

TERROR ON LI

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Dealing with home invasion requires calm



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Honestly, what could be scarier than this?

You're inside your home. An armed intruder comes through a window or a door. A thousand frantic questions go racing through your head.

Does the bad guy know I'm in here? Should I pretend to be asleep? Should I scream at the top of my lungs? How can I get to a telephone? What do I do if he comes in the room? And how do I protect my loved ones who are somewhere else in the house?

For reasons no one's quite sure of, we seem to be experiencing a wave of people bursting into other peoples' homes — on Long Island and elsewhere. Nassau police, responding to the spike, warned recently of a "transient criminal group" engaged in home invasions. Bellport Mayor Frank C. Trotta felt compelled to write village residents reminding them, "We don't live in a world by ourselves."

A 16-year-old New Hyde Park girl woke up early yesterday morning to find a man in her basement bedroom. Thankfully, he ran when she woke up and alerted her parents.

The Basile sisters weren't so fortunate.

Suffolk homicide detectives are still scratching their heads over what happened inside their Brentwood home on March 10.

An intruder burst in while the sisters were sleeping, going from room to room, bludgeoning them in their beds. Kristina, 28, was killed. Jessica, 26, was knocked unconscious and blinded in one eye. Only Diana escaped serious physical harm, although of course her life will never be the same.

Some rough justice was achieved in Nassau County Court yesterday. Judge Jerald Carter sentenced Tyreek Williams to 21 years in prison for a home-invasion shootout on West End Avenue in Inwood. Ten-year-old John Henry Romano was at the house for a sleepover when an intruder forced his way in. The boy was blinded in one eye and partially paralyzed when the bullets began to fly.

"John Henry," the judge said

as he handed down the sentence, "I'm sorry that this happened to you. I hope and pray that you will go on with your life to the best of your ability."

It was a nice touch.

But still. It doesn't answer the question: What should you or I do if we're next? At the worst possible moment, how can any of us expect to be smart?

In a single short column, it's impossible to map out every imaginable home-invasion scenario. But Steve Bramberg agreed yesterday to share some of his expertise.

Bramberg, who lives in Sea Cliff and is a black belt in jujitsu, teaches his Stand Tall Seminars at schools, companies and community groups around the New York area. In a 4- to 6-hour course, he shows students various techniques for shrewdly avoiding trouble — and confronting it effectively when there is no other choice.

Bramberg's no hothead. "It's almost always better to avoid than to fight," he said. He doesn't recommend that most people keep guns in their homes. The first defense to a home-invasion burglary, he said, is keeping the bad guy outside.

"Solid doors, strong locks, a good alarm system, a dog — you're always better off trying to make sure the person doesn't get in," he said.

But if that fails? "You have to be prepared," Bramberg said.

Bramberg said he always recommends keeping a cell phone by the bed. "No one can cut the wires," he said. Internal deadbolts also make sense.

"And if the intruder is in another part of the house, make noise or turn on the lights," he said. "Scare them away."

It is only after everything else fails that any direct, personal confrontation should occur.

Bramberg teaches his students to use familiar household items — pens, a book, an ashtray, a fire extinguisher — to come out ahead in a physical encounter. Mainly, what he teaches them is how to stay calm.

"Most people freeze and they are just totally helpless," he said. "You may have 60 seconds maximum to react. That's what we're training for. To stay in the moment. To stay clam. To avoid what can be avoided. To be prepared for whatever happens next. To have — and to execute — a sensible plan."