

CareFlight news

Proudly sponsored by **NRMA**

Issue 49 | Autumn 2010

Ron's roof fall backs donations call

Because Ron Palmer is a professional roofer by trade his story is even more remarkable.

As he'd done during his 43 working years, Ron climbed a ladder to help a Kurnell neighbour clear leaves and water-test a gutter in Sydney's south in November. Then, with safety brackets temporarily unclipped as he was two metres from the ground, he was thrown off balance when a burst of water from a hose hit him in the face.

The ladder spun and Ron fell, hitting his head on a wrought iron railing and he initially blacked out. A neighbour called 000 while his son tried to make Ron comfortable and stop the bleeding.

"It all happened so quickly, I wondered what on earth had happened," Ron recalled. "An ambulance arrived and then the police arrived with the NRMA CareFlight crew, incredibly professional with all their gear."

With support from Police, the helicopter had landed in the grounds of the nearby Kurnell Primary School to allow the NRMA CareFlight trauma doctor to team with ambulance paramedics treating Ron.

"Fifteen minutes later, after working on the bleeding, protecting my neck and spine with a brace and giving me pain relief, we were in the air. At that point, I wasn't afraid; I knew I was in the very best hands," Ron said.

"I spent two weeks in St George Hospital. Apart from a deep cut on my forehead, I broke my wrist in three places, fractured my shoulder blade and ribs and shattered many of the bones in my face.

"I'm still recuperating. But I was lucky. I could so easily have become a paraplegic - the medical team said it was a razor blade's width away.

"I spent my time in hospital thinking about how I could pass on my experience to others. And about my rescuers."

It's why Ron says: "If it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone. It's why I ask everyone to dip into their pocket a little bit. You never know when you're going to need them."

And it's why he is supporting CareFlight's autumn fundraising appeal in 2010. Ron knows first-hand the training and skill of NRMA CareFlight teams and how every (tax-deductible) donation will help save future lives. ✕



The NRMA CareFlight doctor works with ambulance paramedics in preparing to fly injured roofer Ron Palmer to hospital from Kurnell.

Ladder safety... step by step

Over 3,500 Australians are injured in falls from ladders each year. Here are some simple precautions which may help you avoid a serious injury, a trip to the hospital - or worse.

Getting ready

- Read the safety warnings on ladders.
- Always inspect your ladder.
- Wear enclosed, non-slip footwear.
- Check the non-slip feet on your ladder.
- Check the rungs to make sure they are not slippery.

Setting up

- Don't set your ladder up near a doorway. If you have to, ensure the door is locked or blocked.
- Be careful of powerlines or overhead electrical wiring.
- Never use the ladder on your own.
- Set your ladder up so that it extends at least a metre beyond the support it's resting against.
- Place the ladder on dry, firm, level ground. Use a solid board or base if necessary.

- Secure the top of an extension ladder into position before starting work.
- Set at a slope of approximately four in one, ie for every metre in height the ladder should extend out at the base by about 250mm.

On the ladder

- Never 'walk' your ladder when you're on it.
- When climbing, always face the ladder.
- Keep your body centred on the ladder.
- Work within an arm's length of the ladder, and never reach out too far.
- Only climb as far as the second step from the top of a step ladder or the third step from the top of a straight ladder.

Climbing down

- Never climb up or down while carrying something in your hands. Get someone else to pass it up, or use a tool belt.
- Have someone hold the ladder while you climb up and down.
- Never have more than one person on the ladder.

**We weep a river of tears.
Our doctor's heartfelt plea
- see centre pages.**

New Engineer Bear's debut

Here's the latest addition to our family of CareFlight Bears – the new-look Engineer Bear. Our helicopters carry out medical and rescue missions, often in difficult conditions, thanks to the untiring efforts of our aircraft engineers. Unlike our pilots, air crewmen and clinical teams, the exacting work of our engineers is unseen by the community – so when you buy one of our new bears you will help acknowledge the great work of our support team here at CareFlight.



