

# **Once a Prepper**

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# Chapter 1

I, Levi Swanson, was once a prepper. Maybe I still am a prepper but things have changed so much in my world that many old terms hardly apply anymore. I stored food and supplies for the End Times. I was way ahead of my fellow man by having all those supplies if things ever turned south.

Most people lived paycheck-to-paycheck back then. Of course they did that to themselves. It seemed everyone had the latest and greatest Smart phone that they carried and used everywhere. At home they had the larger cable or satellite television package so they could watch whatever they wanted. They ate out in restaurants often which even they had to know was expensive. Many spent time and money in bars.

That was not my life. I scrimped and saved money anyway I could. Then I spent that money of course. I bought extra food which I stored. And I bought other supplies that I stored. Things like extra soap of all kinds that I used on a regular basis. More things like deodorant, toothpaste and toothbrushes, shampoo, and other items. I was like a maniac scrimping now so I would have supplies when others did not.

Of course I told no one I was doing this. Not my friends or my co-workers. I might have told my family but it was just me and I had no family. I rented like almost everyone. Very few people could afford to buy a house. Especially someone of my age of twenty eight. I rented the smallest and cheapest apartment I could find.

The apartment was very small and so I could not store very much stuff. I did the regular things to provide more storage. I did not have a box-spring for my bed and

instead I had the mattress on a piece of plywood that the big store had cut down to the right size for me. Under that plywood were many standard five gallon buckets. I got the buckets from local delis and bakeries. Sometime for free and sometimes I paid a dollar each for them. Each of these buckets was full of supplies, mostly food.

I had a coffee table with a table cloth over it. It was really just a piece of plywood sitting on six more of those five gallon buckets. The table cloth covered the buckets so you couldn't see them. The cloth I bought at the thrift store when they had a half-price day sale.

I worked hard at my job and I showed up every day and I never came in drunk or hung-over. Because of that simple fact I got raises in pay when others there did not. When over-time was available I always volunteered for the extra time. I always needed money. On Friday nights I never went to the bar with the other workers. Bars are expensive and on Saturday you have nothing to show for all that money you spent except a headache.

I had an old pickup that I drove to work. One front fender was a different color than the rest of the vehicle. There were many dents here and there and the right side (where the odd colored fender was) you could plainly see scrape marks on the whole side. The right side doors opened and closed hard but they did work. The end gate was yet another color. It didn't work all that good either. But the truck ran fine and that was all I needed.

After getting enough raises at work I started looking in the free local paper which was all ads. I was looking for a different place to live. I watched the ads for almost a year before I even looked at a place. It was a small house out in the country about ten miles from town. It turned out to be a very small house, not much bigger than a good two bedroom apartment. It did have a one car garage and a small shed. And it was cheap.

The house was a two bedroom with one bathroom. The bathroom was small but certainly adequate. Of course the bedrooms were small too because it was quite a small house. Surprisingly the kitchen area did include a fair sized pantry. It was heated with two propane gas space heaters but I think one was all that was used because the second looked brand new. There was a washer and dryer included and outside was a standard clothes line. The house had a metal roof which was somewhat uncommon for this area but I liked it.

I rented it and that is where I still live today. When I got this house I had way more room to store stuff so as money permitted I bought more and more supplies. I also bought three guns, none of which were new. Their only real similarity was that the price was cheap and they each fit the criteria that I was looking for. I wanted a deer rifle, a twenty-two rifle, and a center-fire handgun. Once I bought the guns I shot each to make sure they functioned perfectly and were at least fairly accurate. Once I established that each gun did those two things I added ammunition to the supplies I bought.

You might ask why I was buying all this stuff. Well I thought the End Times might be coming. Well that is not really true. I knew the End Times were coming. People called it many different things. End Times, SHTF, The-End-of-The-World-As-We-Know-It, the Second Great Depression, World War Three, the Great Collapse, or many other things.

What it was is that I just thought things would not just continue as they were now. I thought things would deteriorate and we as a nation would maybe cease to exist or at least cease to exist as we were now. I expected the great US Dollar would collapse and throw the nation and likely the whole world into chaos.

You see everything around us is built on debt and debt makes a very poor foundation. Our nation is twenty

three trillion dollars in debt. World debt is over two hundred and fifty trillion dollars so almost every other country is way in debt too. And it is not just nations that have high debt. Corporations have never had this much debt before. Student debt is over one and half trillion dollars and goes up every day. Auto loan debt is about the same as student loan debt and it too has never been higher. Personal debt is setting record highs.

But maybe all that debt might still be fine if we had a growing economy and a growing Gross Domestic Product and a young and growing population. But we have none of those things. Instead we have an aging population with ever more old people and fewer young people. And our economy is stagnant at best. We, as a nation, have farmed out almost all of our manufacturing to other countries. We are called a 'service based economy'. It is very hard to grow that kind of an economy especially if you have a level population, which is what we have here.

Our only growth is from immigrants and most of those are illegal immigrants. These for the most part are people that do not even speak our language and have way different customs than we do here. And they are mostly uneducated or at best have a high school education. So they add little to the economy and instead are a drag on our country. It is not their fault, it is just a fact.

They come here with no money so we have to feed them. They have no place to stay so we have to house them. They are sometimes sick so we have to heal them. And this is all done with taxpayer dollars. But of course we do not pay enough taxes for all this so our federal government just goes ever deeper into debt. A trillion dollars more in debt every year and it gets worse every year too.

A person does not need a degree in economics to know this huge addition to the debt every year cannot go on forever. And what do you think will happen when it

cannot go on anymore? Well, that is the hundred dollar question isn't it. I think it means the End Times. So I am preparing for that event. The only real question is when it will happen and not if it will happen.

Will it happen this year? Next year? Or ten years from now? I don't think anyone knows the answer to that question. And when the end comes and we as a nation can no longer add to the debt what exactly will happen then? I don't know the answer to that either. But I am very sure it will not be happy times. So I prepare. I prepare to best of my ability.

Moving to this small rental house in the country is a big part of me trying to be prepared. The benefits of living here rather than in a small apartment are countless. I am so glad I found this place.

## Chapter 2

I admit I live in poor state for being a prepper. You see I live in central Minnesota. For those of you that don't know, Minnesota has nine months of winter every year. And those ten month long winters usually contain a huge amount of snow and always a huge amount of very cold weather. Living with eleven months of winter is hard to do even in the best of times and when the End Times gets here it will be magnitudes worse. No a real prepper would ever live in a place like this with twelve months of winter every year. Oh, and by the way, I don't like winter.

So I plan for those thirteen months of winter along with planning for everything else. And this house I rent is heated with propane like just about every house in the country here. But luckily this house also has a small wood stove in the kitchen/living room area. So I bought a chainsaw at yard sale that runs and I have started cutting trees and making firewood. Everything about making firewood is both hard work and dangerous work.

I am stacking the firewood behind the garage. On top of regular firewood I also scavenge all wood that I can get for free. I am glad I have this pickup. I get a lot of pallets for free. Some places just give me damaged pallets that they can no longer use. That is fine because I just bust them up for firewood anyway. The wood in these pallets is almost all hard wood that burns well and lasts much longer than the soft wood. I do sometimes burn soft wood too like all the regular lumber that I scrounge up for free.

I am not afraid to dumpster dive for free wood. Many building sites will let me take wood scraps that they are throwing away. Sometime they throw stuff into a handy

pile I sort through and take what I want and throw the rest in their dumpster for them. It saves them from paying for more dumpster dumps and saves a couple man-hours by having me sort and throw the waste away for them. It helps both of us.

