

## SURVIVALIST FICTION



### THE WINDS OF CHANGE: Acorns and Wood Smoke

*by Old Bear*

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#### Acorns and Wood Smoke

Keith Vantine puffed contentedly on his pipe and looked around what he thought of as "his" retreat. After his and Jeremy's return, from a mostly unsuccessful foraging trip, a few good hot meals and a couple of night's sleep in a real bed, instead of hanging from a tree limb in a nylon mesh bag, had worked wonders. Many of the aches and pains that had tormented him were gone. Being able to let his senses somewhat relax also helped. Not that Keith ever completely relaxed these days, but the knowledge that at least one person was in the observation post on watch and armed with a scoped rifle made it easier to relax a little.

Upon returning home Keith was disappointed to learn that "gathering acorns" was still in progress. It was partly because of this that Keith and Jeremy decided that they really "needed" to go on a foraging trip when they did. Gathering acorns and processing them into useful nuts and flour was not arduous, but it was boring. Acorns, when there was a good crop, made up a solid part of their survival diet, as it had for the people who had inhabited this land before the strange white men first stepped ashore. In a good season the ground was littered with the small nuts, but if they laid for more than a few days worms or mold would take most of them. As with many tasks, all of Keith's group turned out to get it done. The children were encouraged to gather the nuts, while the adults did most of the even more tedious shelling and processing to remove the tannic acid, that made the un-processed nuts too bitter to use. Of course the old formula for children working together still held true, if left unsupervised. Hire one child and get one child's worth of work. Hire two children and get one half a child's worth of work. Hire three or more children and get no work at all.

It fell Keith's turn to gather acorns with the children this day, but such was his mood that not even this could spoil it. So midday found Keith down on his knees, surrounded by children, gathering acorns. They would rake a thirty foot or so area, so the acorns would be in a pile, along with leaves and small rocks, and only needed to be picked up and sorted to see that they did not have worms. "Tell us a story while we work Granpa," said Eric. (All older people were called Granpa or Granma by the kids.)

"Yeah. Tell us about the "Old days," the others chimed in.

Keith placed a hand full of nuts in his bucket and looked at the kids. He used this break to refill his pipe. "I hope the tobacco crop is good this year," he thought, hating the idea of giving up yet another "vice" that he enjoyed. "What do you want to hear?" he asked.

"Something about how things were when you were a kid," came the answer. Keith tried to think of something to tell about. "Electricity" always came to mind, but electricity was such an obvious change that it had been talked about almost to death.

"If you will keep picking up the acorns and don't go throwing any wormy ones in, you can see the little hole if you look close, I will tell you about how things used to be with the United States Post Office.". Keith told of how once mail was taken for granted and letters were not too much valued. " Why I have gone to my mail box and found twenty or more letters in there and every dang one of them turned out to be some damned bill or some yahoo advertizing to get me to have more bills. Not one real letter in the whole bunch." Keith said.

Letters now held an almost mystical reverence. The mail still moved, but now it was carried by people and passed from hand to hand, until eventually the letter was worn out, lost, or reached its destination. The letter would be handed to a person who happened to be going in the more or less right direction. This person would pass the letter on to somebody when he reached the furthest point in the right direction, even if that person was not planning on going anywhere. The letter might lie on a shelf for weeks or months, until somebody from that area was traveling in the right direction. It was not uncommon for a traveler to have a packet of several letters in his back pack. People hoped against hope for a letter from missing family and loved ones. Almost everyone had lost track of someone and it was easier to believe that they were alive, somewhere, than that they had

died like so many, in the early days of the collapse. Keith had a sister, who along with her husband and four kids had been living in southern California when things came apart. She had refused to listen to Keith's warnings and pleas. Keith had not heard from her after the collapse. While in his mind Keith knew that she and her family must be dead, his heart kept hoping that some day a letter would arrive telling him that they were ok. With just about everybody hoping for such a letter, the letters of others took on special meaning.

There were stories, always stories. Supposedly, a blood thirsty raider had faced great danger to deliver a packet of several letters his band had found in the pack of one of their victims to a nearby village. It was said that this raider had parents that he hoped to someday hear from. Other stories told of people going many hard miles out of their way to see that a letter got to its destination. One story that was claimed to be true, (almost all good stories were claimed to be true) told of a letter that had crossed the whole country in just under two years. This letter supposedly had "Urgent! Please Rush" written on the envelope. More than once, people had taken the letter a little further than necessary and the final carrier had traveled almost thirty miles, a full day's walk, out of his way, to deliver it, only to learn that the woman and her entire family had recently died from cholera. It was said that a neighbor who had known the woman and family took the letter to the little grave yard and being a sentimental old fool, read the letter over the woman's grave. The letter said the woman's daughter was ok and had just delivered a healthy baby boy. He then left the letter on the grave, thus completing its final delivery.

Dorothy rang the bell lightly, to announce that lunch was ready. Keith got up and dusted off his pants. He had the next four hour watch in the observation post. It was a quiet time, good for thinking, while trying to never get so absorbed in your thoughts that you forgot why you were there. At least he would get out of the shelling of the acorns for a little while longer. The acorns had to immediately be shelled to prevent mold and then they were either diced, if they were going to be used for flour, or left whole, if they were to be used as nuts. Either way, they were placed in hot, almost boiling water on the wood stove and left, with an occasional stirring, until the water began to look like tea. This water was poured out and more added and the process repeated until the water remained clear. Usually three or four changes of water did the trick. A little salt was usually added to the last batch of water. Another way was to put the acorns in a cloth bag, weigh it down, then put it in the fast-moving creek. They were left there for two to three weeks and the water would leach out the tannic acid. The acorns then were

slow roasted until dry and slightly cooked. Ground in a grain mill, they made a light brown flour that when added, one part ground acorn to three parts wheat flour, made a very nutritious flour. It was said that acorns lacked as much oil as most other nuts, but they still had a great nutty flavor. Their resident "Nutritionalist" had "guesstimated" that by adding the acorns they were increasing the nutritional value of their flour by from 50 to 75%. While all this was fine and good, what everybody really liked was the whole roasted acorns after they had been dipped in hot brown sugar glaze. These were what made gathering acorns really worthwhile, at least to Keith. The only problem was that no matter how many of these delicious little treats they made, they seemed to disappear almost over night. The kids were worst than varmints when it came to candied acorns! Keith had started grabbing a double handful and sneaking them to a secret cache that he had, so he could later come back for a snack. This was totally against Keith's own rule of no food hoarding within the retreat, but Keith didn't care. Acorns that had been ran through a grain grinder, with the burrs set fairly loose could be roasted until darker brown, mixed with some roasted dandelion roots to make an almost passable coffee substitute.

Lunch was plenty of garden salad, biscuits left over from breakfast, fried salt pork and goat cheese. Water, still almost ice cold from the well, finished the meal. Until colder weather set in they would continue to eat rather light meals. It seemed to help with the heat of summer to eat lightly and as free from fats as possible. Although they had stored multi vitamins, they now reserved these for the winter months, when fresh fruits and vegetables were hard to come by. "Thank you Ladies." Keith said as he got to his feet. He would now relieve Barton in the observation post, so that Barton could eat.

Keith went to the well house and took down the "Gillie suit" that hung there. It was probably unnecessary to wear one while going to the OP, but they had made it SOP. The "suit", actually a large poncho that would fit over whatever you were wearing, was made entirely out of burlap. The poncho itself was made from a sheet of burlap, with the dyed burlap strips glued on using a substance known as "Shoe Goo." This made a surprisingly nice "Gillie suit" for very little cost, and it was as cool in warm weather as any Gillie suit could be, which was still far too hot.

Keith picked up the SKS that lived in the well house/generator room and headed uphill. He took a roundabout route to the OP, always watching the forest for anything that looked the least bit out of the ordinary. Before approaching the observation post Keith took cover and observed the area well. He then whistled twice and was answered by two whistles followed by three more. Keith now knew

for sure that Barton was still in the OP, was alive and well and nobody was there with a gun on him. Soon Barton popped out of the underground shelter and Keith gave him the sweltering gillie suit and the SKS rifle. Barton would replace them both in the well house, for the next person to use on their way to the OP. Just standard operating procedure.

Keith entered the shelter and felt the coolness of the earth surround him. The plywood and ferro cement roof kept the rain off and with the door closed the place was bearable in the coldest weather. But during the heat they kept the door propped open to allow air to draft through the door and out the observation ports. By digging into the steep hillside, they had been able to make the observation post mostly underground, but have room for a man to stand up and look out the openings. This also made the OP almost invisible. The view from the observation post took in the whole retreat compound, the fallout shelter, the main garden and animal pens. It also covered both roads to the compound and two out of the three small stock ponds. All things considered, it was in the best place possible. This was no accident. Keith had spent many hours walking the hill behind the retreat looking for the right place to build the OP. The number of trees that had to be cut down to make a clear field of view and of fire had been staggering. These trees had not been wasted. Either cut into lengths for fire wood or saw milled into lumber with their "Alaskan saw mill" every foot had been used. While not really a saw mill, the Alaskan saw mill still did a great job. It was a tool that clamped to a chainsaw bar, so the chainsaw would then cut whatever size lumber you needed, the only limit being the length of the chainsaw bar. Theirs had been a Christmas present from his wife Barb, almost two years before things went bad. The saw mill had sat in the well house until the collapse, then it suddenly seemed to take on great value. Keith wondered how much longer they could keep a chain saw running and dreaded the chore that getting fire wood would be without one. He settled himself into a comfortable position and took up the binoculars, patted his shirt pocket to make sure he had his pipe and begin carefully watching the woods line. He watched for mostly movement, but also for any shape or color that seemed the least bit out of place. He also watched the birds and squirrels to see if they showed signs of alarm or avoided any particular area. Mostly he just watched.

Keith had been there for a little more than two hours when he caught sight of movement on the south road to the retreat. A quick scan showed two figures walking slowly along the road. Keith quickly scanned the other road, before coming back to look at the two people. Try as he might, Keith could not see any

other people, on the road or in the woods around it. He lifted the receiver and cranked the handle on the field phone. Nothing! He cranked some more. "Come on, you lazybones. Answer the phone," he muttered.

