

Just Write

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers Group

Selections

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The Blackout

By Brenda Sabol

If you listen to the experts, New York City in 1977 was a terrible place to live. The city's finances were dire; the serial killer known as Son of Sam was on the loose and crime in general was rampant. Times Square was still a place to be avoided at all cost, unless you were looking to hire a lady of the night (or day). No matter the year or decade, one thing is constant in New York; the summers are hot and humid. Evening brings no relief from the unbearable humidity and an air conditioner, if you can afford it, is a must have. Rainstorms make the situation worse because they increase the humidity and as we learned on July 13th, it doesn't even have to rain in the city to make things worse, much worse.

It had become my habit to stop in at Sara's first floor apartment before climbing the three flights of stairs to the apartment Jo and I shared and that evening was no different. I was returning from the grocery store with a few bags of food, including a container of ice cream. We chatted for a few minutes and I was about to leave when the lights went out. Neither one of us thought anything of it; in the summer one got used to traipsing down to the basement to replace a blown fuse. Since I was on my way out the door I offered to go downstairs and replace the fuse for Sara. I opened the door and stepped out into a dark hallway. Turning left I could see out the front door of the building. "Sara, I don't think it's your fuse. If it is, you've blown the entire block. The street lights are out and the building across the street is dark."

Sara had a transistor radio and we soon learned that several lightning strikes north of the city had caused the blackout. This was not a regional outage either; it was contained to the five boroughs.

There was a time not so long ago when all phones were attached to a wall receptacle and the receiver tethered to the handset with a coiled cord. The great feature of these now outdated phones is that they weren't plugged into an electrical outlet; the power could go out and your phone still worked so we were not surprised when Sara's phone rang; it was Mindy, our friend from the building next door. "My lights are out, do you have power?"

"No" Sara replied, "I think we're having a blackout."

"Tell her to come over; we need to eat my ice cream." I said. "I'll get Jo and we'll have a party. Can I borrow your flashlight?"

I found my roommate in the kitchen. "Come down to Sara's, I bought ice cream and it's melting."

"I'll be down shortly, I'm making crepes."

"What? We're in the middle of a blackout and you're cooking? Have you ever made crepes before and how can you see what you're doing with no lights?"

"No and yes, first time but they're easy to make and I have enough candles, so I can see just fine. I'll come downstairs when they're done; crepes are perfect paired with ice cream."

I grabbed my only candle, a pillar decorated with a glittery Santa; ideal for a hot July night, and headed back to Sara's. Mindy was there along with two other neighbors from the block. They'd heard there was free food and wanted to do their part to help in my hour of need.

The crepes and ice cream were gone, it was close to midnight and there was a block party going on outside, so we took our candles and went out to join in the festivities. It seemed as though everyone on the block had come outside. There was singing and dancing and a wonderful feeling of good will, long into the night. My Christmas candle caused quite a few laughs and I resolved to stock up on plain candles during my next shopping trip. The evening ended with a slumber party at Sara's; we spent the night camped out on her floor. It may have been hot and humid, but we had made the best of a bad situation and expected to have air conditioning by the morning.

When we woke the next day, the power was still out. The officials at Con Edison called the outage an act of God and in response the mayor, Abe Beame, had a few choice words for the employees of Con Ed. The agreement on our block was that the utility would take revenge on the mayor by making sure Gracie Mansion and the surrounding Yorkville neighborhood would be the last location to get power back. They wouldn't dare, would they? It would be so obvious and why punish us for living near the mayor.

Our friend Rae called to see if we were ok. The night before she'd gone out to New Jersey with her boyfriend; they were on the approach ramp to the Lincoln Tunnel when the lights went out. She said it was like someone had thrown the light switch. One minute the city was lit up and in the blink of an eye it all went dark. They turned around and went to his parents' house in Hackensack where they spent the night.

We walked to the end of the block and found the mayor's wife on the corner in front of Gracie Mansion. "Come in and have breakfast." Like everyone else the Beame's needed to use up their perishable food or throw it out, so Mrs. Beame was serving breakfast to anyone who wandered by. How often do you get to have breakfast in the Mayor's residence? Bacon and eggs, pancakes, fruit, juice; the chef was cooking up as much food as he could and we left with full stomachs.

