

Bill Rea ? Tiring, but fun

Ever notice how some things were better when you were a kid than they are when you're not a kid any more?

I tend to think the Canadian National Exhibition qualifies.

My wife and I spent the better part of Saturday at the Ex. In addition to being exhausting (Beth fell asleep on the couch while I watched the Blue Jays almost pull off a miracle on TV that night), I thought it was something of a let down. Or was I maybe reflecting on the days of my early teens, when a group of us kids would go to the CNE, start at the Midway and never get out of the Midway?

I'm thinking back to the days when it cost you 50 cents to get on the really good rides, and I thought that was a little steep in those days. You're now looking at several bucks per ride on the Midway.

I was lucky to have been born and raised in Toronto. School kids got an Exhibition ticket tucked in with their report cards (telling them they had passed) the last day of school. My sister-in-law, who teaches in Toronto, told me that tradition continues.

Beth and I usually make a point of getting to the Ex at least once during the time it's operating. My job carries an obligation to get down to cover the Ambassador of the Fairs competition, and that is just what I did a couple of Sundays ago. Beth had an event on her side of the family to address, so I made the trip to the Ex on my own to view the young ladies and gents as they competed. True, there were no representatives from Caledon who showed up, but I was reporting for other papers in this company, and the ambassador from Orangeville did make it to the semifinals. The trip, while brief, was not wasted. There were other things to cover that weekend, like the Befountain Music Festival and the Bolton Rotaryfest, so I couldn't hang around too long at the CNE.

Thus it came that Saturday was the time at the Ex for she who must be obeyed and me.

The Canadian International Air Show was on Saturday, and frankly, I was a little disappointed with it. Saturday's show seemed to be filled with a lot of music and interludes, with certain amount of skimpishness when it came to impressive aircraft. Then again, I might just be excessively picky. I have been accused of that.

Granted the Breitling Jet Team from France, which opened the show, was pretty impressive, and the Snowbirds provided fine finale. But Beth and I spent a lot of the time being impressed with some of the cars passing in front of us on Lakeshore Boulevard. A couple of people parked illegally so they could take in the show without paying. That resulted in a few angry honks on horns, and a couple of arguments that didn't get very far.

We spent a lot of time walking the grounds, which were very crowded. That's hardly surprising, since it was a holiday weekend, and the last weekend of both the fair and summer vacation.

We walked through the Midway a couple of times, and I marvelled (again) at how much the rides cost.

There are always a couple of companies showing a wide selection of hot tubs. Beth and I always check out these displays, and discuss where on our property we could set such a luxury. It's all talk. The fact is that barring a substantial lottery win, when it comes to a hot tub, talking is about as far as we're going to get. But it's still nice to talk about.

There are the waffle and ice cream sandwiches. I had known about them for years, but never bothered with them. It wasn't until I started going to the Exhibition with Beth that I started taking them more seriously. If Beth has an addiction to anything, that's it. When I was a kid, my family always took the last two weeks of summer vacation for holiday time. We'd come home Labour Day weekend and go to the Ex the holiday Monday. For the first couple of years I can remember, my father's office was a couple of blocks away from the Princes' Gates, so parking was never a problem. There was one year we happened to be near the Dufferin Gates when the Labour Day Parade marched onto the grounds. That was the first time I had heard there was such a thing as a Labour Day Parade, and my folks were far too conservative to explain the significance of it to me.

Eventually, I became a bigger kid, and went to the Ex with my friends. Naturally, we spent most of the time on the Midway (make that all of the time). It cost a lot of money, but it was one of those things we had been saving up for all year, so who cared?

And then I became an even bigger kid, and the Ex became an excuse for a date. There was a time when us media folk were able to get passes to the CNE which included a parking pass. In those days, we parked under the Gardiner Expressway, simply waving the pass at the person manning the gate as we motored onto the grounds.

The first time Beth and I went to the Ex together was to see the Air Show, and I well remember how impressed she was with the way I was able to drive into the grounds.

"Out we get," I announced as I finished parking my car.

"Are we in the Exhibition?" she asked, with a rather incredulous tone in her voice.

I'll bet none of you ever realized that a parking pass to the CNE could be used as a courting tool, but it worked quite well.