"Hello. Compound here," said a clear voice. "OP here. I have two. I repeat. Two on foot coming along south road, approximately 700 yards from the compound." The alert would be quickly spread. Children would be called inside the fortress-like rock barn. People would take their positions. And then they would wait. Now Keith had the scoped rifle in position, but continued to watch through the binoculars, because they gave him a larger field of view. The two people stopped at the fence line and one brought out a small white rag that he attached to a stick and waved over his head. Where their road left the woods, they had placed signs in plain sight. These read "You are being watched. Stop here and wave something white if you are friendly. If you don't have something white, shout really loud. You will be told if you can continue. If you are hostile get under cover and at least make this more interesting for our snipers!". Keith liked signs. Keith got back on the field phone. "They are signaling from the fence. I think it is Thomas and his wife."

From the compound Keith heard someone yell for the people to come on along the road. Now Keith no longer watched the two people. They would be watched and covered from the compound, while others in the compound would be scanning other areas. Keith's job now was to watch the roads and wood line, in case these people were decoys to distract the group's attention. All SOP, but Keith wondered how many other people had died before they began to take things seriously enough to set up such procedures. This time it was just the closest neighbor, but the next time it might be life and death. Keith felt a deep pride in his little group and the retreat in general. They would be ready for the next time.

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### **THE WINDS OF CHANGE: Shortly After Y2K – Birth of a Raider**

*by Old Bear*

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#### **Shortly After Y2K - Birth of a Raider**

Three men, their faces showing several days growth of beard sat around a small, smokey campfire. Their wives sat nearby, looking cleaner, if more sullen than the men. Several small children milled around the camp site, which consisted of five back packing tents and two sport utility "bug out" vehicles. They had camped near a small stream. Downed tree branches had provided enough wood for their fire, but by now they were having to go farther to gather wood. Empty food wrappers littered the area. It was supposed to be the job of the oldest children to dispose of these, but this had not been enforced.

The men sat together and talked in low voices. They had expected that after some rioting in the inner city, things would be restored to normal. They had seen what had seemed like a reasonable amount of food (mostly MRE's) quickly diminish as the days went on and the news from their hand crank radio continued to be bad. Returning to their homes right now did not seem to be an option. This morning they had cooked and eaten the dog belonging to one of the families. Nobody had eaten enough. It was a small dog.

Ralph thought that they should approach a farmer and ask for food for their families. Steve and Dennis were not sure. Raised in the city, they had an unreasonable fear of rural folk. What if they shot first and asked questions after? They had at first tried hunting, but the area, known for it's game, seemed devoid of wildlife. In three days they had managed to kill two squirrels and a blue jay.

Lacking any better ideas, it was agreed that they would ask the closest farmer for food. Perhaps they could do some work to pay for it. Leaving the camp behind, they walked toward the farm that they had seen on their way in. Gasoline was

now a premium item they would not waste. At the edge of the woods they stopped to observe the farm house. "I don't think we should all go up there together," Ralph said. "No sense making the farmer nervous."

"Maybe you had better leave your rifle here too," Steve offered. "We can sort of cover you from here, if there is trouble."

"There won't be any trouble," snapped Ralph. "I am just going to explain our situation and ask for a little food." Leaving his AR-15 with his friends, Ralph walked across the barren field toward the farmhouse. The old white farm house was well cared for and showed fairly new painting. As he drew nearer Ralph observed several large chickens wandering inside a fenced in area, with what he decided must be a chicken house attached. "Eggs!" thought Ralph. "They have so much, surely they will let us have some," he thought. When he had gone about as close as he thought was correct Ralph yelled "Hello. Anybody home?" An older man and two rather small dogs appeared from inside one of the buildings. The dogs began to bark and the man held a shotgun in his hands. Ralph's sudden fear began to subside when the man did not start firing immediately. The man walked toward Ralph who waited for him to get nearer, not wanting to have to shout. When they were about ten feet apart, the farmer told Ralph to "turn around slowly.". When Ralph wanted to know why, the farmer said it was so he could see if Ralph had a hidden gun. Ralph turned and the farmer looked.

"This is stupid," thought Ralph. "If I did have a hide out gun, this old geezer would never know it."

The farmer got right to the point. "This is my land and it is posted no trespassing and no hunting. What are you doing here and what do you want?"

Ralph felt his anger rise "Why this old goat! I make enough money in six months to buy and sell this too-bit farm." Trying to keep his true feelings out of his voice Ralph explained the situation and the need for food for their families. The farmer told him that he had to think of his family first and that they might not even have enough food put away for themselves. When Ralph pointed out the chickens and asked for just a couple of them, the farmer went into a tirade about his family needing enough food in case next year's crops did poorly and a lot of other stuff that simply made no sense to Ralph. By this time next year all the hardships would just be memories and the economy would be back on course. Ralph was

not surprised that this dirt farmer would have almost no knowledge about how our interconnected system really worked.

"Need food in case next year's crops did poorly, what a crock of \*\*\*\*," thought Ralph. When Ralph tried to explain why things would be back to normal long before the crops of the next year could be important, the farmer just snorted and accused Ralph of not knowing where the food came from in the first place. During this conversation, Ralph and the farmer had been unconsciously moving closer together and had begun to gesture more. When the farmer told Ralph that he simply could not give, sell or trade him any food, because his family "might need it", Ralph went ballistic. He screamed that his family "did need" the food, right now, and not at some imagined time in the distant future! Advancing, Ralph got close to the farmer's face. The farmer took a couple of steps backward and raised his gun menacingly. "You get off my land right now. Get and don't come back," he yelled, with the old veins bulging in his forehead. From the wood line Steve and Dennis could hear the sound of voices, occasionally rising in anger, but could not make out many of the words. All Steve knew was that the farmer had raised his gun. Ralph decided that he had used the wrong approach. He should not have belittled this man's fears, no matter how unfounded they really were. Based on his poor education, this man was doing the best he could to understand events that were hopelessly beyond him. As Ralph opened his mouth to speak, a shot sounded from the woods. Ralph actually could hear the sickening, slapping sound the bullet made. He saw the look of surprise come into the farmer's eyes for a split second, before the man grabbed his chest and pitched over backwards, fertilizing his fields with his own blood.

Steve claimed that he was sure the farmer was about to shoot Ralph and had only shot to protect him. Ralph had to admit that the shotgun had been more or less pointed at him and the old man had been awfully upset. For some reason, he would never later understand, Ralph picked up the farmer's shotgun and the three of them walked toward the house. They could never later recall when or how the decision was made not to leave any witnesses behind. The eleven-year-old girl was the hardest. After that it just got easier.



## THE WINDS OF CHANGE: Countdown – 102 Days Before Y2K

*by Old Bear*

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### Countdown: 102 Days Before Y2K

Keith had awakened when the alarm clock went off at 4:15 AM and his wife got ready to go to work. She worked in the nearest city of any size which was almost 60 miles away. The drive took over an hour, due to the mountain roads, but traffic was sparse.

Keith, who did not have to get up until daybreak, had just dozed again when the sound of the phone jangled him awake. It was a collect call from his wife, something that he felt could not bode well. "I got a buck this time!" she informed him. Only a few days before, she had hit a fawn with her Jeep. Unwilling to see anything go to waste, she had loaded the dead fawn in her Jeep Cherokee and brought it back to Keith, who made most of it into jerky.

"Are you ok? How is the jeep?" he mumbled, still groggy.

"I got some blood on me from the deer. The Jeep is ok. I just can't lift it into the car by myself," she replied. She told him where she would be waiting and he promised to be there as soon as possible.

Keith dressed quickly, not even bothering to lace his boots. He had to refill the radiator of his VW diesel car and spray starting fluid into the air cleaner before it would run. It took time for the defroster to clear the dew from the windshield, but he drove slowly until it did. Rounding a curve, Keith had to swerve to miss a cow standing partly in the road. Soon he met an on coming car with only one head light that was taking its section of the road out of the middle. As Keith slowed and moved onto the dirt shoulder he reflected that perhaps driving was the most danger that any of them faced at present. They met at the predetermined spot

and he followed her for what seemed a long way, before she pulled off. It DID take both of them to place the buck in the VW. Then they gave the Jeep a better checking over. There was some damage, but Keith thought he could do the repairs himself. Barb went in one direction and Keith the other.

Returning home, Keith put on a pot of strong coffee. Their neighbors had given them plenty of vegetables from their truck garden and had mentioned that they hoped "somebody" would get a deer for them. Keith recognized a hint and had planned to get them one, come deer season. When he was sure the McEntires were up and about, barely after sunrise, Keith drove the VW to their house. Mrs. McEntire said that she was cooking for her church supper and then for a funeral and just couldn't do a deer that day. "I don't have room in my freezer for even another chicken leg," she claimed.

Keith said "I will butcher it up and put it in our freezer, until you are ready for it." The McEntires were good neighbors and were working hard to prepare for y2-k. Although in their late 70's, Keith thought they both out-worked him most days. Raised on a farm, they were used to the physical labor. Up before dawn, often working until they could no longer see, they were the type of people who had carved a nation out of the wilderness. Keith thought it was too bad that there were so few of these kind of people left in America.

Keith took the buck down the one lane dirt road to the retreat, partly for more privacy and partly because the well at their rental house was running out of water, and it took a lot of water to butcher a deer. Keith was greeted by six dogs, four ducks, two cats and an unknown number of chickens. All clambering to be fed or petted. Keith released the dogs from their pen, fed the chickens and ducks, petted the cats and then went to work on the deer. Keith was in a great mood. Fresh venison, a cool morning with the sun barely up, his pipe giving a pleasant aroma to the air. Life was good.

