

Bill Rea ? Winter can get lost

Is it just my imagination, or is winter really over?

I hate to jump to conclusions, especially considering the winter we've been having (notice how I'm hedging on whether it's actually concluded or not).

It is a fact that I have been considering getting the lawnmower out from wherever it was I parked it last fall (I've had other things on my mind in the intervening months). I have not yet taken definite action in that direction ? I think it's known as procrastinating.

In discussion with my wife, I have actually raised the subject of breaking out the barbecue (I know for a fact that it's in the garage). That's only in the discussion stages at this point. Actually, I'm looking forward to getting back into that routine. At the risk of sounding immodest, I believe I am getting rather good at back-yard cooking. I even toyed with the idea of cooking the Christmas turkey on the barbecue this year, but was quickly talked out of it.

One of the issues with barbecuing is it requires my constantly running in and out between the house and yard. We're not sure how our new cat Ella is going to react to that. She's adventuresome enough that we fear she might bolt her way to some unauthorized excursion and my legs are long passed the day when I could run after an excited pussy cat. It was never an issue with our former cat. Sidney wouldn't have voluntarily left the house if it was on fire.

Things haven't progressed yet to the point where we've started talking about that annual failure we call a garden. I'm actually being a harsh with ourselves, because last year's effort was actually not bad. Maybe dig the holes a bit deeper this year, and not bother with the purple alyssum (it didn't work). Beth and I have a rule that we never take action in that direction before Victoria Day ? too often we've been euchred by unexpected frosts.

But there are some sure signs that I have expected that the aforementioned winter is history. For example, I had the winter tires removed from my car earlier this week. That was actually a new experience for me. In the past, I haven't bothered with winter tires, relying instead on my own experience and front-wheel drive to get me out of snow-related messes. I was at a funeral for the mother of a friend about a year ago, and it was the doctor of the deceased, who had also been my late mother's doctor, who recognized me and struck up a conversation. One of the issues he raised dealt with the value of having the appropriate tires on your car for the winter ? he in fact got pretty emphatic. If one can't trust his late mother's doctor, who's he going to trust? So I went out and got them installed, at significant expense, before the snows arrived. I ended up getting stuck in a driveway during the December ice storm and had to call CAA to get me out. Needless to say, that experience gave me cause to wonder how worthwhile the expense was.

Or maybe I'm being somewhat cynical, which could be part of a negative attitude that many of us might be suffering from after such a harsh winter. And most, if not all, of us received ample indications that this was a heavy winter.

During the ice storm, for example, I personally got off rather easy, losing power for about half an hour. Yet I had friends and family who were hit a lot harder, and bearing concerns for them was not the best way to spend the days immediately before Christmas. But we got through it.

So did most of the community, and the evidence of the devastation is still there to be seen. I was out taking pictures last weekend of volunteers dragging downed tree limbs out of the bush. And I noticed that is a very heavy job ? three people were tugging so hard ended up falling on their backsides (I'm too nice a guy to have taken a picture of that).

I was up early Easter Sunday, climbing the Alton Pinnacle to get a picture of the Sunrise Service. There was all manner of downed branches and limbs on and around the trail.

I've lately been seeing lots of piles of storm debris along the sides of roads, waiting to be collected.

Beth and I spent our regular vacation week up north in the first week February. We came home a day early because this area had been hammered with the snow, and a substantial dumping was expected for Muskoka. Once we got home, we found a driveway with about a foot of the white stuff. I spend approximately three hours clearing it out ? I can think of better ways to spend my birthday. It was a hardship on many of us, although I can understand how some people may have spent the last several months rejoicing. I was not surprised to read that ski resort operators had a terrific season. Considering some of the winters they have had to deal with over the last couple of years, I'm happy for them. Too bad I don't ski anymore.

But the point has been made lots of times, and it bears repeating ? we got through it.

Now we have to get ourselves through spring. And don't forget that we're only about six weeks from the start of summer.

And what would this world be without pessimists? I have already heard predictions that this is going to be a cold summer, at least as summers go. I heard on the radio last week about one ?expert? who was quoted as observing the water in Lake Ontario is still a lot colder than it should be this time of year, and it's going to take a while for things to warm up. That, according to the expert I heard being cited, is going to mean there'll be a cooling effect on the water which is expected to have an impact on the whole area.

For what it's worth, I don't buy that for a second. I know it's seldom wise to argue with experts, but I am in the media, which means I spend a lot of my working life trying to find ways to be at odds with people who are supposed to know more than I do.

Besides, who am I to argue with predictions. There are still people around who are happy to razz me about my calls in advance of the 1991 municipal elections in Caledon (contrary to popular belief, they weren't all wrong, but had I backed up my predictions with a sizeable amount of money, I would have been drummed out of my family for skimping on my Christmas shopping that year).

I also picked the Leafs to make the playoffs this year, and even put that prediction into print (one of the people in my office asked me if I was drunk when I wrote that).

But I am always happy to draw on my experiences and plan accordingly. Having already lived through more than 50 summers, I know things can and do get bloody hot around here, and that's what I'm expecting this year.

I plan to make copious use of the air conditioning in my car as I make my way about Caledon and area over the coming months. I plan to kick myself frequently during the weeks to come because I didn't arrange to have our house air-conditioned when I had the chance (not to mention what it might have done for the resale value). I rigged up a spare bed in the basement last year, meaning Beth and I were able to find sort-off comfortable sleeping arrangements in the heat waves. I'm prepared to set up similar arrangements this year.

And as I told people during the coldest days of the winter that may now, at last, be over, ?in a couple of months we'll be complaining about the heat.?

That's a prediction I'm still willing to hold to

