

## Valuable lessons learned from a close call with disaster

By Anna Luca



Anna Luca

*Anna Luca is the founder of TheSpecialLife.com, a site that provides tips and tools to families, teachers and caregivers of people with special needs. The story of her family's experience in the Toronto propane explosion can be found at [www.thespeciallife.com/disaster.html](http://www.thespeciallife.com/disaster.html).*

Last August, my husband and I had to get our kids – an 8-year-old with cerebral palsy and a 6-year-old with Aspergers syndrome – away from a fire and explosions three blocks from our home.

We were far enough that we weren't in immediate danger, but close enough to have to move quickly.

I want to share some of the steps we took and other things we learned from this experience.

Lesson: Assume the best, prepare for the worst. We underestimated the danger and, like many neighbours, stood outside to watch the fire. Days later I saw a portion of a tank in a tree on a lawn not far from us. Homes closer to the site had windows shattered and roofs collapsed. Someone had the ceiling fall on him while he sat in his wheelchair.

Lesson: Keep all medications and syringes in a sealed, waterproof and easy-to-grab container, along with your medication log.

Lesson: Grab a cellphone if you have

one and remember batteries and address lists. And what about other communication needs? My husband and I remembered our cellphones but forgot chargers. Worse, we forgot to grab my son's Go Talk communication device, leaving him unable to communicate independently.

Lesson: Prioritize daily needs items on a checklist, with the most difficult to replace first. For us, that includes prescription items like glasses and orthotics, and my son's diapers since his size is hard to find.

Lesson: Keep stairways and landings clear. Finding your way around obstacles in the dark is dangerous and can increase your tension.

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## Living with MS

# Making a difference when an emergency hits

When a blackout occurred in Toronto's west end this winter, George Tsakonas says he received an unexpected phone call.

A worker from the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) called to check in, which was appreciated because "when you need help, you hope there's someone there for you," George says.

Tara Tyson, senior manager of quality, risk & evaluation at Toronto CCAC, says their role in an emergency is the role they play every day.

"With respect to an emergency situation, we will do everything we can to ensure our clients continue to receive the health care services they need."

In the blackout, CCAC workers ensured that all clients, starting with high risk and moving to low risk, were safe, by phone or in person.

The CCAC assisted in coordinating clients' transportation to warming centres or other temporary quarters, Tara says. Clients in immediate danger went to hospital if necessary.

In George's case, his block was one of the few that still had power. He says he knew there was a power outage because his neighbours were calling him.

George was diagnosed with MS in 1998 after experiencing tingling and weakness in his legs and hands. He now uses a power wheelchair.

Nursing and occupational therapy are the CCAC services George uses, and he says he's looking into physiotherapy.

Tara says people can get involved with the CCAC by a referral from their physician, a family member, friend or by self-referring.

A care coordinator will complete an assessment to determine eligibility to CCAC services, and once the person is deemed eligible and consents to service they can become a client.

Contact the Toronto Central Customer Service Centre at 416-506-9888 or online at [www.ccac-ont.ca](http://www.ccac-ont.ca). ♦

## Chapter Events

## The Toronto Chapter Presents...

## Cognitive Changes and MS



With Dr. Anthony Feinstein  
Dr. Feinstein's neuropsychiatry practice and research focuses on behavioral disorders and cognitive changes associated with MS.

**Thursday, June 11, 2009**  
**Bayview Ave./Eglinton Ave.**  
**Registration – 7 p.m.**  
**Presentation – 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.**  
Light refreshments  
Wheel-Trans can be arranged if requested

## Save the date for our summer event...

# July 8, 2009

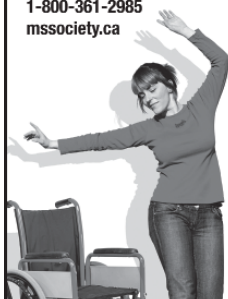
## Details coming soon!

Be part of something monumental. Funded largely by the MS Society, Canadian researchers have brought the cure for MS within reach. Let's take this last step together.

## endMS

May is MS Awareness Month

1-800-361-2985  
mssociety.ca



**MS**  
Multiple Sclerosis  
Society of Canada

To hear an audio presentation of our recent workshop called

## Practical Emergency Preparedness Information for People with Disabilities/ Special Needs

please visit [www.mssociety.ca/toronto/elibrary.htm](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto/elibrary.htm)

## Event Registration

If you would like to register for an event, please contact the chapter by telephone, e-mail or by using our online form.

 **Telephone**

416-922-6600 x.2501

 **E-mail**

[torontoevents@mssociety.ca](mailto:torontoevents@mssociety.ca)

 **Online**

[www.mssociety.ca/toronto](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto)  
(Click on "Events")

## Support Groups

12 Step MS Support Group

The CHAT ROOM: For Women with MS

Family Support Group

East End Women's Wellness Group

Etobicoke MS Group:

VIVA (*Persons with MS and family members*)

## Start-up Support Groups

GLAMS (*Gay and lesbian*)

Iranian Support Group

Downtown Group

◀ *Story continued from page 1*

## Lessons learned...

Lesson: Keep ice packs in the freezer and a cooler ready to go for refrigerated medication, food and drink or infant milk/formula. Our son needs drink with his medication and we wanted to keep everyone hydrated, so I grabbed milk, juice and water for the cooler.

