



Powerful Thoughts

WHEN THE LIGHTS FLICKERED OUT AT 5:23 p.m. on Tuesday evening, I thought it was par for the course on a dark, stormy evening. Dinner had just been prepared and was still hot when the lights extinguished, so my grandma, mom and I lit candles in my mom's living room and dined by candlelight. A rich beef stew with fresh vegetables and potatoes was accompanied by a crisp green salad highlighted with pomegranate seeds. Nutritious and delicious. Ha! Having no power wasn't so bad.

Once dinner was finished, I started to feel an oncoming restlessness I didn't anticipate. It was one week before deadline for the magazine, which is one of my busiest weeks, with evenings usually spent working. I had research to do, articles to write, stories to edit and emails to follow up on. With no power, light or Internet access, I felt a bit lost. "What do I do?" I thought to myself.

Perhaps more surprising than the length of the power outage at my house (seven days for me!) was the impact I felt when all power was taken away. In a world where I have trained myself to always be doing something, I suddenly could do almost nothing. Subconsciously I have convinced myself that sitting, relaxing and resting are things for which to feel guilty. After all, if I want to succeed in this world, I need to be constantly moving, never slowing down and never sitting in silence! Yet, that is exactly what the storm forced me to do.

Sitting in the quiet of the house, I tucked away the to-do list in my mind, giving a sigh of resignation, followed by one of acceptance, that nothing was going to get done that night. I thought about people who lived before electricity was readily available to all. How different their world must have been. Once the sun went down, their lives slowed down to a more relaxed pace. They talked, they gathered by the fire and read, and they went to bed early. All of those things are in some way discouraged in this fast-paced world of do more, get more, be more. When the mantra is "produce, produce, produce," it feels lazy to slow down.

The storm brought forced down time. On the night of the

storm, I put my feet up on the couch, grabbed a flashlight and got caught up on my reading, resting in the comfortable silence inside, listening to the wind rage outside.

An early bedtime beckoned. Preferring it to be cool when I sleep, having no heat wasn't too big of a deal. Flannel pajamas on, down comforter and two quilts heaped atop me, I nestled in a cozy bed and slept soundly, unaware of the damage being done to houses nearby. I woke up refreshed and peeked out the window to see blue skies overhead. The great storm was over!

I assumed the power would be back on in a few hours. Only a few stray branches and twigs here and there, greeted me right outside the door, but no big damage. Then I started to look around. Four houses on the block had massive structural damage from fallen trees, which made them uninhabitable. One of them soon would have a condemned notice in the window, and massive tarps on the roof and exterior wall.

My house was safe, so I couldn't dare complain about no light, heat or power, yet, as the days wore on, the romance of living by candlelight was fading (even though everyone looks *fabulous* in candlelight!). Limited access to Internet made finishing this issue of the magazine difficult, driving my stress level higher. As the grocery stores stayed shut, and perishable items were pulled from the shelves at most of the nearby open stores, I shifted to a grotesque diet of packaged foods, eating an entire box of Pop Tarts for every breakfast that week.

Finally, I gave in when the house temperature got to 46, and relocated to my sister's fully powered house. With four kids, six adults and two dogs descending on her, I named her home The Refugee Ranch. It was cozy, with us tripping over one another, the washer running all day, the crockpot full, pots simmering on the stove, and the door opening and closing every few minutes.

In the midst of the inconvenience, there was a silver lining. Our family was together in a way we hadn't been before. My nieces were giggling in the kitchen. We sat, we laughed, we talked. We slowed down. The magazine deadline suddenly didn't seem so important, as my niece and I peeled potatoes together, and all the girls had a nail painting party in the living room.

The experience also made me see with a painful glare how blessed my life is. Sure, no power, heat or lights for one week is tough, but what about those people who face life this way every day, not knowing where they will sleep at night or how they will stay warm? Being inconvenienced for a week is one thing, living a life of continual uncertainty is another.

So, as I checked the Avista site hourly, wondering when the power would come back on; as I wedged myself into a crowded house and lived as modern day refugee, and as I slowed down, I was reminded of how blessed I am. Blessed that the lights do come back on for me. Blessed that I have a family with which to be crowded together. Blessed that I know where my heat and power are coming from, and blessed that I've never had to go without.

Sometimes it takes a powerful storm to blow everything away to remind you of how much you already have.

May you have a blessed holiday season full of love, joy, peace and power!

Blythe