

‘Twas A Few Weeks Before Christmas

I’m one of those fortunate fellows who has never been really hungry; I’ve never been really cold, either. That is not until a couple of weeks ago when the worst ice storm in North Carolina’s recorded history decided to settle down and freeze my part of the old U.S. of A. here in Danieltown, an unincorporated area of Forest City.

They warned us it was coming but no one anticipated the degree of destruction it brought with it. It sneaked in during the night of Wednesday, December 4... I received a phone call on Thursday morning from friends who said their power was out most of the night but thankfully was back on again. Well, I thought, ole Tomas hit it lucky again since all I experienced was a flicker or two. However, my rejoicing ended a few hours later when I heard a heavy thump out in the front yard. I was pouring another cup of coffee when the light on the coffee maker and the one over the kitchen sink blinked off. And it stayed off all the rest of the day. A tree had fallen across the power service line to my house, pulled it away from the pole-mounted transformer and, as I discovered later, cut the power to a couple dozen neighbor homes. It truly was a dark night in our section of Danieltown.

Power outages happen. Folks living in rural areas as I do take such things in stride. Losing power for a couple of hours is no big deal, but this time a tree was down on my property and I had problems. As did my neighbors. Evening came quickly, followed by the darkest night of the year, at least for me with nary a light anywhere. I managed to scrounge up a few candles I had tucked away years ago which helped, but the temperature was dropping rapidly. I still had some hot water – the tank hadn’t cooled yet – and I was able to fix a cup of almost hot instant coffee to go with my supper: a hard-boiled egg, a banana and corn flakes and milk.

That night and the five following, I went to bed early with pants, a sweatshirt and socks, and a couple of extra quilts pulled up and over my baldhead. Hey, it was toasty in my little cocoon. I lit a candle in the bathroom so I could find my way when nature called, and there was another flickering on the dresser. If the circumstances had been different and I had not been, alone it might have seemed quite romantic. But alas, I slept fairly well and the real trauma occurred twelve hours later when I realized I would have no hot coffee waiting for me. Also, I would not enjoy my steaming shower, nor could I check my e-mail or watch the news on TV. As they say in today’s vernacular, “It was a bummer!”

To make my sad tale of woe less lengthy, a fellow from Duke Power arrived three days later and restored heat and light to all my neighbors, but as for me, he said I had serious problems because I needed an entire new service line installed. He didn't know when that might be since there was a tremendous amount of damage from downed trees and power outages throughout our county. Still I stayed fairly fresh with daily showers at a neighbor's auto repair shop down town where the power had been restored; and I filled my thermos at a local restaurant so I could at least have warm coffee when I emerged from my twelve-hour hibernation on those frosty mornings. One night a friend from church called and brought over a hot meal, which I enjoyed tremendously in my candlelit dining room. Early on Tuesday morning, December 10, I looked out from under my covers to see lights flickering on the ceiling and discovered the power people were all over my yard. Even before sun up, they were solving my problem – climbing poles and cutting away limbs. A couple of hours later, “wahlah!” Harvill had power once again. I was one of the last few hundred to be so blessed.

So, just in time for Christmas, everyone in this part of North Carolina has power, or so they say. And for sure, we're thankful. I hope such devastating ice storms pass us by next time around, but if not, hey, Tarheels are tough, even transplanted Tarheels from L.A. like me. It occurs to me now, as it does so often these days, that we are a spoiled people. So many families throughout the world are struggling to feed themselves and, by and large, we have abundantly more than we need. For some reason, our Lord has chosen to bless us as a nation, individually and collectively, with gifts we in no way deserve. As we prepare to celebrate God's greatest gift to us, the birth of His only Son, Jesus Christ, it's only proper that we turn our thoughts toward Him and offer sacrifices of joy and thanksgiving for providing so many undeserved blessings. For those of us who have been delivered from the ravages of the worst ice storm in North Carolina history, may our hearts be warmed anew with love for one another. Blessings on you and yours, my friends, for a wonderful Christ-filled Christmas.

Tom Harvill, December 21, 2002