Lesson: Have bags readily available. We had reusable bags to fill with special spoons and drink containers, bibs and wipes, as well as large Ziploc bags for clothing and other items.

Lesson: Keep the gas tank filled and the vehicle ready. We were lucky to have gas. Many families, including one with a disabled child, had vehicles trapped in damaged garages.

Lesson: Make sure your caregivers are aware of your emergency preparations. We cancelled a plan to go away that weekend. If we'd gone, our caregiver would have had to deal with the emergency alone.

Lesson: How will you keep everyone occupied, especially children? What will keep them calm away from their environment, maybe for days? Before we walked out the door, I grabbed a portable DVD player and DVDs, which helped a lot.

Lesson: If time allows, secure windows and doors. My husband closed the windows, fearing toxic fumes, which also ended up helping protect our home from looters.

Lesson: Have flashlights and a backup power supply. At first we stumbled around in the dark, but once we found our backup power supply, everything went smoothly.

Lesson: Keep kids calm but aware. Neither child woke up after the blast, so I only woke them at the last minute. I told them we were on an adventure and together and safe, which helped keep their mindset positive.

Lesson: Have several places to go. Keep accessible the contact information of hotels that are not too far or too close and family or friends you may be able to rely on. Normally, in the event of emergency we rely on nearby family, but they were also affected, so we were all at a loss of where to go. We ended up at a hotel. Read the whole story at [www.thespeciallife.com](http://www.thespeciallife.com). ♦

A round of applause please...

for Toronto Chapter  
volunteers!

Call Julie to ask  
about current  
opportunities  
416-967-3046



**MS can feel like an obstacle...  
we can help you clear the way**

- ♦ Information & referrals ♦ Equipment funding & loans
- ♦ Subsidies for home cleaning & incontinence supplies
- ♦ Advocacy ♦ Education & social events ♦ Support groups



MS Society, Toronto Chapter  
416-922-6065

[toronto@mssociety.ca](mailto:toronto@mssociety.ca)

[www.mssociety.ca/toronto](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto)



**Special Report****Best wishes and a warm welcome**

Lisa Landriault, manager of funding programs at the Toronto Chapter, has gone on parental leave. Lisa and her husband Dan have adopted a happy and healthy one-year-old boy named Xavier Cameron Landriault. Lisa is scheduled to return from her leave in January 2010.



*Lisa and Xavier*



*Nancy*

Taking over for Lisa, we welcome Nancy Torrance, a name that may be familiar to some of our members as Nancy previously worked in this role from 1996 to 2001. She has also worked with the MS Society, Ontario Division as an equipment program coordinator.

We wish both Lisa and Nancy the best in their new roles! ♦



**Thank you to  
A Budget for  
helping the  
Toronto Chapter  
to provide air  
conditioners to  
members for  
more than  
15 years.**

**416-703-0571**

## Resources

**Emergency Management  
Ontario (EMO)**  
1-888-795-7635  
www.emergency  
managementontario.ca  
(no spaces in web address)

**Office of Emergency  
Management (OEM)**  
City of Toronto  
www.toronto.ca/oem

**Community Care Access  
Centres (CCAC)**  
416-310-CCAC (2222)  
www.310CCAC.ca

**Access Toronto**  
(General Inquiries)  
416-338-0338  
www.toronto.ca/  
accesstoronto

**Enbridge Gas**  
Emergency line  
1-866-763-5427

**Union Gas**  
Emergency Line  
1-877-969-0999

**Toronto Police Service**  
416-808-2222  
(Non-emergency)

**Toronto Hydro**  
14 Carlton St.  
416-542-3100  
www.torontohydro.com

**Distress Centres of Toronto**  
416-408-HELP (4357)  
www.torontodistress  
centre.com  
(no spaces in web address)

**Toronto Transit Commission**  
416-393-INFO  
www.ttc.ca

## Donations

**Feb-16-09 to April-15-09**

**Memberships**

\$1,953

**Donations, General**

\$2,445

**Commemorative Giving**

\$10,284

**Gifts in Kind**

\$2,400

**United Way Toronto,**

**Donor's Choice**

\$91,848

**Bequest**

\$222

### Thank you donors!

Your contributions help to provide services specific to the needs of individuals and families, including educational, social and financial programs.

### A reminder

If you would like to donate to Toronto Chapter programs & services, please make your cheque payable to:

Toronto Chapter, MS Society

and address it to the attention of Patricia Cole. Thank you!

