

“It’ll never
happen
to me!”

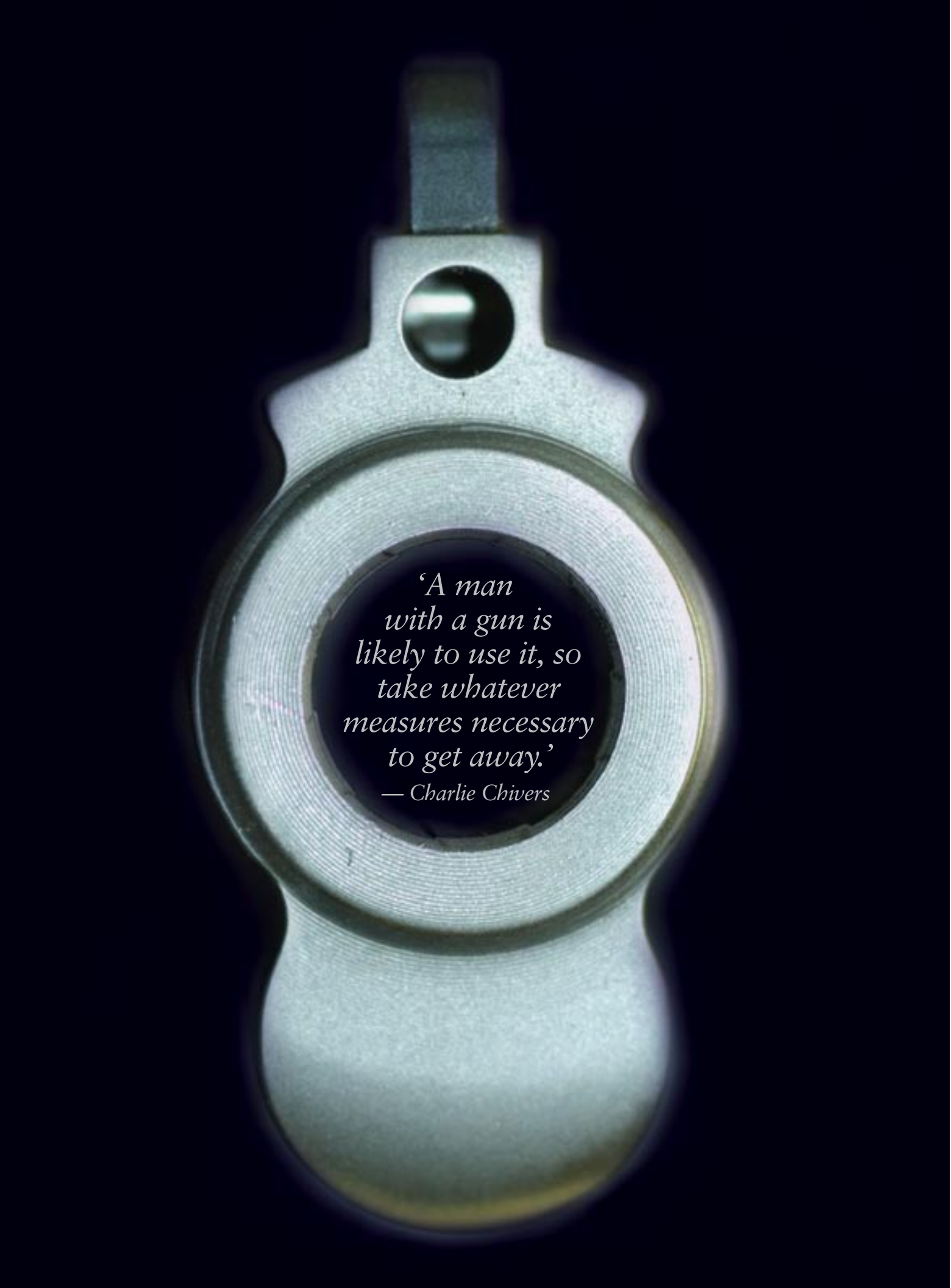
*Safety outside the home begins
with parental precautions*

By John W. Kennedy

As a young child, Cassie Chivers had been reminded periodically about safety precautions while out of the house; she was warned not to walk anywhere alone and to be aware of her surroundings.

But she took the parental counsel more seriously on February 6, 2004, the day Florida investigators identified the body of 11-year-old Carlie Brucia. Five days earlier, a video surveillance camera at a Sarasota car wash captured Carlie’s abduction. The scene of Carlie walking by the business as a shortcut home from a friend’s house had been beamed on TV stations around the country. Joseph P. Smith, a 37-year-old father of three, is scheduled to go on trial in November for her murder.

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*'A man
with a gun is
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to get away.'*

— Charlie Chivers

“It’ll never happen to me!”

Cassie Chivers, with her father, Charlie, is now 15.

‘I knew that God was right there and that His angels were all

When police found Carlie’s body, Charlie and Debbie Chivers were hosting a retreat at a Madison, Wis., hotel for Special Touch, the ministry they founded to assist people with disabilities. Watching the haunting TV image prompted Cassie — whose 7-year-old sister is also named Carley — to ask her dad again what to do if a

man ever put a gun to her head. “He told me to kick, scream and fight,” Cassie recalls. “I’d heard it before, but the Carlie case gave it a new urgency.”



Sixth-grader Carlie Brucia (with her father, Joe) was murdered last year.

Charlie Chivers believes God inspired Cassie to ask the question. That very day, with the conversation fresh in Cassie’s mind, a man did hold a gun to her temple.

James D. Perry entered the hotel elevator just after Cassie did. He offered some small talk about the weather. As the elevator opened

on the second floor, Perry motioned for Cassie to exit first. The next thing Cassie knew, Perry’s hand covered her mouth as he pulled her to him, waving a pistol. “If you scream, I’ll blow your

brains out,” he warned.

