

Bugging Home – Part 1 - Prolog

“Daddy, what are we doing this for? It’s hard!” nine-year-old Peter asked his father. He took the falling apart box of auto parts from his father with a grunt.

“I know it is, son.” The man stopped what he was doing, took the box back from Peter, and set it aside. “I should tell you what is going on, I suppose. Here. Sit down and take a drink of water.” Greg handed Peter an old canteen.

Peter looked at his father expectantly. “You look sad, Daddy.”

“Worried, son. Worried. That’s what I should talk to you about.” Greg took the canteen back and took a drink himself before continuing after Peter had taken a drink. “You see, Peter, there are some bad people that may try to hurt us pretty soon. Russia and Cuba. And...”

“Like we saw on the TV, Daddy? The war stuff.”

Greg nodded. “That’s right, son. War stuff. But with bigger bombs that can hurt you even if they don’t hit you. Atomic bombs.”

“We learned a little in school about them.”

“Well, then you probably know we need shelter. Better than the house.”

“**That’s** why we’re cleaning this out!” exclaimed Peter.

“That’s right. This old tornado shelter will give us a lot more protection than the house. I should have already done this. It’s just we don’t have tornados around here very often and we needed a storage room.”

Greg ruffled Peter’s short hair. “I know it’s a lot of work, but we really need to get things done. You’re mom isn’t feeling well and you are the only one that can help me. What say after this is all over just me and you go fishing on the river?”

“Okay, Daddy. I’ll help. I don’t want that radiation stuff coming to get you and mom and me and little baby sis.”

“You’re a good boy, son. Don’t put off things the way I do sometimes.” Greg stood up and so did Peter. They went back to cleaning up the old storm shelter and then began to carry some of the home canned food from the house to the shelter.

Well, the Soviet Union pulled the missiles from Cuba and there was no Atomic War in 1962. Or since, for that matter. But Peter thought about that conversation from time to time as he grew up. And from the time he became an adult, out on his own, he learned what he could about being prepared.

Not for just nuclear war, but just about every conceivable disaster, natural or man-made. Basic preparations at first. Food, water, shelter. But as he learned the ways of the world, and watched the news and read the papers, he made rather more extensive preparations.

During the late seventies, before the mass media turned it into a dirty world, Peter wore the label of survivalist proudly. It was always more about general preparedness for him and he finally began using the term emergency preparedness rather than survival when he discussed what he was doing. He didn't discuss it often. Not many people wanted to hear about it. When his wife Gwen died in 1988 he became rather reclusive and didn't discuss it at all, except with his son Greg.

Peter taught Greg about preparedness from the time he was old enough to learn. But Peter died of a massive heart attack in 1998. Greg took some vacation time from his work as an information technology specialist and went back to the homestead to settle his father's affairs. It didn't take long.

Greg hired a couple to keep the place up and leased the arable land out to a farmer. That's where things stood a few years into the new millennium.

Bugging Home - Part 1 - Chapter 1

“Hey, Bev,” Greg spoke into the phone. “Where do you want to go to dinner tonight?”

“Can’t tonight, Greg,” replied his girlfriend. “I have other plans.”

“Okay,” Greg replied softly. “This is it, isn’t it? George is back in town.”

“Greg, you know I like being with you, but George and I... Well...”

“I understand.” Greg closed the cell phone. He’d seen it coming and found himself not all that upset. Bev was all right, but he’d been thinking for some time that she wasn’t the woman he was going to spend the rest of his life with.

“Oh, well,” he said to himself as he left his office. He waved at the tech on duty and headed to the elevator. He didn’t particularly like working on the fourteenth floor in an eighteen-story building, but it was where the work was and he couldn’t pass up the \$80K a year position.

It was the same with his apartment. It was an apartment in a moderate rise building. He could walk to work in all but the worst weather. Then he put on the cold weather gear and slogged to work, to the amazement of his co-workers. Greg grinned. “Maybe this is the best thing that could have happened,” he thought. “I guess I was actually dreading tonight.”