Registered clubs donate

Our appreciation is extended to the following clubs which have supported CareFlight during the current financial year, via the CDSE scheme: Kiama Leagues Club, Moree & District Services Club, Nambucca Heads RSL & Ex-services Club, Narramine United Services Memorial Club, Pittwater RSL Club, The Richmond Club, Ryde-Eastwood Leagues Club, Tocumwal Golf Club, Tuncurry Bowling Club, Mudgee Soldiers Club, North Sydney Anzac Memorial Bowling Club, Armidale City Bowling Club, Blacktown Workers Club, City Tattersall's Club, Club Forster, Dooley's Lidcombe Catholic Club, Earlwood Ex-Servicemen's Club.

Sussex Inlet backs Choppers

Choppers for Charity Parade weekend is three days of fun-filled activities in support of NRMA CareFlight from Friday 26 to Sunday 28 February.

Friday kicks off with the Sussex Inlet Bowling Club Bare Foot Bowls at \$10 per person which includes a sausage sizzle and chocolate wheel. Saturday the ever popular Golf Day at the Sussex Inlet Golf Club will take place, costing \$15 per person for nine holes, sausage sizzle and an opportunity to win some outstanding prizes. The massive Street Parade on Sunday will showcase an array of floats including motorcycles, cars, emergency services and bands.

Next 4WD Venture to the Hunter

If you own or have access to a 4WD, don't delay – book now to be part of our next CareFlight 4WD Venture to the Hunter region from Friday 26 to Sunday 28 March.

From rainforest to vast sandy expanses – explore this impressive wine-producing capital while spiralling through rugged country tracks and then tackle the wind-blown dunes of Stockton Beach, the largest continuous mobile sand mass in NSW. ✕

CareFlight doctor's heartfelt plea...

We weep a r



Special report by Dr Steve Walker

drowning. Kids don't understand that pools are dangerous – only that they are fun and perhaps that they offer a respite from the heat.

We have been to so many drowned children over the past few summers. A few of them survived, but a lot did not. They are the most tragic cases that we go to, the jobs we hate most.

Less than an hour to go until the end of the shift and it is starting to look like that will be it for the day. A case comes up on the "000" screens. "Toddler found unconscious in pool. Not breathing. Frothing from mouth. Father doing CPR."

The location is only a few kilometres away. As the four of us (pilot, air crewman, paramedic and myself) walk out to the helicopter, we are all thinking the same things. Not another one! Why does this have to keep happening?

We are airborne in a couple of minutes, and the location is just a few minutes away. A few minutes to think. How long was the child missing before he was found? Don't know. How well can the father do CPR? Don't know. These are the factors which will largely determine whether the child will live or die.

The paramedic and I get out of the helicopter before it has shut down. A moment of confusion – people everywhere. We run up to the ambulances then see people waving and calling out to us. Down the side of a house and into the backyard.

It is always the same. A small child lying motionless in a puddle of water beside the pool. Sometimes a little girl, but more often a little boy. Not moving. Not breathing. Frantic parents crying. The paramedics are now doing the CPR and are putting an oxygen mask on the boy. I observe white froth at the mouth, which means some water has gone down into the lungs. I kneel down beside him. He is pale – almost white. And cold. Very cold.

We quickly dry the child, attach a heart monitor and stop CPR so we can see if the heart is beating. Nothing. Just a flat line. Continue CPR. One of the paramedics carefully puts a small plastic tube down into the child's lungs so that we can administer oxygen more effectively. Not easy to do with all that froth. Nor with the distraught parents looking on. Not easy at all.

It is another hot afternoon in Sydney. The sort of weather we have come to associate with children

We need to get a needle into a vein so that we can give some adrenaline to try and restart the heart. But finding a vein in a cold pulseless toddler could take minutes. It could take longer. And we don't have minutes. Another paramedic uses a cordless drill to insert a thick needle into a bone in the child's leg. From here drugs will quickly reach the heart. It looks brutal, but the child is beyond feeling anything. Still, I wonder what the parents must think.

A dose of adrenaline, and we wait for the CPR to pump it round to the heart. I notice more paramedics and police arriving. The police look young and are visibly shocked - perhaps their first drowning? Some children are standing around. They look frightened but look too young to fully understand what is going on.

