

# The Ice Storm of '98

The Farmers' Almanac had forecast a severe ice storm in January '98. Sure enough freezing rain began to fall steadily on January 3; accompanied by gale force winds which snapped hydro poles and crushed giant electricity pylons as if they were straws. The roads were encrusted with 4" of ice. All night we heard the snapping of trees and branches. What we did not know was that this was Canada's disaster of the century. The freezing rain had coated electrical wires to a diameter of seven inches in many areas, the sheer weight causing the pylons to buckle. From just south of Ottawa to the St. Lawrence scarcely a pylon was standing. In the area of our nearest town of Vankleek Hill nine minutes away, a thousand electrical poles were down.

Ice Storm '98 was frightening, but it pulled the community together. New friendships blossomed and old ones deepened.

Rita Ghey, President, Hill View WI, Prescott.

On the 8th day of darkness, there was a bitter east wind blowing, and we were so cold! My husband ordered a generator from Windsor. On the 9th day we were able to get an electrician to hook it up to the furnace. It seemed to be working, except that I noticed black soot on things. My hands and fingernails were always dirty. We became so tired, barely feeling like putting one foot ahead of the other. We went to bed early and slept soundly. On the 9th day with the generator running (the 18th day of darkness) our Carbon Monoxide Detector went off. We called the fire department and had to leave the house. The generator wasn't powerful enough to operate the furnace, the fan and power vents. CO<sub>2</sub> had been building up in the house, hence the tiredness. We consider ourselves fortunate that we had a detector.

Muriel Belanger, Secretary, Cassburn WI, Prescott.

Disaster only happens somewhere else, not here! I don't think there were many of the 1,760 WI members in the Eastern Area that were not affected by this storm.

The positive side of this is — help came from every direction. The Army helped the Volunteer Firemen in most areas. ... In our Township every home was visited ... to see that everyone was all right. Shelters were set up across the region by local municipalities. ... I worked in one of these and it was amazing how many people needed help. They had no food, heat or water - so many stayed in the shelter until their power came on. ... Eastern Area was overwhelmed with how WI members from all over the province sent greetings and donations to help our area.

The most important thing to come out of this was that people worked together through the ordeal. Children learned how to play without power and to entertain themselves. Adults learned how to cope in a time of disaster. ... Maybe if we look at it in another way, we gained more than we lost from this disaster.

Madonna Bell, PRO, Eastern Area.

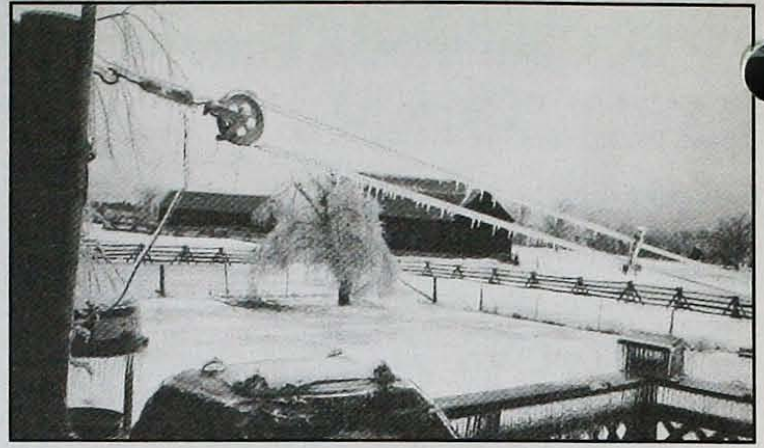


Photo courtesy of Madonna Bell, PRO, Eastern Area.

We lost our power for a total of ten days. This tested our courage, strength, faith and, most of all, our sanity! It gave me a glimpse of what life must have been like for earlier WI women. I hope that I never have to endure another crisis like this but if I do, I know that I can survive it...

This crisis brought out the best of most people. Some shared their homes, helped at the crisis centre, called their neighbours just to say hello and see how they were doing. We got to know our neighbours and hopefully this will continue in the future without mother nature's help.

Pat Hanscom, Ingleside WI, Stormont.

A personal point of view - those who suffered most were those who put dependency on the telephone, have the radio running all day and watch hours of TV; those who can't sew, knit or crochet, who don't read books or a daily paper, who seldom write letters, have never played solitaire and who fear being alone. In our household of a 79-year old and an 80-year old, we accomplished wonders - cleaned out drawers and shelves, tidied sheds, knit a sweater, split a year's worth of kindling and ate three square meals a day. We had no outside help until the last night when a generator on loan arrived out of the blue.

Local WI members met and compiled a list of suggestions for emergency preparedness for the future. This list was forwarded to our Area Executive with the recommendation that a course be offered in the near future. We'll be there! And our neighbourhoods will hear from us when we get back!

Eileen Brydges, Burnstown WI, Renfrew South.

Thanks to WI members who took time out of their busy lives to contact us during the 1998 disaster. We appreciated your concerns, help and donations of money and generators.

WI members staffed shelters, provided food and resources for neighbours and welcomed many into their homes overnight and for showers. They learned how to cope with only a lamp or two, to listen to only the news on battery operated radios, and renewed ties with family and neighbours.

Mae Craig, President, Eastern Area WI. You can write to Mae Craig at RR 5, Renfrew ON K7V 3Z8 or Fax her at (613)432-6010.