We spent the rest of the day wandering the Upper East Side. There were reports of wide spread looting in all the boroughs, but we didn't see any of it and most of the stores in Yorkville were open even though there was no power. The owners, there to protect their businesses were welcoming people in to shop.

The restaurants were also trying to use up their perishable foods and most were not charging their customers; our lunch was free that day and we were encouraged to eat as much as we could which of course we did. How often do you get a free lunch?

By late afternoon power had been restored to most of the city, but not Yorkville. As the sun went down we went back to Sara's and waited and then waited some more; listening to the radio report on all the neighborhoods that now had power while we sat on the dark for a second night. Good thing we had filled up during the day because dinner that evening was a shared bag of potato chips. By now we were tired and sweaty and wanted nothing more than to take a shower and go to sleep in a cool room. Just past 10:30 the power came on; more than twenty five hours after the lights had

gone out. True to the prediction, Yorkville was the last area to be restored. Con Ed claimed it had nothing to do with the mayor's complaints, but of course we knew better.

For some reason, Abe Beame lost his primary election later that year and that's how Ed Koch became the mayor of New York City.

April , 2015

A. Muhammad Ma`ruf

THE CHANGING NATURE OF FRIENDSHIP

We think of friendships as relationships of mutual affection between two or more people when such relationships come about among persons who are not related by descent or marriage. Some additional characteristics are assumed to be present in friendships. They include the enjoyment of each other's company, the opportunity to be casual and informal in behavior, clothing, and so forth. Friends are able to express feelings and thoughts freely to one another. Their interactions are free of the fear of being interrogated and judged negatively. These features are present at varying levels of feeling and overt behavior in different relationships.

Honesty and trust are expected in friendships. However news reports and analyses suggest that Americans tend to trust each other less these days. They'd rather "trust in God". During my early adult life I went through some terribly disheartening experiences because I trusted some people who I thought were my friends.

Mutual understanding may be sought in friendships but is not always achieved in the urban, heterogeneous, multilingual environments within which the friendships that most of us know have been formed and developed.

Friendships don't have to be based on direct, person to person feelings only. Sometimes two or more people may be friends because they are both also friends of a craft such as writing, or painting, or of some large group entity such as a professional or worshipping association or a nation.

According to recent sociological studies, Americans are thought to be suffering a loss in the quality and quantity of close friendships since at least 1985. It is said that one quarter of all Americans have no close confidantes,

and that the average number of confidantes per person has dropped from four to two.

The advance of a highly competitive economy and the associated technology have been blamed for declining friendships in the United States. Longer hours of work and a large amount of online communication take away from personal time spent with others. This makes it harder to form friendships. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter have also led to a lessening in the quality of personal communication experienced in everyday life. It is said that they make emotional attachments more difficult to achieve.

The inventors of the new social media technologies have come up with various means by which online friendships can be formed and cultivated. Online relationships have now become a major means by which people interact with the world. Such interactions have emerged as a new form of friendship or even romance. This happens exclusively over the internet. They may evolve into real-life friendships. Internet friendships - a new, more advanced, and faster means of communication - have replaced an older type of friendship known as pen pals.

The rapid development of online relationships media says a lot about the human need to have friends to communicate with. This is ultimately rooted in the human need for society and company.

Among people with whom I have discussed the topic, opinions differ sharply on how adequately online friendships substitute for real world, on the ground, face to face friendships.

SMOOTH TRAVELING

APRIL, 2015

Jane Harre

The dirt lane leading to our farm was a half mile long with three right angle turns. It had been cut through fields when the New Jersey Turnpike was built and there were banks on either side of the second section, hiding the farm buildings and house from view until the second turn. This cut out section was the worst in any kind of bad weather as the gravel bed turned to mud and vehicles caused deep ruts to form. Only skilled drivers could negotiate this trouble, or perhaps that was how skill was achieved.

