

Montreal students struggle to weather storm of a lifetime

BY IDELLA STURINO

MONTREAL (CUP) — Kathy Proot woke up later than usual on the morning of Jan. 6, because her alarm clock didn't go off. In fact the clock wasn't working and neither was anything else requiring electricity — including the heat. So Proot made her way to the bathroom where she washed with cold water and put on her contact lenses by candlelight. She then went downstairs to the kitchen and ate breakfast in the dark.

By the time the McGill University student arrived at school, late for her second day of winter term classes, she was thinking to herself, "What am I doing here? I want to go home."

It was a sentiment echoed by many Montreal university students hit by the province-wide power failure caused by a massive ice storm early last week.

An eerie feeling pervades the city, with unusually quiet streets and trees disfigured under the weight of ice. Branches encased in inch-thick ice hover menacingly above people's heads as they walk along the sidewalk, dodging falling branches and patches of sheer ice.

Yet during the first few days of what is being described as the worst ice storm Quebec has ever seen, most university students tried to carry on business as usual.

Slippery roads, closed highways and sidewalks littered with fallen tree branches impeded travel and yet students trudged on, making their way through slush, hail and freezing rain to get to classes.

At the same time, universities were trying to carry on as if Montreal had not been transformed into a frozen city of darkness. Most were initially unaffected by the massive blackout which plunged just under 1-million Quebec households and businesses into darkness, as of last Thursday night [Jan. 8]. The storm also affected parts of Ontario and the Maritimes.

By the middle of the week Proot had already received assignments in some of her classes, but couldn't do them because her apartment had no light, her computer wouldn't work and she was too busy trying to stay warm.

"It is seven degrees in my house," Proot said. "So cold that I can see my breath."

Many students would have preferred to stay at home in the cold and to go to one of the many shelters set up across Montreal than deal with school responsibilities, but they came to class anyway for fear of falling behind. McGill student Shane Utter expressed a feeling of frustration and hopelessness at the situation.

"Things are getting worse and there's nothing you can do about it, yet I have to come to school," he said, adding that he preferred to be at home, tending the fireplace and

caring for his 86-year-old grandmother and his dog.

But by Thursday, McGill and Montreal's other three major universities — Concordia, Université de Montreal and Université de

interest of students to close down the university so they can concentrate better on their needs," said Roger Cote, Concordia's dean of students.

Bishop's University in Lennoxville, an hour's drive east of Montreal, has

of weeks, were also unaffected.

At McGill, as with the rest of Montreal and Quebec, the storm has had at least one positive affect, giving people an opportunity to lend a helping hand.

The student union turned the student centre into a shelter Thursday night for students and their families who were stranded on campus or left in the cold by the blackout.

"A lot of people came to our front desk saying, 'We have no heat or hot water' and asking what we would do to help," said McGill student union president Tara Newell.

Once the decision was made to use the student centre as a shelter, dozens of students called to offer help.

In the end, though, only four students came to use the shelter on the first night and then 30 on the second night. This

was attributed by Newell to the little time the council had to get the word out. There were plans to make sure more people knew about the shelter for the weekend, but the project was shut down when McGill's power

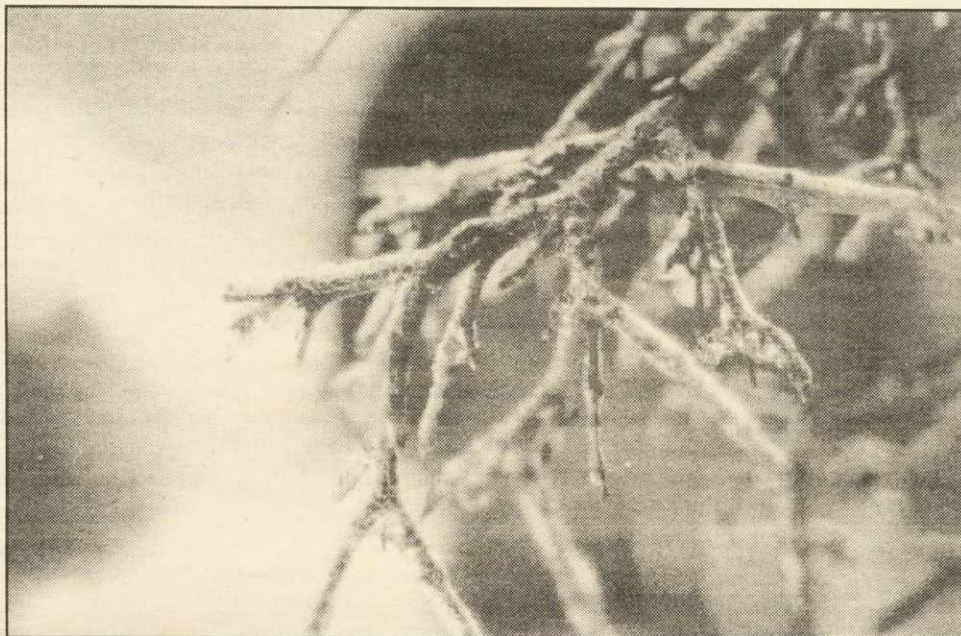
went out Friday as a result of the spreading blackout.

