

resident without speaking. They continue to check both inside and outside of the house for intruders. They find no one but us. Apparently the alarm, our first line of defense, has deterred the attempt even though the phone line had been cut and no evidence of our problem ever reached the alarm company.

I hear the officers referring to the incident as a home invasion, but I am feeling a violation of another sort, a violation of my privacy, my private place in the world, my last safe haven in a world of questionable certainty. There is a feeling of loss and insecurity even though nothing was taken and no one was injured.

The National Rifle Association features a monthly article citing documented accounts of average citizens employing a firearm in defense of themselves or others. Six of the seven documented accounts cited by NRA in the July 2007 issue of the *American Rifleman*, the date of my writing, were variations of home invasions. Law enforcement officials nationwide agree there is a significant up-tic in the number of home invasions, but reliable statistical data is not readily available. Agencies on both local and federal levels often group these incidents with other robbery numbers. They are sometimes referred to as aggravated burglaries. In any case, all appear to be in agreement that this is an offense of increasing frequency and a crime that has the potential to lend itself to horrific violence. It also is a crime that often leaves the survivors with long lasting – if not permanent – psychological scars. It is my nightmare of personal affronts.

While the preceding account is a depiction, made up from a number of actual police reports, it is significantly consistent with accounts given by victims of similar incidents.

What exactly qualifies as a home invasion? It is a forced or otherwise unauthorized entry of a residence where the perpetrator(s) expects one or more occupants to be present at the time of the intrusion, and where the perpetrator(s) intends to overpower the occupants and occupy the residence for a period of time. This might be accomplished by a perpetrator taking control of a resident outside of the residence and having him or her assist in gaining entry, or it may be by forced or otherwise unauthorized entry. It starts with something as simple as resident unloading groceries or by being ambushed when returning home.

Preparation to avoid this terrible event might be as prudent a part of our normal lifestyle as locking your doors; as many in law enforcement feel this crime may become as common as car jacking. You probably hear of the need to be aware of your surroundings more today than ever before. We also tend to overestimate our physical agility and ability to mentally process information when awakened from a deep sleep. In the middle of the night, your adversary may be at the top of his game. You may have mere seconds to get to the top of yours. The key is preparation to buy you time.

Here are a few suggestions that may increase your survival advantage in the event you become the intended victim of this type of crime:

If you have an alarm, turn it on before retiring. (You would be amazed at how many people have systems in place and do not use them)

If you don't have an alarm, consider getting one.

Needless to say, check your doors and windows before going to bed.

Consider locking your bedroom door at night.

Place your cell phone and a dependable flashlight by your bed or on your night table.

Consider whether you feel comfortable having a loaded weapon near your bed.

Have a plan that includes your spouse and family and discuss what they are to do if you or they have reason to believe a perpetrator has entered your home.

Consider within your plan, the option to stay locked in a "safe" place and notifying the police of your location(s) within your residence.

If you have alarms on your autos, have your remote near you.

Don't make excuses to yourself when you see something suspicious. Call and have a police unit check it out. That is what they do.

Review with a police representative, the information you should impart to the dispatcher when you call, and go through the drill in your mind so that it becomes automatic.

Become consistent in your evening preparations so that it becomes routine each night. Think out of the box on considerations that are unique to you and your situation. You can vastly improve your chances of survival with a plan. Devise your own and don't expect the above to be a "do all, end all" for you. And always remember, as the ad suggests, "When the sun goes down the food chain inverts."

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