We have a few family stories about that lane; there is the one about my brother-in-law to-be who carried my older sister in the lane after a date, leaving the car back at the road; one time of meeting his dad's ire when he had brought the family car home with mud on it was enough for him. My personal memory is of an unusual incident when I came down with the chicken pox while at school. Due to a snow fall of a foot or more, I had been staying at the home of my older brother and his wife on the main road, just a short walk from my elementary school. To protect my baby nephew, calls were made and I was taken by car to the end of our lane. The usual ruts, bad enough in soft mud, were made far worse by being frozen and hidden by the snow covering. Standing on the back frame of the red Farmall Tractor was the only choice for negotiating the tricky journey. No doubt this was a unique ride; a ten-year old with her winter gear over pajamas taking the last leg of the short trip home to suffer and recover from the pox.

I was reminded of that lane and the constricting ruts one day when a friend began to go back over a well-worn path, complaining of past hurts and unfulfilled hopes. When I suggested that those tales had been told many times and were better forgotten (and forgiven) and that going over them simply reinforced the power of sin to bind us, her reply was that she knew I was right but that the rehearsing of them felt "normal".

I told her a little about the "normal" ruts that seemed the only pathway available for our travels to and from home. But then, I told her, Daddy would attach a wooden scraper to his red tractor, lower it and drive the rutted part of the lane. It probably took several passes to get the gravel scraped and smooth, but when he was done, the lane was again navigable and the ruts were not simply covered—they were **gone**.

Our heavenly Father has more power and a better "scraper" than my earthly dad had, and he cares even more than Daddy did for our safety as we travel the "lane" which leads toward home. We must not settle for what feels "normal" but is simply habitual, keeping us stuck in dangerous and difficult pathways. Our Father God is waiting for our call for help. He will come and wipe away the imprisoning past, freeing us for safe and continuing travel on the Way. If we choose instead to drive those old familiar ruts, the deeper they will grow. Eventually, they will grow too deep to

escape; they will catch the undercarriage of our vehicle and we will be stuck, unable to go forward or to move in any direction at all.

Why hesitate? Our rescue is planned and prepared, ready for our cry, which is no surprise to the Father or the Son, who shed His blood for this very need.

"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1b, 2 (NIV)

"I waited patiently for the LORD, he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." Psalm: 1,2 (NIV)

I PORTEND A PORTENT

Before the bugs drive me out!
Listen and shout, they come out!
Can you tell about, why they're out.
With a pin nose stout, we're out!

Who has the snout, you project
And with a one, two, three clout
A noble pout and scout you're out!
Ah! And less than a gram no doubt.

We swept out the ashes with a knout
Also known as a whip, no sauerkraut
All for the money, no show
Coleslaw here we checked.

Can a portent portend?
Please do not amend
Or send or bend
The End.

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HMMM!

Curled! There he lay.
Stonefaced, steady, at stay.
Keeping watch, not at play.
Could those basking turtles be his prey?

Or those busy herons a dozen or more?
In water ankle deep, pecking
At those morsels below, simply feeding.
Ignoring that dark green statue, as if asleep.

Would this writer be witness
To the call nature buried deep, behind jaws
Within the creature, prominent big bug eyes
Notwithstanding, if up he lumbered, Then pounced.

Should there be song?
The creature appeared to be a meter long
Not the metre not to prolong.
The creature's cast iron heart was strong.

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Daydreaming

By Marian M. Fay

I see skies of white through curtains of green
Trees giving shelter to birds as they preen
And I say to no one in particular
How peaceful it seems.

I see my husband's face smiling
Holding my cat so beguiling
And I say to no one in particular
Someone's missing and I'm sighing.

I see a child of five, happy and alive
Then a child of twenty struggling to survive
And I say to no one in particular
God touch his heart so to You may he strive.

I see people of faith mouthing words to hymns
A music director full of passion from within
And I say to no one in particular
How blessed my life has been.

I see children unpacking and unzipping
Then quietly sitting, hands folded and listening
And I say to no one in particular
Pinch me, I must be dreaming!

I see words on the screen describing my mind's truancy
A poem taking shape, with just the right touch of fluency
And I say to no one in particular
What a happy state of lunacy!

