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Nancy Q. Keefe

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'MAKE ASSURANCE

A Guide to Home Security

A white-haired woman came home from work, opened the front door of her tree-shaded brick house in an affluent suburb and found the place in mild disarray. Alarmed, but unthinking, she hurried through the house. The portable color TV was missing from its stand. The camera was gone from the front hall closet. The suitcases were not in the storage room. Her husband arrived just then, and they called the police.

After a little investigation, the police learned that the working couple were out of the house every day, that the front door and "maybe the back door" were locked, and that the victims didn't know all that was missing.

Further investigation turned up one appalling clue: the woman next door had called a taxi for two men with suitcases. The neighbor said she had never seen the men before and "just figured they were from the Salvation Army or someplace taking old things away, and maybe their truck broke down."

This incident, absurd but true, illustrates how brazen burglars have become and how they are helped by the average householder's negligence and naiveté. City dwellers have long since been made forcibly aware of burglars. But suburban and small-town residents, which perhaps most H&S families are, have only recently come to realize that burglars also hit close to home—one out of every 45 American homes, according to an estimate made by the 3M Company's security division.

Burglary ranks first of all crimes in this country and is widening its lead. The

DOUBLE SURE:

by Nancy Q. Keefe

dollar loss is staggering—more than \$1.5 billion a year—and the recovery rate is low, although improving in some places. From 1967 to 1972, the latest period for which nationwide figures are available, the FBI reports that nighttime burglary of houses rose by 71 percent over the previous period. Daytime burglary was up even more—by 74 percent—and is highest on rainy days around 3:00 p.m., when mothers rush out to pick up children at school. Burglary gangs know that the hurried mothers will probably leave the house open for just a few minutes—but long enough for a looting.

Worse, the emotional toll on people whose houses have been burglarized verges on traumatic proportions, according to sociologists studying victims of crime. Bad reactions, from instant revulsion to continuing fear, afflict even victims who weren't home when the intruder came and didn't suffer much loss.

A professor of psychology and her family returned from an outing to find that their suburban house had been vandalized. "We didn't lose much," she said. "We haven't much to lose. Burglars don't want books and that's where our biggest investment is. But when I went into my bedroom and saw my underwear and stockings dumped out of the dresser, I felt I'd been violated. The very first thing I did was wash everything."

Following newspaper reports of that burglary, salesmen of household security systems intruded on her "like ghouls," she said. True, some companies hustle on the heels of misfortune, and a

few are outright cheats. But established companies, which made their reputations in banking and industrial security, and local locksmiths in business for years prove reliable.

For all of them, increasing burglary has been a bonanza, creating a bull market in heavy-duty locks, burglar alarms and "multifunctional home security systems," which can cost \$1500 plus a monthly maintenance fee. Locksmiths, who used to grind out a modest living in small shops away from the high-rent district, now earn enough money to live in grand houses with burglar alarms. Security, already a multimillion-dollar business, could by 1980 have Americans spending one dollar on protection for every four dollars of goods stolen.

One deep-rooted cause of this upward spiral has been our acquisitive society's disregard for the Biblical injunction "not to store up treasures on earth, where... thieves can break in and steal." Because, as the passage in Matthew continues, "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Having stored up treasures in our houses, we wholeheartedly try to transform the family home from castle to fortress. You needn't go that far.

Some common-sense measures and perhaps some added hardware will enhance your home security. If your possessions are priceless or your community crime-ridden, more sophisticated precautions can afford you higher protection. But no device or system is burglar proof because, in the words of one security expert, "a dedicated guy can get into Fort Knox." Remember, though, that few burglars are that dedicated, a lot are inept and

all seek the path of least resistance.

"Get a better lock than your neighbor," advises one New York locksmith, admitting, "It's a lousy attitude but it'll protect you." Moreover, most housebreakers are amateurs, who would be stymied or scared off by even a modest systematic effort to batten down the hatches.

The trouble is, so few of us even lock our doors. Last year a wave of "kitchen-door" burglaries in Westchester County, New York, swept scores of women's handbags from kitchen counters and chairs. Every woman tearfully told the police that the door had been unlocked and the bag in plain sight.

National crime statistics show that more than 60 percent of all recorded illegal entries occur through a door. Yet both the police and professional burglars say that relatively few burglars have the skill to jimmy a door quickly and fewer still know how to pick a lock.