My job is at a printing place and I start work very early in the morning. I usually start about three in the morning so I get off work about ten-thirty or eleven. This works out good for me and allows me some free day-light hours to do stuff.

Starting in the very short summer we have here that lasts roughly three days; I try to get in some fishing. This is not just a pastime but I do it to save money on food. Minnesota does have a lot of fish along with many lakes and rivers. Of course lakes and rivers are usually frozen over but like every other fisherman that lives here you get adept at cutting a hole in the ice to fish.

It is probably odd for most people to think about fishing through a hole in the ice but I can assure you that it does work. When the ice gets over two feet thick I quit fishing until we get the three days of summer to melt the ice. It is not uncommon for the ice to get over three feet thick and four feet of ice happens sometimes too.

The land here in the summer is lush. This might surprise some because of the short growing season but plants have adapted to this place. It usually goes from below zero to ninety above in one or two days. Along with the incredibly high humidity, plants can grow very fast and they do too.

To this end I have purchased many books on foraging and on plant identification that I use and gather free food from the surrounding area. There are countless edible plants around here. And as fall approaches you can find many different kinds of berries. I gather everything that I possibly can to reduce my food bill. Some like wild

strawberries and blueberries can be gathered in the summer too.

There were two apple trees here on the property when I started renting here and I gather fruit from them. Also there are three more apple trees about a mile down the county road where a house used to stand that is long gone now but the trees remain. I gather those apples also. I eat them fresh and freeze some and dry the bulk of them in a couple of cheap dehydrators that I bought that looked like they were hardly used. I got them at yard sales where I do a lot of my shopping.

With fall comes hunting season and that was the main reason I bought those guns. The twenty-two rifle gets the most use. There are many rabbits and squirrels here. Both taste very good even when I cook them and I am certainly not a chef. I also shoot a deer every year and sometimes I shoot two. This year I could have legally taken three or four deer but two was enough. I have a small chest freezer that I bought used and that is where I put the deer meat. I process all my own wild game to save money.

I do grow a small garden every year since I started living out here in this rental house. It does not supply all that much produce but I am just mainly using the small garden as a training exercise. Just to get experience in growing different plants. I have plenty of room here to expand the garden if and when the need arises. If I need to depend on a garden to grow all my food I now know how to do it and what plants grow best here. Just part of being prepared.

I had been considering getting some chickens because that is a common prepper item but I really don't think I will get any. I don't really have a good spot to put them. The one shed here is mostly full of other stuff and I need the garage so I guess no chickens. A person can only do what they can do.

I think our nation's downfall has started. The record low unemployment all Americans have enjoyed for the last couple years has turned around and now unemployment is going up again.

Retail sales outlets of all kinds have been fighting a losing battle to stay open for the last few years with many stores closing and now those store closings seem to be ramping up. The stock market, which I consider a very poor economic indicator, has also turned and is slowly going down now. Time will tell but I do think our nation's downhill slide is starting.

Chicago has just filed for bankruptcy! Our nation's third largest city is now officially broke and in dire financial trouble prompting the bankruptcy. Not a surprise to anyone who has been paying attention but a wake-up call to all those with their head in the sand.

Another month and again unemployment has got up and new job numbers have fallen way below expectations. Worker pay has also taken a hit which might mean more jobs have gone to part-time instead of being full-time employment. I am still working and we have had no layoffs where I work.

I have convinced the propane company that owns the tank at my rental house to switch out the propane tank to a larger size. It was a two hundred fifty gallon tank and now I have a five hundred gallon. I had money saved up so I had them fill that large tank now in the summer when prices are the lowest of the year. I have also bumped up my food purchases and I added more ammunition to my already large supply. I think the end is coming and I am desperately trying to be as ready as I can be.

People can hardly believe the dramatic rise just announced in the nation's unemployment. I was not surprised because many more businesses have filed for bankruptcy and have completely closed down all their stores. For the retail stores to close down now with the

Christmas season approaching means they must have been completely broke so they could not even take advantage of the Christmas rush.

This year I could buy as many as four deer tags and I have shot three deer for the first time ever in one season. Once completely deboned, the meat takes up little room in the freezer but I did have a bunch of frozen fish and some fruit in there already and now the freezer is packed along with the freezer on top of the refrigerator.

All the economic news is so bad that I did get one more deer tag and shot a fourth deer just before season closed. I had no freezer room so I made all the meat into jerky using my oven. It took me a few days but the deer hanging in the garage was frozen solid after just one day so I had no worries about losing any meat due to spoilage.

Things look bad for our nation.

## Chapter 3

Christmas sales were down this year and even below the dismal expectations. Right after Christmas there were several more stores that filed for bankruptcy protection. Even Walmart had poor Christmas sales. Many people thought it was because people were just buying everything online but then those online sales numbers came out and they were also down close to ten percent compared to last year. I think many people are getting concerned now.

The first of February they laid off half the work force from where I work. I am still there but the writing is on the wall and I know it is just a matter of time before the whole place closes down and then I will be out of a job.

March first and we got notices at work that March fifteenth the business will be closing. On March thirteenth the boss called me in and asked if I could stay on help with closing down the building for an extended time and do the clean-up. Of course I said yes. It was kind of a strange situation. My last pay check was for March fifteenth and the four days I worked after that I was paid in cash.

I was also able to bring home many things from the place that they were just going to throw in the dumpster. Some I could use and some I could sell I hoped. Some I just hauled to the recycler place and turned directly into cash. Not much but it was extra money. The three pickup loads of pallets I got did increase my firewood supply at home.

I signed up for unemployment and then I signed up for food assistance. I didn't know how long either would last but I would take what I could so I could hopefully

survive a little longer. Everyone was having financial trouble it seemed like. Many items were listed for sale on store bulletin boards, the local paper, and on free internet sites.

I did buy another large propane tank from a private party. It was a two hundred fifty gallon tank for a hundred dollars and it came with a regulator. I got the price down to seventy five and hauled it home. I hooked it up next to my existing tank and called all the local propane dealers to get the best price and I had it filled. I was able to get a new customer discount that lowered the price dramatically for this first fill. In Minnesota you can never have too much propane on hand and it keeps forever in the tank.

I had to drive to town once a week to worthlessly apply for non-existent jobs to meet the requirements for getting unemployment. It was a waste of valuable gas in my truck but I needed those checks so I did it every week.

This spring I really enlarged my garden. I was not working now so I would have plenty of time to work in the garden. I am very glad I had all that venison from the four deer I had shot last fall. Now that the ice is off the local lakes I have started fishing again. To save money on fuel I take a lunch with me and spend all day at the lake and so I bring home enough fish to justify the fuel I use to drive back forth to the lake. The lake is about five miles from my rental house and a couple times I did ride bike there and back instead of driving my truck. I wish I had a small bike trailer because it would sure be handy behind my bike for things like fishing. I'll watch yard sales and hope to find one.

The garden is a lot more work but this year I am canning quite a lot of the produce. It looks like I should get plenty to carry me over winter and hopefully last me until next summer's harvest. I will enlarge the garden even more next year. I'm not sure if I will be able to buy seeds by next year so planning ahead I bought a quite large

amount this year. I have enough for two more years I think and I do plan on saving some seeds from my plants this year too.

The grocery stores quit sending out weekly sale ads about two months ago. There are no more sales. I make sure I am very careful what I buy with my monthly allotment on my food stamp card. I buy quite a bit of rice. It seems to be the best bang for the buck at the grocery store. Some deer meat and a side of rice is almost a daily meal at my house.

