

HAZARDS IN THE HOME

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Sriyawathi fainted when she related the pathetic story of the death of her three-year old son, Manjula Pushpa Kumara. "We live with my sister's family at Wellampitiya" she told the Additional City Coroner Edward Ahangama, "and on February 28, 1994, my brother-in-law who sells curd, boiled milk in a two-feet deep cauldron and kept it inside a room for it to cool. A little while later I heard my son, the eldest of the two children, scream. I ran in and found that he had fallen into the cauldron. I pulled him out. His skin started to peel off. I washed him and took him to Lady Ridgeway Children's Hospital. He died after a week".

On February 4, 1984, the parents took their two-year-old daughter Jayanthi to the Puttalam hospital with a different story. The child had plucked a ball point pen from her father and ran towards the mother. The child fell on her way and the pen had pierced her eye.

A nine-month-old infant died of severe burn at Base Hospital Matara on January 5, 1994. The cradle in which Wijaya Kumara Veaiden was sleeping had caught fire when a bottle lamp fell accidentally. A few weeks earlier, Lakmali, a one-year-old child from Iranawila upset a bottle lamp which stood on stool and set fire to her clothes.

Four children of a family were injured on October 25, last year, when a petromax exploded when the elder boy was inflating it. The children had stood around watching the fun. This happened at Seelapura, Polonnaruwa.

These are only a few cases of child death and injuries I selected when I scanned recent newspapers. No serious study of home accident deaths had been done in Sri Lanka. A new American study places home accidents as the main cause of child death in the United States. It says over 8000 children under 14 years of age die every year due to home accidents and over 50,000 suffer mutilation. Poisoning, falls, drownings, burns, stranglings and traffic accidents are the main causes. An analysis of the newspaper reports in Sri Lanka seem to suggest a similar situation here too. It also shows that children between the ages of nine months and five years are most at risk. Poisonings are mostly accidental and mainly due to the carelessness of the parents and guardians. Parents should realise that children like to taste everything. A mother was cleaning her toilet when the door bell rang.

She went to answer the call and when she returned her 18-month daughter Priyanka had tasted a small amount of caustic soda she had left on the ground. It burnt her tongue and parts of the throat. The child had to hospitalised for six weeks.

Children are inquisitive. That is how they learn. They are not aware of the dangers. Parents should act with caution. If the mother of David had been little cautious the 14-month-old would not have been electrocuted. The little boy used to play with the electric plug. That morning the switch was on when David pushed his tiny figure into the hole.

Parents should realise that most of the chemicals they use for cleaning, washing, to control household pests and as cosmetics are harmful to children. Detergents, caustics, furniture polish, disinfectants, soaps, aftershaves, perfumes, cosmetics, moth-balls, medicines, mini-batteries, alcohol, cigarettes, matches, petrol, paints, weed-killers, rat-killers, kerosene, fertilisers and a host of other things we use at home are poisonous.

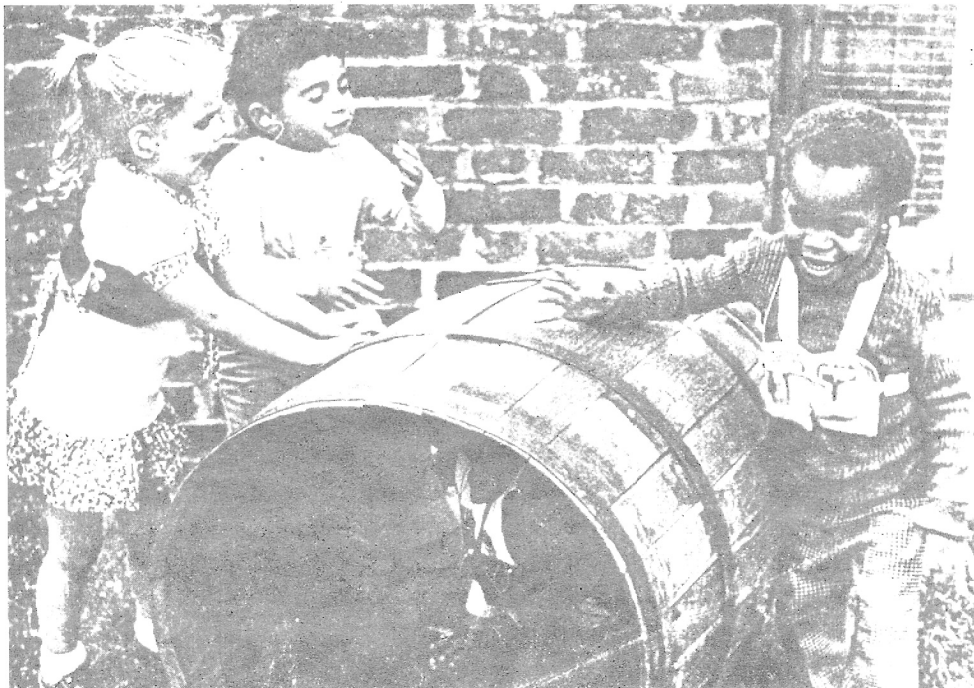
The golden rules every parent should observe are: Keep them above the reach of children; Keep them under lock. And never throw any used material on the ground. A mother while cooking threw some tamarind seeds into the dustbin. The child picked it up and inserted one of them into a nostril. It would not come out and the parents rushed to the Kalubovila Hospital. The medical staff directed the parents to the Colombo Hospital. A 3-year old child saw the sugar coated pill her grandmother was using. It ate eight of them and had to be rushed to the hospital.

Falls are a major cause for child accidents. In cities children break their hands slipping on the spilled water on the polished floors. In rural areas children break their legs while falling from trees. Seela fell on

a granite rock from gowa tree and broke her back and skull. There are also cases of children dying due to coconut falling on them. That happened to six-month old Savithri Priyankani. Her parents were employed. Her grand mother Anne was carrying the child to her home when a coconut fell on the child's head killing her. It happened in Dankotuwa. At Biyagama 3-year-old Janaki was playing in the garden when a coconut fell on her and she died instantly.

Drowning is also common in Sri Lanka. Two children of Menaka were playing in the garden at their Wellampitiya home on November 30 last year. In the evening the elder returned but not the other one. "I went in search of him", Menaka sobbed, "he had fallen into the unprotected well and was drowned". Drowning in rivers, ponds and tanks is also common.

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