Getting the deer out of the car was a task, but by moving one end at a time he managed to transfer the deer to the wheelbarrow, only to have the wheelbarrow tip over and spill the deer out on the ground. Grunting with effort, Keith managed to hoist the deer back into the now righted wheelbarrow. Noticing that the wheelbarrow tire needed a little more air, Keith wheeled the deer inside the compound fence and parked it beside the butchering table. Another lift placed the buck on the outside wooden table. Keith carefully skinned the hide off the deer, trying to not cut the hide or leave any meat attached to it. By God, He was going

to make this attempt at "brain tanning" work, or else, thought Keith. Once the hide was removed, Keith slit the belly, and working with a small knife cut loose the stomach and intestines. These he dropped into a five-gallon bucket and took to the chicken yard. He slit the still full stomach and let the contents spill onto the ground, then dumped the stomach and intestines on the ground. A swarm of chicken attacked the pile. Keith then removed the lungs and heart from the chest cavity and washed the interior of the buck with cold water. This not only cleaned out the blood, but helped to cool the meat. Keith then began to remove the legs at the knee joints and toss them to the dogs. The dogs did not really eat the leg bones, but they did seem to enjoy chewing on them and carrying them around.

Two of the dogs grabbed the same leg bone and suddenly Keith found himself shoved backwards and onto the butchering table, seemingly surrounded by growling, snapping dogs and flashing teeth, some of which were all too close to some body parts that Keith treasured. As Keith flailed around trying to regain his balance, he knocked over a bucket of hand washing water, now bright pink with deer blood. Drenched from the waste down, Keith managed to edge away from the dogs a little. As he stood up, the fight came to him again and he felt a crushing pain in his left leg, just above the knee. His biggest male dog, had his jaws clamped onto Keith's leg! Being attacked by two of the other dogs, it was fighting in a mad frenzy. The pain almost sent Keith into a berserk rage and he grabbed up his butchering hatchet. Using the blunt end, Keith beat dogs indiscriminately until he felt the vice-like grip loosen. More blows with the hatchet failed to break up the three-way dog fight. Keith then turned the hose on the twisting, snapping mass and was totally ignored. Cursing, Keith hobbled into the barn for his rifle, just a few feet away. He fired several rounds into the dirt at the combatant's feet, again with absolutely no effect, other than to waste the rounds. Unless he could stop the fight, his dogs, usually willing to get along, would fight until one or more were dead. Keith began to triage which dog was the most valuable in his mind, considering having to shoot one or more to stop the fight. In desperation, Keith reset the safety on the gun and began smashing at dog heads with the butt of his rifle. Steel butt plate clunked against skull bone and still they fought. Finally one dog had enough and retreated. "Moulder", one of the remaining fighters, then decided that surrender was the better part of valor and tried to break off the fight, but "Bear" was having none of it. Keith smashed "Bear's" head with a blow that would kill a man. "Bear" staggered a few feet back, shook his head and rushed back for the kill. Being careful to stay away from those frenzied jaws, Keith drove the gun butt into "Bear's" head, again and again.

"Moulder" was now trying to crawl away and was whimpering. Finally "Bear" staggered away and the fight was over.

Keith found his breath coming in ragged gasps and had the "shakey" feeling that comes from too much adrenaline. Keith locked "Bear" in one room of the barn, made sure Moulder was ok, then dropped his pants to examine his leg. Canine teeth had been driven into his skin, through the blue jeans and blood slowly oozed from several punctures. While the wound itself was minor, a throbbing pain told of deeply bruised muscles. Not for the first time Keith wished he had stuck with a kinder, gentler breed of guard dog, like maybe Doberman, or Rottweiler.

Replacing his pants, Keith resumed the butchering. The deer carcass had been knocked off the table and lay on the ground. Keith's favorite pipe lay in a puddle of bloody water. Keith cursed. He cursed his own dogs, the dogs of his neighbors, the whole species of dog, and the wolf that first came to share primitive man's camp fire. By the time Keith had finished venting his displeasure, no canine showed anywhere within his range of sight. The pleasant mood of the morning had vanished. To make matters worst a light drizzling rain began to fall. Normally, because of the drought, Keith would have welcomed the rain, but not in his present mood. Keith replaced the deer on the table and made a rough, not too perfect job of finishing the butchering. He then hosed the table down to clean the blood and small bits of meat off it. The chickens gathered around to clean up any scrap that hit the ground. Loading the meat for humans into two clean five-gallon plastic buckets, and the blood, scrap and bones in a large pot, to be cooked for the dogs, Keith prepared to go home and make room in the freezer. He salted the deer hide and put it up to dry, being in no mood to work on the hide at that time. "Another wonderful day 'preparing' in a rural paradise," thought Keith. "Yeah right!"

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### THE WINDS OF CHANGE: The Beginning

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#### The Beginning

Sometime in the 1970's 12 hives of honey bees were imported from India by a bee keeper in Texas, who hoped to cross them with his "Italian Bees." It was later learned that these bees were infected with respiratory mites. Early in the 1990's the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that up to 98% of all the wild honey bees and many of the domestic hives had died due to respiratory mites. Where carried at all, this story was buried on the last page in the local papers. Few people even noticed, just as people failed to notice the absence of honey bees on their flowers or in their "hobby gardens." Few even cared. "I don't use that much honey anyway," was the standard response. The connection between honey bees and the pollination of food crops was never made by most people.

September brought a continuation of the two-year drought that had caused several states to be declared disaster areas as the drought wreaked havoc on agriculture. Hurricane "Floyd" caused the largest evacuation in U.S. history and more people began to give serious thought to preparedness in general. The headlines read "N. CAROLINA TURNS INTO '18,000-SQUARE MILE CESSPOOL."

Polls showed that 78% of Americans were pleased with how things were going, despite some questions of morals and ethics in Washington. The Dow Jones glimmered at above 10,000 points. The economy was strong and things would just keep on getting better. Times were good.

Japan, a country roughly the size of the State of Montana, had run up a national debt of 5.4 Trillion dollars in a failed attempt to restart their economy.

The famine in North Korea went almost unnoticed by well-fed Americans, but already the death toll had climbed above 3.5 million. Times were good.

By mid-October many of the people who had belittled others for preparing for Y2-k decided that maybe they should stock up on "a few things" and take a little money out of the bank "just in case." The Federal Reserve had printed extra money, so there were few problems with the banks. The "just in time delivery system" that most stores used was another story.

With increased demand, certain items became in short supply. Generators were scarce and the price increased steadily. Empty shelves could be seen where kerosene lamps once sat. People could be seen with their shopping carts loaded with toilet paper, matches, canned meat and containers of water. Few people seemed to understand the "just in time" delivery system or had even thought much about how and where all the stuff on the shelves came from. All they knew was that items they suddenly decided their very lives depended on were not available. While most of these people continued to state that y2-k would be "just a bump in the road" they searched from store to store in an increasing buying frenzy. Occasional news stories featured the almost bare shelves of some store, with glib remarks about how "the y2-k people" were causing shortages by hoarding necessary items. The fact that these items would only be "necessary" if y2-k was a problem was never mentioned. As more people made cash withdrawals, armored cars had to run day and night to insure that the banks could continue to shovel out the money.

With the increase of cash on the market and driven by the increased demand, inflation soon reached double digit levels. The new director of the Federal Reserve found himself caught between fighting inflation, or saving the banks. He suddenly had an uneasy feeling about the timing of the previous director's sudden retirement. The Fed supported the banks, reasoning that the country could live with inflation, but not a banking collapse. Even with armored cars running 24 hours a day, many of the smaller banks still had to limit withdrawals to certain days. This was not because these banks were in any way "insolvent." They simply had to wait for delivery of more money.

The more the Government said that y2-k was not going to be a problem, the more some people thought that it was certain to be. A rush to invest in gold drove the price of an ounce of gold to over \$2,000 and still people clamored and finagled to buy. The truth was that the value of gold was not increasing. The

value of the paper dollar, not backed up by anything except blind trust, was diminishing. Gasoline prices, already high, soon reached \$5.00 per gallon. For people trapped on a fixed income, life became an unending nightmare. As the cold of winter began to set in, many people found themselves having to choose between eating and heating their homes. Many older Americans, having worked, saved and invested for their retirement, watched as day by day inflation stripped away their future. By the end of November, with inflation rising, Congress voted a massive increase in payments to Social Security recipients and people receiving "Entitlements." This money had to come from somewhere, so the printing presses ran. City and State employees demanded and got pay increases, often to see the increasing prices eat their paycheck and leave them worse off than the week before.

December opened with a blizzard in the north that closed roads, shut down schools and generally made life miserable for the people who had to deal with it. With many stores already having problems keeping shelves stocked, trucks not being able to get through created havoc. Finding empty shelves caused more people to jump into the "y2-k panic", as it was now being called. When the roads were opened and the trucks arrived, items disappeared as fast as they were placed on shelves. While this was great for certain merchants, others, selling things that did not relate to the hysteria, found few buyers for their products. Firearms and ammunition sales set new levels despite the higher prices. The sale of new cars, computers, home entertainment centers, furniture, etc. on the other hand set new lows.

About this time, many "level headed" people decided to sell "a few" of their stocks, just in case the stock market "fluctuated" after Jan. 1. With plenty of people waiting to buy these stocks, the market did a brisk business while retaining its high level. In fact the market rose 200 points. Slowly the tide turned and with more people wanting to sell than there were buyers, stock prices dropped. The market trembled and began to slide. At first it was a slow decline, but even this slight drop fueled people's fears and they rushed to sell. The stock market, which many analysts had said was "over priced" dropped like an anvil in free fall. Analysts talked about the market making a "much needed correction." To the dismay and horror of others, it was learned that many company retirement funds had been invested in the stock market and that now these, supposedly "safe" funds, were unable to continue paying premiums to retirees. The very air was ripe with tension. Fights broke out among people waiting in lines. "Home

invasions" became the number one crime in America, replacing "car jackings" for top billing.

With y2-k still days away, the U.S. found itself in an inflationary spiral, with a steadily collapsing stock market, while economists talked about a "Deflationary Recession", on the horizon. When y2-k finally arrived, it proved to be more or less the "bump in the road" in the U.S., that so many people had predicted. With the passing of Jan. 1, with few problems in the U.S., many politicians and analysts predicted a rapid recovery for the country.