Congress has brought back the ninety nine week unemployment benefits! It had been used during the last recession and now it is back again. Between the food stamps and the unemployment I am doing pretty well. I know for a fact that neither will last though so I am still trying to boost my food stocks every month.

Food stamp recipients will see a five percent cut to their monthly allotment was just announced on the radio. That really means about a ten percent drop because food prices have been going up pretty steady.

Also now the food stamp cards can only be used at a place of business that receives most of its sales from grocery items. There were a few exceptions. I know this was done to help stop some of the fraud and hopefully people on food stamps would buy real food instead of junk food.

With my garden (which is just about done for the year), my fishing, my foraging, and my deer meat, I was able store most of the food I bought with the food stamps since I started getting them. My house is packed with food and it makes me smile every time I see all this food. I was able to fill my propane tanks this summer when the price was at its lowest so I am setting pretty good now for the long winter ahead.

The state said you could get a free hunting license if you showed your food stamp card this year so I did that

and now have one free deer tag and my free small game license. Dove season is open but the doves have already gone south for the winter. The main small game season opens next Saturday.

My apple trees and the apple trees at the abandoned place all produced very well this year. I dried almost all the apples to save freezer room for game meat. There is a fair amount of frozen fish in the freezer already. But I can always make jerky with the deer meat instead of freezing it.

The unemployment rate is at twelve percent according to the latest figures but I don't think anyone believes that at all. It has to be at least twenty five percent and maybe more than that even. Countless businesses have closed and even city, county, and state employees have been laid off and are now drawing unemployment. There were work force cuts of fifty percent from some government entities. I no longer have to apply for the non-existent jobs anymore in order to keep getting my unemployment. I now only go to town once a month to use up my food stamp card for the month and buy just the few things I actually need. I always go in on Fridays or Saturdays to see if I can catch any yard sales.

I did buy more twenty-two ammunition on the last trip in because Walmart had got a supply of the bulk packs and had a good price on them. I bought four of the five hundred fifty packs. Twenty-two hundred rounds. I have enough to last me a very long time now.

With the garden and apple trees done for the year I spend every day in the woods hunting or out fishing before the lakes freeze over. I carry the twenty-two rifle with me to both spots. I have shot a few ducks in the head with the rifle when I went fishing. It was illegal to use a rifle to shoot waterfowl but I don't think the state has any conservation officers on the payroll anymore so I was not concerned about being caught. I used my fishing rod to retrieve the

dead ducks. It worked out well and I never even got my shoes wet.

I have shot many squirrels and for awhile I had squirrel meat every other day just about. I have picked countless raspberries, black berries, wild grapes, and other wild edibles while out hunting. I always carry a few zip lock bags in my daypack with me in case I find something while out. It has frozen hard now so all that foraging is done for the year.

I have also brought home many pounds of wild hazel nuts along with some butternuts. For the first time I did harvest many pounds of acorns this year. They are a lot of work to get out of the shells but after a few soakings in water they do taste pretty good. When I bake something in the oven I often have a pan of acorns in the oven too so they get roasted as long as the oven is on anyway. I eat the acorns as-is and sometimes add them to things I bake. Usually I crush the acorns into quite small pieces if I use them for baking.

I do have a fair sized two wheeled cart thing with a large box that I have used to bring home many loads of dry branches for firewood. I have also cut more firewood this fall. I have more wood on hand than ever before. But the winters here are long and cold and propane prices are high. I will be using more firewood this winter for sure to save on the valuable propane.

I did shoot my one legal deer and froze all the meat. The next two deer I shot illegally and I froze some of the meat but most I turned into jerky. It is cold now and the added heat from running the oven even at the low two hundred degrees for the jerky added welcome heat into the house so I got double use from that burned propane.

As long as I shot the deer illegally I made sure I shot bucks so I did reduce the deer population as much as if I would have shot does. I think I will shoot at least one more

deer before the end of winter to add even more meat to my supplies.

## Chapter 4

The government has cut back food stamp benefits another ten percent across the nation. This will really hurt most people. The government no longer will post how many are on the food stamp program but I know it has to be more than half of the population. The food stamp cut has ignited riots in just about every larger city in the nation. The Twin Cities here had a very small short protest because the temperature was only ten degrees and that was the daily high for Saturday when the protest was planned. It will surely get ugly though come spring when temperatures and tempers both get hot.

Besides the ten percent cut in benefits the government also put a strict limit on exactly what items could be purchased using the food stamps. A list of items was sent out to all food stamp recipients. The list contained roughly a hundred items and it was noted that items could change with the seasons or with availability. It was all staple foods.

Flour, corn meal, oatmeal, sugar, and similar items were on the list. Fresh foods did include potatoes and eggs. Grocery stores were ordered to have these items grouped together in the store when feasible and all approved items had to be clearly marked as such in the stores.

Crime is flourishing because so many states, cities, and counties have cut the number of police to save money. It is just as well because almost every jail and prison has done early releases to cut the prison populations to save additional money. Governors in almost every state have asked for federal help with crime prevention. I think

Congress will repeal the Posse Comitatus Act so regular armed forces can be used within the nation for policing. I think this will be the first step towards martial law. I hope I am wrong about the martial law part.

Things are looking bad. I knew this was coming but I still don't like it.

Congress and the President have agreed to close almost all our foreign military bases to save money. These bases will be closed and the men and equipment will be returned back to the United States as quickly as possible. It seems first many will be placed on our southern border because illegals are now pouring across our border in record numbers.

Residents of many border states are literally up in arms because they say they are being invaded. Crime is way up in those states and that includes violent crime. In many areas the citizens have formed armed neighborhood watch programs. Also it seems many Americans have turned vigilante and are killing any illegals they find. Of course most of these illegals are also armed and many Americans are also dying. It is apparently a very ugly situation near our border.

The President has ordered the Air Force to patrol the southern border until additional troops can arrive there. He has authorized using all armament available to stop all illegal entry. The only terms of engagement is that if they cross onto US soil then live fire is allowed.

Mexico is having a fit and threatening the United States if we kill any of their countrymen. Our President replied that our Armed Forces will not cross our border into Mexico, at least at this time. This made the Mexican President even more furious. But the fact is that he is totally impotent to do anything to America.

Our State department has issued a warning for all American citizens to leave Mexico and return to the USA. Three days later this warning was changed to include all

American citizens that were currently abroad in any foreign country. Those unable to procure transport home were told to go to the nearest US consulate and military transport would be made available to them.

The whole world was now in turmoil just like America. When our economy collapsed so did the whole world economy. The news is no longer saying much about the world situation but I can only assume it is also getting worse by the day. I just hope all this does not lead to a major war.

The winter is long and there are many things different this year. The county road past my house does get the snow plowed off of it after a major snowfall but certainly not right away. Once it was three days before it was plowed. That time after it was plowed I went to town to shop (to use up my food stamps) and to draw money out of the bank.

I do not trust the banks at all anymore. So I have been steadily drawing money out every trip into town. I keep getting money in my checking account because I am still getting the unemployment benefits. I pay the rent and the electric bill with this money. I do have a fair amount of cash at home now.

I have also stockpiled a fair amount of gas at home thanks to being able to buy gas cans for a dollar or less at yard sales. All the gas has been treated with fuel stabilizer for longer storage. I did not have a generator but I was finally able to buy one at moving sale. It looks old but it does start and run fine and it is just big enough to run my well pump. The pump is on a shallow well and it only draws one hundred and twenty volts so the generator did not need to be very big to run that pump. I am afraid the power might shut down at some point in the future but I sure hope not.

