

Winner

Electricity is a huge part of society today. It runs as a part of our everyday lives, making it easier to fit more into our busy schedules, and is more convenient than lighting a candle. A couple of days before I was born, a hurricane hit Kauai and electricity was shut down, causing devastation for our family and all those inhabiting the island. For six weeks, people were using fire pits to boil water, kerosene and candles to read by, and finding ways other than television and radio for their entertainment.

Our family living in the house at the time was my mom, dad, and older brother who'd all been enjoying the Hawaiian weather for the past several years. When they first came to Kauai, they had no idea of the dangers a hurricane could bring; they had no idea they would have to endure the dangers of a class 5 turmoil right before giving birth.

I was born on September 13, 1992, right after Hurricane Iniki created havoc throughout Hawaii. The winds were coming in at 175 miles per hour and the meter at the highest point of the island broke when a gust of 225 miles per hour hit it. During the very first part of the storm, the electricity went out and my family was left in the shifting shadows to fend for themselves. After eleven hours of breaking glass, crashing trees, and incredibly damp environments, the hurricane ebbed, leaving the island in chaotic distress. That was on the 11th.

Two days later, while people who lived on the beaches were still looking for shelters to stay, my mom was giving birth to me in our broken, wreck of a house. The fear of something going wrong when there was no way of getting to a hospital was the most torturous thing they could have gone through at that time. Having no electricity heightened that fear to near panic when the moment came.

Because it was Hawaii, with no electricity, it wasn't the heating but the cooling that became a problem. My parents bought a propane refrigerator after finding no other way. It was possible to put some foods in the ocean, but it was either the tides would wash it away, or other people would steal it. Soon, we were down to eating rice and vegetables for most meals because it was too much of an effort to find cooling for other foods.

Electricity was absent for the next month and a half, and though families found ways of improvising, the lack of it was always on their minds. I was too young to remember this of course, but in the way we conserve lighting today and how often my parents talk about those times, I have a small knowledge of how they must have felt. Last winter, when our electricity went out for a couple of days, was nothing compared to the electricity crisis after Iniki, but I can't imagine spending more than a month without it.