Unfortunately the U.S. did not exist alone in a vacuum. Politicians and big business had for years pushed to get the U.S. involved in the "Global Economy." They had done their job all too well. Most other countries fared far worse than the U.S. from the "y2-k bug." Power grids went down, transportation systems failed, communication systems fell. U.S. plants abroad shut down when raw materials ceased to arrive. Many problems developed with the oil industry, from pipe lines, to refinery failures. Most of the "Super Tankers" that carried the oil to refineries in the U.S. had crews of less than 10 men and the huge ships were almost completely run by computers, that controlled everything from engine speed to steering. These huge ships now sat idle, waiting for programmers, or in some cases, computer chips that had been long since discontinued.

Well-fed men in Washington had decided that even the most fanatic terrorist, hating the U.S. from deep within his very bowels, would never "cut off his own nose to spite his face" and attack the oil fields. If these men had known a little more of hunger and frustration, perhaps they would have never made this mistake. The first clue that all was not well, came when a "suit case" nuclear bomb destroyed a section of a major middle eastern oil field. The President ordered an immediate mobilization of National Guard troops to protect the oil fields. Russia and China also sent troops in a "joint U.N. effort." In many of the "oil rich" countries, only a very few got "rich" off the oil, while most lived their lives in desperate poverty. These people felt they had little to lose if the oil stopped flowing and were easy to convince to do acts of sabotage. Also, the presence of large numbers of American troops in their country did not set well with many of these people. As with most "police actions" more troops had to be sent, leaving many states with very limited National Guard.

Rioting had long since broken out in many of the cities. State and local law enforcement, aided by what was left of the National Guard had not been able to

quell the riots. As soon as one area was quieted, another would erupt. They managed to hold the rioting inside the city, in most cases.

January set records for cold weather. Many States pushed through legislation that power companies could not shut anyone off for failure to pay during the winter. While this, like so much Government bumbling was well meant, it created huge problems for the utility companies that were already facing higher costs in production of electricity. Many people that would have otherwise found some way to afford their electricity simply stopped paying. When several large utility companies threatened to file bankruptcy and shut down, the States were forced to subsidize them. The various States turned to the Federal Government for help. Disaster areas were declared and Federal dollars flowed in. The printing presses ran 24 hours a day. Despite the inflation most people were optimistic that they were on the way to recovery. The attempt by the Federal Government to slow inflation by "price fixing" was a disaster. Many companies, which were already on the edge of bankruptcy, were forced to lay off thousands of employees. To keep these people working, subsidies were given to the large companies.

The President, caught between serious trouble at home and the need to maintain American presence in the oil fields called on the United Nations to "come to the aid of America, in her hour of need." The responding silence was deafening. Most other countries had problems enough at home and few really gave a damn what happened to America in the first place. Canada was the only country to send troops. They could only send one battalion, which was reportedly met at the border by a large number of the Michigan Militia and told to go home. They did.

Despite Government statements that the economy was stabilizing and the inflation was ending, the spiral continued. The pressure had eased up on the banks, not because people stopped wanting their money, but because fewer people still had any left in the banks. The Government printing presses ran day and night. They had stopped printing anything smaller than a twenty, which had more or less replaced the one dollar bill as a medium of exchange. Before the presses finally shut down they were only printing on one side of the bill to save the cost of the ink. One Senator, a long opponent of the President, was heard to remark, "This administration has done what no other has been able to do. They have actually put a stop to counterfeiting."

Many older people had their lives destroyed by the situation. Life savings would often not now even pay a month's rent. Many were starving. The times brought

out the best and worst in people. The staff of one nursing home simply walked out, leaving the old folks to fend for themselves. At another home the staff each took several of the people into their own homes. A news flash mentioned that the Branch Davidians had taken 12 residents from a local nursing home into their rebuilt church-compound, at the Mount Carmel site. With their retirement gone, hungry and cold, many people chose to "end their lives with dignity." The suicide rate rose by 600%. People responded differently. Alcoholism was up, while others, perhaps with a purpose in their lives for the first time, stopped drinking entirely and were able to help others survive.

A spokesperson for a large environmental lobby group stated that perhaps all this death was a good thing, because "now there will be room for our animal brothers." Their Washington, D.C. office was fire bombed the next day, by a 67-year-old man that made no attempt to escape. He had lost his life savings and retirement and his wife had recently died in their unheated apartment. He made the statement to the press that "I have never owned a gun, but by God I wish I had one now."

Despite the deteriorating conditions in Washington, D.C. most congressmen were reluctant to return to their districts. One unfortunate, nicknamed "Porky Pig" by his fellow lawmakers, because of his ability to get "pork barrel" projects for his district, was tarred and feathered by the same people that had claimed to love him just a few short months before, when he returned to his home state. With the collapse of the dollar, society broke down. Garbage lay uncollected in the streets. Some people without water to flush toilets, simply threw their waste out windows. People walking near an apartment building might suddenly be hit by human waste.

Having barely enough to feed themselves, but being unwilling to kill their pets, people turned thousands of dogs and cats loose "to fend for themselves." Cities had packs of starving dogs roaming the streets. Some of these packs soon located a slow moving, easy to kill food source in the homeless, the elderly and the young. Some people, more enterprising than their neighbors, found the dogs themselves to be a good source of food. It became a question of who would eat who first.

When the water stopped flowing through the pipes in the various cities, a mass exodus began. People swarmed over the thin police lines and headed for the countryside. Most were on foot, because only the strongest gangs could hold on

to running vehicles with gasoline. Struggling on foot, in the dead of winter, many having committed no crime other than trusting that strangers would always provide for them, untold numbers died. Those who remained in the city were the hopeless, the helpless, the sick and elderly, or their families who would not leave them behind.

They searched each day for enough water and food to face the next day, and waited for the help that would never arrive in time. If it had been only one city, help could have been sent, but it was too many cities.

While life in the cities was chaos, life in the country was far from perfect. Many people who had prepared for y2-k by storing food, water and gasoline now found themselves in a state of siege by their neighbors who had not prepared. Irrationally, the whole collapse was somehow blamed on these unfortunate people. These people were accused of "hoarding" and that they had destroyed the country, even though they had taken their money out of the banks slowly and months before the panic and had bought their food a little at a time when it was still plentiful. Houses were burned, people murdered, their stores looted and then fought over by the thieves. In a few areas, cooler heads prevailed and the people worked, for the most part, together. Some people had planned for lunacy by their neighbors, or rioters from the cities, and had fortified their homes. In many cases these people kept their food.

Feral dogs were also a problem in rural areas. Although there were fewer of them than in the urban areas, there was still much loss to livestock and few people would travel on foot alone, even when well armed. The Governor of Missouri was the first to call out the "Unorganized Militia" in his state. While many were poorly trained, unruly and poorly disciplined and in many cases lacking in matching uniforms, they made up for their lack of "military bearing" in exuberance. One crusty old Guard officer, having been pulled back to duty from retirement, remarked "I would hate to try to put them in a parade, but by God I would not hesitate to lead them into battle." Within two weeks a chain of command had been established, some basic training provided and the Missouri Militia was a functioning unit. This was mostly due to the volunteers feeling that they had something to prove to the nation. With Missouri's success other states followed suite.

Deciding the cities were a loss, at least for the present, the now legalized and recognized Militia turned to helping the refugees and policing the rural areas. Things were mostly organized along county lines, with as little gasoline used as

possible. This meant the militia often had to make a forced march to some trouble spot, often to find that the trouble had worked itself out by the time they got there.

## SURVIVALIST FICTION



### THE WINDS OF CHANGE:

#### The Girl and the Ninja

*by Old Bear*

The following short stories are for entertainment purposes only. The stories are purposely out of chronological order. You can read any story in any order you would like. Any resemblance to real people, living or dead, is coincidence. I am not a good enough writer to have planned it.

#### The Girl and the Ninja

Ellen looked out of the kitchen window of her parent's house and stared into the drizzling Oregon rain. "At 23 I ought to be on my own, or even married," she thought with some despair. She sometimes wondered why she was "different." The other young girls never seemed to have a worry in their heads. Even her own parents could not picture the world ever changing, unless it was to get better and better. Three years before, while working on her Associate of Arts degree in computer science, Ellen had first heard about a possible computer problem, that might occur at the end of the century. Most of her professors, while agreeing that the problem did exist, did not think it was anything to worry about, but one rather young professor had talked with her at some length about it and he was convinced that how much damage the problem might cause was totally unknown. "We have never done anything like this before," he said. "We are almost totally dependant on computers, in all aspects of our lives. If they should suddenly shut down, or start to give false data, the outcome is unimaginable."

Ellen had wondered what was being done about the problem and had not been much reassured. "The problem is that each segment of the government has its own computers, each business has its own, and the codes are almost all different. Secondly, nobody seems to know about the problem except some computer programmers, so very little is being done. The problem can be fixed. It would cost, but it can be fixed, providing people wake up in time for the work to be done before Jan. 2000," he had said.

Now it was three years later and the problem was in all the news. Now it even had its own cute name, "y2-k", and some people were publicly stating that we had waited too long to begin work on the problem. "Computer Science" had

turned out to be mostly a course on how to be a modern secretary, using the computer instead of a typewriter, but Ellen had learned about the internet, how to search effectively for information, and even the best way to set up internet advertising. All things a good little secretary should know. Upon getting her "degree" she was able to find employment at last. By working just a little harder than need be, she was able to find time to "surf" the internet for short periods. Her main area of interest was the possible computer glitch that appeared to be coming. It was not long before she found a web site hosted by some doctor, where she found out more than she had even wanted to know about y2-k. Ellen had gone through all the "stages." Denial, anger and finally acceptance.

