

Bill Rea ? Takes thought to beat heat

This time of year, people like you and I think about getting away for a week or so for what is commonly known as summer vacation.

Some of you have already been away. I pity you, to a certain extent. I have not yet headed off to elsewhere away from work, meaning I have something extra to look forward to.

My wife and I are planning to head away Aug. 9, and that date is a little significant. It will mark exactly six months to the day since we departed on our winter get away.

But things weren't supposed to work out that way. Feb. 9 was a Saturday. We were supposed to depart Friday night, right after I was done with work. We would have too, were it not that we were snowed in.

Feb. 8, for the benefit of those of you who might have forgotten, was the day this area received that major dumping of snow. I just about threw my back out in the morning shovelling out the driveway so I could get my car on the road, then I had to figure out where to take the car through roads that had not been plowed. During the day, I needed at least one boost, and pushes from more obliging people than I could count. Then I had to do more shovelling when I got home. Police all over the province were urging people to stay off the roads, and that was one very rare occasion when I was more than happy to go along with being bossed around. I was in no mood that night to drive north of about 100 miles.

Don't worry. We'll probably be dealing with more of the same six months from now.

As a community service during this heat wave we have been enduring the last little while, I'm going to recommend that you think cool thoughts, if not bone-chilling frigid thoughts. And I'm going to help you.

Set your mind back six months, to winter. To when there was snow on the ground. To when you were always checking the thermostat to see if there was any more heat to be cranked out in the house. To when you would get up extra early in the morning to see if there was any shovelling to be done. To when trying to find the appropriate temperature in which to sleep consisted mainly of looking around for that extra blanket. It was a time for heavy coats, heavy boots and heavy use of whatever environmentally-friendly stuff you throw down on your walk to make sure people don't slip and fall and think about suing you.

Don't these memories give you a nice warm feeling?

Or have we had too much warmth for our own good over the last week or so? I know I have.

It's not all been bad. The work days have been tolerable, thanks to the fact the air conditioning in the office works reasonably well. And even going out to cover events for the newspaper isn't too bad. Most of the meetings I have to attend are in rooms equipped with air conditioning. There have been meetings that I have been reluctant to leave. True, when politicians get severe cases of yackaholism, blood pressures can elevate. But that happens in snow storms too. And attending outdoor events are actually a lot of fun. True, scorching heat can be a burden, but if one dresses appropriately, remembers to wear a hat, make generous use of sunscreen and makes sure they stay hydrated, things usually work out just fine.

Getting work done at home is another matter. Although I did not have the energy to do so, I did cut my front lawn one evening last week. But that was only because it desperately needed cutting. And my body was very angry with me when I was done. The need to cut the back lawn was even more serious. I managed to work up the required energy in the sort of cool temperatures of Sunday, largely because Beth told me to.

Gardening has sort of taken a back seat to the heat too. And when it comes to doing work inside, well, things have fallen way behind, with no immediate indication that they're going to catch up any time soon.

And I have run into some other burdens, and I admit that part of that is my own fault.

Some years ago, when our house was being built, Beth and I discussed the possibility of air conditioning. Being the prudent money man that I fancy myself to be, I thought it a bit frivolous and indulgent, and I have been kicking myself every summer ever since. Besides, it was to be our home, so thoughts of resale never occurred to me.

Trying to get sleep at night during summer heat waves is no easy task, and that was especially the case last week.

But being the smart fellow that I am (that observation alone is usually good for a couple of nasty emails, but I digress), I thought of a possible solution last Wednesday when I got home from work.

We have a spare bedroom in our house, with two small beds that I use to pile stuff on. We also have a basement, and like most basements, it's the coolest place in the house this time of year ? Having a dehumidifier down there helps a lot too.

So I showed some initiative for once in my life, moved the junk from one of the two small beds and piled it on the other one, then took the first bed apart and lugged the components down to the basement and reassembled them. I did all this in the midst of a heat wave, meaning I was drenched with sweat at the end of the exercise. But I also reasoned that Beth and I would have a somewhat

more comfortable place to sleep for the next couple of nights. Our basement is a little on the cramped side, so there was only room for one of the two beds. Besides, under those conditions, there was a limit to the amount of physical labour to which I was prepared to subject myself, and I had reached that limit.

I don't think Beth was too keen about the arrangement initially, but I reminded her of the alternative, and the grumbling dried up pretty quick.

True, the sleeping quarters were a bit cramped, but since we're legally married, I figured that was permissible. The mattress left a lot to be desired, especially compared to the one we used to. But the temperature was a lot better.

Just some thoughts to bear in mind six months from now in the winter blahs.

Oh yeah, if you're dithering about getting air conditioning in your new house, remember there are times for being a tightwad, and this is not one of them.