The blackout spread Friday to Montreal's downtown core, which had been unaffected until then. Stores closed early and the streets were lined with slow-moving cars attempting to navigate without traffic lights.

Pedestrians scrambled to make their way to the crowded bus stops and watched the passing army trucks with curiosity. Troops are assisting in the restoration of power to the area.

Hydro Quebec predicts that it will be a few weeks before power distribution is back to normal across the province.

Most of Montreal, however, has had power restored, and universities are expecting to be opened by Friday, or Monday at the latest. According to a report in the Montreal Gazette, the universities are considering many options to make up for time lost due to the storm. Some options included extending classes one week into April, scheduling weekend classes, cancelling spring break, or simply squeezing the material into the time left in the term. When pressed, an official from Concordia University, speaking on behalf of all Montreal Universities, admitted they favoured the option of cancelling spring break.



Halifax got a much milder version of the ice storm of the century. (Photo by Ryan Lash)

Quebec a Montreal — responded to the concerns of students like Utter by cancelling all classes.

"Our concern is for the needs of our clients — the students and staff. It was felt that it would be in the best

so far not been affected by the ice storm. The area is prone to flooding, which may result from the storm, and the university is ready to evacuate if necessary. Quebec's colleges, which don't resume classes for another couple

Dr. Internet revolutionizes health care

Good Health Online: A Wellness Guide for Every Canadian

by Jim Carroll and Rick Broadhead

Prentice Hall Canada

"The Internet is the vanguard of what will prove to be a revolutionary change in the way that government, health care, and medical professionals, as well as average folks view the health care industry," write Carroll and Broadhead in their latest Internet handbook.

The pair are Canada's best-selling Internet authors and have already written 18 other handbooks for Canadian internet users. In fact, they donated a whole thirteen pages of *Good Health Online* to plugging themselves and their previous publications — not to mention the continuous self-quoting throughout the text. But self-advertising aside, they managed to put together a fairly comprehensive guide to searching the web for health information.

An estimated ten per cent of the information available on the Internet is related to health care, and a recent survey by *Yahoo!* (one of the Web's premier directory services) places interest in health related issues third behind computer/Internet information and entertainment.

Carroll and Broadhead believe that in this age of health care cutbacks and reform, many Canadians are feeling the need to learn more about health care issues. Statistics show many of them are turning to the Internet for this information.

Good Health Online devotes three chapters to how to begin searching for health care and medical information online, beginning with the straight-forward "common cold" type questions and leading into very specific and complex medical questions. Websites listed range from online "check-ups" and health quizzes to "Ask Dr. X" sites to detailed sites and chat lines on specific diseases and medical conditions.

"Everything isn't rosy, however, when it comes to the world of health care information on the Internet," write Carroll and Broadhead. "Sometimes, traversing the world of health care online is like visiting the dark, seamy underside of the human condition." (Cheesy, yes, but they're Internet experts, not English majors...)

Good Health Online is written as a handbook to guide Canadians through the wealth of health information available to them on the web. Often, medical information posted on the web can be fraudulent, out of date, incomplete, inaccurate and/or misleading. In the blunt words of Carroll and Broadhead: "[The Internet] is also full of human scum." In many cases, this leads the user to misdiagnose themselves, causing unnecessary damage.

"A lot of time is now being spent in the medical system by many health care professionals who have to undo the damage that is being done as patients begin to use the Internet without truly understanding the risks of doing so and without

respecting the position and expertise of the health care professional."

Good Health Online attempts to educate the reader on how to determine the validity of the information posted. They provide a list of ten questions to help you evaluate a site before you take it seriously.

Good Health Online is hardly the "fascinating reference that no Canadian can afford to be without" it

claims to be on its back cover. But you can't sell a book by saying, "Well, it's a bit of a dull read, but contains important information you may or may not need someday."

In short, I'd never have bought it. But since acquiring a review copy, I've successfully used it twice, and was satisfied with the results of my search.

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