The kitchen-door thief and others of the casual door-rattling school could be thwarted by your having and using a good lock or two. Experienced locksmiths honestly differ over preferences, but in general they offer this advice:

If you live in a low-risk community, a mortise lock (with a keyhole outside above the door handle) will make you fairly secure. It has two metal pieces that latch into the door jamb. One, the dead bolt, operates by a thumb turn inside and a key outside. The other, a convenience latch or night lock, can be set by buttons. In the locked position, it requires a key for an honest person to open it from the outside. A burglar can open it in seconds with a piece of celluloid.

A credit card will do. Try it. It's frighteningly simple. So a mortise is only

really locked when you set the dead bolt, too. That can't be depressed by celluloid—or "loided," as they say in the trade.

Key-in-the-knob locks give way easily to brute force or jimmying with a screwdriver. A 12-year-old successfully picked one in about 30 seconds on his first try. Knob locks will keep someone from accidentally walking in on you in the bathroom, but they won't keep an intruder from entering your house. Locksmiths suggest adding an auxiliary lock, or, as Macbeth said: "Make assurance double sure."

Eddie Morrissey, who operates a locksmith shop in Grand Central Terminal and advises burglary-prone New Yorkers about home security, thinks a Segalock with a Medeco cylinder makes doors highly secure. It costs less than \$50 installed. The lock has a vertical bolt that passes through a mating plate on the door jamb. Adding a high-security cylinder (the part the key turns) deters the pick man. "Nothing is absolutely burglar proof," Eddie says, "but I know of only one man who picked this type of cylinder. He's a former head cop on the burglary squad, now a vice president of a big security company."

Another prominent New York locksmith opts for the 3M electronic lock alarm (priced around \$80), which has good hardware and sounds a siren if it's tampered with. It would probably scare off an intruder. It almost certainly would alert you inside to call the police. In an apartment building, a neighbor could hear it and summon the police—if you have worked out a cooperative arrangement. From a private house, though, a neighbor probably couldn't hear the alarm.

Instead of adding an auxiliary lock, which can mean having to use two keys, you may prefer to replace a weak knob-lock. The Schlage Lock Company G series, with a

guarded latch and dead bolt, offers excellent protection against loiding, jimmying and brute force. Some specialists say it combines the best security features of all primary locks.

Ask an established locksmith what he suggests. In general, locksmiths are honest (in some places they must be licensed and bonded), and they are skilled. A really good one is a first-class artisan, who wants to be treated with respect. A woman in a New England town called the local Yankee locksmith to open her house when she'd forgotten the keys. He did it quickly and charged five dollars.

"That's too much," the woman said. "I'm not going to pay you."

"Suit yourself," the smith replied. He relocked the house and walked away.

When you're upgrading your home security, remember a lock is effective only if you use it, and then it's only as good as the door it's mounted on. Loose jambs or hinges, windows and decorative panels make a door vulnerable because they can be broken and the lock released, unless the lock requires a key for inside opening, too. This extreme precaution means you could not get out quickly in case of fire, though. At some point you have to draw a prudent line between one kind of security and another. Don't become neurotic about it: just ask yourself how much burglary protection you realistically need.

Sliding glass patio doors are weak spots that can be strengthened by fitting a steel or wooden block in the channel. It can't be moved except from inside, and it works more effectively than a key lock.

A house entrance through the garage lets a burglar work out of sight to break in. Keeping your garage locked will keep an intruder away from the inside

door and protect your yard equipment, lawn chairs and bicycles, too. If you're in a high-risk neighborhood, tighten the entrance from the garage with a brace lock, a latch that extends unesthetically but effectively from the door to a hole in the floor.

Having locked the doors, you should remember that nearly 40 percent of illegal entries are made through other openings. The rich criminal jargon calls burglars ledgemen and second-story men, indicating that windows are prime targets. Combination storm windows and screens, which can be opened only by releasing an inside catch, add considerable security in addition to weather protection. Lacking those, you can make windows somewhat more secure by inserting a tenpenny (three-inch) nail through both sashes where they meet. If you drill holes in both corners, you can slip the nails out when you want to open the windows.

Beyond the hardware that is adequate for most houses is the gilt-edged security of a whole-house system, which employs a startling array of technological gadgetry and electronic marvels to foil, scare or snare intruders. Some of it calls to mind mission control for astronauts. Some seems to be straight out of "Mission Impossible." Nearly all of it is expensive and worth it if you need a lot of protection. Specialists and consumer groups generally agree that the more a system costs the better it is.