The father keeps asking what is happening and is he going to be OK? How do you say, "I don't think so"?

Still a flat line on the monitor. A second dose of adrenaline. Plus another drug to try and stimulate the heart. More CPR. And we wait. We notice ants crawling over the boy's

“To anyone who thinks... them; please understand every drowned child once

legs, and paramedics brush them off. We want to save his dignity if nothing else. I can hear the parents screaming and one of them seems to be blaming the other. I dread what lies ahead and know that the guilt and blame will endure for days, months and years to come.

Still no response. A third dose of drugs and more CPR. I have never met most of the paramedics I am working with, but we are working well as a team. Everyone is operating well outside their comfort zone - nothing can really prepare you for this.

We stop CPR again. Still nothing on the monitor. How long now? – ten minutes since we arrived. Plus five minutes for us to get here. Plus however long he was in the water before he was found. What now? We have tried everything and nothing has worked. We talk quietly among ourselves. At some point hope has to give way to futility and we are now very close to that point. How do you tell the parents that you are sorry but their boy is dead?

A fourth (and final) dose of drugs and some more CPR. We wait and watch. Something on the monitor as the heart finally starts. Slow and erratic – please don't stop. One of the paramedics can feel a strong pulse and other monitors tell us that blood and oxygen are now flowing around his little body.

Check our website for full details of upcoming events at www.careflight.org



river of tears

But it has taken such a long time for his heart to start – was it too long? Apart from a pulse, the boy shows no sign of life. We wouldn't expect anything else yet. It is far too early for him to wake up. And he possibly never will. But at least he is in with a chance.

We transfer the boy onto a stretcher and out to the ambulance. Over short distances, the ambulance is faster than the helicopter. I dial the “Batphone” (an emergency phone which is always answered immediately) at the Westmead Children’s Hospital so that they can prepare for us. Even through the phone I can sense the thoughts of the nurse – not another drowning!

A ten minute ride in the ambulance. The heart keeps beating strongly. I keep squeezing oxygen into his lungs through the plastic tube. Not much else to do now. I contemplate a life lost and a family in grief. Why does this keep happening over and over again?

We arrive at the hospital. Perhaps 20 staff waiting in the resuscitation room. We handover to them and then start packing away our gear. I notice the parents in a corner. The mother is sitting crying while the father

if he lives, longer still until they know whether life will be good. Will their boy still be able to walk and talk and play? One hell of a wait.

After we have finished, all the paramedics involved join us at the helicopter base behind the hospital. There is a mix of older experienced paramedics and younger officers for whom this is their first drowning. Sadly it will not be their last. After such a case it helps if staff have an opportunity to wind down and to discuss what they saw, did and felt. They need to understand how this experience will live with them for a long while to come and that it is quite normal to be affected by it.

At home that night I lie awake. I keep replaying what happened. I hope the boy will make a miraculous recovery. I think of the parents who will be keeping a bedside vigil throughout the days and nights ahead. And I wonder how this could happen again and again.

I visit the child in hospital several days later. He has lived, but has been left with brain damage and it is still too early to know what the future holds.

When people hear of a child drowning, their first thought is often to blame the parents and to think that they must be irresponsible for this to have happened. Perhaps this belief is a defense mechanism that helps reassure parents that such a fate will never befall them. But this isn't usually the case.

I met the parents several times over the next few weeks and they seem like good responsible people. Dad had worked that day and had come home to look after the
Continued on page four...

“This can't happen to
how the parents of
ce believed this too.”

paces around in anguish and looks like he will collapse. They face a long wait.

They are told that things are very serious, but at least there is a chance. There are no tests that can predict the future. Only time will tell. It will probably be several days before they know whether he will live or die. And

Glass door cuts boy's flight



A boy suffered severe cuts when he walked through a plate glass door at his Palm Beach home, on Sydney's Northern Beaches, in late December.

Ambulance paramedics and an NRMA CareFlight doctor teamed to treat the nine-year-old boy who received deep cuts to his right arm and leg when he walked through the door as he was distracted while listening to his iPod.

Toddler run over twice in driveway



A toddler suffered serious injuries when run over by a vehicle in the driveway of a Campbelltown home in Sydney's south-west in November.