Because the well is shallow I did previously buy a used hand pump and I made sure I had what I needed to

hook it up in place of the electric pump. The well pump is located under the house in what might be called a basement but is only about ten foot square. It is accessed through an actual trapdoor under a rug in the middle of the kitchen floor. It does not ever freeze down there and I do store potatoes down there but not too much else.

I did check and see if I put an extension on the well if I could have the hand pump inside the kitchen and not have to go into the basement to get water. I would have to cut a small hole in the floor to bring the pipe through but I think it would work. I hope it doesn't ever come to doing that.

The long winter is drawing to a close. I got a notice in the mail that said rural mail delivery will be cut back to one delivery per week. On my postcard the word "Thursday" was stamped so I assume that is the day I will receive my mail. I was not surprised by this note from the postal service. And I don't get much mail anyway so it doesn't bother me any. It does point to the fact that things have changed drastically in our nation and more changes are sure to follow. Bad changes too I think.

When the snow all melted I worked up my garden as soon as I could to get it ready for planting. It was way too early to plant yet but I was anxious to do something. When I went into town for my monthly run I found that garden seeds had been added to the items that you could use the food stamps on though it was just a small selection.

The seeds were in the food stamp section and had generic labels with larger than normal packaging. I read the labels on a couple and they were listed as "heirloom" seeds which means they were not hybrids and the seeds produced by the plants could be saved and planted the next year with good results. With hybrid seeds you can do the same but the next year's results might be poor or non-existent. The seeds were cheaper than normal and I got some of each variety.

While I could not use the food stamps for them the grocery store did for the first time have "seed" potatoes for sale of which I bought a fair amount to plant. I like potatoes and they seem to be easy to grow in this area with excellent results.

As was my usual routine when I went to town I did a lot of shopping. Not that I bought much and instead it was more for information and entertainment. So I wandered around in the stores and I saw while the shelves were not bare they sure had reduced quantities. Also the variety appeared to also be quite reduced. The goods were arranged on the shelving to try and hide this fact but it was still quite obvious.

## Chapter 5

I started to buy much more stuff than I originally planned. I had just got a bad feeling when I was looking around in the stores. I was sitting good on most regular foods but I did buy a lot more things like soaps and other sundry items. I had also noticed that prices had increased and everything by a pretty large amount. I saw the same thing coming into town with the much higher fuel prices at the gas stations.

So I ended up spending a bunch of money. I was still getting the unemployment deposits in my checking account every month so money was not a big issue with me. After spending more time in town than usual I made an additional stop that I had not planned. I stopped at my landlord's place and paid a month's rent in advance. He gave me an odd look but readily accepted the money. I had never been late on my rent or anything but I just had a bad feeling that things would get worse and I wanted to make sure I would have a place to live I guess.

While in town I did notice that many more businesses had closed down. In many cases the glass was boarded over instead of "For Rent" signs placed in the windows. I guess the owners knew that no one would be renting those buildings for long time and they did not want them damaged.

I never saw a police car on the road or in the town while I was out and about. I also noticed that while there were other vehicles driving around there were very few, way fewer than I had ever seen before. There were several yard sales and most looked like they were ongoing and never closed. I guess people needed money pretty bad and were trying to raise at least a little extra cash.

Prices on everything at these yard sales were very low and still it appeared little was selling.

I went back home worried. I did top off the gas tank in my old truck on the way out of town. Gas was high but I bet it would be even higher on my next trip.

The ice was off the lakes now and I started fishing again. The added fish meat was welcomed into my diet. Wild plants started growing way before I could start planting the garden and I did spend time gathering wild greens for daily salads. As soon as I thought it was warm enough I planted big slightly increased garden. I couldn't help myself and I had again enlarged the garden plot. Not too much though, honestly hardly any even though I was worried about the future.

I finally got around to making a smoker out of a steel barrel I had brought home from where I used to work. When I was done making the smoker I built a very hot wood fire in it to burn off anything inside that might be toxic. I will try it out on some fish the next time I go fishing. I'm sure there will be a learning curve using that home-made smoker.

The smoker works great and the fish taste good so that is now a viable option for me. I even speared a large carp in the nearby creek and smoked that just to see if smoking would make the carp edible. I had heard many people around saying carp and other rough fish came out tasty when smoked but I always had my doubts. But now I have to admit the carp tasted just fine when smoked. Plus I can get them about a mile from my house. And there are many of the large ones along with some Red Horse (fish) too. Now they will be added to my diet.

I got a letter that my unemployment would be ending next month. I will have no money coming in now at all. There is zero chance of any employment. I will still have the food stamps unless that program stops. I think I have maybe two years of food stored here at my house so food

will not be an issue. Plus I can bolster that stored food with natural things around here, both meat and greens.

The problem is fuel for my truck and propane fuel for cooking and heating. Also my rent which is the big thing. Next is the truck insurance and even the yearly license tabs. Also the monthly electric bill. I do have money saved up and I will just have to be even more careful with my spending.

The next month I made another trip into town after I knew the last unemployment check had been deposited into my account. I went to the bank and closed my checking account. I went to grocery store and got everything I could on my food stamps. Next I went to the electric company office and paid ahead on my account. I paid maybe six months ahead.

Next was a stop at my landlord's place. I explained that I no longer had any income and no hope to get a job. This was no surprise to him because a large part of the population was in the same shape. I paid him two month's rent but I honestly told him that was it and unless a miracle happened I would not have any money for further rent payments. I did say I would keep the place up and not allow the pipes to freeze or anything like that. He agreed that I could remain living there because it would be almost impossible for him to rent it out anyway. We were at least in agreement.

So I would have electricity for another six months and a place to live for an undermined time period. The truck could go without insurance and when the tabs were due I would ignore it. I had some money left and I ordered a propane delivery to top off the tank at home. Whatever money was left would be used to buy gas for my occasional trips into town.

I filled the truck's gas tank on the way out of town and drove home. At home I had an old television with an equally old roof antenna but it did work and that is where I

got my news. I also had a couple radios but I seldom used them. The news was always bad and continued to get worse.

The summer went fine. My garden grew fine and I canned a lot of home produce. I had a large supply of new canning lids and many used jars that I bought cheap here and there. Between the garden and foraging around the area I had plenty of greens and veggies. I had bought a used three-wheeled stroller that I adapted into a trailer for my bike. It worked better than I expected and I always used my bike all summer for going to the lake fishing. It saved a lot of truck fuel.

I skipped a month going to town but I was still able to use the food stamps for both months when I did drive in. The selection of eligible foods was less but I did find things to buy that I could use but would just store them for now. Food prices had went way up and gas prices had almost doubled since my last town visit. I don't know how most people were making a go of it.

As summer wound down and my garden was about done the apple trees started producing. Again I dried almost all of them in my dehydrators. On the way to the lake I found another abandoned place with an apple tree and this year I harvested those apples also. Also there were wild blueberries, pin cherries, raspberries, and black berries in the area that I harvested. This fall I also harvested a lot more nuts and acorns than last year. The nuts have good nutrition and like all wild things they were free to harvest.

As fall came I started hunting again and continued fishing until the lake froze over for the winter. I stuck to birds and small game until the weather got quite cold. I used my twenty-two rifle to harvest everything including waterfowl and upland birds. When it got cold I did shoot a deer with my deer rifle. I always use that bigger gun for deer even though I could likely get a deer with a head shot

with the twenty-two. It usually only takes one shot with my deer rifle and at that rate I have enough ammunition for it to last for years anyway.

