

?We're living in the electric age. All you need to do is flip a switch?

by BROCK WEIR

As Friday wore on, I couldn't help but think of an old I Love Lucy episode as I tried to get creative in getting what needed to be done?done without some of the necessities in doing so.

In this particular episode, Lucy and Ethel, fresh from washing a plethora of dishes in the kitchen while their husbands refrained from lifting a finger in the comfort of the living room, square off with Ricky and Fred about how easy each other has it thanks to the wonders of modern-day conveniences.

The women have it easy, the men argued, because with the advent of the automatic washer and dryer, refrigerator and so forth (apparently not a dishwasher) all they needed to do to complete their domestic drudgery was ?flip a switch.?

Naturally, those who had been doing the drudgery disagreed and what followed was a battle of the sexes scenario to see who could do without ?modern conveniences? the longest. Want to go grocery shopping? Bake your own bread and churn your own butter. What to get rid of overnight stubble before heading off to work? Don't even think of the safety razor. Or even water hot from the tap, for that matter.

So, as one of our largest telecom giants left a significant chunk of the country offline last week, in many respects it seemed like we had collectively been thrown back to that fabled period so gag-worthily known as ?a simpler time.?

Although, as a newspaper editor, there's precious little one can do to finish the day with a straight razor or a butter churn.

My day usually begins with a terrible habit: reaching for the phone left beside my bed, contrary to all sensible advice on getting a good night's sleep. It's not kept there for the purpose of scrolling endlessly through a social media platform, although I freely admit to falling in that trap?well, more times than I care to admit, it's a matter of starting the day catching up on the news that may have happened overnight.

And, if the last two-and-a-half years has taught us anything, it's that a lot can happen around you when you're charging up for the day ahead. Case in point, when I went to bed Wednesday night, Boris Johnson was still clinging to power as the UK's Prime Minister. By the time I opened my eyes the next day, he'd already announced his resignation upon the selection of his successor.

The next night brought the very sad news that former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had been the victim of an assassination attempt. As the Friday morning sun woke me up, I reached over, braced, to find out whether the attempt had been successful and found ? nothing. Back to the ol' radio to, unfortunately, learn his tragic fate.

No data, no wifi, and, without a traditional landline, no connection to the outside world.

People often boast about taking the bold step of ?cutting the cord? as far as cable television is concerned, but I'd wager those boasts don't extend to having the fragments of the cord cut out from beneath them.

Personally, I have no shame in admitting to feeling a bit claustrophobic not having information as readily at my fingertips, a gentle reminder that I all too often take this privilege for granted. Finally, the lightbulb went off. I was able to connect again at the public library ? along with, it seemed, most of our neighbours. Thank goodness for such a resource!

When I was able to connect, albeit temporarily as I had to head back to the office where the traditional land line was keeping me grounded, I had time to think about the breadth of our collective situation.

Taking in feedback from other residents gathered at this electronic watering hole, their days were negatively impacted in just about every way, from kids and parents trying to communicate and coordinate, people looking to get money out of their banks, depending on which service their financial institution subscribed to, people unable to tap their card on their afternoon Tim Hortons' run as their debit and credit systems were knocked offline, and the list went on and on.

As the dust continues to settle this week, it will be interesting for all the wrong reasons, to see the full impact of the outage on residents and neighbours alike.

Just how much money did businesses lose by being forced to go back to a cash only system? Just how big of a hit has consumer confidence taken, knowing that when one system goes down, for instance, they may not be able to access their hard-earned money? Most importantly, just how many residents have been impacted in long-term and even permanent ways, with emergency calls being very difficult to make?

If there is a silver lining to be had here, and, when it comes down to it, I'm always looking for them (sometimes to my own detriment) maybe it's the starkness of Friday's reminder of just how reliant we are on technology and, compared to other nations, a dearth of providers we call upon to keep things humming.

Maybe it is also timely reminder of how vulnerable we are in this situation and a wake-up call for the powers that be that more needs to be done to protect it.

While technologies we enjoy offered me, with some out-of-the-box thinking, some creative workarounds to get the job done with a traditional landline and a laptop and phone connected wirelessly to precious little else than our office printer, it has also set us up for a situation that when things grind to a halt, it's more impactful than ever.

The speed at which we live our lives today is unique to this snapshot in time.

It's much faster than it was 20 years ago and it will likely, for better or worse, be much slower compared to 20 years hence, but it is always nice to live in the here and now.

Our early settlers in what was once Upper Canada in 1837, for instance, went about their business, including the business of government, for several months not knowing that across the pond King William IV had died and they were now living in the Victorian Era.

By the time of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, the news reached our shores in mere minutes thanks to the telegraph, an invention which drastically shaped the era that had just come to a close.

Nowadays we live in an instant world ? of news, of information right at our fingertips, and even of food and gratification. How odd it feels when the instantaneousness we've become used to suddenly grinds to a halt.

While it is nice to disconnect, even for just a little while, it is only nice when it's done on your terms. Or, in the case of Lucy, Ricky, Fred and Ethel, when fifty smackers are on the line?adjusted from 1952 to account for inflation, of course.