

Bill Rea ? Well meaning, but going too far?

I often write in this space about my adventures as a pet owner.

One reason for that is this topic tends to draw a lot of reaction; mostly positive. And there are the weeks when I simply can't think of anything else to write about.

Such, however, is not the case this week, and I have the powers that be in the City of Mississauga to thank for it.

I listened to the radio newscast while driving last Thursday morning with my wife. We were on our way to Mayor Marolyn Morrison's Business Breakfast, and the news commentators were full of details about the new regulations in Mississauga, governing the treatment of animals; namely pets. According to the accounts I've read, they're aimed mainly at dealing with extreme weather conditions, such as what were enjoying last week in the aftermath of that summer we never really had.

Now like most normal people, I love animals and will go out of my way to avoid harming them.

For some reason, there have been about three or four occasions in the last couple of weeks when a squirrel has darted right in front of me in the path of my car. In each occasion, there was absolutely no time to brake or take evasive action. I just gripped the wheel as tight as I could, held my breath and hoped the critter concerned had enough agility to avoid getting creamed. Happy endings all around, I'm very glad to report, because I would have felt like dung had it been a sad outcome.

There are other examples.

I used to fish a lot when I was a kid, but haven't baited a hook in more than 20 years, and am not likely to start again at this stage of my life. In my mind, I just couldn't justify the idea of making sport by forcing a fellow living creature to fight for its life.

And people in my office will tell you I'm not one to squish spiders or other repulsive bugs that somehow get in. I'd much rather grab a piece of paper towel, pick up the offending critter and toss it out the door, letting nature decide its fate. I hate the thought of being called a litterbug, but that's one of those occasions when I think the other kind of bug has to get a certain amount of priority.

I'm such a good guy!

My first reaction upon hearing of these new regulations in Mississauga was to wonder if it was another case of government imposing a 'nanny state' on us. One would presume common sense should give people a few basic pointers on proper pet care. Do we really need government imposing new regulations on everyone?

I have a hard time believing that people don't understand the implications of extreme weather on our four-legged friends.

Our cat Ella is an indoor cat, meaning Mother Nature and her weather-related freak shows have little impact on her. The electrical storm that rumbled through the area Friday night didn't seem to bother her a bit (she was too busy bothering me).

But after 16 years of being responsible for a cat, I've learned there are certain things one can do with a feline that can't be done with a dog. Dogs don't use litter boxes, so unless you're fond of having awkward wet spots on the carpet, etc., your dog needs a certain amount of time outside.

My formative years were spent in a house with dogs. My father used to travel a lot on business, and he decreed that if he was going to be away from home so much, there was going to be a dog on the premises.

But that meant he (meaning the pooch) had to get outside a certain amount of the time, along with walks every evening.

Animals have internal clocks ? never kid yourself otherwise. As I got older, and my big brother went away to university, the task of walking the dog fell upon Your Humble. The nightly walk usually came at about 9 p.m., but the object of the exercise usually started pushing the agenda at about 8:15. And if things got delayed, the walk never waited past 9:30, if for no other reason than to shut the dog up.

But things changed a lot if the weather was inclement. The dog was never very enthused about going out if it was raining. And if there were a couple of inches of snow on the ground, then the evening walk got interesting. I should point out the dog in question was a dachshund, meaning he was built very low to the ground. And since he was a male, there were certain anatomical issues that presented themselves, especially in the snow (you know what I mean, gentlemen). My method of dealing with the situation was to carry him a couple of hundred yards from the house, and then put him down. The only way he was going to get home was by walking.

My point is people who have pets and love their pets also know how to care for them. And that includes when the weather is not what we'd like it to be.

There were also new required provisions for outdoor doghouses coming from Mississauga that were recited on the radio for the benefit of Beth and myself, ala they must insulated and large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around, lie down and stretch. The shelters must also have clean dry bedding and shade and be in good repair. There are also extra requirements for each additional dog. ?What, no Wi-Fi?? I said to Beth, drawing a laugh in the process.

I will admit that was a little flippant, considering the fact that we continue to hear horror stories about people doing dumb things, like leaving their pets locked in cars during heat waves, despite all the media play such incidents receive when they do occur. I have seen such situations.

In one of the very few times I have called 9-1-1, I did so one evening last summer (which was a lot hotter than the summer of recent memory) when Beth and I heard the unmistakable sounds of a dog in distress in a car in a Brampton parking lot. Like most people, my usual inclination in a case like this is to mind my own business. But I knew my conscience wasn't going to let me off that easy. An arachnophobic guy who would prefer to chuck spiders outside rather than stomping on them is not likely to look the other way from a suffering dog.

The problem with the 'nanny state' mentality, apart from the fact it can be very annoying, is there's a solid argument to be made that it's needed. The twits Beth and I encountered last summer tend to be proof of that, don't they?

I'm a little disturbed with provisions that would allow animal services officers to walk on a property to make sure all is in accordance with the regulations.

I know we live in the Dominion of Canada, not the United States of America. In this country, the concept of private property is largely a myth, but I would have one hell of a problem if some municipal official rang my doorbell, demanding to inspect Ella's litter box. And just what's to stop some obnoxious neighbour from making a nuisance of him or herself, calling in the authorities with some frivolous complaint about pet mistreatment? Such things do happen.

Although there are cases of stupidity (too many), I think people generally know how to care for their pets. The recent action from those in charge in Mississauga have certainly been taken with the best intentions. But I believe there are times when people have to govern themselves