The deer was mostly turned into jerky. I did freeze some but I was afraid to depend too much on the freezer because I wondered if the power would go off at some point. Though now in the winter I could just use my whole garage as a freezer with no worry of anything thawing out until spring. With that thought I shot another deer and froze most of the meat. I did try making some into jerky using my home-made smoker. It seemed to work just fine, partly because I had used the smoker quite a bit by now on many fish so I had some experience.

The advantage of the smoker was the fuel was easily replaced with no cost because I just used dry branches. Now knowing the smoker worked to make jerky I did gradually thaw some deer meat out and jerk it in the smoker until I was low on the frozen meat. I then shot another deer which I froze.

The jerky I made I often used in soups and stews and so not all of it was eaten as-is. I never made it very spicy and I had a large supply of the required salt on hand. I would say five to ten years worth of salt at home. And that was not even counting the two fifty pound bags of softener salt that was pure salt that I could use also if I ran out of the regular salt.

Before winter ended and while the buck deer still had their antlers I shot one more of them. This was all turned into jerky using the smoker. I always tried to shoot bucks even though I cared nothing for the antlers. Just that all the does were carrying fawns over winter and killing a doe would mean also killing the one or two fawns inside her.

Over winter I did take up drinking pine needle tea on occasion. This provided me with additional vitamin C in my diet. After awhile I came to even like the taste. I did also

try juniper berry tea. It was okay but I stuck with the pine needle tea that I was used to at that point.

I did still watch the television to get the news. When it was announced that the food stamp program was ending I was not surprised. Soup kitchens would be set up in most every town and city to give out free hot meals instead. I had to wait five days for the snow plow and when the road was clear I went into town to use up the last of my food stamp money. Now I was completely on my own. No income and no more free food from town.

## Chapter 6

Winter ended and spring was here again. As soon as I could I resumed riding bike to the lake for fishing. It was a small lake and never was very popular for fishing and honestly I went there just because it was the closest one to my house. Minnesota is full of lakes and this one was nothing to brag about and seldom in the past did I ever see other people fishing there. When things started to go bad there were additional fishermen seen occasionally when I did come here. So catching fish was not as easy as it once was here. There were still fish and I still caught fish but their numbers had obviously been reduced. I was not surprised by this happening. It was about the same with hunting last fall. Obviously many others were also hunting. There was still game around, just less of it.

As the days warmed and I deemed it warm enough I again planted my garden. I did not enlarge it this year because I still had canned produce left over from last year so I left the size the same. I had saved enough potatoes so I had plenty for planting this spring. And I still had plenty of garden seeds including many I had saved from plants that I had let go-to-seed- last season. Plus I was again foraging in the area.

When foraging I was smart enough to only take some from each spot. This way the plants did not die out and I could harvest there again and again. The exception to this rule was berries which I always picked clean of ripe ones whenever I found them.

My garden was growing fine and I was about to start harvesting produce when it happened. I had my garden carefully fenced to keep out rabbits and such. But the fence likely did not even slow down the black bear. I don't

think the bear actually ate much but he destroyed a bunch of my garden. I heard the commotion during the night and I ran outside with a flashlight and my pistol.

I saw the bear right away. And I saw the destruction right away too. I was mad and the bear was scared. He was trying to leave but got tangled in the fencing around the garden. My pistol was a nine millimeter and not a bear caliber. But I was mad and I emptied the pistol into the bear. I'm not sure how many of those shots actually hit the bear but he did end up very dead. The magazine held fourteen rounds and I had shot every one of them.

It just made a lot more work for me. The garden and the garden fencing was a big mess. And now I also had a dead bear to do something with too. It was completely dark but soon it would get light and I just went inside to have an early breakfast and decide what I would do while I waited for the sun to come up.

I used my truck to drag the bear a short distance near a friendly tree. I threw a rope over a limb and used the truck to pull the bear up so it was hanging free. I skinned the bear and gutted him out then started cutting the meat off. Luckily my freezer had a bunch of room right now and I froze just large chunks of the bear meat. I had eaten bear before I did not like it but letting the meat go to waste was not something I would do.

So I made no special cuts or anything but instead just cut the meat in as big of chunks as I could to freeze and work on at me leisure. It was summer and quite warm so I had to work fast on the meat. I was an old hand at this point with cutting up animals and the work went quickly. As soon as I was done I hauled away the carcass, hide, bones, and guts of the bear. Then I started on the garden to save as much of it as I could. The last thing was working on the fence to try a salvage that. It was a busy but frustrating day.

A big chunk of my garden was toast. The potatoes were fine but many other plants were a complete loss and some plants were only partially destroyed. The fence I fixed using scraps I had at the place. Over the next several days when I got time I started smoking the bear meat. I did just a little at a time because I wanted to try different things and seasonings to make it edible. I finally found a recipe for a meat dip that made it almost fit to eat and smoked most of the meat over the next couple weeks. After eating more of the meat I knew I never wanted to see another bear in my life.

I did can some garden produce but it was less than half from last year. I was lucky to still have plenty of stored food. I even still had some canned produce from my last year's garden. It was still a major set-back. I did beef up my foraging and that helped some, especially when all the different berry plants started producing. I did have to fight the wood ticks, the deer flies, and the mosquitoes but I did gather much more than previous years. I froze several bags of berries.

I went into fall with less canned produce and less frozen fish than last year. I predicted that hunting would be tougher this season also because of the competition from other hunters. I don't think I will gain any weight over winter.

Before winter hits I decide to make a trip into town. I want to see first-hand what is happening and hopefully buy some supplies. I count my money and take it all with me when I leave. The trip in is uneventful though I do see not another person or vehicle on the road. I drive past a couple closed gas stations and head to the closest grocery store.

It too is closed and I drive to the Walmart store. If anyplace is still open I figured it would be and turning in to their parking lot see that I am correct in that assumption. I

see a very few cars in the lot but I do see a few people near the store and some going in and out.

I lock the pickup even though there is nothing to steal inside and walk into the store. Inside things look fairly normal. I grab a cart and start shopping. The shelves have noticeably less merchandise on them. I shop around the whole store just about but I buy not very much. Just a few things I need or want. I check out and see the signs that say cash only and they look old so they must have been there for some time already. That is fine because all I have is cash. The prices were much higher than on my last trip.

I pay and leave. I am uneasy for no apparent reason and feel relieved when I get to the truck and load my purchases. I waste no time and drive away. I do drive a little farther into town and find a gas station that is open. I am shocked at the price of fuel. I do not stop and just drive back home again.

It was not a wasted trip because I bought some things I needed and few items I just wanted. I also learned you needed cash to buy anything. I saw a total of one other moving vehicle while in town and none on the way in or back. With no one working and the prices sky high I do not know how people are surviving. I wonder if we have hit bottom yet so the situation will turn around and start getting better. Or are things still going downhill. I wonder just how much worse things could even get.

I am glad to be home and I know it will be a long time before I attempt another trip into town. Fall is almost here and I start by hunting doves before they leave. I again just use my twenty-two rifle and make mostly head shots on sitting birds.

I do not worry about hurting the population of these birds because like waterfowl they migrate and would likely be shot in their travels anyway. I'm quite sure everyone is

killing any and all wild birds and animals for food no matter where they happen to live.

