

Are You Prepared for the Worst?

by Robin Manougian

As we have seen in recent history in our area, with record snowfalls that can keep us socked away indoors for days (perhaps without power or the ability to get to a store) to damaging hurricanes that bring flooding, power outages, and destruction of property, we can never be too prepared for disaster, large or small.

Disasters don't always have to be related to some "outside force" though. Sometimes accidents can have tragic and disastrous consequences if you aren't prepared or don't know what to do, or worse, do the wrong thing.

In 2002, I had a terrible accident. Some of what I did to help myself probably saved my life, but I did one "wrong" thing that could have had disastrous results. One night, as I sat in bed sewing a small gift for a friend's new baby, the telephone rang. As I reached to answer the phone with my left hand, I braced myself on the side of the bed with my right hand. Suddenly, my right hand slipped off the side of the bed, and I went tumbling onto the floor. The fall itself wasn't remarkable—but the scissors that had been sitting in my lap fell with

me, and as I came down hard onto the floor, the closed, 4" shears went completely through my left leg above my knee and out the other side.


The friend who had phoned me heard everything that happened; I reached for the phone and yelled for her to call my parents and she told me to hang up and dial 911. I think I probably went into shock, and the sight of the scissors through my leg wasn't something I could handle... so I pulled them out, which could have been a deadly mistake, given the proximity of the entry wound to my femoral artery.

I was lucky—I missed my femoral artery by a mere quarter of an inch, but I had no idea that it was actually safer to have left the scissors in. What would you have done?

Everything else I did was right: I called 911 (the paramedics and police arrived very quickly), I wrapped my leg tightly to control bleeding, and I stayed on the phone with someone the entire time until help arrived. I was even able to pull myself to the front door to let the police in.

Would you have known what to do? Does

your family know basic First Aid? The following list of questions could help save yourself and your family in the event of disaster or accident. Don't think it can't happen to you. According to the National Safety Council, in Itasca, IL, only 36 deaths were reported in the United States in 2000 from a "foreign body entering through the skin". The odds of dying from such an injury in 2000 were one in 7,647,398. The odds of dying in a lifetime from such causes are 99,446. I'm still here because of luck, but also because I knew, at least in part, what to do to save myself.

As the old adage says, "Hope for the best and plan for the worst." The checklist below is a good place to start in planning for disasters and medical emergencies. 

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- Do you have a home emergency plan? Does it cover all emergencies such as fire, weather, and medical emergencies? Does your family practice this home emergency plan?
- Does your plan include smoke, gas, and carbon monoxide detectors?
- Do you have a weather radio and do all members of your family know what the signals mean?
- Does each member of your family know of two ways out of your home? If your second way out of a two-story home is a window, do you need a safety ladder? If you live in a high-rise building, does your family know and practice two ways out of the building? (Remember that an elevator is never a way out during a fire.)
- Can all members of your family operate the locks, windows, and doors for escape?
- Does your family understand to leave or seek shelter when an alarm sounds?
- In emergencies, do you have a planned meeting place, and does each member of your family know where to go after evacuating your home? Do you have a number that everyone knows to call in case of such an emergency (preferably a cell phone number)?
- Does each member of your family know whom to call for help, and are the telephone numbers posted? Do

young children know how to call 9-1-1?

- In addition to emergency numbers, do you have phone numbers for neighbors and friends to contact?
- Would you know what—or what not—to administer in case of poisoning?
- In a weather-related emergency, does your family know where to seek shelter?
- Escape planning and smoke detectors are essential for getting everyone out safely. Are the batteries in your smoke detectors routinely replaced? A good way to remember when to change batteries is during the fall when clocks are turned back to standard time, and during the spring when clocks are turned forward to daylight savings time.
- Does your family understand that once they are outside, they should stay outside? Do not allow anyone to return to a home or building that is on fire.
- Do you have a first-aid kit and is it fully stocked?
- Do you have a fire extinguisher and is it serviced?
- Following a weather-related or other disaster, do you have extra water on hand in case tap water is unsafe to drink?
- Do you encourage family members to take first-aid and CPR classes?

- Would you know what to do if someone were choking?
- Does your family know how to shut off the water, gas, and electricity to your home?
- Does your plan cover whom to call in case of a utility problem?
- Do you maintain a supply of tarps or plywood to cover openings created by a storm or fire?
- Do you have flashlights, radios, and extra batteries located in a central area known to all family members?
- Do you have a written inventory and photographs of all valuable items in your home? Do you have more than one copy located outside of your home?
- If you have pets, have you provided for them in your home emergency plan?
- Plan for disasters and emergencies today. Do not wait to go over these points with your family. Being prepared could save your life.
- Checklist adapted in part from the National Safety Council. You may visit the National Safety Council's web site at <http://www.nsc.org/index.htm>