

Bill Rea ? Passing Valentine's grade

Is it me, or has Valentine's Day become a lot more popular over the last couple of years?

It seems there's a lot more happening that particular day, and in the days leading up to it, than when I was a younger man. For one thing, I had to work Friday night, which was Valentine's Day, meaning I was a little late getting home to my wife. Worry not, however. I had the good sense not to walk into the house empty-handed (I ain't as dumb as I look).

But there was a time when Valentine's Day was just another day, especially when it came to work. There was a time there were no parties to cover that particular night, but there were two Friday night, which explains why Beth had to wait for me to get home. And the wait was prolonged by the fact I had to stop for the long-stem roses. It was a little past 8 p.m. when I stopped at the supermarket and approached the floral section and I walked right into the middle of a mob. And despite the crowd of flower shoppers and the fact that inventory had clearly been depleted, there was still some selection ? enough to ensure I would be welcomed when I arrived at my hutch.

There was a lineup at the counter to pay for them, and barely had I plunked the flowers down on the counter that the young lady on the other side efficiently got busy with the task of wrapping them, pulling out the paper. I started to remind her to remove the price, but it quickly became obvious that I need not bother.

?We've been doing this all day, sir,? she told me with a grin. ?We know the routine.?

I think there are lots of men who know the routine too, but like I stated above, I think they have become a lot more common in recent years.

In fact, it was a topic of conversation in the office Friday. It was helped by one of the women accepting delivery of flowers from her husband (it happens every Valentine's Day). I contributed to the conversation by showing off my knack for trivia, naming all seven victims of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre (I admit I got hung up for a few seconds recalling the name of Albert Weinshank). I was the only one in the office able to do it, and probably one of only six people the Western Hemisphere who think that's something to brag about. I think it's also indicative of just how much of a romantic slob I am. In case you hadn't figured it out by now, I'm not. Case in point ? I did arrive home Friday night bearing flowers. But after the appropriate hugs and kisses, the overtures ended. There was no romantic dinner at some exotic restaurant. In fact, we ordered in pizza, at Beth's insistence (she had actually made the announcement a couple of days before). She even paid (Casanova I ain't).

Ironically (or maybe it wasn't so ironic), the movie Marty was on Friday night. It was a 1955 romantic drama starring Ernest Borgnine (he won his Oscar for this one) about a very nice, but lonely man in his early 30s with no immediate prospects. I know very well what it's like to be alone in one's early 30s. Fortunately for me, Beth and I had become an item by the time I got into my mid-30s.

I guess one needs a good reason for celebrating Valentine's Day before actually being inclined to do so, and there was a time in my life when I didn't have it. By that, I mean what is commonly known as a ?significant other.? It is true that celebrating the day is much more of a priority when one has someone to celebrate it with.

So we both ended up having a good day, and a pretty good evening, even if I was late getting home.

We did go out for dinner Saturday night. It was the annual Oyster and Pasta Dinner, put on by the King City Lions, and Beth and I have been regularly attending since the days I worked in that municipality. It's basically an all-you-can-eat affair, starting with bowl after bowl of terrific oyster chowder. I had six and a half bowls. I would have been able to say I had seven, but while she worked on her pasta, Beth kept sticking her spoon into my bowl. She commented at one point that it was a sign of endearment, appropriate for the time of year (namely Valentine's Day). I had to admonish her that I was still eating.

Nobody ever asked me to play a romantic lead in anything. Hardly a surprise!

Remembering the Beatles,

50 years later

I phoned my aunt at about 7:30 last Sunday evening (Feb. 9), and pointedly asked her what she was doing exactly 50 years prior to that moment.

Nothing wrong with her memory, although her timelines were a wee bit off. She knew which house she was in (the one in which I was living at the time), and she told me she and I and other people (my late grandfather, mother, father and uncle, and still-living brother and cousin) were watching the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show. In fact, the Ed Sullivan show didn't start until 8, which is why I said her timelines were off. But there comes a point at which one can be too picky, and I guess I was there.

Harkening back 50 years, I well remember that evening, and it was my aunt and brother who were anxious to get dinner done so we could all watch the Beatles. My patents generally had a problem with rushing anything to accommodate TV schedules, but the

Beatles seemed to be something of an exception (to this day, I cannot explain why, because neither of them were ever fans of the Fab Four).

That evening was just three days after my sixth birthday (I'll bet some of you are doing mental arithmetic right now), and I had no idea what the Beatles were. My family usually watched Ed Sullivan Sunday nights, and being the little kid that I was, there wasn't much there to attract me, Topo Gigio notwithstanding.

Even while the show was going on, I was puzzled at what all the fuss was about. I was watching a couple of guys on stage with funny haircuts.

I started appreciating what was going on the following day at school. There was a kindergarten class full of kids who were excited about having watched the Beatles on TV the night before. But our teacher, Miss Ferguson, brought us all down to earth fast. She told us the Beatles were bad, that they wore wigs and those haircuts weren't real. There were a couple of other negative things she had to say about them.

It's a bit of a pity, really. Miss Ferguson retired a couple of years later, so I suspect she's no longer with us (I don't know for sure). She was a wonderful lady and my memories of her are very happy, if I can set aside the propaganda she was trying to spread about the Beatles.

I have always been interested in history, and I appreciate some of the major events I have been privileged to have been around to see. I well remember that day in July 1969 as my mother told me how fortunate I was to have been alive as men landed on the Moon. Watching the Beatles start what became known as 'The British Invasion' was another such example. I didn't grasp what I was experiencing at the time, but I have come to appreciate it in the years that have followed.