When the doves leave to fly south I transition to hunting squirrels. They are still fairly plentiful and I have no trouble getting one or two when I go out. I am ranging quite a distance from my home. Commonly when hunting or foraging I travel five to ten miles a day. I also go in all directions from my home.

Then there was the day I came home to find someone breaking into my house.

## Chapter 7

I saw the man kicking my front door trying to get inside. I saw no sense in speaking or yelling. I had my twenty-two rifle and I did not waste a second. I had recently been shooting doves in the head and also making head shots on squirrels. A man's head is much larger. I aimed and fired. I was to one side and picked a spot between his eye and his ear.

I was able to fire three shots before he started to fall. As he was falling I shot three more shots into his body. I slipped a fresh loaded magazine into the rifle and then just waited. After maybe five to ten minutes with zero movement from the man and no movement around the place from any other people I approached the suspected dead man. When I got close I had the rifle ready and watched the man's chest carefully. I saw no indication he was breathing. I stepped closer and kicked him hard which elicited no response.

I left the man and walked around the place in widening circles. Just off the road in the trees I found a backpack. I carried it up to my house and I was fairly sure now that the man was alone and had no partner nearby. My next task was to thoroughly search the dead man and I took everything I thought might have any value to me or other people that I could trade with at some point in the future.

I had a tough time getting his jacket off but I thought I might be able to trade it to someone else. His boots were worn out and not worth keeping. I did take the belt which I needed to remove any way to get the pistol and holster and then the sheath knife. Once I was sure the body now had nothing of value I went and got my two wheeled cart and

managed to get the dead man inside it. I wheeled it right down the road simply because that was the easiest. I went about a mile and dumped the body about thirty yards off the road in the trees and brush. I doubted it would ever be found.

Back home I got the garden hose and washed the bloody cart and then washed down the front step area. When I was done there was little to show that someone had been killed there.

I carried the backpack and other items into my house. I always used the side door and I had the front door very well secured from the inside. The backpack had some good stuff inside but was mostly empty. I suppose he was planning to fill it with loot from my house or the house of someone else. I felt nothing about killing the man. It was the same to me as shooting a squirrel. The only difference was I used more bullets. But I had got a good return with the now extra pistol and other items I recovered.

I washed the new-to-me jacket with a few of my clothes that evening. I had supper and thought nothing more of killing a human. He played his hand and he lost. I have no doubt that he knew the house was occupied. It was quite obvious that someone was currently living here. He chose to try and break in and I chose to stop him. He was carrying a pistol that was no good for hunting and only was good for killing people (or bears in your garden). That was the end of the story.

I briefly thought about making some kind of traps in case one or more other people tried to break in or to just kill me. But though I had planned for this and had items needed for the project I saw little point in setting something up. When I was home the place would be protected. When I was gone I was armed and could take care of any problem when I got back. Besides whichever of the rifles I carried I always also carried my pistol on my hip, whether I was at home or out walking.

I had also never seen anyone walk past my house or even drive past my house for many months now. I was well off the beaten path here. While only about ten miles from town you had to make several turns on different county roads to get here. I felt fairly safe here. The fact that one showed up did prove it could happen but I do think it was a kind of a fluke event and not real likely to be repeated.

There was no calling the police. I did own a pay-as-you-go cell phone but it had said no service quite some time back and I had checked it a few times since and apparently cell service was done around here. I don't know if land lines still worked because I did not have one here. I admit I was surprised that the electric power was still working. I am very glad it is but I am surprised every day when I see it is still working. I haven't paid an electric bill for months. Come to think of it I have received no mail for many months either.

The television no longer worked. Well the machine works fine just there are no stations still broadcasting anymore. The radio is the same way. It does have static but that's it. So I have no means of getting any information unless I go to town and I have no intention of doing that until next spring.

With the arrival of the cold of winter I managed to shoot two deer. A little of the meat was frozen but most was made into jerky using the smoker. I do most of my cooking on the wood stove and I use that sparingly. I keep the house quite cool. I do still have the water heater working but long ago I turned the heat down to the warm setting to save the precious propane. It is warm enough to take a quick shower using just hot water. The water heater and kitchen range use little propane. I keep a kettle full of water sitting on the wood stove to have hot water for coffee or tea and to wash dishes and such.

I do not go out much in the winter. There is just too much snow. I do have a pair of half worn out snowshoes in case of an emergency but I have no desire to use them. I am running out of toilet paper and in the spring I will dig a pit and make an outhouse. I will make it a lean-to against the shed. It will require less building materials that way. I do enough toilet paper to last that long and will keep some for emergency use too. Again I had planned ahead and kept a lot of paper materials in case I needed to have an outhouse in the future.

The county has never plowed my road all winter. I wonder if there are any government entities left anymore. I hope things turn around soon. I have no idea what the date is but spring is coming and the weather is warming. I am waiting for all the snow to melt.

With the snow now gone I have started riding bike. My muscles have disappeared over winter so I am building them up again. I have worked up the garden and I am waiting to plant until it is warmer. I have used the bike to make several trips to the lake. And I have caught many fish. I have not seen any other fishermen there either so far this year.

Now that I have ridden bike a fair amount I am leaving early tomorrow morning to ride into town. This is going to be just a reconnaissance trip. I will have my pistol and my twenty-two rifle with me.

Riding in I see no tracks of any cars or trucks on any of the county roads. I approach town carefully. I was smart enough to bring a pair of binoculars with me and stop often and look ahead of me. So far I have seen no one. I am now on the edge of town and still I have seen no one. I am proceeding with extreme caution. I have decided to ride to the Walmart store. If anything is going on I figure there will be the base, whether the store is open or not and at this point I assume not.

The Walmart is closed and the front is boarded up. I see broken glass still lying on the sidewalk in front of the store. There are a couple of posters on the plywood that is boarding up the front. I ride up slowly after looking all around me. The posters look old and I hope I can still read them.

“The military will be back to this parking lot on (unreadable) to provide transportation to FEMA shelters set up in other areas. Bring clothing and very limited other items with you. We will return again on (unreadable) to provide transportation to anyone else who missed the first transfer date. It is possible we might come through other times on no set schedule. If you see a transport just flag it down and you will receive transportation at that time. This is not guaranteed so please be here at one of the above dates.”

The unreadable dates were hand written and the rest of the poster was machine printed. They must have used the same posters for all locations and just wrote in the dates. I wondered if all the people in town left. I would think not because it is hard to get even a few people to agree to do anything.

The power is still working at my house so I am sure it is working here in town. So the water and sewer would still be working. People could have used electric heaters for heat and electric stoves and hot plates for cooking. But food would be a major issue. Obviously many people did leave but certainly not all.

On a whim I rode around the big Walmart building. In the back I could see a door though now closed had been forced open at some point. I bet at least some people were still here and looting whatever they could from the stores. I'm sure that did not include food items because those would have been gone long ago.

I rode a little farther into town then turned around for the long ride back home again. I did a lot of thinking on the

long ride home. I wondered if I should return and see if I could find any supplies in the stores. It was a fleeting thought but I dismissed it. It was just too dangerous. If people were still around I doubted if they wanted to share. It would be way better just to stay home and get by on my own.

## Chapter 8

I was finally convinced it was warm enough so I planted my garden. Yes I did expand the garden some. I would need a bigger garden because my food supplies were very low now. Thank goodness I still had plenty of seeds. I have been foraging a lot and also I have been fishing many days. I now again have a fair supply of fish in the freezer. I have speared several carp and Red Horse in the creek and smoked them. I have been using none of my remaining stored food.