Ambulance paramedics, police and the NRMA CareFlight trauma team rushed to the Richmond Avenue home following a “000” alert shortly before 3 pm as the helicopter landed in the grounds of a nearby primary school.

The NRMA CareFlight doctor said the 22-month-old boy suffered abdominal, head and back injuries when run over twice by the utility but remained conscious. The tray of the ute apparently struck the boy who fell to the ground, then was run over by a wheel.

Night vision aids quick NT rescue

Two Darwin fishermen set off an emergency beacon to alert authorities of their plight near Bathurst Island, 80km north-west of Darwin, when their boat's engine failed off the Territory coast in November.

Within 90 minutes the Darwin-based CareFlight crew – in their helicopter equipped with night vision – had tracked down the men.

Trying to do a search that far offshore in the darkness without night goggles would have been impossible. Darwin's CareFlight helicopter is dedicated to medical and search and rescue work, so it is fitted with all the equipment required to provide these services, including night vision goggles. ✕



A river of tears

From page three...

children so mum could get a few hours sleep before she worked a night shift. He had given up his dream so that he would not have to travel and could spend more time with his family. A normal family with both parents working and with a few kids – just like millions of other families around the country.

It can be difficult to supervise a family of kids – they are so quick and you can't be everywhere. This tragedy arose from a momentary oversight, not because of bad parents. It can happen so quickly.

There are always so many victims when a child drowns. Someone will feel responsible for years to come. Marriages will often end in divorce due to the intense guilt and blame. Siblings will miss their little brother or sister; they will struggle to understand what happened and they will wonder why family life has forever changed.

To anyone who thinks this can't happen to them; please understand how the parents of every drowned child once believed this too.

Dr Steve Walker is a senior specialist emergency physician with CareFlight. ✕

Toddler's pool escape at Mt Druitt

A toddler had a lucky escape at a swimming pool at Emerton, near Mt Druitt in Sydney's west, just before Christmas.

Ambulance officers alerted NRMA CareFlight's rapid response trauma team to the incident at the Jersey Road Leisure Centre pool.

The NRMA CareFlight doctor said the girl from West Hoxton, aged about 18 months, was at a family outing to the pool when she was spotted under the water by the girl's grandmother and the duty lifeguard who

both jumped in and pulled the unconscious girl to safety.

As the lifeguard started treating the girl she immediately started to breath spontaneously.

The girl was treated by ambulance paramedics and the CareFlight doctor as she was driven to the Westmead Children's Hospital for observation.

The NRMA CareFlight doctor praised the quick action of the Blacktown Council lifeguard, the grandmother and emergency service officers who rushed to her aid. ✕



The NRMA CareFlight helicopter lands at the Emerton pool to assist treatment to a toddler pulled from the water.

DONATIONS

YES! I would like to make a donation. MONTHLY DONATION SINGLE DONATION

TITLE FIRST NAME SURNAME

ADDRESS

STATE POSTCODE

SUBURB/TOWN

PHONE

DONATION AMOUNT \$

EMAIL

PAYMENT DETAILS

MASTERCARD VISA AMEX DINERS CHEQUE/MONEY ORDER

CREDIT CARD NUMBER

CARDHOLDER'S NAME EXPIRY DATE

CARDHOLDER'S SIGNATURE DATE

Once completed, please return this coupon to:
CareFlight, Reply Paid 84642, Wentworthville NSW 2145

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

10APF

Donations Toll Free 1800 655 876

NOW – Online Donations

Without the generous support of community minded people, NRMA CareFlight would not be able to take off – literally. Now you can donate using our website. Go to www.careflight.org and on the home page click on the DONATE NOW button.

On the next page simply click on one of the buttons which will give you the option of making a single donation or donating on a monthly basis.



Other ways to help:

If you would like any information on the following, please contact CareFlight:

- Organising a fundraising event
- Arranging a base dinner or an interest visit
- Making a gift to CareFlight through your Will
- Making donations to CareFlight through your payroll
- Making a regular monthly donation

CONTACT

02 9843 5100
info@careflight.org