

Fire, shelter priorities

Surviving cold weather needs planning

By LORI TAYLOR Herald staff writer The key to coping with being stranded in a snowstorm in the middle of a Canadian winter is to have some kind of plan before you go out, Georgetown resident Bill Garrard says.

Mr. Garrard, as well as being a photographer, is an expert on what it takes to survive being stranded in a snowstorm for a few hours, days or weeks. As a member of the Armed Forces, attached to a mobile artillery unit, Mr. Garrard spent a number of winters in Churchill, Manitoba. The men, in addition to their regular duties, were "guinea pigs" for military techniques and survival techniques in the high arctic. Mr. Garrard has been involved in survival techniques for almost 25 years.

It was not unusual to find someone by the side of the highway, frozen to death, during the 18 years he spent in the west, Mr. Garrard said. People were too civilized, and they believed their car would continue to function, and would not break down.

SURVIVAL EPISODES In survival episodes, the survivors were required to submit a report on what had happened, how they had reacted, and to describe the entire episode, so that lessons could be learned from it. Investigations were carried out on episodes where the people involved failed to survive, such as investigations are carried out after plane crashes to find out what went wrong, Mr. Garrard said.

In the air force, or with any kind of flying, it is one of the areas where survival is a "furious thing", he said. A plane leaves Dallas in the morning in the bright sunshine, and by evening, it's in the high arctic, having flown over the greatest imaginable variety of terrain in the mean time.

The end product of all the thrashing about and hand-wringing and brain-cudgling is a set of vague ideas which are applicable equally to being stuck beside the Highway #1 as they are to the high arctic," Mr. Garrard said.

being alive, in the terms of the basic physiological requirements, and then you have to look at the environmental factors which a person can draw on to fill those requirements, Mr. Garrard said.

In survival training, he said, the first thing to start with is Murphy's Law, that if anything can go wrong, it will. Mr. Garrard referred back to the idea that people are too civilized in that they expect their car to take them where they are going without breaking down; they don't prepare for being stranded even for a short time of a few hours.

"That doesn't mean adopting the method of Churchill, wearing wind pants, mukluks and a parka over a tuxedo," he said.

Most survival episodes begin with an accident. A car breaks down or runs off the road into the ditch, or is struck by another car. The first element to consider in preparing to survive, Mr. Garrard said, is some kind of first aid kit. The next two elements, and the order is arguable, he said, are fire and shelter.

From the aviation point of view, the first priority is signals, or some form of communications to let people know where you are, Mr. Garrard said. In the case of a stranded motorist, it's as simple as tying a handkerchief to the aerial of the car to let people know there's someone there. Whether or not a signal is a prime factor is a matter of judgement, he said. If road conditions are bad, rescue people will be out, on snowmobiles, or other snow-travelling vehicles, looking for those who are stranded.

Once the car has stopped, you're better off out of it, Mr. Garrard said. Once it is off, the heater is gone, and it's not better than an ice box. Building a shelter serves a threefold purpose: it keeps you warm, working around keeps you from panicking, and while you're doing something productive for yourself, you're not going to give up, Mr. Garrard said.

The next step is to build a fire. Fire is an elementary part of this climate, Mr. Garrard said, although we don't see it as much as we used to because it's kept locked in a furnace.



pieces of flint, are available, as are safety matches. Mr. Garrard said safety matches are not the best to use because they require a fine, abrasive surface for striking.

If the motorist has a lighter and matches, he or she is better off using the lighter first, because if he saves it, and uses the matches first and the lighter may dry up. Even after the fuel is gone, however, the lighter can be used to strike sparks, which will ignite a handkerchief soaked in gasoline, or absorbent cotton or gauze from a first aid kit.

Liquid gas lighters are good, Mr. Garrard said, but if they are plastic-covered, they must be kept warm. He said he is not aware of the breaking point of the plastic in cold temperatures, but it could shatter.

Mr. Garrard suggested starting with a small fire "you can put out with two fingers" and build it up from there.

agent in the morning," he said. The second factor in those deaths on the prairies in the winter was alcohol, Mr. Garrard said.

"Now I'm not a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union or anything like that," Mr. Garrard said, "but alcohol is a bad idea in a survival situation for a number of reasons."

A long-range caution against taking a good stiff belt to keep you warm is that alcohol wastes water, Mr. Garrard said. The dehydration will only happen over a period of a few days, but it will happen.

The second big strike against alcohol is that in small amounts it reduces the body's sensitivity to the environment. Nobody in good health and sober will freeze to death, Mr. Garrard said, because you begin to shiver when you get cold, and you wake up, because you're cold. Alcohol, antihistamines, tranquilizers, hard drugs and any mood-modifying drugs will interfere with that response.

You'll wake up too late, with a case of frostbite, or you won't wake up at all, Mr. Garrard said. He pointed out, as well, that alcohol has a low freezing

point, and can be very cold and still remain liquid. Taking a big gulp of that alcohol that has been sitting out in temperatures 15 degrees below zero Fahrenheit can cause patches of frostbite all the way down your throat into your stomach, and create a dangerous loss of body heat.