Today was Friday so he was taking the elevator down. He usually rode it up every day, but took the stairs down, except on Fridays. When the lights in the elevator flickered and the elevator stopped moving, Greg just sighed. Another power failure. All their computer systems in the office were on uninterruptible power supplies, but the generator for the building’s essential circuits was waiting of repair parts. It could be hours before he got out.

Greg was in no real hurry now, but just for the practice, he decided to get himself out. He removed from his jacket pocket the leather case that contained his multi-tool. He didn’t take out the multi-tool, but a flat piece of metal about four inches long. It wasn’t too thick, but was of hardened steel and very strong.

It took only a moment to work one end between the door panels and spread them enough to get his fingers between them. It was a bit of a struggle but he opened the doors of the elevator car. He went to one knee and did the same thing with the outer doors for the elevator on what turned out to be the eighth floor.

The car floor was almost level with the eighth floor so he rolled out of the elevator quickly and climbed to his feet. It took only a moment to replace the tool in the pouch and return it to his pocket.

Whistling, he came out of the stairwell on the ground floor, and spoke to the entryway guard. “I heard some yelling from one of the elevators on six.”

“Yeah. They called on the emergency phone. Fire department is on the way. Lucky you weren’t caught in one. This is Friday.”

“Sometimes I’m lucky,” Greg said. “See ya’.”

As usual when there was one of these semi-regular blackouts, the streets were pandemonium. He had a pocket flash on him, but there was plenty of light from the cars on the street to see. It took him a few extra minutes to walk the three blocks to his apartment building, needing to wend his way around the groups of people from the stalled cars in the traffic jam caused when the traffic signals went out.

“Another mess, sir,” Fredrick said as the doorman opened the door for Greg at the apartment building. The emergency lights were burning, as they had been in the office building. “They went to get more fuel for the generator. You going to wait for the power or walk up?”

“I’ll walk.”

Fredrick shook his head. “Better thee than me. I don’t see how you do it. Nine floors.”

Greg grinned at him. “At least I’m not on the tenth.”

“Don’t remind of the tenth floor,” Fredrick said with a grimace. The DuCouskies are going to throw a fit if the power isn’t on by the time they get back tonight. If we keep getting these power failures, I may just take up a collection to get a larger fuel tank to run the generator to power the elevator. Or pay for it myself.”

“Let me know. I’ll chip in five bucks,” Greg said with a laugh and a wave as he headed for the stairs. He was breathing deeply, but easily when he reached his apartment. Since he wasn’t going out with Beverly tonight and the facts of the power outage, it would be easier to eat in.

Greg turned on the battery lamp on the entry table, then another in the kitchen. It didn’t take long to decide. He didn’t feel like pulling out his camping gear and setting up the stove so he just made a small bowl of tuna fish salad and had a sandwich and a wedge of lettuce for his supper.

The DSL connection was still up and Greg spent the time between supper and bedtime on the internet. The power outage was widespread again. He got tired of the repetitive stories, since most lacked hard information about what had caused this one. Greg checked a few of the preparedness forums of which he was a member and caught up on the postings. He added a comment or two, and then turned off the computer and went to bed.

The power came back on the next morning while he was showering by lamplight. The news wasn’t good as he watched one of the morning TV news shows. It had been another act of terrorism that caused the blackout the evening before. The equipment at three key substations had been hit with multiple rocket-propelled grenades.

The police were still clearing the traffic jams as Greg walked to work. Normally he only worked one weekend out of six, but with the system on backup power for as long as it was, wanted to check on things personally.

When he got to the offices, things were more or less normal. The UPS systems had maintained the computers the entire night and all the regular backups had been done without problem, but the reserve power was low now and Greg began backing critical systems up every hour in case another blackout occurred before the UPS systems were back up to full charge.

Even with the additional storage capacity that had been added to the system, the UPS could barely cover the automatic backups and shutdowns of the computers, except for the one critical server, which had its own long term UPS. It had been a costly upgrade, but the frequent blackouts had mandated it.

There was another short power outage just after lunch, but it only lasted an hour. Reports on the radio indicated the power company had downed the power to get some replacement equipment hooked up.