Snapshot

By Marian M. Fay

Sparrow hawks swooping
Their high pitched lonely songs echoing
Blue Jays perch, tails flipping
Their sharp harsh vocals are piercing
Cardinals timidly perch and twitch
They squeak and fly away
The winds are frozen in stillness
Their songs on the wind chimes are silent
The trees look like unearthed plant roots
Scraggly and bare
The sky is blue with puffs of white
The sun casts shadows of rooftops onto the frozen snow
And reflects blindingly off of parked car windows
That's life in a snapshot on Quail court this cold winter morn.

First Day of Spring 2015

By Marian M. Fay

S now
P lowing
R emoving
I cy
N umbing
G roaning

Spring is groaning under winter's burden.
Snow and ice making streets sloppy,
Dusting rooftops, tree limbs, bushes and lawns.
Winter has gone and Spring is here
Bringing a twisted sense of humor
One might say that is very weird.

I'm Different

By Marian M. Fay

I'm different, can't you see me?
One arm is smaller than the other
I wear thick glasses
I'm slower to learn than my friends.
You must have seen me!
In stores I see you looking my way but then quickly turn away.
When I'm with friends and family you speak to them, and not me.
I'm different, can't you see me?
I have braces on my legs,
I am missing an arm and a leg
I am bald from cancer treatments.
When I pass you in the street
Don't look away! It isn't catching!
This is my normal and I have a life and friends.
I may have challenges but I also have feelings.
Don't look away in fear
Or meet my gaze with a nervous smile
The kind that says I make you uncomfortable.
I can see you, on the inside and outside.
I'm different not stupid,
You're different too!
Not always on the outside where it shows,
But sometimes on the inside where your differences hide.
Like I said I can see you on the inside and outside
It's both a curse and a gift that comes with the territory.
Sometimes I wish I lived in blissful ignorance
Where everything is super sparkly and an even playing field.
Can't see me yet?
Look in a mirror!

General John A. "Black Jack" Logan – Namesake of Logan Township,

New Jersey (Part II) – by Ben Carlton

(Continued from *Just Write*/January 2015)

Colonel Logan displayed great courage and an instinctive talent for command at Battle of Belmont, Missouri, on 7 November 1861. It was his regiment's baptism of fire, and also the first battle of the Civil War for General U.S. Grant, in overall command of the Union force tasked with attacking and driving the Confederates from their camps. The Federal troops were initially successful until the Rebels rallied after Confederate General Leonidas Polk sent re-enforcements across the river from Columbus on the Kentucky side of the Mississippi. The small Union force was in danger of being cut off from their transports until Logan led a breakthrough and pushed past the encircling Confederates. During the battle, Logan's horse was hit by shrapnel and collapsed dead beneath him. An enemy ball shattered the handle of his pistol and also carried away his holster and belt, but Logan himself remained unscathed. Largely through Logan's heroics, Union troops were able to retreat to the landing where Union gunboats, *Tyler* and *Lexington*, kept the rebels at bay long enough for Grant to load his men onto waiting transports.

Colonel Logan next participated in the Battles of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, Tennessee, where, at the latter engagement, he was seriously wounded on February 15, 1862. As General Grant invested the well-entrenched Confederates at Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, the Rebels attempted to break through the encircling Federalists. Logan's troops bravely met the attack but were rapidly running low on ammunition. As the Yankees slowly began to give way, Logan tried desperately to rally his men and halt the Confederate advance. Logan was shot in the thigh, the musket ball shattering the pommel of his saddle. After receiving treatment from the surgeon during a brief lull in the fighting, instead of staying at the field hospital, Logan returned to the fray. Then, as at Belmont, a bullet shattered the wooden handle of his pistol, painfully bruising his hip and side. Finally, Logan was struck a third time, as a musket ball penetrated his left breast at the shoulder joint and passed completely through the shoulder, nicking an artery.

Logan refused to leave the field until, reeling in the saddle from loss of blood, he was compelled to relinquish command. Aides carried their wounded colonel to the steamer, *New Uncle Sam*, Grant's floating headquarters on the Cumberland River.

