

KAREN PALMER

It was the last night of 1999, the night that it was predicted a glitch in zeroes and ones would grind the whole world to a halt.

I was an intern at the Toronto Star. On that night, it seemed everybody but the foreign correspondents had been called into work. At the office, there were a dozen of people on the phone checking for the coming digital crash, more were at the airport, there were some at the hospitals, the TTC...

I was assigned to be at the main headquarters of Toronto Hydro and it was a quiet night. A very quiet night. Over the hours, the visual of the city's power grid just didn't change, just remained unblinking, and then, it floated down. There was an outage.

Somewhere in the East-end, a neighbourhood had gone dark. Was this it? The beginning of the end? We waited for more lights to blink out, but they didn't come. It was a squirrel, a squirrel who got fried in a transformer and luckily, power was quickly restored.

To make up for us working on the last night of the millennium, the Star had organized this huge spread of food except absolutely no one wanted to spend what was left of the night at the office. So with a couple other interns, we swiped a massive sheet cake, emblazoned with the Star's blue and white logo, wrestled it into a cab and took it to a party full of other fledgling journalists.

The volume was pretty deafening in a room full of storytellers. I remember one guy put his elbow through a window with his exuberant gestures. We waited for gushes of blood, but he simply removed his sweater, stuffed up the hole and just carried on.

On that night, when we avoided the end of the world when we knew it, I smoked a clove cigarette for the first time, feeling very grown-up and exotic. I swung joyously on the swings at a nearby park while looking up at the stars. I remember so clearly feeling the happiness of that night in that moment. We were alive. It was a new millennium and anything was possible.

Every now and again I think of those people plunged into darkness, how their hearts must have raced at the world gone black, and how relieved they must have been when the lights flickered back on. Rest in peace, you little squirrel of mayhem.