

# It's All in the Cause

## Personal Safety



By Faisuly Scheurer

Only after my nine year old daughter and I had noticed that there may have been someone following us did I realize just how empty the streets were that night. It wasn't that late, but being off-season most of the shops were closed and it was cold. We turned the corner of our street and he turned as well. Luckily, a friend happened to drive by and I was able to flag her down. The man kept walking and me and my two little girls were safe. I will never know if this guy was just heading home after having a few drinks at the local bar or if he had some kind of sinister intention, but that night served as a wakeup call. A false sense of security had crept up in my life in the three years since my family and I moved from Florida. "Nothing ever happens in small, quaint, mountain towns," was the message I kept playing over and over in my head since we moved here.

While it is true that we are less likely to be victims of a crime than if we lived, say, in New York City, it is still important to be smart about staying safe. Taking some precautionary measures and having an action plan may actually keep you from being a victim yourself. While researching safety tips for this article, I came across one from the Women's Safety Project; if you do end up in the trunk of a car, look for the glow in the dark trunk release that newer cars have. Also, some models have it so that the back seat rest can be lowered to make way for large items and a victim can use this to escape through the back door of a car. I would have never thought to do this, but now have actually shared it with my daughters. Of course, the last thing we want to do is end up in the trunk of some maniac's car so I have found some tips (some of which I used when I lived alone in Central Florida) that will help to keep you from ending up in the trunk in the first place.

- Avoid questionable places. A good rule of thumb is if it's a place where there aren't that many people around, you should avoid it.
- Always stay alert! Always be aware of your surroundings and the people around you. This means being in the moment and not being distracted by texting, calls, or by simply walking with your head down and lost in your own thoughts. Creeps always look for someone they can "surprise."
- Don't disregard your instinct! This is huge. Afterwards, I asked my daughter why this particular man had made her feel "creepy" and she replied that he had a "funny" look in his eyes. She said "he looked like he was up to no good mom." It is this instinct we must follow. We are always taught to be polite. However, politeness goes out the window where safety is concerned. For instance, if a stranger offers to help you put your groceries in your car and it is late at night, there is no one around, and you get a weird feeling about it, say "no thanks, I got it" then head back to the grocery store. On an Oprah show on this very subject, a rape victim said that when the man who raped her had offered to help her bring in her groceries to her apartment, she disregarded her instinct to say no because she didn't want to be rude and hurt his feelings because he had been so polite. Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.
- If you are going out for a night on the town, go with a group, have a designated driver and carpool. As in the recent case of the Virginia Tech Student who disappeared during a Metallica concert, she got separated from her group and was last seen walking alone along a highway trying to hitch a ride. This leads me to my next tip:
- Never accept a car ride from someone you don't know or trust.
- Never use ATMs in questionable locations, if it is desolate, or at night.

- If you like to run or hike on a regular basis, keep your routes varied. Don't do the same thing every single time. Better yet, go with a buddy and avoid going during times when you know there may not be anyone else around.
- Always lock your car. Look around you before you unlock to enter and lock yourself back after you get in. Before you get in your car however, give the back seat a quick glance to make sure it's empty.
- Always lock your front door and make sure your home is secure by installing deadbolts in all doors leading outside and a peep hole in the front door. If you rent, request that your landlord make these changes if you don't have these already. Don't leave windows open, as this is how many intruders gain access.
- Never let a stranger into your home. Even if they are in some type of uniform, make them wait outside and talk to them through your locked door.
- Take a self-defense class. This will not only empower you, but may protect you.

The main idea here is to avoid putting yourself in a dangerous situation in the first place. However, sometimes the trouble will come to you anyway so you need to be prepared and have a plan just in case:

- Go out and get pepper spray or mace. If you follow tip #1 above and notice someone coming at you, get your spray ready and make eye contact. This will let them know they will have a fight if they decide to take you on. Pepper spray can spray from several feet away, which is the best way to go since you don't want to be overpowered before you get a chance to use it.
- Take your keys or anything you may have on you and turn it into a weapon. By placing your keys between your fingers and punching someone as hard as you can (that may be the only chance you have) you may buy yourself a few seconds to run as fast as you can.
- Here is a simple one: RUN SCREAMING!!! That is many times enough to get a criminal packing.
- If someone tries to overpower you, fight back! (Unless your gut tells you otherwise or he is well armed.) Statistics show that your chances of surviving an attack go down if the attacker succeeds in taking you to a second location. So scream, scratch, kick, do whatever you have to do to try to get away. Remember that the groin, eyes, throat, and knees are good areas to inflict some damage. There are some experts that believe you should never fight back an assailant, however, you should do what you feel is best in a specific situation.

The main idea is to be aware and to have a plan. Not that you are going to obsess about, just be smart about your personal safety. There are many great resources online to help you put a safety plan in action such as the National Crime Prevention Council. Type this link on your browser to get invaluable tips and information: <http://www.ncpc.org/topics/violent-crime-and-personal-safety>. Statistically speaking, there is a low chance that anyone of us will be victims of some random crime; however, by following these tips and suggestions you will decrease your chances even more. Stay safe!