

This is a blog post from the Web site Dognobit.com. As you will see it was written by Susi and addresses some good points that all of us should take into consideration. We obtained permission to reprint this in our newsletter as a service to all of our members.

Will You Be Coming Home to Your Dogs Tonight?

by [Susi](#) on August 13, 2013



[dreamstime.com](#)

Had he died, mine would have been the last face he ever saw. People don't tend to die in bicycle accidents, however, when a car isn't involved. They tend to break themselves into pieces. This man had broken his nose. Also his neck.



He'd ridden past me, which is to say he was going too fast for the path we were on. He'd negotiated one curve, but physics was against him as he approached the second too quickly and it was here his bicycle took over. As he lost control, his handlebars wobbled sideways – gently at first, then wildly. I'm not sure what launched the man and his bicycle into space, but it was enough to clear a three foot rock wall lining the bicycle path. He landed on the hillside awkwardly and wailed an ear deafening, otherworldly sound I'll never forget.

He was far louder than I'd been when I wrecked on the same path three years before. But then, I was unconscious.

By the time I rode up to the man a moment later, I had my cell phone out, but as I called 911, I was pretty sure he wouldn't be going home that night. I hadn't gone home the night of my accident, either.

I wondered if he had someone waiting for him at home.

I wondered if he had pets.

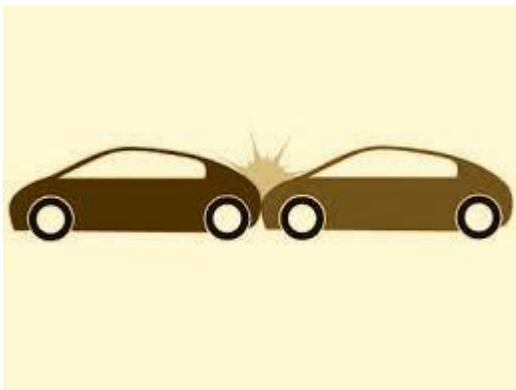
In *my* accident, both my husband and I were injured, he with broken ribs, a broken clavicle, a punctured lung and torn rotator cuff, I with a concussion and small brain bleed (which, my dogs say, explains everything over the last three years). We'd been lucky in that my husband remained alert and was able to communicate with paramedics, as well as call our daughter. She took charge and split her time between caring for her wild and crazy parents and our pets.

But what if I'd been alone when I had the accident? What if I had *lived* alone? Who would have known that I had dogs and a rabbit at home, let alone cared for them?

Today I write *not* about making long-term provisions for your animals, but about the first 24 hours after you're incapacitated (God forbid). Right now, I'm asking you what happens if you don't go home tonight? I ask because I can promise you that as I got on my road bike that morning, it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be coming back. I'm pretty sure that a broken neck wasn't in the plans for the chap whose accident I witnessed, either.

I know of people who think they have things "covered" because they have a note on their refrigerator door with instructions on how to care for their pets. That's great if they also have tattooed on their forehead, "I have pets at home" along with an address and a door key hanging from an ear. Without either, how is anyone to know they have pets, and how is anyone to get into the house to care for them?

I've learned a few things since my accident and if nothing else, I hope to prod you into thinking about a subject no one likes to think about: What if you don't make it home tonight?



A quick run to the store may take longer than we think

Before the day is over, make sure your cell phone has an ICE entry on your call list. I.C.E. stands for "in case of emergency" and should include the phone numbers of at least two people who have access to your home and are comfortable caring for your pets. EMTs, firefighters and emergency room personnel know to look for this I.C.E. entry on cell phones, and if you're unconscious, it may be the only way your friends, family, or even a neighbor is notified and your pets cared for.

If your ICE contacts can't be reached, if you live alone, have no friends or family, or are new in town, it's not a bad idea to find a professional pet sitting service *before* you need one, which, if all else fails, can at least get to your pets immediately until someone is found to fill in. Find a service with which you're comfortable and tell them that you'd like to list them as a contact on your ICE list. Make sure the other people you have listed as contacts are aware of the service just in case they can't care for your pets and can contact them on your behalf. Try to find someone who's certified with NAPPS ([National Association of Professional Pet sitters](#)).

Never assume that the person to whom you've given a house key can get to your home quickly, or even that this same person will be the one to get to your pets first. A key should be hidden somewhere accessible on the outside of your home and your contacts advised of its location, but realize that the only available person might be a neighbor whom your ICE contacts should know how to reach. In a perfect world, the first person to get to your pets will be someone you trust, but be mindful that it might also be a complete stranger. If you elect to use a professional service, be aware that some of them won't use a "hide-a-key" for liability reasons. Use a bonded service that will keep a copy of your key on file.

