

Bill Rea ? Spring time blues

I hate to be the fly in everyone's sunscreen, but I do find this time of year rather tiring.

Don't get the wrong idea. I like the nice weather as much as the next person. Granted, it took a while for spring to take hold, and I heard more than my fair share of complaints about things being unseasonably cold. I generally responded by asking these people if they would prefer snow. There are some arguments you just know you were meant to win.

I also enjoy not having to worry about how much snow I'm going to wake up to in the morning, and what the driving is going to be like.

No, I'm happy to see the weather improve, and look forward to things getting better in the weeks to come.

But there's just too much going on that requires attention.

For one thing, this is traditionally a busy time in the community newspaper business. There are a lot of events happening. Seldom is the evening I don't have something to cover, meaning I'm usually out rather late. There are certain advantages to that, however. My wife doesn't have me to fight with her for the remote, meaning she's free to please herself channel-hopping between the Blue Jays, chick flicks and the crime shows she enjoys. The fact is I seldom fight her for the remote anyway. I just like to seem a little assertive occasionally.

But I can look forward to busy times until school lets out at the end of June.

There are a lot of other things to worry about this time of year.

This is my first spring living in a rural environment. I have gone from worrying about a relatively small property to roughly an acre. That's a lot of grass to cut. And there are other property-maintenance matters I have to address. I'll get to them. I'm not sure when, but I'll get to them. Beth is already coming up with a lot of things that need to be done. She also says she's going easy on me, not wanting to overwhelm me.

We're into barbecuing season. It took a bit of searching, but I found where I had stashed the barbecue in the fall. I brought it out last weekend, sparked it up, and found numerous problems. In short, the stupid thing was falling apart on me. I spent part of the week debating with myself whether a new one was in order. I took a good look at it Friday night and determined that it might be fixable, then spent about an hour Saturday actually fixing it. I'm a better handyman than I thought, and Beth and I had the hamburgers that night to prove it.

This spring has got to be a burden on hockey fans, as they try to keep track of who's doing what in the playoffs. Since the Leafs didn't make the playoffs (I'm not too surprised), and neither did any other Canadian team, I really have no cheering interest in the matter. That's a short way of stating I have no idea what's going on in the NHL at this time, and am not terribly interested. If I'm pushed into taking a stand, I'll probably pull for Pittsburgh, if for no other reason than my 10-year-old niece is a big Sidney Crosby fan, and Uncle Bill wants to stay on her good side.

Basketball fans, of which I am not one, have had lots to cheer about this spring. In my case, I keep track of the Blue Jays. Granted, they are not off to a stellar start, but if I recall correctly, things didn't look that great last April, but they worked out well in the end. We're at the start of a long season.

But there is one big reason why I am inclined to hate this time of year, and I'll bet there are a lot of you who agree with me.

As if none of us already have enough to do, those jokers who run the country in Ottawa actually expect all of us to provide an accounting of our financial situation, including details on the amount of money we made last year.

I know that there are some of you out there who are ready to tell the government to mind its own business.

Okay, I'm being facetious. I understand the necessity of taxes, and I have no trouble paying them, provided the money is used wisely (that's the subject of another column).

But I think I have a lot of company when I say doing one's income tax is an ordeal.

True, I could get a professional to do the job for me. Indeed, I've had a couple of people express surprise that I actually fill out my forms on my own.

I blame my late parents for that, especially my mother. She spent the last several years of her working life as a payroll clerk for a chartered account's office (I secured myself a sound maternal bawling out when I bragged in one of my columns that she could have lectured the Minister of Finance on tax law). Both my parents rather enjoyed keeping track of financial matters.

My dad was into futures for a while. Shortly after he retired, he and Mom took a motor trip to the East Coast. Before leaving, he gave instructions to my brother and I on what had to be done in the event of something tragic happening on their trip. He gave us a phone number, and in the event of his death or disappearance, we were to dial that number, cite an account number and say ?sell!? We naturally asked what would happen if such instructions were not issued.

?You'll have 35 dairy cattle on the front lawn,? was his very dry reply.

Since I have never involved myself with futures, I'm not sure how that would have worked out. And since my father died before Beth became part of my life, I'm not sure what, if anything, I would have done with those cows. I basically took my old man's word. They both returned home safe, meaning the phone call never had to be made.

So were I to farm the job out to someone else, it would probably earn me some frowns from whatever is in the beyond.

Although filling out those damned tax forms is an ordeal, there's also a certain amount of exhilaration. The combination of income, deductions, investments, etc. told me early on that I would be in for a refund this year. The main reason for the refund, of course, was the amount of tax my employer was obliged to dock from my pay cheque every two weeks. So the whole exercise boils down to figuring how much I'm getting back. I also did several drafts of my return, and each time, I found my refund had shrunk. In the end, there was still enough to do what I had planned, once the cheque gets into my mitts.

I have been working on my income tax return for the last month or so, lest you get the idea that I left the whole thing to the ?last bloody minute,? as my dad would have accused me of with plenty of gusto. But I did get it wrapped up over the weekend.

Now all I need is for the weather to improve.