## Special Report

# Your emergency kit checklist

- Flashlight and batteries
- Radio and batteries or crank radio
- Spare batteries (for radio, flashlight, assistive devices, etc.)
- First-aid kit
- Telephone that can work during a power disruption
- Candles and matches/lighter
- Extra car keys and cash
- Important papers (identification)
- Non-perishable food and bottled water
- Manual can opener
- Clothing and footwear
- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Toilet paper and other personal items
- Medication
- MedicAlert® bracelet or identification
- Backpack/duffle bag
- Whistle (to attract attention, if needed)

*From the Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities/ Special Needs.*

*(Visit [www.emergencymanagementontario.com](http://www.emergencymanagementontario.com), click on "People with Disabilities/Special Needs").*

### Commemorative Giving

The gift that helps to improve the quality of life for people with MS

**Birthdays ♦ Anniversaries  
♦ Memoriams ♦ Bar  
mitzvahs & bat mitzvahs ♦  
Wedding favours**

Contact Patricia Cole at 416-967-3036  
or [patricia.cole@mssociety.ca](mailto:patricia.cole@mssociety.ca), or visit  
[mssociety.ca/toronto/help.htm](http://mssociety.ca/toronto/help.htm)



220 Lesmill Road  
Toronto, Ontario, M3B 2T5  
Phone: 416.444.4470  
[www.abilityhealthcare.ca](http://www.abilityhealthcare.ca)  
[info@abilityhealthcare.ca](mailto:info@abilityhealthcare.ca)

*Special Report***Meet the board: Michael Binder***Michael Binder*

Over the past four years, Michael Binder, along with his wife Jackie and his sister Caley, have raised around \$40,000 for the MS Walk. But Michael decided that he still wanted to do more. So he applied to the Toronto Chapter's board of directors.

"I wanted to get more involved from a volunteer perspective, so I thought sitting on the board would be a good way to have a say in how the MS Society works and see the inner workings of it," he says.

Michael's mother was diagnosed with MS about 15 years ago, which is his main motivation for being involved with the MS Society.

Michael holds an Honours BA in Economics from the University of Western Ontario, as well as a Masters of Science in Real Estate Development from Columbia University.

Since completing his education he has worked at CIBC in World Markets and has most recently been working at Parallax Investment Corp. sourcing new real estate opportunities.

Michael brings his youthful perspective to the board, he says, as well as a financial perspective. Over time, Michael hopes to be more involved with the financial aspects of the chapter board.

In his spare time, Michael says he is an avid sports fan and skiing is a new love for him. ♦

## Toronto Chapter's Programs & Services

### Education, Information & Referral

- Bimonthly newsletter, literature, resource room and a website
- Education workshops and specialized courses including MS 101

### Equipment Loans & Equipment Funding

### Subsidies for Home Help & Incontinence Supplies

### Supportive Counselling & Support Groups

### Recreation Programs

### Volunteer Services

### Social Action & Advocacy

[www.mssociety.ca/toronto](http://www.mssociety.ca/toronto)

## Help's Here!™

### Resources for Seniors & Caregivers

Help is out there! It's just finding it?  
Reach for the **Help's Here!** resource guide

**A FREE DIRECTORY OF RESOURCES IN THE GTA  
FOR SENIORS & CAREGIVERS**

12 distinct chapters with helpful information,  
telephone numbers, tips and editorial.

For locations to pick up your free copy visit  
[www.HelpsHere.com](http://www.HelpsHere.com) or call 416-423-6547

## Members Helping Members

# Emergency numbers can help you

by Brent Cowell

Dear Brent,

*My mother has MS and lives on her own. Unfortunately, I have had to relocate for work and am too far to get to her quickly in an emergency. How can I help her if the unthinkable happens?*

*Signed,  
Worried About Mom*

Dear W.A.M.,

Recently, I was in a similar situation as the one you are fearing. It was an unusually cold day in January. A watermain break flooded a hydro vault, shorting out a neighbourhood, some areas for 24 hours, including my friend's apartment building. I felt helpless in the situation, not being able to jump in a car or walk to help her out.

Her ninth floor unit had no working elevators, no phones, no radio and no power to recharge the wheelchair that gives her some freedom from a disability.

If you still have access to electricity, emergency numbers may be given out on the radio. On my radio, I heard a phone number given out for Community Program Services. I called and spoke to a helpful worker named Lilly.

If you have access, the Internet is another option to locate the appropriate emergency numbers in a hurry.

If you have no access to electricity, you can try to call Toronto's general Access Toronto line at 416-338-0338. This number is in service from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., excluding some holidays. ([www.toronto.ca/accesstoronto](http://www.toronto.ca/accesstoronto)).

In my case, the story ends well. I explained my friend's situation and her location to Lilly. Five minutes later Lilly called me back personally and reported that my friend was okay and was being cared for. I could then lay down and enjoy the cold under my blanket.

Good luck, and make sure your mom has plenty of provisions on hand, just in case. ♦

## MS Toronto

Chair: Colin Rickards  
Co-Acting Executive Directors:  
Angela Rodriguez  
Lynn Laccohee  
Editor: Julie Crljen

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### MS Society of Canada Mission

To be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life.

### Toronto Chapter Vision

To maximize the quality of life for persons with MS and their support network living in Toronto Chapter's geographic boundaries.

The opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of MS Toronto and of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. Articles on products and services are for information only and are not meant to be seen as endorsements.



The Toronto Chapter, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada is a United Way member agency.

Would you like to contribute to MS Toronto? Please contact Julie at 416-967-3046 or [julie.crljen@mssociety.ca](mailto:julie.crljen@mssociety.ca)