Many people are starting to carry a personal "thumb," or flash drive like the [Sony Micro Vault Thumb Drive](#) containing ICE information, health alerts and pet care instructions. It comes with a soft shell carrying case that can be attached to key chains or hung around one's neck. Other people prefer something like the [MedicTag](#) that **looks** more like an emergency device and may be easier to spot by medical personnel. My own preference is the [Road ID](#), a wrist band with color and tag options. [There's even one for dogs!](#)



When I'm riding my bike, my Road ID is the most important piece of equipment I carry that doesn't have moving parts

As for your pets, every time you leave the house you should consider their "what ifs" as well. Dogs can go awhile without food, but **they need water**. It's never a bad idea to have a water system like [this](#) in the dog area, but even that is pointless if you keep your dogs crated when you're out of the house. There are pros and cons to crating dogs during your absences, but if you do crate them, it's especially important that you carry ICE contact information and leave a way for someone to get into the house to let them out.

There are a lot of clever ways to [hide a key](#), but in addition to the key itself there should be a slip of paper indicating **where** pet instructions can be found. Those instructions should include common sense information:

- A picture of each pet with his or her name below;
- Food – where it's kept, how much is given and how often pets are fed;
- Medications;
- Veterinarian contact information (as well as the name and number of an emergency clinic in case your regular veterinarian isn't available), and **a signed and dated note giving permission for the pet sitter to take your pet to your veterinarian in an emergency;**
- Where leashes can be found;
- Mention your dog's favorite hiding place in the house. Dogs who feel stress, detect change, or are frightened of a stranger will often hide. Where will that be?
- What words do you use to tell the dogs it's time for a potty break, to go for a walk, or get into their crates? Little things are helpful not only to the person helping your pets, but also to maintain some normalcy for the pets.

Once help arrives, remember that this person may be a stranger to your dogs. Depending upon the dog(s), leaving dog treats near the door enables someone to “bribe” their way into a dog's trust, or at least break the ice.

No one plans to have an accident, and few of us leave our homes thinking we won't be coming back, especially if it's a quick run to the store – or a bike ride. Take a few minutes to think about your pets' first 24 hours without you. In a future article, I'll be writing about longer term scenarios.

As to the man whose accident I'd witnessed, he was discharged the following day by the VA Hospital in Denver. He called me several times over the coming months, hungry for details of what I'd seen as he tried to understand what had happened to him. He'd been told that if he had broken his neck in a place even a fraction of a centimeter away from where it did break, he would have been paralyzed. It was a life altering event for him, and I think about him every time I get on a bike.

UPDATE – 8/19/13: Response to this article has been, to say the least, overwhelming, and I've been humbled by the number of reprint requests and notes expressing gratitude for having written it. The most important comments, however, have come from medical and emergency personnel who've written to suggest I update my information which I'm happy to do now.

iPhone Screenshots



The Acadian I.C.E App indicates an emergency contact number even if your phone is locked

Several readers wrote to advise me that ICE cell phone listings are problematic these days because of password protection. While there are “tricks” to get around cell phone passwords, emergency response personnel don’t have the time to fiddle around with “tricks” while they’re trying to save your life. **The most sensible solution is to create an emergency contact banner for your phone’s home screen or lock screen so that even if you’re unable to communicate, authorities can contact your emergency contact even if your phone is locked.** There are [many apps](#) to consider, including [Acadia’s free iPhone app](#), [the Cadence ICE app](#) for Droids and iPhones, and [this](#) one from Google Apps for Droids, but a simple search using the phrase, “ICE lock screen app” either through your iPhone’s App Store, your Droid’s Android Market, or even using a Google search on your computer will bring up lots of options. Find the best one for yourself, **but find one** if your phone is password protected or locked.

If you’re the creative sort undaunted by “techie” things, consider making your own home or lock screen with your ICE numbers on it by looking at [this](#) You Tube video.

A few people from the emergency medical profession wrote to explain that virtually the first thing *they* do in an emergency is to look for a victim's identification. Keeping ICE information on a slip of paper wrapped around, say, a driver's license, they say, will be seen by authorities long before they'll look for ICE numbers on a cell phone. To be safe, it's not a bad idea to do this **and** have an emergency contact banner for your phone's home screen or lock screen.

My final update comes from a reader who keeps ICE information on her dogs' crates in the car just in case of a vehicular accident. And to that end, are your dogs' microchipped? I've heard too many stories of dogs that survived a car accident but got loose and were hit by other cars – or lost, altogether.

Writing about this puts me in a somber mood, but the subject is too important to avoid. I know you love your pets. Now do something to protect them if you don't come home tonight.

- See more at: <http://dogknobit.com/2013/08/13/will-you-be-coming-home-to-your-dogs-tonight/#sthash.5tVZgx8o.dpuf>