

Forced disconnect reveals our weaknesses

by Mark Pavilons

Stuck.

No that's not the name of a new reality show (but it could be. I?got dibs.)

The country-wide crash of Rogers services sent people into a tailspin. Many services were cancelled, and debit machines were down for a couple of days.

I'm sure this was devastating for many, since most of us don't carry cash any more. I would not want to have been a cashier this past weekend.

It would be funny, if it didn't snarl pretty much everything we do.

Don't you love technology? This recent event shows just how vulnerable we are; how tied we are to an online way of life.

Attention enemies and alien invaders:?simply flick the switch and we're at your mercy!

While defunct debit machines sucked, people were lost at home without TV, Internet, Facebook, email and the like.

Okay, it wasn't everyone, but it did affect a large portion of the population from coast to coast.

What to do?

My daughter had a get-together and without WiFi at home, the kids pocketed the smart phones and didn't know what to do with themselves. They could have talked, played games or danced. Nah. They stood around, completely lost.

Boy, a few bad connections and loose wires and we became pioneers, tossed back a couple of decades.

Boy, did I get a lot of chores done! All this ?free? time provided pause, reflection, contemplation, and yes, conversation.

There were a ton of good things we discovered, but this one major ?glitch? revealed that our society, maybe the entire planet, can be brought to its needs if you just pull the plug.

Previously, on none other than the afternoon of Friday the 13th back in?May, power was out to most of the south hill in Bolton, impacting well, pretty much everything.

No electricity, no modern conveniences. Nada, nichts, bupkis.

Virtually everything came to a standstill. Drivers who forgot about 4-ways stops when traffic lights fail, caused quite a bit of congestion along the town's main drag.

Parking lots were abandoned, looking more like a holiday Monday than a busy Friday afternoon.

Interac is one thing, but it's weird how our entire society comes to a grinding halt without electricity.

Stores closed their doors, gas pumps were cordoned off, and the tumble weed blew by.

People looked utterly confused, almost dumbfounded.

I smiled to myself, wondering how many people were asking themselves, 'well this is just great, what am I supposed to do now?'

Nothing, because Murphy's Law reigns supreme. Natural or unnatural occurrences don't care about human beings and their hectic lives and schedules. Hydro One gets to it when they can.

The power grid was silent and it was eerie. But not in the Jason type of way (a blatant reference to Friday the 13th here).

No, it was a pleasant, sun-kissed, breeze-blowing break from the typical hustle and bustle. It was calm, almost peaceful.

Another kick in the shins for local businesses, eateries and shops, I thought. Just when things were bustling again, this Friday afternoon lockdown was not welcome at all.

Back to the stone age. Well not quite. Batteries, generators, portable power supply units can keep us functioning. A bit of gas can get us out of harm's way.

And I thought back to August 2003 when most of Ontario and the northern U.S. went dark for roughly four days. What a mess!

I love post-apocalyptic scenarios, stories, movies and TV shows. I am impressed at how quickly nature reclaims the planet after we mortals are left helpless or disappear entirely.

Thirsty citizens were turned away from the LCBO and families went without groceries for an hour or so. Heck, there are plenty of geese and wild turkeys in the area if it came to that!

Only our seniors and some Boomers fully understand doing without modern tech. My parents came from post-war Europe where shortages, power outages and rationing were commonplace. They made do. They figured it out.

I chuckle as the youngins break down, unravel and fall apart at the seams. Just what do they do now? Indeed. Selfies will have to wait.

Then, the neon 'open' signs flickered at a nearby store and life returned. People began showing up, seemingly out of nowhere, like ants at a picnic.

I thought back to my youth in Etobicoke. In my pre-teen years, we headed out after breakfast and didn't show our faces until the sun went down and the street lights came on.

Yes, we were dirty, sweaty and maybe even banged up a bit from the day's adventures. If we dented our bike, we hid it around back so our parents wouldn't notice. But they always did.

I gently placed my jar containing a praying mantis and crickets down next to my bike, after I punched a few holes in the lid so the critters could breathe. I'd check on them every day until I released them back into the wild.

Our lives weren't exciting or noteworthy, yet they were filled with 'moments.'

One of those was when I got my foot caught between the chain and the frame of my bike. I just slipped as I pedalled from a standing position. The battalion of rescuers 'neighbours and parents' swarmed the scene and after wiggling and unbolting, I was free!

We kids of the 1970s and 80s took things in stride. We weren't deterred by much. We broke rules and definitely pushed boundaries.

We teased one another to no end. We tussled from time to time. And yes, some of our pick-up ball games ended in a black eye or bloody nose. Battle scars that we wore with pride. We didn't need electricity all. A ball, glove, soccer ball, even a large tree branch would do just fine. A rock and an empty pop can became prize possessions for us wee sandlot pickers.

We were lucky to have change in our pockets and when one of us did, we shared the candy and sipped from the same bottle.

I'm not sure what soothes the soul when life gets hectic.

But I do know that living off the grid is sounding a lot more appealing these days.

Tie two cans together and chat! Grab a long piece of grass, stick it between your thumbs and make the trumpet sound for all to hear!