

Bill Rea ? Winter?s not so bad

Anyone who knows me of course knows I am no fan of winter.

On the other hand, I like to think I'm a realist, so I know the cold and snowy conditions are going to come on a regular basis. That's simply part of reality if one is going to live in Canada.

Besides, winter is not so bad, sometimes.

When I was a kid, I was able to make a certain amount of pocket money shoveling neighbours out. That type of get-up-and-go seems somewhat lacking these days, although I will grant the evidence on which I base that assertion is a little skimpy.

During the time, a couple of years ago, when I lived in an urban area, if there was snow in my driveway and walk, getting rid of it fast was high on my list of priorities. I would avoid, if possible, putting my car in the driveway until the snow had been cleared. The tires tended to force the snow into the pavement, requiring a lot of energy to get it off.

I was out shoveling my driveway one winter afternoon some years ago, while the lady who lived next door was doing the same with hers. At one point, she paused, I guess to take a breath, then wondered why we didn't see neighbourhood kids out trying to make some bucks for themselves.

?Where are the kids?? she asked. ?When I was a kid, there was competition for the snow-shoveling business.?

I told her things had been a little different for me.

?I didn't have competition,? I observed. ?I just had a dad who told me to get off my (rear end) and go shovel the neighbours out.?

During particularly severe storms, my folks were taking the phone calls, letting me know which neighbour was next on the list.

Nothing like having a built-in dispatch system.

Since I moved to a slightly more rural area, I don't bother with snow shoveling much.

I think I miss the exercise.

Even if there was no money to be made from the neighbours, there are certain charms to the winter weather, especially if you are a kid.

Street hockey is fun in the winter, especially if you have a good street on which to play. I was fortunate enough to grow up (make that pretend to grow up) on a cul-de-sac, so there were some great games over the years. As much as I loved street hockey, I don't think it would have the same appeal if it was played during a heat wave in August.

I know there are people who live for the winter. During the aforementioned period of my youth, when I shoveled snow for the neighbours, there was one guy on the street who was frequently out of town on business trips, so we had an understanding that I would dig him out if it snowed, and we'd settle up in due course. In the midst of all this, he got married. I was shoveling him out one afternoon when the new wife emerged from the house, grabbed a shovel and started digging.

I started assuring her that I was able to handle it (I would have been in deep doo-doo if my old man had seen what was going on).

?I just love the snow,? she replied. ?I wanted to get out into it.?

There are some times when it's just pointless to argue.

Besides, she was a skier, and I do understand the attraction of that activity.

I did try skiing when I was a kid. I quite enjoyed it, although I was never any good at it. I gave it up largely because there were other things that held my interest and simply didn't have time to slap on the boards.

There was one time I stupidly tried the run reserved for expert skiers (it was at Hockley Hills, if I recall correctly). Being young and foolish, I let my speed on the slope get much too high, with a large mount of snow coming up fast. I tried to turn, using the snowplow method, and my skis crossed. The good news was I didn't hit the mount, but rather flew over it. The bad news was gravity, being what it is, took over, and I found myself going headlong into the ground. I lay there for a few seconds, moving various parts of my body, trying to determine what, if anything, I had broken.

As it turned out, the only thing that was damaged was my ego.

Some people were made to take part in downhill skiing, and others were meant to watch it during the Olympics. If nothing else, I do know my place.

So even if I do lack the necessary skills (not to mention courage) to ski, I know there are lots of people who live for it. Who am I to reject their thrills?

There are other fun things to do during winter, especially late winter, as I reminded myself Friday (Good Friday).

True the freezing rain caused a certain amount of havoc for some people, with fallen tree limbs, power outages, etc. But even those problems can have a positive side.

I went out that morning and found my car was encrusted with ice. But I also found that the temperature had increased to the point

that the ice was no longer adhering to the surface. I dug out the scraper from the back seat, and closed the door. As it slammed, a couple of large chunks of ice were dislodged and fell to the ground. I soon found that a few well-placed, moderate blows with my hand was freeing up more ice. I didn't need the scraper, as I happily took care of this little matter with my hands (I was wearing gloves, of course). Its moments like that which give people the feeling they can actually strike a blow against winter.

I was out for a couple of hours doing work-related stuff, returning home around mid afternoon. I saw my wife's car was covered with similar ice to what I had found on mine. I was tempted to remove it for her, but then realized she might want to do the job herself. It is, after all, her car.

I went into the house, and mentioned her car was covered with ice, and telling her I had left the happy task of knocking it off to her. I didn't think she had taken me seriously, but about 15 minutes later, I noticed she was at the front door, with her winter coat, boots and mitts on and ready. In response to my question, Beth said she was just going to put some stuff in the recycling bin on the porch. She didn't need to get that dressed up to walk to a bin about five feet from the front door.

?Enjoy the ice breaking,? I called after her.

Sure enough, I spent the next five minutes standing at the living room window, watching my spouse happily remove the ice from her car.

Winter is certainly not all bad.

