

Carol Risley

“We didn’t think about disaster planning until she became disabled.”

My Story

I am like 99 percent of the population, all those people who don’t think about anything like that until something significant changes their lives. Even after our experience when traveling in Florida during Hurricane Andrew, where we lived for four days with no electricity, my partner and I were not realistic about planning in the event of a disaster or emergency.



We always thought we could just grab some belongings, take the dogs and jump in car. That was before her disability.

What I Did

After her stroke our lives shifted dramatically. I had to think about more complicated needs and planned accordingly, recognizing a person who has limited mobility cannot move fast, even with a motorized wheelchair. Everything takes at least twice as long. As we organized for her support at home, neighbors became more significant, when planning day-to-day and for possible emergencies.

I put together home emergency kits, including more personal supplies, our Advance Directives, medications (using mail orders to obtain adequate supply), and wheelchair-related tools (battery charger, extra chord, etc.). Most importantly, I planned more realistically for extra time needed to leave our home with ourselves, pets and emergency belongings. We also have a plan, in case I am not home. We prepared a suitcase on wheels and medications to be ready, if she had to be evacuated. The animals have their bags, too, so we don't stress about them.

What I Learned

Without ongoing planning, we just wouldn't make it. It is all the more necessary to organize well and often, in day-to-day routines, in cooperation with neighbors, and with local emergency preparedness officials. There is much more thinking now about her accommodations, then me, then our animals. I understand the community better, where there are shelters but also know we may need to stay in our home. I have talked to our fire department about sheltering in place. We have a sign for the front door that indicates if we need help or are OK. However, even with the best plans when time is short in an emergency, organization is key to saving lives. And getting to know our neighbors, being neighborly, we are aware that we may all need help someday.

What's Next

- 1) Given dependency on electricity for wheelchair, etc., obtain a portable generator
- 2) Stay in communication with local fire dept. about dependency issues
- 3) Staying in communication with neighbors.
- 4) Keep things up to date, documents, meds, extra batteries, cell phones charged, etc.