

THE WINTER STORM of January 1982

By Paula Coffey

I have long, thick, curly hair, so to save time, I book a weekly hair appointment with my local hairdresser. When I do my hair at home, after the shampoo, I have to put 2 books on my kitchen table, set the portable dryer on the books, stretch the big plastic hood over my giant, round, pink plastic rollers and sit there for at least an hour to dry my hair.

On this particular day, I went to the hair salon at Paul Wolfe Plaza. I had been under the dryer for about two minutes when the wind gusts from the winter storm caused us to lose power. It had been spitting snow and windy when I left my house, but the storm was definitely ramping up.

Everyone in the shop waited for about a half hour and when power wasn't restored, we all headed for our respective homes. When I did arrive at my house, I found that I also had no power or heat. So in my puffy "down coat," a long woolen scarf wrapped around the big wet rollers, mittens and boots, I climbed under the covers in my bed – hoping to get warm.

My good friend, Denise, who lives at the other end of town, called and told me that she still had power. We talked and thought it would be a good idea for me to go to her house to dry my hair and get warm. So I packed up my hair dryer and left Spring Street, drove through the center of town and headed for Leaf Lane. Everything was fine until I got to the Town Common, across the street from St John's church. The snow and sleet were so heavy that my windshield wipers stopped working. I had to get out of the car to try to clear off some of the ice and snow. I had to attempt this with a magazine because, of course, I couldn't find my snow scraper. I had most of the snow cleared when I realized that I had locked myself out of the car. The car was running, the wipers were working and I was outside, very cold, still in my puffy coat, huge wet rollers, now wet scarf, wet woolen mittens and frozen toes.

I trudged into St John's rectory to ask for help. The priest was not there and the housekeeper had no way to help me. She didn't drive and was waiting for someone to take her home. I decided to trek across the street to the high school and get house keys from my son, Jim, who was in class at the time. I thought I would drive his car home, get my keys, bring back his car and finally get my car and drive to Leaf Lane.

When I got to the lobby of the school, I was greeted by Mrs. Nash – the most glamorous teacher in the system. I told her my sad story and then headed to the front office to have Jim paged. He came to the office and as soon as he saw me, a look of horror crossed his face. He said, "Mom, what is the matter? You look like the one of the people in the "Thriller" video." He was embarrassed. I hadn't realized that my black mascara and eyeliner – in style at the time – had run down my face and I did indeed look like I was the star of Thriller.

I was about to take the keys and make a quick exit (so that I wouldn't see Mrs. Nash again) when Officer Kennedy came in and offered to drive me home. No doubt he was feeling bad for me because of my wet, cold clothes and the black make up that was streaked down my face. Meanwhile my car is still running on the side of the Common across from the church. And I am very, very cold.

I got my keys from home, was driven back to my car, cleaned the windshield again and headed for my friend's house. When I arrived, I toted in my big, hooded hair dryer and set myself up at her kitchen table. I didn't do this until we calmed down her two crying toddlers. Although they knew me well, I had frightened them. They didn't recognize me because of the "Thriller" look. I was finally feeling some heat from my hair dryer, when you know what happened – a large tree in her yard crashed down in her driveway and landed on the roof and hood of my car. Of course – we lost power. Please note: I am now extremely cold.

We huddled together on her couch for a few hours. By now we are all really cold and I am wondering how and when I will ever get home. And how long will all of us be without power? The plow went by and stopped when they saw the fallen tree. I pleaded with them to let me into the plow and take me home. They agreed and I ended up right where I was before the adventure started – at home, in bed with my big puffy down coat, a woolen scarf over my still wet, big rollers, still cold and looking even more like one of the characters in Thriller. We didn't get power back that night until midnight.

One storm I will never forget.