

“Acorns in the Snow”

By Toby Frost

Friday afternoon... it was scary being alone in the house, with snow falling, falling, falling, heavy and wet. I've never lived alone before; I always had my husband/best friend to share good news and bad, and it's better that way.

Then the power went out, and I discovered that my landline doesn't work without power. My cell phone had been acting dead since a couple of days before, when it ran out of juice, and I charged it, and got nothing but a deathly black screen.

So I went to the police station, twice! The first time, I explained that I'm living alone, and had no communication whatsoever. I asked if I could use a phone, and they let me. I called my son's landline on Woodcock Lane, and my daughter-in-law's cell phone. No answer, so I left messages. Were they out of power too? Then I called my son's cell phone and caught him at work in Boston. (He said the T was fine going in that morning, but later he told me that coming home, he'd rushed to catch the faster train home, only to have it stop for 45 minutes en route, and be passed by the slower train on the other track!)

I fired up the little wood stove in the living room, and the temperature, which had dropped to 42 in the house, slowly crept back up to 55. (The thermostat which revealed the dismal 42 is around the corner from the stove, and the house is very open, so the heat rises to the second floor, and the next day, I napped, with warm blankets, on a couch at the top of the stairs.) But even though it was warm close to the stove, I somehow got chilled, and continued to feel cold until the power was restored Saturday afternoon—except when I went to bed Friday night on the living room couch, which faces the stove. Of course, it didn't hurt that I was snuggled under a lovely, very thick down comforter, which was super-comforting!

My son had said he was coming over on Saturday to do a couple of minor repairs and cut me some more wood for the stove. At noon I headed out to see if I could locate him. There was an Eversource truck parked a little way down from our driveway, and I stopped to ask them when they thought the power would come back on. They said it should be back by midnight—fortunately, it came back eight hours sooner than that. When I told them I had no communication, one man offered to let me call from his cell phone, and I was able to reach my son, who said he'd be over shortly.

When he got there, I was feeling cold and lonely. He cut and brought in wood and told me to take a rest while he took my stuff and his to the dump. He told me he'd take me to the AT&T store when he got back. I thought I was going to have to buy another cell phone, but a very helpful AT&T guy took my phone and... turned it on! I just didn't know how—but I do now!

When we got home, the power came on, and I thought the saga was over. Not quite: around 6 p.m. I saw flashing emergency lights on a vehicle almost opposite our driveway. I went out to find out what was going on, and the Lincoln fireman who was in the truck got out and pointed to one of our trees. A branch was being chafed by an electric wire, and it was

sparking! He told me he was staying there to be sure no one got hurt, until the power could be safely turned off and the limb removed before it fell on the road. A bit further down, I saw two other police cars blocking the road. It wasn't until around 10 p.m. that the vehicles finally left, and I could see that it was consolingly dark out where the sparks had been.

There are several important messages (acorns?) behind this chronicle. The first is that we in Lincoln are very, very fortunate to have truly wonderful police and fire people, totally different from what we too often hear about in other places. We need to let them know how much we appreciate them.

Second, communication is critical when things aren't going the way they're supposed to - or the way we expect. I'd like to urge everyone—especially the elderly and those living alone, like me—to buy and learn to use a cell phone and keep it with them at all times.

Third, if you don't have a cell phone, or it's not working, know where you can go for help. I was able to drive to the police station, and I was able to use other people's cell phones twice. But I would like to make an important suggestion: that we as a community think about how we might make cell phones available in emergencies. We'd have to think this through very carefully, because there will always be someone who knowingly or unknowingly takes advantage of the opportunity to use a cell phone for free, but I'm sure we can figure out ways to handle (or better, prevent) that.

Finally, when things go very wrong, I believe it will always be possible in a community like Lincoln to find help if you just tell your story and explain what you need in a gentle way, and show your appreciation for whatever help you get.