

POLITICS AS USUAL: Back to the Ice Age

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

I had a completely different column ready to go for this last week of the year, but in light of the week that was, and the devastation that has been wrought as a result of the ice storm, I have abandoned it to make a few comments about community and good will. It has been a difficult week for Ontario residents and businesses alike. In what is usually the frantic few days before Christmas, almost everyone was forced to make alternate plans. Shopping was out of the question as even if you could get out of your driveway, past the downed tree branches and power lines, chances are the stores weren't open anyway, as they were in the same boat as everyone else. Dark and cold.

My husband and I were pretty lucky. We were only without power for about 30 hours in total. However, even in the space of that short time, the temperature in our house dropped to just 12 degrees, we lost half a fridge full of groceries, and had to make alternate arrangements for Christmas dinner. Can't host a turkey dinner without a turkey!

My sister's family was not as lucky. She and her in-laws were without power for almost 48 hours. Some parts of their street in Toronto are still without power.

My nephew came to stay with us as we had power and a working wood fireplace. Other family members were farmed out to those that had heat, power and food.

But, again, we cannot complain (especially given that many Torontonians are still without power, after six days). We're all very lucky. Knock on wood, no damage to our homes. We moved our vehicles in time to avoid being hit with falling icy branches. We experienced the unexpected generosity, thoughtfulness and kindness of friends and family alike. And that is the good that has come from the bad.

I am sure there are many wonderful tales of community spirit but I'd like to share a few that we experienced. Due to the vagaries of the power delivery to our neighbourhood courtesy of the hodgepodge of power lines and mature trees that drape over them, all of our neighbours had power but we sadly did not. (I do admit that I looked out my window in envy as I saw the twinkly lights of their Christmas trees).

Seeing that we did not have power, our next door neighbours called my husband on his cell to see if we were okay, and then they brought us travel mugs of coffee, and hot toasted bagels for breakfast. I've never been so happy to have a hot bagel in my life. Thoughtful. Kind. Wonderful.

Our other dear friends that live just 3 blocks from us offered us a place to sleep, worried that we'd freeze in our beds during the night. They checked on us numerous times during the evening. Again, thoughtful. Kind. Wonderful.

Many decry the lack of community in our modern age. That our technology disconnects us from each other. But, I think this past week's unexpected trip back to the ice age has proven that our community spirit is still very much alive. And more important, it's there when we need it most.

I am so happy to call Aurora home. I feel very fortunate indeed to live in such a wonderful town.

In the spirit of the season, I wish all of you a safe, happy and prosperous New Year. And see you in 2014!

Until next time, stay informed, stay involved, because this is, after all, Our Town.