forward to that period known as vacation to get away from some of the pressures.

I know I'm making it sound like I blame the world of work for all our problems, or at least a lot of them. And it is true that in many cases, our jobs are our main source of stress and accompanying other problems. And for many of us, our jobs get in the way of doing some of the things we might really like to do. For example, the one game the Blue Jays won last week against Baltimore I had to miss completely because I had to work late ? Not to worry though, because I was home in plenty of time to watch them blow the other two.

On the other hand, for many of us, our jobs are what defines us, and provides us with identity.

They also provide us with our income, which brings us, not necessarily to interesting times, but to stressful times.

Have you done your Income Tax yet?

As of this writing (Friday night), I have made a good start on mine, but it is not yet complete.

For many of us, tax time is relatively simple. For me it's a bit more complicated. Owing to my job, there are some work-related expenses that I'm allowed to claim a break on (mainly to do with my car). I also have some modest investments, which add a certain

amount of confusion to what is already an ordeal.

I have always rather enjoyed working with numbers. Although I am a writer, I would much rather kill time working on a Sudoku or Kakuro than a crossword puzzle. But when it comes to these damned tax forms, things just get too tedious. I usually get one of those computer tax programs, and I'll admit they have helped steer me in the right direction a couple of times.

But the really big problem is finding the time in which to do it all, and keep up with all the other normal demands on times, like work, household and watching the Jays blow ball games (they are getting hammered by Boston as I write this).

In view of the great stress involved, I think tax time could qualify as an interesting time, which might tie in with the belief of some that the saying I quoted off the top was meant as a curse. This is not a time of year that I enjoy. I'm also mindful, as I'm sure most of you are, of the line underneath where the signature goes on the tax return ? ?It is a serious offence to make a false return. ?

The reality is I have very little reason to put off doing my taxes, considering the fact that the sooner I get them done, the sooner I get the refund cheque, and yes, I am getting a refund. Since I first started in the workforce, my parents (my father in particular) nagged me annually to max out on my RRSP contributions, so I always have, finding the money somewhere, and that almost always means a refund.

Yet the whole thing is an ordeal, but as I have already observed, ordeals are part of that group of things that make life interesting. So whether it was meant as a blessing or a curse, I do live in interesting times, and worrying about getting my taxes figured out just makes things more interesting, as well as traumatic. But it's a task that must be done, and since this column is just about done, I can't use it as an excuse to procrastinate any longer. Besides, the Blue Jays lost, so it's time to get to work.

It's also time for bed. I'll work on the taxes tomorrow