Greg went home that night with the system at full readiness. When he watched the news he found himself tensing up. There were more than the usual number of political trouble spots in the world tonight. And the weather... Greg looked up as the windows lit up with a lightning strike and thunder shook them. Another big storm and the local one wasn't the only one brewing, according to the Weather Channel when he switched to it.

When he went back to the local news, there was a series of photographs of three men and two women on the screen. The police wanted them for questioning about the substation attacks. One of them looked vaguely familiar to him, but Greg put it off to just a similarity of features to someone he'd seen occasionally, probably where he shopped.

Greg went to bed that night feeling uneasy. He didn't sleep well, and was up early Sunday morning. It was still raining. He flipped on the news while he prepared a light breakfast. A recap of last night's news. Everything as it was or worse. He thought about what his father would think about the situation. With a fond smile he muttered, "Better stock up on a few things."

That was as good a plan as any for a rainy Sunday. Again thinking of his father, Greg pulled out a set of his khaki work clothes. The ones he wore when he was doing physical work. He liked them better than jeans. People sometimes made fun of him for looking like an African hunter, or Indiana Jones, due to the leather jacket and wide-brimmed leather hat he wore he often wore with the khakis.

But Greg had grown up with the comments and he didn't let them bother him. He loaded up his pockets and went down to the parking garage. He didn't drive much in the city. Greg either walked or took cabs or mass transit most of the time. Most of what he did was within a ten-block area of the apartment building.

One of the reasons he shopped where he did, despite there being stores closer, was it was an excuse to take out his old truck every couple of weeks or so. He'd bought it used from a friend of his dad's that could no longer drive. It had been a farm truck and looked pretty rough, but the running gear was in great shape and only had twenty-thousand miles on it. Mostly slow speed miles at that, being used on the farm mostly. It was a 1976 Chevrolet K20 long wheelbase Fleetside pickup truck. It had been red at one time, but was now a rather rusty looking grey-brown.

It sported a very modern, 98-gallon auto transfer fuel tank, the standard left-side 20 gallon fuel tank, a 42-gallon right side aftermarket fuel tank, and a custom 15-gallon tank where the original spare tire had been under the bed, giving a total of 175 gallons of fuel. The truck got at least sixteen miles to the gallon come rain or shine and therefore had an un-refueled highway range of 2,800 miles.

There was a bedrail-mount toolbox on each side, and two spare tires in the bed. The side toolboxes had rails on their back to support a sectioned hard cover stout enough to support significant weight. The heavy-duty rear bumper incorporated a two inch receiver hitch and swing away mounts for a spare tire, Hi-Lift jack, D-handle shovel, axe, pick-mattock, sledge hammer, and three five-gallon jerry cans of water.

The original small block 283 cubic inch displacement engine, despite having only twenty-thousand miles on it, had many more hours of slow speed running than the number of miles would indicate. It was probably fine, but Greg wanted a little more power anyway, with the modifications he planned for the truck. He got another small block Chevy engine. This one was set up as a 327 cubic inch with four bolt mains, with a super charger.

The truck fired right up, and despite the potential power of the engine, it barely rumbled as it warmed up. Greg didn't like loud things. The truck had large diameter dual exhausts and extra quiet mufflers. He put the truck in gear after a minute or so and headed out of the parking garage.

Traffic was light downtown on a rainy Sunday and Greg quickly got away from the high-density buildings of downtown. A few more minutes and he was at the huge shopping complex where he did his grocery shopping.

He'd done a quick inventory at home, and while he didn't really need anything, Greg decided to increase his stocks somewhat, on general principles. He hit Sam's Club first and got the same basic things he always got, and then hit his regular grocery store for the rest.

By noon he was back at the apartment and everything was put away. Greg lazed around the rest of the day. It was the last lazy day he would have for some time.

Bugging Home - Part 1 - Chapter 2

The day started off just fine. It had stopped raining, the sun was shining, and it looked to be pretty for at least three days. But shortly after start of business Monday morning, things took an ominous turn. The first inkling came when he stretched and looked out the window, down toward the street. There was a light fog drifting down the street.