The ordeal seemed surreal to Cassie. “A 13-year-old girl doesn’t think something like this is going to happen to her,” she says.

Perry dragged Cassie into a vacant stairwell.

Struggling for breath, Cassie pried Perry’s fingers from her mouth and prayed audibly, “Jesus, I love You.”

Her captor told her to shut up, and again threatened to kill her if she kept praying.

After reaching the ground floor, Perry violently pulled Cassie into an alley, where police believe he planned to rape her.

Still, Cassie had the presence of mind to remember her father’s advice: A man

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around me.’ — Cassie Chivers

with a gun is likely to use it, so take whatever measures necessary to get away.

Cassie spotted friends about 100 feet away down the alley. She broke free and screamed. Her abductor fled.

Cassie says God’s peace enabled her to remain calm.

“A lot of teenage kids don’t know if God is really listening,” Cassie says. “I knew that God was right there and that His angels were all around me.”

Parents are living in an age when watchfulness must begin on the maternity ward. Infant abductions are rare, but they are an indication of the potential dangers a child may face growing up.

According to the U.S. Justice Department, 58,000 children are kidnapped annually in nonfamily situations, most for sexual purposes. About 50 of those children are murdered, but the likelier outcome is being sexually assaulted and then released. Those traumatic scars can last a lifetime.

Taking preventative measures can thwart an abduction. The biggest risk factor, according to Nancy McBride, national safety director of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, is a youngster left improperly supervised without adequate safety skills.

“The onus for the safety of children — especially young children — belongs squarely on the shoulders of parents, guardians or trusted adults in the lives of those children,” McBride says. “If there isn’t a safety net in place to know what to do in a situation, it makes a child more vulnerable to an advance from a predator.”

Although there is a new breed of aggressive sexual offenders who boldly and irrationally attack in public, the typical adult who exploits children is difficult to pinpoint. It can be someone who appears benign, such as a coach or music teacher, with regular access to children.

“It’s important for parents to know who these adults are and not just trust

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“It’ll never happen to me!”

‘He always wants to know where I’m going. Overprotective parents love their kids.’

— *Cassie Chivers*

them because they’re doing an after-school activity,” McBride says.

Most perpetrators are adults who have given the child special attention in the past. A “bad” person can’t be spotted by appearance. He may be good looking, smile broadly and dress well.

Parents must periodically review rules and parameters for their children’s safety, according to McBride.

Having a friend along is certainly safer than being alone, but even two children are no match for an adult male attacker. And never send a small child alone into a public restroom.

“Offenders are looking for access and opportunity — and this gives them both,” McBride says.

Parents should keep an updated, candid photo in their wallet or purse in case their child becomes lost. They also should be aware of what their child is wearing when leaving the house in case a search is necessary.

McBride cautions parents to become acquainted with the parents of their child’s friends before allowing a visit to that home. If something is going on in the house that makes the child feel unsafe — such as the adult watching a pornographic movie — the child should immediately get out.

“A child can’t be afraid to be impolite,” McBride says. “It’s a tough lesson for kids to learn because we teach them to be polite, to be helpful, to respect authority. But we also must teach them that their safety is more important, and those rules don’t apply if they’re in trouble.”

McBride says modeling behavior is crucial, because kids don’t take mere lecturing to heart. Parents need to role-play with their children in what-if scenarios that get the point across. Such trick situations include a stranger driving up in a car and asking directions or asking for help to find a lost pet.

“The child needs to comprehend that if an adult needs to get someplace he isn’t going to ask a child how to get there,” McBride says. “And there is no puppy to be found off in the bushes.”

However, McBride warns parents to

remove “stranger danger” terminology from their lingo.

“It’s an ineffective message,” she says. “Children don’t grasp it and adults don’t practice it.” Parents break the rule all the time, talking to everyone from the clerk in the checkout line to the person in the next seat at the ballpark.

Children fearful of all adults won’t seek help when they are in danger. For example, in June 11-year-old Brennan Hawkins got lost at a Boy Scout camp in the Utah mountains. Having been taught by his family to avoid strangers, he eluded rescuers for four days because he feared they would harm him.

McBride advises parents to teach children that they can trust adults such as a police officer in uniform or a mother with children in tow.

Once they reach the teenage years many young people let down their guard. McBride tells of a recent undercover experiment her organization, which is based in West Palm Beach, Fla., conducted on a beach. A man with a clipboard individually approached half a dozen youths, ages 13 to 16, claiming he was from MTV and looking for new talent. All six teens walked away alone with the man.

“The kids went with him because he offered them something they wanted, even though they didn’t feel right about it,” McBride says. “Teenagers are sometimes at greater risk than younger children.”

Based on Cassie Chivers’ description of her attacker, police later connected Perry to a series of sexual assaults. Last November, Perry was sentenced to 375 years in prison.

Cassie, who says her faith in Christ allowed her to heal emotionally from the ordeal, is grateful for her father’s vigilance. “He always wants to know where I’m going,” she says. “Overprotective parents love their kids.”

Charlie is glad he had the talk that day last year. “It was embarrassing for me as a dad to admit to my daughter that there are men out there who have very impure thoughts,” Charlie says.

"But dads need to talk to their children about the evil intentions of some men."

"Never assume that it won't happen to you," Cassie says. ■

John W. Kennedy is news editor of Today's Pentecostal Evangel.

E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.

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A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
Romans 3:10,23
(See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16
(See John 14:6.)

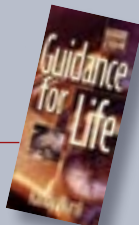
Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12
(See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9
(See verse 10.)

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