I did make an outhouse. I took my time and did a good job. It is as windproof as I could make it. I do not look forward to wintertime use.

I have made and placed noise makers around my garden. I cannot take a chance that another bear might come and ruin it. I even need to keep out the rabbits and raccoons. I will need every plant to grow well and produce a lot. I had again saved enough potatoes for planting. I was careful cutting them up so I could plant the maximum number of plants.

I work the garden one day and fish the next day. I have started my truck off and on along with my generator so they will stay in usable condition. I only use my bike for transportation though to save fuel. I now have a very good supply of fish, both frozen and smoked. I have been foraging a lot and besides keeping me fed I have added some to my storage. I admit my low food supply has me worried.

My garden is growing well and things are looking up. While riding back and forth to the lake I have seen many deer including many fawns. As always squirrels are everywhere. There are also many ducks at the lake. I

think hunting should be fine this fall. I have still not seen another fisherman. This is just fine.

I have been canning every couple days now. I have also frozen many berries that I have picked besides all the ones I have eaten. I am really working at the foraging to boost my food storage. With the garden produce now I am feeling much better. I am sure glad I stocked up on all those canning lids. I still have many unopened boxes plus I do save every used lid and the better ones I could likely re-use if it ever comes down to that.

The garden is winding down and I had a bumper crop this year. The wild plants have also produced well and I have a lot of frozen berries. The apples are starting to get ripe now. I have ridden bike to several existing places around here. They are all empty of people though I have never gone inside any house. Many have fruit trees and I am picking fruit many places now. The dehydrators cannot keep up. I have made some make-shift solar driers and they do work to some extent. Now I run the fruit through the solar ones and finish them in the real dehydrators. I am just barely keeping up with all that I am picking. I am also eating as much fresh fruit as I dare.

The fruit is about done and I am now just using the real dehydrators. I have now looked through all the barns and sheds at the surrounding places looking for useful items that might help me survive. I have used my bike trailer to bring home several things. Over winter I will be making some better solar driers. I think they might work well and I have to plan on the power being off at some point. I am still surprised it is still on here.

The fruit is done now and I have finally started looking inside the houses around here. I have brought home some food items that I thought were still fit to eat. Mostly just some salt and spices but a little flour and sugar also. I have found a bunch of toilet paper and brought all that home.

In the garage of a house next to the lake I have left a good fishing rod and reel along with a big tackle box full of lures that I found at a different house. It is handy to leave it there so I don't have to carry my equipment back and forth to the lake for fishing. I never saw another person all summer.

I did use my truck and I borrowed a trailer from a house to bring home a lot of already cut firewood. Many places still had stacks of firewood and it will rot if not used. I have more firewood than ever at home now. I have brought home many candles and three oil lamps along with a lot of lamp oil too. At every house I always shut off the main electric breaker just in case mice or something chew the wires so a fire would not start.

Will the nation never get back on its feet? I do check both the radio and the television at least once a week but so far I never hear anything. The nation is still up and running or the electric would not be on. Before winter I am taking another ride into town to see if things and people are coming back.

It is a nice morning and I decide today is a good day to ride bike to town. I take both my rifle and pistol again and take off. I have my summer muscles and make short work of the ten miles ride. Just like last time I see no one and no moving vehicles on the way in. I ride directly to Walmart.

It is closed and the old posters are still on the front of the building. Still I saw no one and I just left town and headed back home again. The whole ride was totally uneventful and all I learned was that nothing had changed since my last time in town.

Winter is coming. I have been doing plenty of hunting and I have done fine in that department. Oh, thank goodness all that bear meat is now gone! I now have plenty of deer meat frozen and made into jerky. I also have plenty of frozen fish for some variety over winter. I even

have a couple of frozen turkey breasts. I will pick a day and call it Thanksgiving and have one and later I will pick a day and call it Christmas and have the other turkey.

I have also planned ahead and I collected books from all the surrounding houses. I will have plenty to read to pass the time this winter. I admit I do miss having the television to watch now that it is cold and snowy with very short days.

Again I stay inside most winter days, other than going outside for more wood or to use the outhouse. And yes that outhouse is cold. I do not spend much time in there.

I have moved a bed into the open kitchen/living room area and I leave the doors shut to the bedrooms so most of the heat stays in the main area. The bedrooms stay above freezing, not that it really matters. I have all items that must be kept above freezing in the main area or down in the basement. I do store many of the five gallon pails down there with cans and jars and such inside them. It is cold down there in the basement but it never freezes even when the temperatures outside stay below zero for several days in a row.

Like every winter here in Minnesota, it stays cold and snowy for roughly fourteen months. But finally the temps are slowly going up and the snow is starting to melt gradually. The county road was never plowed all winter of course. Also though I did check occasionally there were never any radio or television broadcasts.

Again I lost muscles during winter. I did not really exercise and I did cut down on my food consumption. Now with warmer weather I have increased the amount I eat and I have started working again. While some snow was still on the ground I started walking in large loops around the area. When the snow was all off the road I started riding bike again.

I was happy when the ice went off the lake and I could start fishing again. The fresh fish was a treat because I had long since used up all my frozen fish. I picked a warm day and rode bike into town. I expected nothing and I saw no one and no tracks on any of the roads. Until I got into town that is.

Once on the main street there was a couple moving vehicles. I rode on to the Walmart store and there was activity there. At that point I did realize that I had forgotten to check the radio and TV for quite awhile. I had just gotten so busy with being outside everyday with the warmer weather they had just slipped my mind.

## Chapter 9

I rode up near some people to see if I could talk to them. They gave me a strange look and then I realized that I likely look a fright. I did not think I would see anyone on this trip.

My hair is short because I had just recently cut it. I used a hair clipper (I had two) and as was my custom I wore my hair very short in the summer. I also had always cut my beard back so I was just kind of grizzly. I clothes were mostly clean so I guess I was not all that bad. Maybe it was just the expression I had on my face or maybe the rifle on my shoulder that gave them pause.

“Excuse me. I have been living alone in the country and have not talked to anyone for quite some time. Will you fill me in about what’s going on?”

The couple guys just stared for a moment then started talking.

“You lived here during the winter?”

“Yes I have always lived here.”

“You had food?”

“Yes I always grow a big garden and I hunt in the fall. I did okay.”

“Well, I’m not sure where to start. The military hauled most people down south and we all worked and lived down there where it was warmer. A lot more land was used for farming and many worked on those farms. Also factories were opened or in a couple cases moved to more southern locations so people could work in them. Very few people stayed in the northern areas. A few stayed in Minnesota I know because they kept the nuclear power plants running, both here and in other states. The government said any people that stayed here would need

the electric power to survive but I know I questioned whether anyone was living up here anymore.”

“So people are moving back now?”

“Yes and no. Some are moving back. Things are running fairly smooth again. But many, many people died. The big cities are a mess and I doubt many of them will be inhabited again for a long time. The military has blocked off most big cities to keep people out of them. So many people died.”

“Do you know if there is any chance of getting a job in town?”

“They likely need some city workers here and as things get going there will be jobs. You could go over to city hall and ask there and they would know more. Ah, you might not want to carry your rifle in with you.”

“Thanks for the information. Maybe I’ll ride home and come in a different day without my rifle. Thanks again for talking to me.”

We gave each other wave and I rode off. I rode through the whole town. There was activity going on but I did not see any stores that were actually open. It did look like one gas station would be open soon because there was a lot of activity there. I guess there would be a pressing need for fuel if people moved back here.