“That’s odd,” Greg said, bringing his arms down to his sides. They’d occasionally get fog early in the morning, but not on a warm day like today. “That’s odd, too,” he added when he glanced in the direction the fog was coming from. He couldn’t see anyone, but the other direction there was the normal foot traffic on the sidewalk.

Just then a car came roaring out of the fog and jumped the curb, crossing the sidewalk and slamming into a building down the street from his. Then people on the sidewalk began running away from the fog. Greg saw the fog overtake two people walking slowly along, in the same direction the fog was flowing. Suddenly both people fell out of sight under the fog.

“**Holy Moly!**” exclaimed Greg. He quickly turned on the TV set in his office and checked the news channels. Nothing. Same on the internet. He looked out the window again. The hue and cry of those near the fog moments ago must have alerted more people. There were dozens leaving the buildings downwind of the fog, running away from it.

Someone stuck their head in his office door and said, “Come on, Greg! We have to get out of here! There’s a gas leak or something.”

The man was gone without hearing Greg’s remark, “I don’t think that’s a gas leak. Gas, yes. Leak, no.”

When he went out of his office, the staff were heading for the elevators. “I wouldn’t go down there!” he called. “I think it’s gas!”

“That’s right,” someone responded. “I, for one, am not waiting around for it to blow!”

Realizing he would never convince anyone, Greg turned back to his office. One of the local TV stations was just breaking in with the news. The report confirmed what Greg had thought. It was a terrorist chemical attack. It also confirmed that his course of action was a good one. “Anyone in a multi-story building should go to at least the third floor or above. The gas is hugging the ground. Do not try to go through the gas to get away.”

Greg looked out of the window again. The gas fog was at the building he was in now. People were still streaming out. Then there was no one. Even the building down the street stopped spewing people. Apparently the news had spread to get above the fog.

He was going to be here a while, so Greg began backing up the systems and shutting them down. A couple of people showed up in the office again. “They told us to get above the second floor. It’s poison gas!”

“Yes. I saw it on the news. I suggest...”

“We’re going back down to join the others on the fifth floor,” said one. “We just wanted to get our things.”

Ignoring Greg, the other said, “I think we should go with those going to the roof to wait for a helicopter to come get us. Rodney said they’d surely send one.”

Greg stayed silent. He doubted there’d be anyone in to rescue them for some time. The authorities would wait for the gas to dissipate, and then bring in decontamination teams. The two women headed out, Greg did not know which way they actually went. He went back into his office to see what else the media was saying.

Pretty much the same thing. The power went off shortly after he had finished the back-ups he was running. The UPS systems would have kept the computers going for long enough to do the back-ups, but he was glad he was finished.

People continued to pop in and out of the offices, trying to figure out what to do. Finally Greg gathered a group of them together in an area with plenty of windows to provide light. “Okay. I’ve thought about something like this happening. There is quite a bit of food and water in the building. I would suggest everyone find some before the emergency lights loose power. The water might go off or be shut off, so a few of you should empty and clean some waste baskets and fill them with water.

“I think we’ll be here for a day or so, maybe longer, so we should get as many things done that we can while we still have what services we do have.”

“Surely someone will rescue us within a few hours!” someone called out.

“I don’t think so,” replied Greg.

“Well, just who the hell are you? What do you know about it? I think I’m just going to wet some towels and cover my mouth and nose with them and get out of here.”

“I wouldn’t try that. I saw people succumbing to the gas down on the street.”

Someone else said, “Well, we can’t just sit around here. What if the gas starts coming higher or something?”

It was a lost cause, for the most part. People went off on their own. Greg hoped they’d all be okay, but he figured some would try to leave and suffer the consequences. Others would stay and probably be okay, but suffer needlessly. He, on the other hand, had his work bug-in supplies and would be just fine.

Greg thought everyone had left, including all of his co-workers, but as he turned to go to his office he heard one lone voice ask a question. “You’re awfully calm in all this. You really think it’s better to just stay and not try to get out some way?”

