

From the frontlines of Blackout 2003

Where were you when the lights went out?
A hundred people will provide a hundred different answers.

Wherever you were and whatever you were doing, Aug. 14 will remain etched in your minds for days, weeks, even months. I was working on the final page of our church's monthly newsletter when the screen went blank and all was lost. Not a monumental catastrophe on a level with being marooned, like some poor souls, aboard the subway between St. Clair Avenue and Bloor Street. But frustrating just the same. None of us want anything to impede our normal routine.

So, it was for hundreds of commuters, returning to Stouffville from Toronto. With all traffic signals out, the four-way stop rule came into play, making progress slower than usual. At this point, I turned on the car radio and heard how ordinary citizens were, without being asked, coming to the aid of beleaguered police.

"Why not here?" I asked myself.

"Why not me?"

Obviously, others were thinking the same. At the intersection of Winona Drive and Main, Cheryl Brown had already assumed her self-appointed post. With both arms flailing in windmill fashion, she had vehicles sailing through without delay.

What prompted the decision, I asked?

"Two children on bicycles were almost hit," she explained. "Someone had to do something."

Similarly, at Ninth North and Main, a man stepped into the breach.

As for me, I headed downtown where I discovered a log-jam at Main, Market and Mill streets. Admittedly, I felt about as safe as a rabbit on a rifle range, with vehicles of every size and description challenging my wee spot of pavement.

Fortunately, a sympathetic observer took pity on my plight and handed me a hazard vest and gloves. These helped enormously, providing an element of authority I badly needed.

A whistle would have come in handy also, but these, like candles and flashlights, were in short supply.

APPRECIATION FROM MOTORISTS

People, both drivers and pedestrians, were wonderful. Except for one goon propelling a battered-up Buick, they did as sometimes nondescript hand signals requested. And obligingly.

"You should be here every night," came a voice from the high altitude cab of an 18-wheeler.

"Keep 'em rolling," said another.

Four kindly folks delivered bottled water. Two others brought cold cans of Coke.

The police, while appreciative, were less than exuberant. A wee bit intimidated?

Maybe. Concerned for my safety? Perhaps. An (old) boy doing a (young) man's job? Possibly.

Said one officer:

"It's nice of you to help but be advised, you're on your own."

Another, flashing a badge, ruled approaching darkness as my deadline. I didn't argue. As the sun disappeared from view, so did I.

Regardless, it felt good. Lending a hand to lighten the load. I wasn't alone. While not as visible, residents by the hundreds assisted seniors behind the scenes at Parkview Home, Parkview Village, Buckingham Manor and Bloomington Cove.

That's what Whitchurch-Stouffville is all about — people helping people in times of need.

Aug. 14 was such a time. A crisis time.

You did yourselves proud.

QUESTIONS FOR DRIVERS: POLICE

But a couple of questions. Why do many drivers signal left, then turn right? Why do many drivers signal right, then turn left? Why do many drivers not signal at all?

Secondly, whatever happened to Stouffville's once-proud auxiliary police unit, the uniformed guys and gals with checkerboard bands on their caps?

What a glorious opportunity to press such people into service if, in fact, such people still exist. If not, I recommend the Community Policing Academy consider their reinstatement a top order of September business.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 50 years.



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with Jim Thomas

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