Unlike some, she felt the need to do something to prepare, because the bottom line was that nobody seemed to really know how bad it might be. When she had approached her father, a retired building contractor and good father, but with all the imagination of a bulldozer blade, he had taken the time to explain that it was all "hype" because people had gotten along just fine without computers in the past and would do so again. None of Ellen's arguments could reach him, in his tight smugness. Ellen's mother looked to her husband for answers about the world, so was no help. Of Ellen's two younger brothers the oldest, Johnny, simply was not interested in anything other than girls and cars. Needing someone to talk to more than anything else, Ellen turned to her fifteen-year-old brother Steve, and found a more than sympathetic ear. When she outlined the problem and possible results his response was "Mad Max! Awesome!". Steve then showed her his "survival gear" which consisted of a black "Ninja" outfit, several knives, a crossbow and some other items that Ellen did not at that time recognize. "This is the best defense there is," he told her. "Totally silent."

Ellen was not convinced and found a used pump twelve gauge shotgun that she could afford. At least Ellen now had an ally, if a bit weird, in her preparations. Together they looked for and found places to stash food, water and other supplies around their parent's house. Ellen just hoped nobody decided to try to go into the "crawl space" under their house. Because of her "limited budget", and wanting to store food that she and her family could not mind eating, Ellen searched the grocery stores for "two for the price of one" sales and general good bargains. She got high calorie foods whenever possible, like Chili, beef stew, canned meats, plus powdered milk, mashed potato mix, peanut butter, Crisco, table salt, hard candy and as much as she could afford and find space to store.

Storing gasoline proved to be a problem until Steve came up with the idea of burying it in the back yard. Waiting until all were asleep in their house, they would sneak into the back yard and carefully dig a hole, saving the sod on plastic sheets and putting the dirt in plastic five gallon buckets. The extra dirt Steve would carry off in these buckets and dispose of. Ellen never knew where he took it and did not ask. Once the container of gas, with the correct amount of "Sta-bil" added, was set deeply in the hole, they filled it in, packed it down and replaced the sod. Her father wondered about the brown patches in the lawn, but with extra fertilizer and water the grass came back.

For lighting, if the power went off, they chose inexpensive kerosene lamps their local Wal-Mart carried. At first they had been buying the little bottles of lamp oil, but discovered from one "survival" forum that diesel fuel would also work and was MUCH cheaper. They soon heard about "off road" diesel that at 78 cents a gallon, became also the heating fuel to be used in their "kerosene" heater, that Ellen had bought and was now hidden safely under the house. At the price of diesel, they found themselves in the back yard again, hiding more fuel. Around this time, fire extinguishers began "magically" appearing in various places around their home. One suddenly appeared under the kitchen sink, several in the garage, and there seemed to be one in almost every closet in the house. The smoke detectors in every room also went almost unnoticed by her parents. When her father did comment, Ellen's "I saw an article about fire at work and it seemed a good idea." Brought a shrug and he put the matter out of his mind. "Ellen was always a strange child," he thought.

During this time Steve had been working on additions to their armament. By working odd jobs around the neighborhood after school he earned the money needed for these things. The cost was little because according to Steve "Ninjas traditionally made their own weapons and gear."

One day Ellen came home from work to find Steve cutting some 3/4 inch thin wall conduit into various lengths. Having seen some of his wilder ideas, Ellen was ready for about anything. "What ya doing squirt?" She asked. Steve looked up and said "Making a blowgun. Silent death."

Ellen was not convinced. "There are "blowguns" for sale already, so why go through all the work of building one" Ellen wanted to know.

Steve rolled his eyes and his voice took on that "Explaining things to my dumb sister" tone. "Those things are toys. They are all right for kids to practice in the house with, but I want real power and penetration and you can only get that by making it for yourself."

"So what is the difference between what you can buy and the thing you are making?" Ellen asked.

"Almost all the store-bought blowguns use darts with a little plastic ball on the end or a plastic cone. None of these fit the tube or barrel very tightly, so a lot of air goes around them, also the darts themselves are too light." Steve returned. "Here, I will show you," said Steve as he took a homemade dart out of a drawer. He then placed a Reader's Digest upright against his bed pillow, and stepping across the room, placed the dart in the piece of pipe. "Look. It won't fall out if I tip it down and shake it, like the store-bought darts will do. That means I can keep it loaded." Steve said. Filling his lungs with air, Steve placed his mouth over the end of the tube and blew. There was a soft "Pop" and then a thunk. Steve went to the bed and retrieved the Reader's Digest. The dart had penetrated the small book and about one half inch of the point showed on the other side.

Ellen WAS impressed in spite of herself. Many of Steve's projects did not yield tangible results, as far as Ellen could tell. This one did show promise however. While Ellen did not share Steve's thinking that the blowgun would be a good defense tool, in Ellen's mind many small animals fell to its accurate and more important quiet darts.

Steve twisted and pulled until he had the dart free. "Let me see that," said Ellen. "Why it's just a nail!" she exclaimed and could see the sudden hurt expression on Steve's face.

"It was a nail. Now it is a blowgun dart," said Steve sullenly.

"OK. I am sorry. I was just surprised that it was made from a nail." Ellen said, wanting to smooth her brother's ruffled feathers. "How did you get this cone on the end?" Ellen wondered.

"Here. I will show you. It is easier than trying to explain." Steve said. He took a 16 penny nail that had the point area flattened by hammering. This flat area had been filed to shape and sharpened. Ellen noted that barbs had been added, making it look wicked and, for a nail, dangerous. Steve then took a piece of black

visquene plastic and cut out a 2 inch square. He then made a cut from one edge to the center of this square. With a twisting action he slid one part of the square over of the other, making a cone shape. The sharpened nail was then forced through the center of the cone and strong black thread was wrapped around the end of the cone and the nail. Steve then took his blowgun and sat the unfinished dart inside. With scissors Steve cut off all of the plastic that protruded from the pipe. He then removed the finished dart for Ellen to inspect.

"That's all it takes to make them?" she exclaimed. "No wonder you didn't want to spend money to buy them."

"These are much better," Steve said. "Look. The cone is flexible and fits the blowgun. When you blow, the pressure forces the cone tighter against the barrel, so you don't lose any power. The weight of the nail gives it enough weight to really penetrate!" With that, Steve placed a cardboard box on his bed and fired the just made dart at it. Again the slight "popping" sound and only the black cone shown from the box. "Here. You try it," Steve said as he loaded and handed the blowgun to Ellen.

Her first try was a dismal failure. The dart barely reached Steve's bed and had a trajectory like a rainbow. "You are doing it wrong," said Steve. "You have to blow out your air, all at once." He had her watch him again, as he made penetrating the Reader's Digest look rather easy. This time Ellen's dart had enough power, but stuck in the plaster board above Steve's bed. "That is great Sis! Now lets work on accuracy."

Ellen later learned that Steve kept a small can of spackle under his bed, just in case of accidents like her's. Ellen surprised herself by soon being able to not only hit the Reader's Digest, but drive the dart almost through. She had to admit that her little brother was smart, at least part of the time.

While Ellen spent most of her free time trying to learn as much "survival" related material as possible, Steve continued his pursuit of "ninja knowledge". Ellen and Steve religiously hunted out yard sales, local flea markets and thrift stores to find survival supplies they could afford. Ellen found two pairs of good sturdy boots, in almost new condition, for a few dollars each. Steve found a set of Roller Blades that fit him for \$4.00 and several used skillsaw blades for a quarter a piece. Ellen had learned to not question Steve's buying strange things, but simply could not see a practical use for roller blades and skillsaw blades. When she mentioned it,

Steve told her the saw blades could be made into "shower cans". At least that is how it sounded to Ellen. At a small, run down, flea market, they bought an old, but in good shape, axe, for \$3.00, and an old hack saw that seemed much stronger than the newer ones. They added these to their growing stash, along with the hammers, saws, metal files, spare hack saw blades, strike anywhere matches, crow bar, and used bolt cutters, that they had already gathered. It was getting harder to find places to hide things around their parents' house. Steve told her about the method of "hiding in plain sight". After a little cleaning and repainting the axe and hack saw went next to her father's tools, where they were not noticed.

A few days later Steve showed Ellen what he had made out of the saw blades. "These are 'Shurikens,'" Steve said. They were about four inch square, hollowed to make points at the four corners and sharp! Steve claimed that he had made them "right under old Henderson's (his metal shop teacher) nose. Steve was still rubbing them on a sharpening stone to make them almost razor sharp. "What are these for ?" asked Ellen. Steve took a cardboard box and set it on his bed, this being the longest distance he could find in his room, and threw the square thing, not at all hard at the box. It sunk deeply into the box and had it been thrown with any force at all would have gone through both sides.

"It is like a throwing knife, that can't help but stick," Steve said. As Ellen studied the "Shuriken" she saw why it would stick every time. All anyone needed to do was practice accuracy and maybe power. Ellen thought these were interesting, but not nearly as practical as the blowgun for taking small game. Steve tried to explain that these were a defense weapon, but mostly used to distract an enemy. Ellen felt that they certainly would "distract" someone.

As time passed, under Steve's insistence, they found an abandoned building where they could practice with the weapons Steve had made. Ellen practiced too, mostly to make her brother happy, but to also evaluate the things he had made, for future use. She was surprised to learn that once she got past some bad mental programming, she was able to use these things pretty well. The blowgun was extremely easy to learn to shoot with surprising accuracy, once she learned how to get power from her lungs. The "Shurikens" were easy to make stick in the wooden target, a door, but it took time to gain accuracy to the point that Steve felt comfortable with her use of them.

Steve had used roller blades before, but had outgrown the boots. It took little practice to be comfortable on his new ones. Being fifteen and a "wannabe" Ninja, Steve worked to get all the possible use from the new roller blades. Besides being able to travel faster on pavement than he could on foot, Steve learned that he could also run on his tip toes, to cross lawns and places too uneven or soft to roller blade. Steve did most of his roller blading late at night, when he claimed it was safer, because he could see the car head lights and the cars could not suddenly speed around a corner toward him. Of course Steve liked to dress in black for these nightly jaunts.