He turned around and saw the woman speaking. She stood near the business entrance, and then took a couple of steps toward him. She was dressed in a nice, conservative gray business outfit, with a knee length skirt and white blouse.

“Yes, I do,” Greg replied. “I’m Greg, by the way.”

“Audrey. I’m inclined to agree,” she said. “I work for Lowenstein, down on five. The news had said to get above the third floor. I thought up here would be better than floor three, just in case. I was hoping I might get a signal on my cell up here, too. Ever since that site went down last month my cell phone hasn’t worked worth a hoot here in downtown.”

“I know,” replied Greg.

“If you’ll explain what you think we should do, I’ll help,” Audrey said when Greg didn’t continue. “I can do the wastebaskets. Or food. I must say I’m getting hungry. It’s way past lunch.”

“Can’t do the restaurant since it’s on the first floor. I know some of the offices have break rooms. Including ours. Let’s see if there’s anything left. Some of my co-workers might have cleaned it out after I said what I did.”

When they got there, it was obvious that at least some of Greg’s advice to the group had been taken. There wasn’t anything left in the goodies box, cabinet, or refrigerator.

“Well. No real problem,” Greg said.

“Speak for yourself. I skipped breakfast this morning and I’m starving.”

“We can check some other places, though if you aren’t too picky I have some things in my office.”

“Your office,” Audrey said without hesitation.

“I’d just as soon you not say anything about what I’m going to show you,” Greg told Audrey. “I keep a bug-in and bug-out supplies here in the office. My boss knows I do, but not really the extent.”

Audrey smiled. “Bug-in and bug-out? Are you a survivalist or something? Not that I mind. Not if you have food.”

“I consider it emergency preparedness. I don’t like the term survivalist since the media made such an evil word of it. But... Yes... In the original context.”

Greg led Audrey to the shelving unit against one wall of his office. The bottom section was cabinets rather than open shelves. He opened one and pulled out a plastic storage box that filled the one cabinet.

“Pretty much iron rations,” he said, handing Audrey a foil packaged Mainstay lifeboat ration pack. “I have bottled water, but I prefer to keep that, just in case and get water from the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”

Audrey read the package, then tore it open and tried the compressed food bar. She was about ready to go check on Greg when he didn’t return immediately, but realized she really wasn’t thirsty. The package had indicated the ration was not thirst inducing.

Greg showed up a couple minutes later, with water in the collapsible cup he’d taken from the box.

“This is pretty good,” Audrey told him, taking the water.

“Yes. I like them, though I don’t want a steady diet of them. About a third of that should be enough. It’s a 3,600 calorie bar. I have some gorp, too, for desert. I like my comfort food. And there are other things besides the lifeboat rations and gorp.”

He took the one-third piece of the ration when Audrey handed it to him. “I filled the trashcan in the men’s room with water, but I want to get some more filled pretty quick,” Greg said between bites.

Audrey nodded. “How long do you think we’ll be stuck here?”

Greg shook his head. “Couple days, maybe. Perhaps more. Depends on when they can start decontaminating. It’s going to take a lot of equipment, even if this is only a four or five block area. There’s plenty of food and drinking water. I mostly want to store water to make sure we have a working toilet if the water is shut off.”

“Why would they do that?”

“I can’t think of a reason, but I don’t like taking chances.” He reached over and tried the phone. “Out. Don’t know if the system overloaded or it went down for some other reason. This was another terror attack. They might have sabotaged the phones and might the water, too. Probably what happened to the power, though that happens often enough now, anyway.”

“You sure are calm about all this.”

With a shrug Greg replied, “I’ve been preparing all my life. Nothing much surprises me. My dad was into it, and so was my grandfather.”

Audrey finished her third of the ration bar and wrapped the rest back up. She walked over to the window. “Hey! The gas is gone! People are leaving.”

“Bad move,” Greg replied, moving over to stand beside her. “Look. Those first three or four people are going down.”

Some of those trying to leave the other building hurried back inside, but Greg thought it was probably too late for them. They couldn't see their own building's entrance so couldn't tell if anyone from it had tried to leave.

"Okay. I'm going to draw up some more water," Greg said.

