

Bill Rea ? I've got the winter blues

As a Canadian, I probably should be ashamed of myself for writing this.

But the truth is I'm not likely to be deported (besides, what country would have me?)

I am sick of this winter, and there are still several weeks of it remaining, regardless of whatever input some groundhog might have next week.

It's not just the problems presented by last month's massive ice storm that has me down. Although I got off relatively lightly, my home was impacted, and some of my relations got it even worse. My aunt was forced from her home for a couple of days.

And in the midst of the maintenance work I was called upon to do, there were the falls. I had a couple of them the night after the storm. One was so spectacular, my brother-in-law, who witnessed it, I think was inclined to applaud. I landed flat on my back, but after a couple of seconds taken to verify that I was still alive and hadn't broken anything, I was back on feet, ready for the next fall. That came a couple of hours later and there were no witnesses. I landed on my bum that time, and somewhat to my surprise, that's the part that hurt the most in the days that followed. At my age, I guess I should be concerned about such incidents. On the other hand, the fact I recovered so quickly might be a sign that I'm actually in better shape than I thought. I harkened back to the occasion in the 1970s, when then American President Gerald Ford fell down the ramp as he was getting off an airplane in Austria. People at the time wondered if that was a sign that his health wasn't what it might be. The 60-something Ford countered with the argument that his fast recovery was a sign of what good shape he was in. I guess the fact that he lived to be 93 proved that.

So on a personal level, the storm wasn't that bad for me. Besides, it's provided me with lots to write about. I'm still writing, so who am I to complain?

The fact is that despite my Canadian upbringing, I am simply not a cold-weather person. I don't like getting up cold winter mornings. I dread looking out the window to find out if my day is going to involve snow shoveling (things get even worse when I find that it does).

But it is also a fact that the ice storm notwithstanding, this has not been a terribly trying winter when it comes for snow. Setting aside the couple of days before Christmas, the precipitation has been relatively moderate and spread out. While driving has been occasionally tricky, with the exception of that one major event, things have been pretty manageable.

A couple of years ago, the accumulations resulted in massive snowbanks on our front lawn, created by my efforts to keep the driveway shoveled out. Things got so bad that the serious issue revolved around how high I could throw a shovelful of snow. Last year saw a considerable amount of moderation, broken up by a massive dumping of snow the day my wife and I were supposed to start on our annual winter holiday. Things were delayed 24 hours. I hate letting the elements set my schedule for me. So while the quantity of snow hasn't been that great, the real problem this year has been the cold. And it certainly has been bloody cold.

I know there are some who are into winter sports, like skiing and hockey. I guess that's especially the case as the winter Olympics draw near, and a certain national pride promises to kindle itself.

Even without the Olympics, the recent Winter Classic or the recent world championships, there's always a focus on the seasonal sports.

There are 50-something guys like me who lace on their skates, strap on their pads, grab their hockey sticks and hit the ice to risk breaking their bones. I'm not into that. For one thing, my legs and back are barely up to the task of shoveling snow, let alone shoveling pucks around. Besides, my glittering hockey career ended when I was 14, and for very good reasons too. One goal in seven years should have drilled the message into me about my chances for an NHL contract, and that one goal was something of fluke. I think I have a pair of skates in my basement somewhere (I haven't bothered to look lately). If they're still there, that's where they're going to stay, at least for now.

Others hit the ski slopes. Skiing is another thing I tried a few times while I was in high school, but was never very good at.

Drive around Palgrave in the coming days, and observe the shoveled rinks for young and old to get in some intense action. It almost makes you forget the summery scenes that had been coming from the Australian Open, where they play something called ?tennis.? Some people were cut out to be champion athletes, and your humble ain't one of them. As the years have gone by, I have come to understand that they invented fireplaces and chairs next to them for a good reason. That's the place for me.

There are some who think like me who try to escape the winter chill of this climate for something warmer. I have little desire to do that, having done it once in my youth. One year in my teens, my family spent the week between Christmas and the restart of school in Cuba. It was nice to experience swimming, getting a sunburn and checking out another culture in the dead of winter. And since there was no drinking age in Cuba in those days, I was able to indulge to the extent that the pesos in my pocket would permit me ?

Cuba is where I had my first hangover.

But it's a case of 'been there, done that.'

I have no burning desire to take winter trips to sunspots. My reasons are largely financial, I'll grant. I get lots of sun in the summer for free, so I'm reluctant to pay for it in the colder months, preferring to wait. And there are lots of other places in this world that I would like to use my travel dollars to visit. Besides, I'm Canadian, which means I'm supposed to be able to take it, despite what conclusions you have drawn from the last 1,000-some-odd words.

That doesn't mean I'm opposed to travelling during the winter. Indeed, Beth and I traditionally spend a week away, and such plans are very much in the works in the near future. We are not going to Florida for the beaches, Australia for the tennis or even Cuba for the hangovers.

We're going to be heading north to a favourite spot of ours in Muskoka.

This place, which we know well, has a lot to recommend it. We could skate if we wanted to (we won't). We could cross-country ski if we wanted to (we won't). We could probably find some downhill skiing a reasonable drive away if we wanted to (we won't). We could even go snowshoeing if we wanted to (we won't).

What we can do is eat well, take walks in the winter landscape or sit around and do next to nothing. We plan to get a lot of that in. It is also a fact that someone else will be worrying about manning the shovels if we happen to get snowed in (it has happened). I think I'm going to enjoy that.

The problem with winter is we can't do anything about it. It comes when it has to, is just as miserable as it decides to be and ends not a moment too soon for people like me. Such is going to be the case with this winter too.

And I think people are getting sick of my frequently repeated observation, 'Six months from now, we'll be complaining about the heat.'

Well, we will be.