Three types can be detected among the varieties now on the market: Wired or wireless systems guard entryways to a house. Photoelectric or ultrasonic area systems (which can be disguised as a dictionary if you like) guard a particular room. Secret and highly sensitive microphones monitor a whole house, but only when the family is away. They can be triggered accidentally by a snore.

If the system is a local alarm unit and

detects an intruder, it will wail or ring or turn on lights or shoot tear gas. A remote alarm will ring the police or private security company, which will come to the rescue. Even with their possible \$1500 price tag, these aren't burglar proof, either. Local alarms fail if worn out batteries aren't replaced or if families forget to turn them on at bedtime.

But alarm failure isn't the big headache. False alarms are. Los Angeles and Philadelphia police have ended direct connections with home alarms, and New York police are trying to, because answering so many false alarms keeps policemen from patrolling the rest of the city.

Handsome and rich Scarsdale, New York, 35 minutes from New York City, has made the police-monitoring system work, however. What looks like "burglar's paradise" was instead 50 percent below the national burglary rate average last year. One out of six Scarsdale houses has a burglar alarm, indicated by red lights over the doors and hooked into the police station. Not many false alarms ring, because homeowners are fined for false alarms, and Scarsdale residents have already paid out a lot for security — an average of \$1200 for the alarm system, \$45 for the police hookup and \$9 a month maintenance.

Before you rush out to buy a space-age security system, remember that dogs often scare away burglars. If you don't want a dog, you can buy a tape cassette of growling sounds to switch on if you hear a prowler, or you can try the suggestion of a nervous woman who worries about prowlers but dislikes dogs. She has a Great Dane's feeding dish, as big as a child's snow saucer, and thinks that just the sight of that dish in her garage will put prowlers to flight.

Two less whimsical suggestions would aid recovery of valuables in case of burglary: take inventory of your

possessions and find out about Operation Identification. With the inventory, you'll be able to tell the police and insurance company what you've lost. Keep a copy of the list in your safe deposit box.

The identification plan operates in nearly 200 communities, where police departments lend electric etching tools with instructions for marking your Social Security or license plate number on items most frequently stolen. When marked valuables are listed with the police, owners receive an Operation Identification decal, a deterrent in itself. Monterey Park, California, originated the plan in 1963, and the National Exchange Club has promoted its extension. Marking items lowers their value with "fences" and makes recovery possible.

Whatever precautions you take to protect your home, reinforce them with common sense:

- ▶ **Don't leave doors and windows unlocked.**
- ▶ **Don't leave a ladder in the yard to help second-story men. Chain it to a fence or lock it to a bicycle in the garage, making both cumbersome to steal.**
- ▶ **Don't leave handbags in view of windows.**
- ▶ **Don't "hide" housekeys under the welcome mat or over the door ledge.**
- ▶ **Don't put your address on your house keys. If you do lose an identifiable set, or if you move to a new house, change locks.**
- ▶ **Don't keep precious but seldom-worn jewelry at home. Rent a safe deposit box.**
- ▶ **Don't stint on locks for cellar doors and don't neglect fire escape windows, where an obstacle course of potted plants and glass knickknacks will**

put off an intruder as too noisy to tangle with.

If you are going on vacation:

- ▶ **Stop delivery of milk, mail and newspapers.**
- ▶ **Arrange to have your lawn mowed or walk shoveled if you're to be away a long time.**
- ▶ **Ask a neighbor to park his second car in your driveway and to dump some garbage in your outdoor refuse cans so your absence is less noticeable.**

If, in spite of your safeguards and ruses, someone does break in, take this advice from the police:

Don't play hero. play possum. If you're in bed, pretend to be asleep. Most intruders want your valuables, not you. Be wary of trying to use a gun. It may be turned against you.

Don't rush in where angels fear to tread. If you come home and find signs of burglary, leave immediately and call the police from a neighbor's. The woman mentioned at the beginning of this article shouldn't have gone in alone in case the housebreakers were still there.

One last suggestion: don't let crime statistics and security advice demoralize you. because there's something droll about all this. Burglary is increasing as affluence rises. In turn, we have to expend part of our new affluence to forestall the very burglary that it causes. Preserve a sense of balance between relaxation and security. Let a little humor through the hardware, like the Grand Central locksmith who displays formidable locks and chains in tissue-lined gift boxes appropriate to the season. □

Nancy Q. Keefe, a freelance writer and editor, is a regular contributor to *H&S Reports*.