

John Morris Butler, Jr., was on top of the world. Handsome and healthy at age 45, he had a high-paying job with the electric company in New York City. He and his wife, Isabel, had three young sons, a comfortable home and a country club membership.



It must have seemed like a charmed life. Butler, however, had no way of knowing that he would die suddenly and his family would be torn apart.

It was influenza that did him in. The date was April 28, 1918.

After Butler died, his sons never lived at home again. A well-meaning uncle enrolled them in a military boarding school. When it was time for summer vacation he sent them to summer camp.

The youngest, Laurance, was only 7 when this all started. For the next ten years he was reared with cool efficiency by the staff at these impersonal institutions. Even as an old man the chill never quite left his system, and neither did the bitter cynicism. He spent his last days drinking way too much, but at least he stayed alive.

The oldest boy, John Morris Butler III, tried to make a go of it. He finished school, got married, had a couple of children. But in the end the darkness was too much for him and he took his own life.

The middle child, Henry, found happiness as a chicken farmer in Pennsylvania. As for Isabel, she took in sewing to help support herself. She never remarried, although she did have a special friend, a British colonel who was a veteran of the Second Boer War. Sometimes they would see the boys briefly at holidays.

I know all this because Laurance was my grandfather. And I'm sharing it because it is a concrete example of the kind of personal devastation that pandemic flu causes.

Seasonal flu – the regular flu – is bad. It kills around 36,000 people in the U.S. each year. Pandemic flu, however, is worse. It could kill around 36,000 people in South Carolina alone. An additional 366,000 people might need medical attention.

Life as we know it will shift. Nothing will get done as quickly, if it gets done at all. Lots of people won't be able to make it in to work. Schools may be shut down. Groceries may not be delivered to the stores. We may have to take isolation and quarantine precautions. We, as a community, need to be ready to meet these challenges.

I was reminded about the need for pandemic flu preparedness in the CERT training I participated in recently. Here is their blurb:

"The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program helps train citizens to be better prepared to respond to emergency situations in their communities. CERT members can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. CERT training includes disaster preparedness, disaster fire suppression, basic disaster medical operations, and light search and rescue operations."

CERT is administered by FEMA's Community Preparedness Division. The main point of CERT training is that you can't always rely on local, state or federal government for your

survival. Sometimes there are going to be extraordinary circumstances. When these arise, you have to assume some personal responsibility and learn how to do things yourself.

So here are some things to plan for:

Plan to wash your hands all the time. With soap, in hot water, for two minutes.

Practice cough and sneeze etiquette. Do it into your short sleeve, not the palm of your hand. You'll transfer fewer germs that way.

Plan to care for sick people at home. Medical professionals will be overwhelmed and won't have time for minor complaints.

Don't go to the emergency room unless you're at death's door.

If you are really, truly dying, and you absolutely have to go to the emergency room, plan to get your own ride. Don't count on an ambulance coming to your rescue. Don't even count on your 911 call going through, because that system may also be overwhelmed.

Have a two week supply of everything. Food, water, pet food, pain killers, disinfectants and rehydration liquids.

Just a few words about rehydration. Flu can dry you out. Vomiting and diarrhea can cause dehydration, which can cause death. If you're in a hospital it's no big deal, because they can just stick some tubes in you and pump you full of stuff. But you don't want to do that at home. You'll need to do rehydration through the mouth, or oral rehydration. You can buy storebought drinks like Pedialyte or Gatorade. You also can make up a batch of homemade oral rehydration solution. In their pandemic flu brochure, DHEC offers a "Rehydration Electrolyte Drink for Adults and Teens" recipe that includes water, sugar, salt and baking soda.

If you keep having diarrhea or vomiting,. keep sipping on it. You need to take in more liquid than you are excreting, This is critical for babies, especially, because they get so easily dehydrated.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. If you'd like more information from DHEC about pandemic flu visit www.scdhec.gov/panflu.

To find out the State's plan for dealing with pandemic flu, visit www.scmd.org/Plans/MassCasualtyPlan/13-Annex2-PandemicInfluenza.pdf

To learn more about CERT training, visit [/www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm](http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm)

If you are a health care professional, your services as a volunteer will be particularly valuable during a pandemic. Consider joining the Coastal Carolina Medical Reserve Corps. For more info, visit www.medicalreservecorps.gov