

Place of Refuge

A truly frightening phenomenon in the crime situation is being confronted in your own home. You may or may not be in the physical or mental condition to fight off an intruder so to best cope with the situation, preparation is the key.

I truly do not believe in spreading undue fear and paranoia in terms of preventing crime, but rather have a well-rehearsed, proper plan in place that needs little maintenance and cost outlay to set up. There was a movie made some time ago by the name of *Panic Room* starring Jodie Foster, in which she had a hidden room in her house to which she could flee if attacked. Unfortunately in the movie, the room became more of a prison than anything else. I want to steer completely away from this image and setup, but help create a comfortable, safe place for you to take refuge in the case of an emergency of most sorts.

To get started you will need a few things:

A trusted and competent handyman.

A cheap, Rica'd cell phone loaded with R50 airtime.

A big blob of Press-Stick.

A handful of sweets.

Some old magazines.

A pen that works.

Your alarm company technician.

To create your Place of Refuge you will not need to completely remodel or rebuild your house. You can use entirely existing features at very little cost. The design will be of a nature that your additions and features will not impede of your normal life or get you funny looks from visitors. The room I suggest you use is your bathroom. Not the toilet, the bathroom. (Unless the toilet is in the bathroom which is even better.) In most suburban homes, the bathroom is situated pretty much half way down the passage. This is convenient in that you can be anywhere in the house and only having half the distance to travel to get there. The room is normally well lit, has a source of water, and is familiar to you.

Here's how to begin.

Ask your trusted handyman/carpenter to reinforce the bathroom door. If a sixteen year old can kick his way in or out, it needs re-enforcing. This can be done in a number of ways from replacing the whole door with a big solid wooden one, to having the existing one stuffed with chicken wire to make kicking holes a bit more difficult. Get him to place a couple of big thick dead bolts on the inside of the door. If your door is not solid, the screws must go right to the other side and secured with washers and nuts. He will know what to do. Then beef up the burglar guards. Crooks break into bathroom windows because they are usually the most flimsy. You need to make them really tough to break through. Think, this might be the deterrent that stops you being a victim of crime altogether!

Buy a cheap but reliable cell phone. You don't need Bluetooth or a camera, just a cell that you can sms or make calls. Charge the battery fully and load the airtime. Save a whole stack of friends, family, the police and security numbers on it. Switch the phone off, put a big blob of Press Stick on it and jam it in a place you or your kids can find, but casual lookers cant. Like, under the sink. Give the number for that phone to the same people you have loaded on the phone-book. Tell them that if that particular number rings, miss calls or sms's it is because there is nothing short of a real

emergency. That cell phone is not to use because your other one has a flat battery or any other reason. That phone is your life line to the outside world. Keep it switched off but check its battery level every so often.

If you are contracted to an alarm or armed response company, don't tell them what you are up to, but request they fit two extra panic buttons in the bathroom. One, next to the toilet and one near the bath. There is no rule that says you can't be busy with one or the other when a brick comes through your lounge window. Make sure the buttons are in reach of children, and make sure your children are taught that the buttons are not toys but only for calling for help if there is a major problem. Relate the story of the boy who called "wolf!" if necessary. A big plus of the added panic buttons is if you have elderly or sick in your home. They can use the bathroom, especially if home alone safe in the knowledge that help is an arm's reach away.

For comfort sake, if you don't already have them, put a few magazines and a pen on a shelf in the bathroom. If you have locked yourself in, you can spend the time writing notes or doing the puzzles. A bowl of sweets is nice to keep the kids happy. You can also place a couple of stools in there too if you don't have already. You might not want to sit on the floor.

There you have it, a comfortable, equipped Place of Refuge ready for any time of day or night that can be used by you and your family if there is a threat to your safety. The positives are too many to count. It will not cost you much, you have peace of mind that you are prepared, but it is very empowering to have ready contingency for an emergency. What this whole exercise is designed to do is to move us away from a state of fear and the unknown of "what if..." By effective preparation and proper planning you are moving to a positive state where you have the power and ability to keep yourself safe until emergency services arrive.

Like anything, the advice I have given is completely useless unless you actually do something about it. You don't have to go the whole hog, but a good start is the stashed away cell phone. I have lost count of people I speak to telling me, "Yes, you are so right..." but do nothing. It's your life, take it seriously.

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