Around this time, some punks had started harassing the neighborhood. They would drive through late at night, throw beer bottles at houses, knock over trash cans and drive through people's lawns. Nothing too bad, but aggravating. On one of his roller blading outings Steve saw the punks driving through a neighbor's yard. Picking up a rock, Steve set off in pursuit. He gained on them, by "running" across two lawns and by roller blading at top speed, pulled alongside the driver's side window, which was tinted dark. Wanting to get their attention, Steve threw the rock at the driver's window and was pleasantly surprised when the glass exploded into a thousand tiny fragments. The driver of course looked to see what had happened and was startled to see a very tall human figure, all in black, only feet away from him, seemingly gliding easily beside his car, which was moving at over 30 miles per hour. Steve's almost 6 foot frame loomed much larger, due to the height of the roller blades. Not only the driver, but the other punks gave a frightened yelp and the car swerved away from the partition that they now felt must be that of "death" itself. With the gas pedal glued to the floor the punk's car left the neighborhood, loudly and often sideways, never to return. (Many segments are based on true stories, past, present and future.)

On one of his less adventurous roller blade trips, Steve found a treasure trove of five gallon plastic buckets behind a bakery. Steve was all for "liberating" the buckets, but Ellen insisted on asking the owners, and was rewarded by being told they could have "all they wanted" of the sticky buckets. The next night, they went in Ellen's car to get some of the free buckets. As they started to get in Steve said "Hey Sis, Look at what I did," pointing to the front door frame of her car. "I drilled a small hole and screwed a short flat piece of metal to the frame so that it can be slid over the interior light button, to keep the interior light from coming on when you open the door."

"Why would you want that, and stop messing with my car," said Ellen.

"In case we need to get out of the car without the light coming on," Steve said "You can just slide the metal tab to the side and the light works fine."

Ellen looked her car over and said "OK . But don't go changing things on my car without asking me. I don't want any rocket launchers mounted under the fenders." Seeing the expression on Steve's face Ellen said "NO rocket launchers anywhere on my car! I have to drive this thing to work. So help me Steve, if you mess with my car without my permission I will kill you!"

As they approached the rear of the bakery Ellen noticed how dark it was. "I guess we will have to get used to the dark, if y2-k is bad," she thought. "Perhaps there is a higher power that protects fools and hero's. The two having so much in common."

Steve was dressed in his "urban ninja" outfit. This consisted of black pants, black long sleeve turtle neck shirt, plain brown cotton gloves and a black ski mask that he usually kept in his back pocket. He had sewn a strip of black cloth along the outside of his right thigh to hold a short blowgun, with six darts in a holder on his belt. Steve had talked Ellen into wearing a pouch with two shurikens on her belt, in the small of her back.

Steve was again "playing ninja", insisting on keeping his head down so there would appear to only be one person in the car. With the interior light switched off, Steve explained how he wanted Ellen to get out her car door, but hold it open while he "rolled" out and lay next to the car. She could then close her door. All Ellen, who was tired from her job, wanted to do was get a few buckets and go home. It was often easier to go along with her brother than it was to argue with him.

She pulled alongside of the stack of plastic buckets and shut off the car. She opened the door as far as it would go and stepped slightly away, to give Steve room. Once he was out she closed the door and went to work. The buckets were indeed sticky from the cake frosting that had been shipped in them. At least it would be easy to clean with hot water Ellen thought. Engrossed in her work, Ellen did not at first notice that Steve was not helping her, or more importantly, hear the approach of the two men. Suddenly Ellen "felt" danger and looked up from the buckets she was separating to see a strange man standing on each side of her, only about five feet away. Ellen felt the need to swallow, but her mouth

was suddenly dry. The men appeared to be in their early twenties and wore the same kind of jacket. Ellen thought that she recognized it as belonging to one of the gangs that had sprung up around the area. One of the men produced, with a fluid movement, a wicked looking knife. Ellen wiped her damp palms on her pants and took a step backwards, so that she could watch both men at once. "Hey Baby. Let's you and us go for a ride," one of the men taunted. "Forget them buckets. We will show you what a good time is," the other one said.

Ellen shook her head and managing to speak in a more or less normal voice answered "No thank you. I have to be getting home now."

"I SAID, let's go for a ride," the man repeated, this time with more command in his voice. "Come on Baby. You cooperate and we won't hurt you none. " "You gonna like it, once we start." The other said.

By now Ellen was really scared. "This can't be happening!" she thought. "This is a good neighborhood and this is America and I am a good girl." But it was happening. Both men edged closer to Ellen, cutting off any avenues of escape. The man holding the knife screamed. Ellen in her heightened state of tension jumped and her hand, almost as if it had a mind of its own, went to the small of her back. The knife wielder dropped his knife and both hands went to his face, where a black cone could barely be seen in the subdued light, protruding from his left eye socket. "Take it out!" "Take it out!" he screamed.

Remembering the wicked barbs, Ellen knew that "it" would not be coming out easily. Suddenly Ellen was aware that her right hand was moving away from her back and forward, in an underhand throwing motion, and for the first time in her sheltered life, Ellen threw razor sharp steel at another human being. She threw it as hard as she could. The shuriken seemed to slide from her hand and into the stomach of the punk. It sunk in at least half of its length and the punk's mouth opened as if to scream, but no sound came from his throat. Ellen almost jumped out of her skin as a hand grasped her shoulder. The figure dressed in black jerked her and said "Let's get out of here Sis!" and shoved her toward the car.

The punk that had taken up collecting shurikens growled "You \*\*\*\*\*s! I am going to blow your damn heads off!" and reached in his jacket pocket. Steve took two fast steps and kicked the man in the stomach, directly over the imbedded shuriken, forcing it deeply inside and out of sight. This time when the man's

mouth opened he did scream. Ellen had the door open and was starting the car already. As Steve jumped into the car, Ellen roared away.

"Stop the car, Sis," Steve said. Ellen looked at him with eyes that did not seem to see him. "STOP THE CAR!" he yelled and recognition came into her eyes and she did stop. Steve told her to wait right there and ran back down the alley. He found the man with the shuriken laying on his side with his legs down up. Steve felt the man's jacket pockets and took the short barreled revolver that he found there. He then moved quickly to the other man, still standing with his hands cupped around his eye. "Here. Let me help you," said Steve as he grasped the end of the dart. With a sudden strong jerk, Steve had the dart and the man spun around in circles of pain, emitting a high-pitched scream that sounded a lot like a woman. Steve raced back to Ellen's car and she was all too ready to speed away. Ellen wanted to go directly to the police station, but Steve talked her out of it. Instead they went home. When Steve explained that they had maimed one man and probably killed another, Ellen saw the wisdom in not dialing 911.

When Steve pulled the dart out of his pocket, Ellen took one quick look and fled to the bathroom and retched her insides out. The flattened head of the dart had probably hit bone and bent over, forming a hook. Ellen would never think of Steve's "Ninja toys" in the same way again and it seemed to her that her "Little Brother" was in some way changed from that time on.

# SURVIVALIST FICTION



## THE WINDS OF CHANGE:

### Foraging

*by Old Bear*

(Not for the squeamish, faint hearted or children under 35, even then I am not sure anybody should read it)

"They had been watching the house for what seemed like hours. They were two days away from home, the furthest they had yet foraged, and it made Keith nervous, but then again everything made Keith nervous. "Nervous" was the price for staying alive. Keith's back ached and there was a fly, or something crawling on his neck. There had been no activity in the house in all the time they had watched through their rifle scopes. The front door stood partly open and something was laying on the floor just inside. It looked like a pile of rags. No smoke showed from the chimney, as should have been the case. A newer car, parked in a opened sided shed, showed by the thick layer of dust that it had not moved in months. Keith slowly turned his head and caught Jeremy, his stepson's, attention. He finger-signed for him to advance. While Keith covered the house with his rifle, Jeremy made a series of short dashes until he had achieved suitable cover again. "Now it's my turn" thought Keith as he raised his body from the kneeling position. His body protested too long being immobile by sending sharp pains through his joints. "Damn! I am getting too old for this, " thought Keith. As he made his run from what cover there was to the next safe area, he kept thinking "one of these days one of us is going to get whacked, doing this". Keith reached his goal and dropped down. With another signal passed between them Jeremy made a rush and flattened himself against the house wall. This was the time that anybody in the house would have to open fire, if they were going to. The rush to the house did not bring a hail of bullets and Keith took several deep breaths. He signaled Jeremy to take the back door and prepared to go in the front. After waiting the prescribed amount of time, he switched to his handgun and rushed the front door. He immediatly saw the body laying on the living room floor. He could see by the way the blood had dried that it had been several hours at least. It was the body of a man, middle aged. Moving to a better position, he waited for Jeremy . They then began a room to room check of the house, in case hostiles were still present. Looking in the bed room door Keith felt his stomach churn, despite all that he had seen in the past two years. A woman was tied spread eagle on the bed. She was middle aged and had probably never been particularly pretty. Dried

blood and entrails showed where a poor job of disemboweling had been done to her. She should have been dead, but she wasn't. Her eyes looked straight into his. Keith's eyes swept the room, before he went in. Such training was why he was still alive and others weren't. He pulled his knife and the ropes that bound her seemed to melt away from the Gerber steel. Her mouth formed a soundless word. "Water". Keith pressed his canteens to her lips, raising her head slightly. She drank, choked, then drank some more. As he started to withdraw the canteen she spoke in a hoarse croak, "more". He gave her more water, then rubbed her wrists to bring back circulation, and was pleased when she was able to hold the canteen herself. Keith caught movement out of the corner of his eye and noticed Jeremy standing at the door, outside of the woman's sight. Jeremy drew his four finger across his throat in the old "cut throat" sign. Jeremy was such a kind boy. He hated to see anything suffer. Of course he was right. That would be the kindest thing he could do for the woman, but Keith had grown up and lived in a entirely different time than Jeremy and he felt that he just had to try. Leaving his canteen with the woman Keith went into the hall to talk with his stepson. "See if you can find me some clean water and some clean rags. Oh yeah, And maybe some thread." Jeremy gave him that "are you nuts" look, but went. By the time Keith went back into the bedroom his canteen was empty. He took the canteen and went to look for more water. A hand pump had been installed on the well behind the house and the water was cold and looked clean. These people had been pretty well prepared, it seemed. He had only shortly returned to the woman when Jeremy turned up with a pan of water and a real towel, of all things. Keith wet the towel and began to soak away the dried blood, so he could try to judge the extent of the wound. By the time he had the wound more or less clean, Jeremy was back with a partial spool of thread. Using the needle from his own sewing kit, Keith began to sew rent intestines back together. The wound had not been too deep, so there was a possibility...He sent Jeremy for two refills of water before he felt he had done enough cleaning. While he worked he talked to the woman. mostly to try to distract her from any pain, but she seemed not to feel much. "What happened?" he ask. "Two days ago a young woman came walking up our drive. She was alone and had a baby, that was crying. My husband went to the door. He was always careful not to step outside until he knew it was safe. The woman said her man was killed by some raiders and she and her baby were bad hungry." The woman paused, drank from the canteen, then went on. "If anybody strange came up I was supposed to watch from the kitchen to make sure nobody was sneaking up from that side, but when I heard that baby crying I came to help. I was just coming out of the kitchen, when the woman seemed like she was about to faint and drop that baby. My husband

