Rangely Colorado Ice Storm

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It is always an extra eye-opener to awaken, finding that the hours asleep had changed the landscape, to be unrecognizable.

As so it was for this traveler, who had spent the night at a motel in downtown Rangely, Colorado not that long ago.

When awake he found a room without electricity. Looking outside, that never bustling small town was without lights or motion; but it was apparent that snow had fallen, for there was that pure white coverlet on everything, including his auto in the motel lot. But more. Everything glistened. Checking, it was confirmed. Rangely was without electricity.

He had showered and shaved the night before, so carefully dressing in the dark, he walked into the 6:45 am winter air, heading to the cafe which never closed.

It was open in candlelight. The breakfast menu was limited. He ordered. Sat near a window facing northwest where in the breaking sunrise he began to see other changes. Trees that had stood for years, part of that expected landscape, had broken branches. That scene, frozen, resembled a still-life painting, nothing moved, the air motionless.

He had listened to others, employees and customers, learned that the Rangely sat in a bowl of a silent ice storm. The motionless air, really cold, maybe a 100 percent humidity. Cold and moisture made the Rangely vicinity the victim of this phenomena. For anything exposed, all sides had an even coat of ice crystals. This grew silently. In time that accumulated weight had crashed tree limbs.

At another table six linemen of Moon Lake Electric had gathered, trucks outside. Radio reports from management told where electricity still existed within their system. Damage was wide-spread, not just in Rangely.

From that information they planned to restore electricity throughout their service area of northwest Colorado. They had trucks and equipment, would begin where power existed, repair/replace, lines, relays, transformers, whatever, as they worked to restore power. Mostly this meant beginning in Utah, where power existed.

For these men, an exceptional storm. Getting power to individual destinations was common. Today, that job, in the extreme.

As they prepared to leave, daylight had arrived, highlighting the beauty of a world covered with rime ice. Weeds, the roads, homes, power lines, glittered in the early morning sunlight that began behind our vision. Power lines headed west in our view, sagged, almost to the ground, because of this weight.

Suddenly, a loud SNAP. As we watched, the core-ice surrounding one wire, melted by the sunlight, fell like a long ice string onto the snow. That release of weight caused the line between its supporting poles, to instantly fly up, as if in joy. That motion immediately repeating between its two poles. Then either side. As more ice fell, lines waved randomly. Alas, weak spots snapped some copper lines. No sparks; the line dead already. The enormity of their task grew as we watched, fascinated, as Mother Natures assaulted human creation.

Their initial assessment unchanged, the three teams gulped a last mouth of hot coffee. In three trucks they headed west, to commence what was certain to be a grueling day, climbing poles, testing transformers, stringing wire, mile after mile, back toward that last transmission disruption.

When on occasion, lights go out in Windsor Gardens, he marvels at the service that keeps our world humming and lighted; and those dedicated to provide, and restore, invisible electricity.