

## Contact in case of emergency

I was at the doctor's recently and as usual it was the same old bullshit. Having an appointment means nothing; it's just a matter of when you sign up on their little sheet on the front desk. Of course the young woman at the front desk is obnoxiously cheery and the first thing out of her mouth is always about your insurance, or how are you going to pay for this? Then you wait in the waiting room, then you wait in the little isolation cubicle, then you talk to another obnoxiously cheery nurse, then you wait some more, then the obnoxiously cheery doctor comes in and asks you to repeat what you already told the girl at the front desk and told the cheery nurse. He then makes light patter for five minutes and then prescribes drugs (usually ones that the suppliers who took him to lunch recommend), or refers you to a specialist, or if it takes more than five minutes asks you to schedule another appointment. But that's not what got me thinking; all that is old hat. The line in the paperwork that got me thinking is an old one, Who to contact in case of emergency? Ever since I was a kid I've always written in my father's name. When you're in your teens and twenties and bouncing around, your parents are your anchor and home base. Besides, they often know best (whether to pull the plug or not), and are usually good for the bill if their darling is in trouble. But as you get older and older, are your parents still the ones to contact in case of emergency? I remember when I was twenty-one and I got busted for pot and I called my parents; that was one of the worst decisions I ever made. So now I'm fifty-five, do I still write in my father's name on the medical forms? My father is eighty-five and a bit confused these days. When you have parents that old you realize that they shouldn't be upset. As my mother once said, write often; just don't write any bad news. You know your parents are really getting old when they start asking *you* for advice. Now that's scary. But if you don't write down your parents' names as those to contact in an emergency, who do you write down? My wife has the same last name and phone number and I don't know if they want to contact someone at the same house. Otherwise, who do you put down, your next door neighbor?, your old college buddy?, your ex-wife, a sibling, cousin, etc? How many of you would ask your neighbors for help in an emergency? It seems as if either I have moved in recently or the neighbors have. Rather than an emergency life line, I'm usually happy if the neighbors and I can practice a "live and let live" philosophy.

Let's take it down a notch. Recently I did move, and still poor at fifty-five I couldn't afford to hire professional movers. So I rented a truck and had to round up a team of friends to help me move. This used to be fun in college but fear of breaking your back takes all the fun out of it. Now the question is not a medical emergency but who is a good enough friend to help you move all of your shit? Remember the Seinfeld episode when Keith Hernandez asked Jerry to help him move? Jerry was very uncomfortable because their relationship hadn't progressed that far. Apparently, helping someone move implies a very close personal relationship, and for someone my age it also means putting their back at risk too. Eventually it came down to a few loyal friends and a team of my teenage daughter's friends whom I paid. As you go through life though you learn that there are friends and there are friends. In other words there are all levels of friendship and it's painful to realize that what you consider a friendship other people consider an acquaintance. When a friend asks for my help I'm honored and glad to be of assistance. But when you need to ask for a favor and you hear that little hesitation on the other end

of the phone , it's crushing. Like the song "Imagine", I imagine a world where people answer your phone calls, remember what you told them the last time, call you first once in awhile instead of the other way around, and drop by to visit for no good reason. Are people too busy protecting themselves or don't they really want to have a close friendship? Well, I can't complain, some friends did come through for the move, but for the time being I'll keep putting my father's name on the medical forms.