stepped out to sort of catch her like and somebody shot him from the woods." "Ed, that's my husband, he was real strong like and even though they shot him, he turned around and tried to get to his gun, by the door. That's when that woman grabbed a pistol out of the baby's blankets and shot him in the back. She shot him three times. May she burn in hell for it!". She shivered and he covered her chest and legs with a sheet that he saw on the floor. " Such an old trick." thought Keith. He would have seen through it in a instant. Jeremy would have been even less likely to fall for something like that, and yet this man, who was obviously very capable, had allowed his instincts to take over for just a moment and now he was dead. It was an all too common situation. Slowly neighbors had left to join with other family, or perhaps some had died from Typhoid or Cholera. These people had eventually found themselves isolated, with no close neighbors for support and had become perfect targets for raiders. Perhaps they did not know anyone they could join with, or maybe they stayed, hoping that loved ones would some day arrive. He was almost finished sewing. " I didn't figure I could get to Ed's gun with that tramp standing there with her pistol, so I ran back towards the kitchen for my gun. Before I could get there, the kitchen door burst in and three men rushed in and grabbed me." She seemed to have a glazed look to her eyes, but her voice was clear. Keith ask the question that was most on his mind. " How many were there and when did they leave ?". There was a long pause before she said " There was six of them. Five guys and that girl. They stayed here all that day and night and left real early this morning. They loaded our food and whatever they wanted in our old pick up. We had maybe ten gallons of gas left, maybe a bit less. I don't know if the men were just going to leave me, or if they forgot about me, but they all left and then that woman came back with a knife and cut me. She is the one that done this ! I could see in her face that she liked doing it. She was a daughter of Satan! Damn her forever! May she die by fire and burn in hell!". He left her and went to find Jeremy. If it was only this morning, then those raiders could still be close by. After explaining, they separated to search for usable or tradable items. Of course the house had been ransacked and almost everything of real value taken. Light nylon clothing, considered useless, had been dumped on the floor, while others still hung in closets. Woman's shoes, once considered fashionable, but now useless in a world turned upside down, had been left. The heavier and winter clothing, blankets, the food, useful tools, etc. had all been taken. Jeremy went to search the out buildings and Keith checked out the book case. Most of the books had been dumped on the floor, but he checked each title to be sure that no valuable "How to" information was left behind. While almost every book was of some value now, their weight made it impossible to carry every book back to the

retreat. Finding nothing he considered worth taking, Keith went straight to the kitchen draws. Most people, except maybe women, never realized what good stuff could often be found in a kitchen drawer, he thought. Sure enough, he found a partial roll of tape, several cork stoppers, one with 4 sewing needles stuck in it, a old ice pick that would be perfect for leather work, and a tarnished .30-06 round. While it might not fire, somebody would still trade for it. If it did fire, you could just about bet that it would put deer meat on somebody's table. Keith mentally kicked himself again for not including a 30-06 in the rifles he got for the retreat. 30-06 rounds had a way of turning up in the strangest places, sometimes even in houses where the people swore they had never owned a 30-06. Just when Keith was sure that he would beat Jeremy's haul this time, Jeremy showed up with a hand file, a two blade pocket knife with only one blade broken, a small role of "bailing wire", several fish hooks, a rat trap and a perfectly good metal bucket, to carry it all in. After examining each others finds, Jeremy spoke, " that woman isn't in any condition to walk, or even be moved. More likely than not she will get all infected and die anyway. Even if we could get her home, what would Ma and Dorothy say about you dragging home another mouth to feed, and a wounded woman at that ?". Keith just shrugged. He knew it was silly to try to save her, but something in the way he had been raised and his own nature would not let him give up. It was this nature that had kept him and his small band alive when others, larger and better prepared, had perished. "We will give it a little while son." Keith said. "I doubt the raiders will come back here. They took about everything they thought was of any value already.". Jeremy rolled his eyes heavenward, a habit the he knew irritated his step father and walked away to keep watch. Keith went back to talk to the woman some more, hoping to get a description of the raiders and to possibly learn how well they were armed. He had seen enough death to know that it was in this bedroom, even before he felt for a pulse. The canteen has slipped from her hands and added it's liquid to the sticky mass. She had started bleeding again while he was gone. Keith reflected that he had never even learned what her name was. This thought, perhaps more than her death, filled him with a deep depression. Taking his canteen, Keith left the bed room, now tomb, and closed the door behind him. He drug the dead man's legs out of the way, so that the front door would close and called softly for Jeremy. Times were harsh. The living looked after the living and the dead would have to take care of the dead. They would not take the time to dig graves. These people's house would be their tomb and marker. Keith and Jeremy made another search of the house and out buildings for hidden treasures, but found little more that was worth carrying. A search by Keith for an attic proved fruitless. This had been their least successful foraging trip so far. Times were getting tougher all

over. After they both topped off their canteens from the hand pump, they scanned the tree line for several minutes before leaving at a brisk pace. The trip home would take longer, because they would have to be even more careful than usual, with the knowledge of raiders in the area. Keith longed for home, his chair, the wood stove, the sounds of activity, familiar voices and the chance to let his senses somewhat relax. Keith thought of his pipe and tobacco pouch with longing. He did not allow himself this luxury while foraging or on patrol around the retreat, because the smell of the smoke could give his position away. With what had become old habit, Keith put all thoughts of the dead from his mind and the depression lifted with every step away from the doomed homestead. Keith liked talking to people and was looking forward to spreading the news. The next trade day would set people buzzing. People would carry the news to neighbors, who would in turn pass it on. When the raiders struck again, many people would be warned. Eventually the raiders would choose the wrong victims. "Those who live by the sword, shall die by the sword." Eventually family, neighbors or friends of the slain would go out to hunt them down. Rumors and stories abounded, mostly untrue, but good telling none the less. One story, almost a legend, told of how a man came home to find his family killed by a large group of raiders. After burying his loved ones, this man, totally alone, had gone after the killers and one by one executed them. At first the raiders tried to ambush him, but he eluded their traps and continued to hunt them. Finally the raiders had panicked and tried to get away, but he still pursued them. They left nothing behind, destroying everything edible as they passed. Still the man followed. The story claimed that he had begun to eat his victims, even drying some of the meat to carry with him. According to the story all of the raiders were killed, with the last one dying over a year after they had killed his family. His work done, the man simply disappeared. He was said to still be living alone, somewhere in the forest, always hunting for other raiders. Keith did not doubt that there may have once been a grain of truth to the story. Checking his compass, Keith decided to follow the power line right of way, instead of the road or heading cross country. While the right of ways had become more brushy, they still offered pretty good walking. Their light back packs riding easily, they set a steady pace. Talking was kept to a minimum and hand signs were used most of the time. Few sounds would register in the brain as quickly as the sound of a human voice. When they did need to talk, it was in whispers, with their heads close together. It was not that they really expected trouble, but it was standard operating procedure. By the time they came to a small creek, they had each drunk about half of the water in one of their canteens. Jeremy poured what was left in his canteen into Keith's and drank the little that would not fit. He then filled his now empty canteen from the stream and added

purification tablets. While it might have been safe to drink the creek water, it was not worth taking the chance. They did not know what filth might be laying in some pool upstream. Boiling would have been better, but when foraging they made it a practice to seldom light a fire. They once had filters for purifying water, but had squandered them early on and now had to use other ways. Keith chewed some dried meat as he walked. Probably dog he thought, judging from the taste. With the salt and spice it had on it, it was pretty good, actually. Keith never had developed a real taste for dog. They walked steadily, occasionally pausing to check their compass. At intervals they took sit down breaks, but never for too long. Too long a break caused muscles to stiffen. Using the position of the sun for their time piece, they began to look for a good spot to stop for the night, while there was still about an hour of daylight left. Eventually Jeremy spotted the right tree and unpacked his set of light weight climbing spikes. Leaving his pack and rifle with Keith, Jeremy took the mesh nylon bags, that would serve as their beds up the tree with him. Soon he had his own and Keith's tied to strong branches and lowered a rope for all their gear. The last thing Keith sent up was the two rifles, which Jeremy secured to a branch. Armed with only his handgun and fighting knife, Keith felt almost naked. Jeremy lowered the climbing spikes to Keith, who was soon up the tree. Carefully easing himself into his "bed", after checking that it was secure, Keith tried to find the most comfortable position. The nylon sleeping gear were a idea that Barton had come up with. Sort of a short hammock, they could be tied to a branch and formed a bag like sleeping place. Sleeping was done in an upright position, which was far from comfortable, but due to the nylon mesh, fairly secure and safe from falling. Keith hated them. By morning Keith would find his body stiff from lack of movement, only to be forced to carefully make his way out of his support and down the tree. At least they could both more or less sleep, without the fear of being wakened by the fangs feral dogs. Before they had the short hammocks, which Barton named "Tree Beds" and Keith named "torture racks", they had to take turns standing watch all night, something that built up fatigue very quickly. Always trying to look on the bright side, Keith thought that at least it was not raining this time. As the sky was beginning to lighten, Jeremy poked Keith awake. Keith had squirmed and fidgeted for a long time and never realized he had fallen asleep. Almost losing his grip on the tree limb, with his body screaming in protest, Keith made his way out of the tree. While Jeremy got the rifles ready to send down, Keith worked out as much of the pain and stiffness as possible. " I am too damn old for this," he thought. Soon Jeremy would be going out with Michael, and Keith could stay at home and worry all the time they were gone. Soon they were again on their way and as the sun warmed the world Keith's body stopped tormenting him. Jerked