There did not seem to be all that many people around here yet. I maybe saw a total of fifty people at most though I suppose many were inside buildings that I did not see. I rode home in high spirits.

I waited a week and rode back to town. It was still too soon to plant the garden anyway. I did not have my rifle today and I even left my pistol at home. I hope that wasn’t a mistake. I had thought about driving my truck but my gas is too precious to waste. I rode directly to city hall and left my bike and walked inside. This time at home I had taken a shower, shaved, and dressed in nicer clothes. I even looked in the mirror to see how I looked.

When I saw someone I stopped them and asked if he knew where I could check for a job. He directed me to an office nearby. There was busy looking woman and I got her attention and asked about a job.

“Just as a laborer?”

“Yes, that would be fine.”

She gave me directions to a place that was only a couple blocks away. I thanked her and left her to get back to her work. I got to the address and it was just a house with a couple workers there doing this and that. I asked one about a job and he pointed at another man who had just come outside.

“I heard you might have a job for me.”

“Do you have any plumbing experience?”

“A little. I’m not a plumber though.”

“Can you solder copper pipes together without them leaking?”

“Yes, I’ve done that many times.”

“We are fixing some houses and businesses that have freeze damage to the plumbing. When can you start?”

“Tomorrow would be great with me.”

“Meet me here at eight in the morning tomorrow. You can follow me to your job site. I will have all the equipment you will need. Bring a lunch and plenty of water with you to drink. Pay is a dollar an hour.”

“A dollar an hour?”

“A new dollar. It’s the going rate. Everyone knows that.”

“I, ah, don’t know anything about it. A ‘new’ dollar?”

“Yes we have new currency now. Just trust me for now and show up tomorrow at eight, okay?”

“I’ll be here.”

The guy took off and was obviously busy. I rode over to the Walmart store that was now open it looked like.

I did not plan on buying anything but I obviously needed to know what was going on.

I walked in and there was stuff for sale but very little as of yet. I walked around some and the prices were just a fraction of what they used to be. There were hardly any customers and I walked up to the checkouts. There was a woman there putting stuff in the racks near the register.

“Can I ask a couple questions?”

“Sure.”

“I have lived here the whole time and never went south. What is the deal with the ‘new’ dollars?”

“Boy you sure don’t know what’s happened do you? Congress made a new currency to replace the old dollar. The exchange rate is now a hundred old dollars to one new dollar. When it first came out the exchange rate was twenty five to one and then after a month it went to fifty to one and now it is a hundred to one. In another month the old dollars will have no value. Congress did that to get people to quickly exchange their old money for the new. We don’t take any old dollars here and I don’t think any business does anymore.”

“That’s okay because I am about broke anyway. But I am starting a job tomorrow. It pays a dollar an hour. Is that an okay rate?”

“Yeah. That’s what I make. It is the common rate for most jobs at least to start out. I think raises will be slow coming though. There have been a lot of changes.”

She had kept working as we talked.

“I saw all the prices were just a fraction of what they once were.”

“Yeah, things are sure different now. They were really screwed up for a long time. So many people died. I came back here just because it is where I grew up. Plus the nuclear power plants here have never stopped producing power. Some spots in the nation there still is no power. Mostly those places that just had coal fired power

plants. It takes a lot of people to mine the coal, transport it, and then remove the ash. Besides the power being on here they will be starting up the farming and dairy operations here again. I think potato farming is going to start first."

"Thanks for answering my questions. I'll let you get back to work now."

"No problem!"

She seemed nice but I did not want to get her in trouble with her boss by just talking to me. I guess there have been a lot of changes that I know nothing about. But I start work tomorrow and I will learn about the changes as time goes by I guess.

I just ride back home. I will drive tomorrow to go to work. I'll see how it goes, I might keep using my bike for awhile to save money. At home I try the television and there is nothing on that I can find. I try the radio and find a station right away. I only listen for a few minutes because I still have daylight and work to do.

I spend time getting the garden ready and I think I will be able to plant in a week or two. I have fish and a side of rice for supper. I decide to just take some water and a bunch of jerky with to work tomorrow.

The first day at work is different. I fill out no W-4 form or anything. My boss, Lucas, just shows me what I need to do and shows me where the tools and new pipes and fittings and such are and then I am on my own because he leaves for another job site.

I work all day and at quitting time Lucas shows up and looks over what work I got done.

"Good job! Here is your pay for today. In the morning I might not be here right away. Just finish up work here and I will should show up before you're done to take you to the next job. See you tomorrow!"

I worked all day and I got eight dollars in cash. The dollars looked somewhat the same as the old ones but way

different to. The backs were red instead of green. They did not have a picture of some dead President but instead just had the American flag as the center piece. I folded my 'new' dollars and put them in my pocket.

# Chapter 10

I continued to drive my truck to work. Fuel was now available in town at twenty seven cents per gallon. Plus the fuel I had on hand was old and I needed to replace with new anyway before it went bad. I worked in a couple more residences and then I was at a commercial building. This one required more work and I was there for six and half days then it was on to another commercial building.

I have bought a few grocery items, mostly things I just missed eating. I still had plenty of food at home. I also started my garden. It was not as big this year; I hope that is not a mistake. Lucas is happy with my steady work and says he has many jobs lined up.

I have been working for a month now and Lucas just gave me a ten cent an hour raise. I stopped at my landlord's house but the house is empty. There are countless empty houses. Some are empty because the people died and some are empty because the people moved away and just never came back.

I could move into town to one of the empty houses but I decided to stay in my same house. I suppose I could move into one nearby my house if I wanted a bigger house. One on the lake would be nice and I might think about that. There is a database of those known dead that can be used to look up certain people. Here in town you can go to the police station or city hall and they look up people for you. I did check on my landlord and he was listed as deceased. I guessed as much because he was older and way overweight. I think he told me one time that he had diabetes.

House ownership is a gray area right now. So many people have died and often whole extended families have

died. Also those left alive have moved because of necessity and finding them is an issue. Plus most homes had mortgages on them and that whole financial part has not been worked out yet by Congress or the courts. Plus there are way more homes and apartments than there are people now.

There are likely millions of vehicles also with no real owners. There are a lot of details that have to be worked out. I think the government is leaning heavily towards all property that has no known owner being taken over by the government then be sold to raise operating capital for the government's use. It could be a long time before that is all worked out.

There are literally millions of people missing or unaccounted for in the nation. There are also millions known dead. I have to assume most of the missing or unaccounted for will never be resolved as to their fate.

I have been kind of seeing Brenda the clerk at Walmart. Well it is not really Walmart, it is just their building. All corporations are in limbo now. All or almost all of them were way in debt and in most cases the top people are among the missing or dead. That will be a long time getting that all worked out too.

Brenda and I just talk and stuff. Last Sunday I did take her fishing out by my place. I showed her my place as we drove past but I didn't stop. We caught some fish and I filleted all of them. She was suitably impressed with the speed and ease which I did that. Of course I have had a whole lot of practice. I gave her all the fish so she could have fresh fish to eat for a change.

She lives in an apartment building. Many people live there. They don't pay rent or anything because no one really owns that place anymore, like so many places. Brenda walks to work every day but it is only about three or four blocks. Fine in the summer months but she won't like it in the winter.

She told me there are still empty apartments left in her building. But I still have my garden growing and after that is the all the fruit to take care of and then there is hunting. She said I don't really have to do all that stuff anymore but while I know what she says is technically correct, I can't change who I am. I'm a prepper.

I will always be a prepper I guess.

Maybe I can get her to be a prepper too!

**The End**

