

Home & Heart



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With the “energy crisis” in California, the stage three electrical alerts, and the rolling blackouts, I have to admit that Bob-O and I have been hit by electrical blackouts ourselves. This certainly is not the norm for us. In fact, we had to go to some effort to actually experience grid blackouts.

Bob-O was skiing the slopes of our county’s own Mt. Shasta. We call it “doing a frozen hydro survey.” When the power unexpectedly quit, all the ski lifts stopped. The resort used emergency generators to get the lifts going long enough to get everyone off. Then they closed down the ski area. The power outage was caused by a snow-laden tree taking out a power line.

Over the Hills

I had been planning a trip to see my dad, who lives near Paradise, California. The night before I left home, I found out that there had been a snowstorm there, with two feet of snow in some places. The power and phones were down at his house. Of course, I went anyway.

As I turned up highway 70, just ten miles from Dad’s, I was stopped by a California Highway Patrol blockade. When the officer found out that I was only going ten miles farther, and noted that my car was four-wheel drive and that I had chains, he let me through. As I slowly drove the winding country road, I passed many vehicles stuck by the sides of the narrow road. By then, the snowplow had boxed each of them in with a high ridge of frozen snow.

Dad had left the gate open for me, so I turned into his driveway, up a slight incline, and got stuck. I tried to back out. No luck. Dad and my sister Mary had been watching for me. They came out to help. We got the car loose and backed onto the main road.

The problem was that the driveway has a slight sideways lean to it. As I would take a run at the

driveway, I would start slipping towards the ditch on the downhill side.

I didn’t want to put chains on for the last 20 feet. And if I stayed outside the gate, the back of my car would be dangerously close to the icy road. Mary’s friend Jer got in my car, and was assertive enough to get it up the driveway and through the gate. He managed to miss all the parked cars before sliding to a stop.

No Power in Paradise

Now this wasn’t a blackout caused by the power crisis. This was an old fashioned snowstorm, lines-down kind of thing. Each evening we would turn on Dad’s generator for a couple of hours. This would allow us to watch the local news, cook dinner, shower, run the well pump, and cool down the refrigerator. (We’ve offered to set up a battery/inverter system, but Dad has refused any help. He is fiercely independent.)

The rumor circulating was that the utility was in no hurry to fix the powerlines because then they wouldn’t have to have a forced blackout somewhere else. That was good gossip, but I don’t think it was true. But people did wonder...

After three days, the power and phones came back on. I was glad, since my itinerary was to continue on down to the Bay Area to visit my two brothers and sister and their families in the old hometown.

REaching the Kids

Whenever I visit my family in Napa, I call ahead and offer to give some sort of renewable energy presentation to my nieces’ classes. If the time of year is right, I do some solar cooking.

This time my topic was living on renewable energy. Friends asked me what my classroom spiel was. I don’t have one. I’m afraid my preparation included bringing a compact fluorescent light bulb, some *Home Power* mags, and a list of the components of our RE system.

My niece, Tesla, is in the eighth grade. Her teacher decided to bring in two classes, science and social studies, to my presentation. There were about sixty kids. It was daunting. Tesla wore her *Home Power* t-shirt in a show of support.

I started by drawing a crude diagram of our system and how we used the different renewable energies—wind, water, and sun. I invited any and all questions. I was glad to be interrupted at any time to answer the kids’ questions.

When the questions slowed, I used a technique Richard Perez turned me on to—tell a story. Any little story related to what you are talking about will do. I told about our dual-axis solar tracker that was tracking lightning on

a dark and stormy night. I did an impression of a tracker turning towards the light.

I explained about using energy as it comes into your system. I told the kids that when the wind blows, water flows, or the sky is blue, I know I can do several loads of laundry and vacuum besides. If you are producing energy and not storing or using it, you are wasting it.

When the sun goes down and the wind stops, we go into a conservative mode. Hence, the compact fluorescent light bulbs. I explained the one person/one light theory to the kids. After dark, when you need light, you turn on the light in the room you are in. When you leave that room, you turn out the light there and turn on the light in the room you are going to. Your one light follows you around, and you don't waste energy by having lights on in empty rooms.

Phantom Loads

"Phantom loads" were good for a couple of minutes of discussion and questions. These are things that consume energy twenty-four hours a day without any real benefit. For these kids, it was a totally new concept. By putting all your appliances that have built-in clocks or instant-on features on plugstrips (available at any hardware store), you can cut down on phantom loads.

For example, a television set with a remote control can draw as much as 10 watts just sitting there waiting for you to turn it on. Microwave ovens and VCRs are using energy all the time, just to keep the little clocks going. Computers and stereo components are often phantoms as well. To use these appliances, turn on the plugstrip, and then the appliance. It becomes a habit you don't even notice after a while.

Class Act

From Tesla's class, I went to my niece Anna's fifth grade class. As I arrived, the teacher was just finishing an assignment on energy in the kids' science book. They were taking turns reading aloud. The book explained some very basic terms, and had some good pictures. It even had a picture of a utility bill.

This was the best preparation I could have hoped for. I introduced myself as Aunt Kathy (I wasn't going to make those poor kids try to pronounce my last name). Then I started talking. This led to questions, which led to referencing some pictures in their science book. I passed out copies of *Home Power*. When the kids saw my picture in *HP41*, I suddenly gained celebrity status.

I suggested that the kids go home and make a deal with their parents. See if they could get a reward of a nickel for finding a light or TV left on in an empty room. This would save energy and money, and train both children

and parents to be aware of wasteful electrical use. (Anna earned twenty cents before I left Napa...)

That presentation lasted for 45 minutes. The teacher said that they felt good if they could hold the kids' attention for 20 minutes, so I had done quite well.

I was done being RE Queen, but my auntly responsibilities weren't over yet. As the kids were excused for recess, I listened to Anna and her friend Raven recite the first paragraphs of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They had to read it aloud to ten different people for a homework assignment.

Power Hungry

Knowledge is power, choice is freedom. Knowledgeable choice is what is going to save our planet and the future quality of life. Spread the word.

Access

Kathleen Jarschke-Schultze is posting her rural adventures online from her home in Northernmost California. Go to www.electronconnection.com, click on "Back @ Ranch" (for stories) or "Articles" (for earlier *H&H*). c/o *Home Power* magazine, PO Box 520, Ashland, OR 97520
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