"I'll help," replied Audrey.

They worked until it was dark outside. Greg fixed some hot tea to go with their ration bars that evening, using the supplies from the bug-in kit. He had a one burner Apex II stove that quickly heated up the water. Audrey took a little of the gorp as she drank her tea. They used the break room after it got dark. There were two sofas in addition to the table and a few chairs, plus there was a counter with a sink to make things a bit easier.

There were a couple of jackets in the break room they could use as pillows. Greg handed Audrey one of the two heavy-duty thermal reflective blankets in his supplies when they decided to go ahead and go to bed. The emergency lights had long since depleted their batteries so Greg wound up his radio flashlight combo unit. They listened to the news for a bit. It was all about the terrorist attacks, but there wasn't much information useful to them, so Greg turned it off.

Bugging Home - Part 1 - Chapter 3

It was noon the next day when they saw the first signs of help being on its way. They watched from the window as three men in environmental suits moved around the area, took samples from the air, the street and sidewalks, and the building walls. They would disappear into a building for a few minutes, and then reappear. Greg and Audrey watched them work their way down the street until they passed out of their line of sight.

It was obvious that people had been calling to them from the buildings, but they had made no response other than to wave in acknowledgement and motions to stay inside and up. “Well, Greg said, as the group moved out of sight, “It shouldn’t be too much longer. The news said it was only a six-block area. They probably have more teams sampling. The decontamination should start first thing tomorrow, if not sooner.

It was sooner. A Fire Department pumper truck was spraying things down by six that evening. It didn’t look like plain water. There was a little color to it and it didn’t splash the same way. “Probably a neutralizer,” Greg replied when Audrey asked about the appearance.

A group of people in protective gear came along behind. They were the inside decontamination crews from the looks of the equipment they took into the buildings. Additional samplers followed them.

Clean up crews of another type came next. Bodies were being placed in body bags and loaded onto a truck. Then ambulances and city busses began showing up. The crews were all in protective gear, as well. From their vantage point, Greg and Audrey could see people being taken from the buildings down the street. Many people walked out, but there were more than a few on stretchers and gurneys. And some body bags.

The activity stopped when it got full dark. “Looks like another night here,” Greg said, stepping away from the window when it was obvious they would not be leaving that evening. But they had everything they needed, thanks to Greg’s bug-in box, including toiletries. The water was still working so they had not needed to resort to flushing the toilets with water they’d drawn up in wastebaskets.

The following morning when the activity approached their building, Audrey said, “I guess we should go down. They’ll be in this building soon.” She looked over at Greg.

“I’m going to clean things up a little and repack my things. I’ll be down in a while.”

“Oh.” She hesitated a moment, then said, “I want to thank you for helping me out. I can’t imagine what the others have been going through. We had it pretty easy here, thanks to you.”

“Don’t mention it, Audrey. I’ve been at this for a long time. I’ll see you later. When they let us back into the building. Okay?”

“Audrey nodded. “Okay. Uh... Bye... I guess.”

“Bye. Be careful going down the stairs. Just do what the rescue teams say. They’ll get you out safe.” Greg turned back to what he was doing.

“I will.” With a last look at his back, Audrey turned and left his office, wondering how he could be so calm. “Of course,” she muttered to herself as she opened the stairway door, “he’s been calm through this whole thing. I guess it pays to be prepared.”

Her last sentiment was confirmed when she saw the condition of the others from the building. They looked terrible. She heard several people asking the suited up crew if they would be fed when they got to where they were going. At least they got an affirmative answer.

Audrey turned her head away when she saw an ambulance crew working on someone that had been exposed to the gas. She held back, hoping Greg would come down to the third floor, letting others be taken out to the bus before her. Firefighters, dressed in their turnout gear and wearing their SCBA equipment began to head for the stairs to search the building.

Greg, thinking that they probably would not let him go to his apartment building, decided to leave his Tyvek footed and hooded coveralls and respirator in the box. He’d go out through the regular process. He doubted he would have much choice, anyway. He was right. When he heard the firefighter call out if anyone was on the floor, Greg called out, “Here. I’m almost ready.”