"One has to believe it's the St. Bernards and not the brandy they carry that keeps people warm," Mr. Garrard said. "After all, you get a big furry 150 to 175 pound dog to curl up to and he's pretty warm."

Preparations for being stranded include a number of items which it would be a good idea to keep handy in the car. In the way of clothing and equipment, First, Mr. Garrard suggested, get in the habit of keeping outdoor clothing in your car, and get it out when you want to use it.

ENOUGH HEAT "The human body is capable of manufacturing enough heat to kill the person with heat stroke if it isn't given off in some way," he said. "You must have equipment and clothing available to make use of that heat and manage it."

A sleeping bag, preferably down-filled and nylon-covered, or a couple of extra blankets are handy, and extra clothing could include a pair of pants made from an old blanket, to be put on over what you're wearing to keep you warm and dry, Mr. Garrard said.

Insulated gloves and boots and a parka with a hood you can pull around in front of your face are also good protection against the cold, he said. Mr. Garrard said he carries a pair of snowmobile pants, a tush pack with extra socks, gloves, pants and other such items, and a bush parka with wire threaded through the hem of the hood so it can be twisted into any shape.

Next to down-filled items, synthetics provide the best insulation, "although you'll probably hear from the wool enthusiasts on that one," Mr. Garrard said. He is opposed to the use of wool because he said it will eventually get wet, "and once it gets good and wet, it's very difficult to get dry again. What you're looking for is something that won't absorb water."

For someone who is concerned about carrying a winter survival kit, a snowmobile suit that "fits you and half of somebody else" is a good way to create a layer of warm air around your body inside the suit, Mr. Garrard said. He also recommended two pairs of mittens, one fairly close-fitting, and the others a big sloppy pair, again to capture a layer of warm air around the inside mittens.

The outer mittens should be loose-fitting, so that no matter how cold your hands are, you can get them into the mittens. They don't even need thumbs to them, Mr. Garrard said, just big sacks to trap a layer of air. Once you get wet, the only answer is to get dry, he said. Get into some kind of shelter out of the wind, and if at all possible, get into some other clothing to give the wet clothes an opportunity to dry out.

GASOLINE SPILL Gasoline spilled on your

clothing is the coldest thing imaginable, Mr. Garrard said, and he advised taking a great deal of care with it if you use it to try to start a fire.

A survival kit kept in the back of the car can be expensive, he said, and some people don't want to tie up \$100, \$200 or \$500 in something that will stay in the trunk of a car. On the other hand, keeping outdoor clothing and a couple of spare blankets in the back of the car could save a lot of discomfort, Mr. Garrard said. "Any damn fool can be uncomfortable," he said.

Food is the last thing on a list for a survival kit, Mr. Garrard said. People can go without food for lengthy periods of time without starving. Water is more important over the long term, but on a short-term basis, food is valuable because it helps to keep the body generating heat.

The best foods to keep on hand in a car are things with lots of raisins and nuts, like granola bars and oatmeal bars. A big chunk of fruit and nut cake would be an excellent thing to have along, Mr. Garrard said. Shortbread with a lot of butter and a little sugar is good too, and if the food is well sealed, it will keep for some time.

Other tools Mr. Garrard suggested keeping hand are a small axe and a ball of twine, both of which would be very helpful in building a shelter. If all else fails, he suggested, scoop a hole in a snow bank, with the wind blowing across the door, not into it, bringing in the cold, or from the back, drifting snow over the door.

"Then make a fire, put up a signal to let rescuers know you're there, curl up in your down-filled sleeping bag and go to sleep," Mr. Garrard said. "When the rescuers come by in the morning, they'll find you nice and warm."

Among some of the myths is that which says an overweight person will withstand cold for longer than a small person, Mr. Garrard said. An overweight person would withstand starvation for longer, but they would have only a minor edge in staying alive in the cold.

A fit person has more chances of survival, to a point, he said, although a "fine-tuned athlete may well be using more energy to maintain muscle tone."

"We talk about this as survival, but LaVerendrye (a Canadian explorer in the 1700's) was in survival conditions from the time he left Montreal," Mr. Garrard said. "And even in what passed for civilized circumstances, they weren't that far removed from living off the land."



Catherine Haarsma looks on as Harry Wilson of Glass Art Colours in Toronto makes notes on one of the pieces. Mr. Wilson was one of the judges in the first annual Student of the Year competition at Georgetown Ceramics Friday evening.



This fisherman was done by Tracy Bowman, and was her first piece of work.



ACTON WOMAN WINS AWARD IN GEORGETOWN CERAMICS CONTEST Catherine Haarsma, who owns Georgetown Ceramics along with her husband, Nick, presented the Student of the Year award to Wendy Bos of Acton for her lamp. The judges agreed that there were several excellent pieces in the competition which lost only because of minor flaws in the cleaning.