meat made a breakfast while on the move, washed down with cold water from their canteens. The world was good. By pushing hard they were close to the retreat before dark. As they neared, they became more careful. Tied to a tree limb on the trail they were using was a faded white rag. If this rag had been missing it would have meant that something bad had happened and for them to by pass the retreat and go to a prearranged spot. Of course it might not have been possible for anyone to get to this signal, so they approached with caution. Keith waited with Jeremy's pack, while Jeremy went carefully forward, crawling the last 50 yards, to observe the retreat. The American flag was still flying. If it had not been, this would have been a trouble signal. Time seemed to drag for Keith as he waited. "What is he doing?" "Gone home and eating lunch?" Keith muttered. Jeremy was thorough. He waited until he saw Dorothy come out of the house with some laundry. If hostiles had been in control of the retreat she would have signaled in a prearranged manner. When she did not, Jeremy waved a white rag on a stick, in case who ever was in the observation post had not already seen him, only when he was sure that he had been seen and recognized did he go back for Keith. They were home.

## SURVIVALIST FICTION



### THE WINDS OF CHANGE:

#### The Winds of Winter

*by Old Bear*

The following short stories are for entertainment purposes only. The stories are purposely out of chronological order. You can read any story in any order you would like. Any resemblance to real people, living or dead, is coincidence. I am not a good enough writer to have planned it.

#### The Winds of Winter

Life did not end in the urban areas after the collapse. Even with the mass exodus, urban dwellers still outnumbered the rural folks.

Some animals have sharp fangs, others large claws, still others the gift of flight, or great speed in running or swimming. Man has none of these things, yet man has survived. Where man lacks the fangs and sharp claws, he does have hands with an opposable thumb, and a creative brain. Man developed his own "fangs" until they far outstretched the rest of the animal kingdom. Although not as much as the ants or the honey bees, man is still a "social animal." Humans tend to seek out other humans and to form groups.

Those still in the cities suddenly found it necessary to redefine their priorities. Water, which had been taken for granted by almost all, was suddenly the most important commodity, followed by warmth-shelter, with food bringing up the rear. Tent cities and "Shanty towns" sprang up around water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Without electricity, people wanted to live close enough to a source of water to be able to haul water to their home. This was why so many great cities started as villages near water.

Even with law enforcement, for the most part nonexistent, the number of honest people still exceeded the number of criminals and punks. This also may have been because so many of the "criminal types" had "bailed out" of the cities earlier on. As is the tendency with humans everywhere, some form of order sprang up in the new "villages." Lacking paid police officers and anything to pay them, many of these villages went, unknowingly, back to the 1500's English system called "The night watch," where every able-bodied male was required to serve on the watch a

certain number of nights per month. The number in the watch depended on each village's size, situation and danger level. While many people owned guns, the weapon of choice for this kind of night work soon turned out to be another item from the 1500's, the spear. A long stout staff, with a solid sharp blade on the end was perfect for checking out dark niches, did not waste precious ammunition and was more than adequate in case of a feral dog attack, feral dogs still being a serious problem in many urban areas. In the Vietnamese communities, feral dogs did not seem to be as much of a problem. Also the spear did not "jam" or run out of ammunition and could be made by most people. The "night watch" would patrol the village during the hours of darkness, but during the day time the "Hue and Cry" was the system for dealing with crime. It is probable that almost no one had ever even heard of the "hue and cry" system that had been used for centuries in medieval Europe and that it developed here the same way it had there, so long ago. This system was simplicity itself. When somebody, or a group, tried to rob, rape, pillage, etc. someone would cry out "Thief!" "Stop Thief!" and point at the would be criminal. Other villagers would rush to see what the excitement was and they would also take up the cry. People would grab their weapons, from M-16's, to baseball bats with large nails driven through the head, and begin to chase the criminal or criminals. People knew that if they failed to support their neighbors, they would not be protected if they were being attacked, so they turned out with gusto. As more people spilled from shacks and tents, the criminals would soon find themselves badly outnumbered. Eventually, unless the criminal or criminals were able to escape, the crowd of angry villagers would surround them and justice would be fast, if somewhat brutal. In another time some people had opposed capital punishment and claimed that it did not deter crime. This may have once been so, with the long delays and the question of guilt or innocence often hinging on the price of the lawyers, but the older system now in use in many of the growing villages definitely did deter crime. At the very least the criminal, when caught, was permanently "deterred."

The real "first profession" was not prostitution, which came second, but the procurement of food and bartering it for services, sometimes of the second profession.

Fishing is one of mankind's oldest industries and wherever there was a large enough body of water some men began to fish, not only to feed themselves and their family's, but to trade.

Fuel for warmth and cooking became a very tradeable item. There was a great many burnable things in and around most cities. Some of these had previously been thought of as trash. Huge piles of rubber tires existed in many places. Soon enterprising people were finding ways to cut these into smaller more manageable pieces, which were used for heating and for trade. Old wooden buildings were torn down. Some of the lumber was used for cook fires and heating during the first and harshest winter. Some of the wood was used to replace tents with more solid, easier to heat, buildings. Most buildings had not been designed for "primitive" heating.

In the early days, after the collapse of the dollar, many fires had broken out, due to the use of candles for lighting and various forms of heating-cooking that most people were not experienced in the use of. Many fires had also been set during the rioting. Along with the night watch and the hue and cry, volunteer fire brigades were formed. Based on the hue and cry, the call of "Fire!" would bring people scurrying from their shelters to join in extinguishing the fire. "Bucket lines" were formed, to bring water to the fire. In some villages older fire fighting equipment was put back into use, but most had been designed to hook into existing water supplies, which now seldom worked.

Whenever large masses of human beings came together, waste disposal always presents a problem. Overall "the system" in America had worked so well that most people barely noticed that it existed. Mail was delivered promptly, garbage was collected, the sewers worked, clean water flowed with the turn of a knob and electricity was always there. Most people had grown totally complacent about all of these things. For all of their lifetime, this was how it had always been and this was how it would always be. Despite its efficiency, huge cracks had been forming in the "system" years before the collapse.

Water had already become a problem. Political battles had been fought over water, often resulting in the area with the most population taking the much needed water from the more rural areas. It was only by bigger and better water purification plants that the growing needs of an ever increasing population could be met. It was claimed by water purification engineers that a drop of water falling in the Great Valley of California, would pass through the kidneys of six people, before returning to the sea.

Disposing of waste had already become a nightmare for the engineers and politicians. Modern packaging and the increasing population were the cause of

most of this. People were used to placing their trash on the sidewalk and it would "magically" disappear. So even after the collapse, many people continued to haul their trash to the side walk and add it to the ever growing pile, in the hopes that "the system" would start working again and make the trash go away. In some places this garbage formed huge "walls" that ran for miles. Once ignited, these smouldered for weeks, giving off continuous foul-smelling smoke that made the cities seem like something out of "Dante's Inferno."

Human waste was another problem, which was taken for granted. Simply move the handle and clean water would wash the awful smelling stuff out of your life. When the water stopped flowing, the toilets stopped flushing. This did not deter many people from continuing to use them however. Some dumped ever more precious water down them to make them flush, while others simply let the pile grow until the smell drove them from using that room. Around this time people begin to find inventive ways of dealing with human waste. Some simply threw it out their windows. Others buried it. A few built the old fashioned, but sanitary "out houses." Some dumped it in the gutter for rains to carry to the nearest creek or river. Rats, who always live side by side with men, increased in numbers suddenly as they found huge piles of food on the sidewalks. Old diseases made comebacks, as people began to make the same mistakes as their ancestors. Typhoid and Cholera, both connected to unsanitary conditions, killed thousands before simple waste disposal rules were again enforced.

The number of survivalists living and secretly preparing within the urban areas had never been known. These prepared people now proved to be the backbone from which rebuilding could begin. Along with food and water, gasoline had been stored, often in violation of existing fire codes. Many more people had made preparation than was ever suspected. While these people had planned for their family's needs first, most were far sighted enough to realize that in order for them to survive, they would have to help their neighbors. Much of the early organization came from these people.

During that first winter, most people struggled to get through each day, but some found uses for their knowledge and began to ply a trade. A doctor was always in demand, although many had become so specialized that without modern equipment, they were almost useless. Old-fashioned soap making became a worthwhile business. A gunsmith could make a living.

With the approach of spring, many of the people accepted the fact that "something" had gone wrong and that "Big Brother" was not going to be there, taking care of their every need. These people cultivated the soil to plant gardens. Because of the labor involved, many of the gardens were community efforts. Packets of seeds were found, many much older than the recommended planting date. Many people had enthusiasm and the necessary energy, but lacked the practical knowledge of growing food crops.

A great and, until now, totally unvalued source of knowledge was found in the old. Having lived through so many major changes, the older people most often had answers, to a world that somewhat resembled that of their youth. Sought out for their knowledge, the old were suddenly respected and valued once again, as people began to look past each day and toward the future. Despite the stress and rigors of life in the new villages, many people found that they had more energy and actually "felt better" than before the collapse. This was because the collapse had brought one blessing with it. Television was gone. Many people had been suffering from "sensory overload." When the power grid shut down, it took the TV's and computers with it. People suddenly found that they had more time to do the things they wanted and needed to do. Families actually had meaningful conversations together. Living in the raw present, people found their lives full. No longer did they need to live vicariously to find meaning. The rebuilding had begun, but it would be a long road back.