The firefighter keyed the microphone of his radio and said, “Found one.” Studying Greg for a moment he asked, “You okay? You need help with the stairs or anything?”

“No. I’m fine. What floor are they processing us?”

“Third. By the elevators.”

“Okay. I’ll be on my way. Thanks. Haven’t seen anyone else in these offices since it started, but I guess you have to check that anyway, huh?”

Greg received a nod in reply. The firefighter watched Greg until Greg went into the stairwell, then continued his search on the fourteenth floor. Greg decided he must be the last one, unless someone else on fifteen through eighteen hadn’t come down yet. Which he doubted.

A paramedic checked him over and asked him a few questions about his exposure. “Nope. Been on the fourteenth since it began. I haven’t had any exposure at all.”

Another firefighter led him out to the bus. It was filling up quickly from the other buildings. He’d debated bringing his bug-out bag with him, but was glad he hadn’t when he saw others have their belongings taken from them for decontamination when they reached the processing center.

Everyone had to strip and go through a decontamination shower, and then were given underwear, a blue jumpsuit to put on, and a pair of simple sandals. As soon as he was processed Greg went to the information desk that had been set up. He gave his address and asked if it had been cleared for occupancy.

After checking a list, the clerk said, “No, sir. It hasn’t. They’re projecting three more days. Don’t worry. We’ve made provisions to house those from the affected residential buildings.”

“If we have somewhere else to go are we free to leave?”

“Once you’ve been cleared,” he replied. “We need to get a little information from everyone before they leave. What you saw and heard. Where you were when it happened. That sort of thing. We’re working through people as they come in. No one is having to stay very long, if they live outside the affected area.”

Greg nodded and said, “I see.” He wasn’t going to be going anywhere for a while. Might as well get comfortable and wait. It was problematic he’d be able to go directly home when he was released. No point in brooding about it. Right or wrong, Homeland Security had the authority under the Patriot Act.

At least the accommodations weren’t bad. Greg found a quiet corner and made himself comfortable until his debriefing. It really didn’t take long, once they got to him. Rather routine. He got his wallet and keys back, the only things he’d brought from the office other than the clothes he wore. He wouldn’t be getting those back. They were to be destroyed for safety reasons. Just in case.

Greg was released when he indicated he would get a motel room for the duration. Greg had enough cash to do so, and a credit card, or they would not have let him go.

He looked for Audrey, but apparently she’d been cleared and allowed to leave already, since she had an apartment well away from the affected area.

The powers-that-be were providing transportation assistance, so Greg had them drop him off at a budget motel on the far side of town. The driver assumed it was because Greg wanted to be as far away as possible from the area he’d just left. Actually, it was because he had a mini-storage room rented within walking distance of the motel.

It didn’t take long to go to the storage room after he’d checked into the motel, and get a few things. A small duffle bag containing a couple of changes of clothes, another with basic equipment and supplies, and a third with provisions. It would be a bit easier to just eat out, but he didn’t see the point. He had the supplies and it was about time to rotate them, anyway.

According to the news reports, the area was still quarantined. No point in trying to get to the apartment building. He hoped everyone there was all right, but there was nothing he could do about it. Greg decided the best thing he could do was just take it easy and watch the news reports until there was some mention that the area was being opened up again.

Bugging Home - Part 1 - Chapter 4

It was a week, not three days, before Greg was able to get to his apartment. A bit worried about what might have been done about the contamination of his truck, since it was in the underground parking garage of the apartment building, Greg checked it first.

I turned out part of the reason they waited the full week was to let the chemical gas break down on its own. The authorities had sampled and declared the area safe without further decontamination. They had done only what was needed to get the people that were trapped out. As yet, the identity of the agent used had not been released.

There was some speculation that the attack was conducted by the same team of terrorists that had taken the power down previously. The apparent main target was the cluster of financial businesses in the area.

Greg was able to go back to work the following Monday after he got home. He'd picked up or ordered replacements for the supplies he'd used. He'd also returned the items he'd taken from the cache at the mini-warehouse.

