

Bill Rea ? Getting along without power

As the reasonably popular song (one I have frankly never liked) goes, ?Don't it always seem to go, That you don't know what you've got Till it's gone.?

I started writing this piece in the dark, and I mean real dark.

The power in some places went kabloolie last Thursday morning, a couple of minutes after 11, including much of Bolton. Things came back on quite quickly for a number of businesses in the core. In some other cases that I know of (I know because I was sitting in the middle of one of them), the power blanked out, and then partially came right back on. Like I just stated, the lights in the Citizen office went out, and then half of them came right back on. I regret to report that's not the half where I perform.

There I was, going on for noon, and the lights flickered, then they came one, then they got dim, and then they flickered, and then they did various combinations of all of the above. I was able to get a bit of work done on my laptop, although the way the lights were operating, it was a little like trying to type in a disco (not a lot of fun, I can assure you). While I'm not an expert in ophthalmology, I'm willing to bet this was not doing my eyes a whole lot of good.

Like I said, we had some lights, but not enough to be really functional. Some of the computers were functioning, but not all of them, and that included the one I do my work on, which is why I resorted to back-up. And forget about trying to get on the internet or read emails.

Part of my regular Thursday routine is updating the Citizen's website. Fortunately, I got some of it done before going home the previous night, but I'm afraid the rest of the task had to wait for Friday.

Welcome to the wonderful world of frustration.

I made efforts to find out how widespread this mess was. It seemed to cover a relatively small area, which I guess was good news. But even as I wrote this, the situation seemed to keep changing. People who had power now seem to have lost it. And all of the Citizen office had gone out. The traffic lights at the intersection of King and Queen Streets in Bolton had been working, but such was not the case for too long.

I called other people, including my aunt in Etobicoke, and things seemed to be okay with her.

The phones in the office were working fine too.

I was also able to verify that things seemed to be okay in Caledon East and Palgrave, at least according to the few people in those areas I spoke to.

Although I was limited in the amount of work I could do in the dark, the demands of the job required me to hit the road for a time last Thursday.

It was getting on for 4 in the afternoon when reality told me there was little to be accomplished by hanging around the office, so I went home.

Arriving home early had a couple of advantages. I was able to access my emails, which was a very good thing, because I found out about a picture I almost missed. I was able to excuse myself from the house and get to the assignment in just about perfect time. It was also one night I dared not be late. It was my wife and my 15th wedding anniversary, and I know better than to violate marital protocol for such an occasions (of course I bought flowers on my way home).

We're a couple of weeks shy of the 10th anniversary of the major power outage of 2003. I recall that at first, people thought the problem was fairly localized. It wasn't until I got in my car and turned on the radio that I realized how big the situation really was. The really memorable part of that experience is we all seemed to come through it, even with a bit of difficulty.

Beth and I converged on her mother's place to verify that she was okay. Then we went home and found that our phone wasn't working. I had to use my cell phone to call my mother in Toronto, who up until then hadn't realized how widespread the problem was (I had more immediate access to a radio through my car than she did through her condo). I remember repeating to her the assurances that I had heard that terrorism was not suspected (this was less than two years after 9-11). I also told her to leave messages for me on my cell if she needed me, since I planned to keep it shut off most of the time to preserve the charge in the battery as long as possible, and would turn it on periodically to check for messages.

?God knows when I'll be able to get this thing charged again,? I told her, and she understood.

Like I said, we all got through it.

It seemed almost as easy as getting through the fun of the November 1965 blackout.

A lot of you reading this probably don't remember that night, when parts of Ontario, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, New York and New Jersey went dark.

Big kids can understand that the lights and TV aren't going to always work. It's a little bit more to expect such understanding from a

seven-year-old kid who's afraid of the dark. The upshot was dinner was a delayed and I missed watching Batman that night (at the time, that was a very big deal, for both my brother and I).

That was a memorable night for a lot of other reasons, not the least of which was that my father, who had just started taking business trips to Europe for about four weeks at a time, was slated to fly out that night for his second trip across the Atlantic. He made a couple of phone calls to verify the airport was still functioning, and I think he was able to get a cab to get him out there. The upshot was his plane took off at some point while the rest of the vicinity was in darkness.

My mother's Bridge Club was supposed to get together that night. Mom called the babysitter and told her to forget it, and she stayed home.

This was during the time that every kid had a transistor radio. We used them mainly to listen to CHUM. But that night, the three of us just sat on the couch in silence, listening to the radio for news on when we might get some power. There really wasn't much else to do.

History records it did come on, at some point, and it served as another example of the resiliency and resourcefulness of people.

My teacher, the next day, killed the whole afternoon giving the class the assignment of writing essays on how our families handled the ordeal of the previous night.

The whole thing got her out of an afternoon of teaching.

My getting out of a day of work last week was a lot less convenient