Afterwards, Union troops reclaimed the lost ground as the Confederates fell back to their fortress. Confederate General Buckner surrendered unconditionally to General Grant the next day. But Logan was in grave condition. Surgeons wanted to amputate Logan's arm at the shoulder, but he refused to allow it. Infection caused a high fever that left the Colonel at death's door. Back home in Illinois, Mary read about her husband's demise in an erroneous newspaper report. Rushing to the train station, she boarded the cars on a mission she thought to bring Logan's body home. However, when Mrs. Logan arrived at Cairo, she was told that her husband was still alive, but just barely. At first sight of her wounded husband, Mary later said, "He looked like death." She became his devoted nurse, and through her tender ministrations, Logan began to slowly recover. When he was strong enough to travel, Mary brought her husband home to recuperate. Meanwhile, General Grant recommended Logan's promotion to brigadier general, which was confirmed by the Senate on March 21, 1862. Of course, in order to accept the commission to brigadier, Logan had to relinquish his seat in the House of Representatives. Placing military service above politics, Logan promptly resigned, since the highest rank a sitting U.S. congressman could legally hold was that of colonel. He would not regret his decision.

Logan left Mary in Illinois to return to the army during the first week of April. He arrived at Pittsburgh Landing in Tennessee too late to participate in the Battle of Shiloh, the largest and bloodiest battle of the war to date. Logan now had responsibility for a large division of troops. Logan participated in the siege of Corinth, wherein General Halleck's plodding and over-cautious advance toward the rail junction allowed the Confederates to escape the town with all their stores and ordnance in tow.

During the winter campaign in northern Mississippi, as U.S. Grant maneuvered to set up his spring and summer operations against Vicksburg, Logan was again promoted and made a major general in the Army of the Tennessee on March 13, 1863. He commanded the 3rd Division of General McPherson's XVII Corps. Logan fought with great distinction at the battle of Champion's Hill on May 16, 1863. Confederate General John Pemberton's force was defeated and forced to fall back on the entrenchments at Vicksburg, as Grant tightened the noose around the rebel stronghold on the Mississippi River. Logan and his men were, as usual, in the thickest of the fight.

During the siege, General Logan established his division headquarters so close to the enemy earthworks that leaden missiles fired from rebel muskets and artillery pieces routinely landed uncomfortably close to his camp. Logan himself was slightly wounded in

the fleshy part of the thigh while he sat on his campstool inside his canvas tent with one leg propped against a tent pole.

As the siege wore on into the summer, Grant launched several attacks against the enemy's fortifications. One such attack was preceded by sappers tunneling under the Confederate works. The former miners placed one ton of black powder beneath a salient in the rebel line. When the mine was detonated on May 25 with a deafening roar, Logan's troops rushed into the enormous crater caused by the terrific explosion. Yankee fought rebel hand to hand with bayonets and clubbed muskets as the enemy hurled hand grenades down on the blue mass swarming into the cavernous pit.

Logan lost nearly 200 men in the attack. At one point during the battle, which lasted from three o' clock pm, through the night and into the next morning, Logan exclaimed, "My God! They are killing my bravest men in that hole!" Although Logan's attack did not succeed in breaking through Pemberton's line, for his actions that day and during the entire siege of Vicksburg, General Logan would be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his valor.

Grant ordered the explosion of another mine in the same sector on July 1. The explosion literally blew a slave named Abraham from the Confederate side up and over to freedom in Logan's lines. Remarkably, he landed uninjured among the astonished Federals. Enterprising soldiers in Logan's division began charging admission for other soldiers to see Abraham. (Later the former slave became an attraction at P. T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City.)

Pemberton surrendered Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. It was the second army General Grant had captured in 18 months. The battle was considered a major turning point in the War of the Rebellion, sealing the ultimate fate of the Confederacy. The victory, coupled with the news that General Lee had been defeated at Gettysburg the day before Vicksburg surrendered, was a great boost to northern morale.

To be continued in the next issue of *Just Write*

Just Write

Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @

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