

## **Point of Egress for Emergency Evacuation on Upper French River**

by Geordie Hendrie

In July 2019, I was at the cottage with my wife Janet and fell from an extension ladder while working on the roof of the cottage (there are a myriad of precautionary messages I could insert here and believe me I heard them all after the fact but that is not the point of this story). In any event I sustained serious injuries to my left arm shattering both my elbow and wrist. The accident rendered me immobile and it was clear that I was going to need help getting transported to medical assistance.

Now comes the point of what we really wanted to share with our fellow cottagers. Given the challenge we were in, the actions that Janet took were very important in how the situation got dealt with and resolved. The first thing she did was to get in touch with our neighbor Todd Thomas at Sandy Haven Camp who arranged for his father Howie to get over to our place. This proved important as once Howie arrived, followed by Earl Webster, it gave Janet the opportunity to deal with EMS while I had friendly faces to try to help keep me calm.

The second thing she did, immediately after calling Todd, was to call 911 which began the process of coordinating my rescue and recovery. It turned out to not be a straight forward process and involved a fair amount of back and forth (complicated by the fact that we had problems with our landline at the time resulting in Janet getting disconnected a number of times) with the EMS personnel. That said, the EMS contact, whom was very helpful, began to work on a solution for evacuating me. The key question EMS had was, where were we located and whether or not a helicopter could land anywhere near us? Janet wasn't able to answer re a suitable landing site but fortunately recalled that a number of years earlier a small helicopter being used by Hydro One landed on the rock at the shore of our property (those of you familiar with our cottage will know what I am talking about). This said it wasn't clear if an air Evac helicopter would be able to land at our place and there was nowhere else nearby that anyone was aware of that a helicopter could put down. Given the condition I was in EMS made the decision to send the helicopter and see if it would be able to land at our place. They also determined to send the Paramedic team from West Nipissing Fire and Rescue in Sturgeon Falls as a backup in the event that the helicopter was unable to land.

Janet provided the EMS contact person with our locator number WB 1890 and asked if they would like the GPS coordinates (we had these but somewhat strangely they didn't want them) as well as the description of our location which is at the mouth of Canoe Pass on the Sturgeon Falls side (some of you will remember that this is where The Lady of the Lake was and our cottage now sits).

Fast forward to the arrival of ORNGE some 45 minutes later, they were actually able to land on our rock ( it was necessary to clear the furniture ) and very fortunately for me began medical treatment and my evacuation – roughly 15 minutes later they were followed by the team from West Nipissing so I was now in doubly capable

hands. The decision was made to transport me by helicopter to Health Sciences North in Sudbury and the West Nipissing team took Janet across a very rough lake to our marina in Sturgeon Falls, after which she drove her car to join me at the hospital in Sudbury. The significance of this was that I was in the emergency room where care began immediately some 30 minutes after my leaving the cottage while Janet arrived 3 ½ hours after me having crossed a brutal lake and equally brutal traffic conditions – the point being that there was a significant time advantage gained, which in a crisis situation, can and was very important.

I then spent 3 days in the Sudbury hospital and received excellent care that was primarily focused on stabilizing me so that I could be transferred to St Michael's Hospital in Toronto to see an orthopedic surgeon who specialized in upper extremity trauma. I underwent reconstructive surgery 5 days after the accident and am pleased to report it was very successful and as I write this, the long process of recovery continues and goes well. We were able to get back up to the cottage some six weeks after the accident and while very limited in my activities and capabilities we did enjoy a little late summer/early fall time on the French and look forward to spending a good amount of time (I've climbed my last ladder) there this summer.

In concluding there are a few key points that should be underscored:

- 1) There is a point of egress for an air evacuation in the area in the event of a medical emergency (this was always a question for the UFCRA and I recall it being so when I was on the Board) and it happens to be from our cottage at the mouth of Canoe Pass.
- 2) The West Nipissing Fire and Rescue Service is also a very viable option for evacuation in the case of medical emergency.
- 3) EMS was excellent and provided critical support when it was really needed. The 911 number is the one to dial in case of emergency.
- 4) It is important to not only be able to describe where your property is located but also to have the locator number and the GPS coordinates at hand, written down by the telephone is a suggestion.
- 5) In the case of an emergency if at all possible get a neighbor on site to assist as focus and clarity in dealing with EMS is important and can't be underestimated.