He was pleasantly surprised when Audrey showed up one day as he was getting ready to leave the office. "Audrey... I'm sorry. I don't think we ever exchanged last names. Mine's Eaken."

Audrey shook Greg's hand and replied. "And mine is Rounds. Audrey Elizabeth Rounds."

Greg smiled. "Full names, huh. Gregory Cornelius Eaken."

Audrey smiled in return. "I wanted to thank you again, and offer to replace the food and things I used. I have no idea where to purchase them. If you'll let me know where you bought them, I'll get replacements."

"No need," replied Greg. "I've already picked some up. My bug-in kit is right back to up to snuff."

"I'd really like to repay you in some way. I didn't realize it at the time, but after talking with some of the others that went through what we did, they suffered drastically. It was no more than an inconvenience for us... well, me."

"For me, as well. And it really wasn't that much. Don't worry about it."

"Well, at least let me buy you lunch one day, in return."

"Sure. That'll be fine. Tomorrow? In the restaurant downstairs?"

"Certainly. My lunch break is from 11:30 to 12:30. Is that okay?"

“I’m flexible. That’s fine.”

“I’ll meet you there, then. Tomorrow at 11:35.”

“I’ll be there.”

It had been a month since the incident and Audrey and Greg had lunch twice more after that first one. Greg helped her set up a bug-in kit similar to his, though she was rather restricted in what she could do. Her bosses weren’t as understanding as Greg’s, despite what had happened. Neither of them had been in the building when the attack occurred.

A great deal of it had to do with security. It was a diamond brokerage house, and security was tight. They didn’t want much in the way of unnecessary items about the place. Audrey was able to get a couple of the lifeboat ration packs and some bottled water, but that was about the limit. A bug-out kit kept at her work was out of the question. As she took public transportation to and from work, the one she put together for her car, did her no good at work.

It didn’t matter, anyway. She was at her sister’s in New Mexico when the announcement came that terrorists had planted small nuclear devices in several cities, unnamed. There were calls for calm. The Nuclear Emergency Search Teams were on the job. But in every major city and some not so major, impromptu mass evacuations began to take place. Pandemonium reigned. Gridlock was the order of the day.

Greg had several alternatives. He could stay. That was the easiest. Chicago might or might not be a target. His truck had more than enough range to get him to the homestead in the Missouri Ozarks, even taking a very circuitous route. That was the next option, but could he even get out of the city now in the truck, with the traffic the way it was? There’d been no announcement as to when the devices might go off.

He could leave the truck and get the Rokon with sidecar and trailer out of storage and head for one of his mini-retreats well outside of the city limits. He had three, in different directions. There was also the mountain bike and trailer. If all else failed he could go shank’s mare and back pack, with or without the two wheeled cart. Greg liked to have options. It was just, which one and how soon, if he decided to leave. Or, just take all the options with him.

Greg kept an eye on the news. Traffic was tangled, but steps were being taken to get it moving again. He loaded most of the equipment and supplies from the apartment into the truck, leaving some just in case he needed to come back at some point. They included the bike, bike trailer, and two-wheel handcart.

It wasn’t that difficult to get the truck over to the mini-warehouse and hook up to the modified barge trailer that carried the Rokon and its trailer. Traffic within the city wasn’t too bad.

All he had to do was hook up to the trailer. Everything he kept stored in the mini-warehouse was already packed on it.

It looked like the lightest traveled routes were the side roads leading east toward Gary, Indiana. That's the way he headed. He'd need to swing south on US 41, then west on US 24 at Kentland. That would loop around south Chicago and hopefully bypass the interstates close in, which were moving, but very slowly. He'd pick up I-57 south off US 24 to take him to the Missouri border, south of Cape Girardeau.

Illinois, especially Chicago, wasn't gun friendly. He kept everything unloaded and cased, in one of the truck's toolboxes. Except for a Para-ordinance P-14 .45 ACP. It and seven magazines were in the lock box behind the seat.

He could reach behind the seat and retrieve the weapon and magazines, or snap the box shut and locked at a moments notice. There was still a lot of official presence and he doubted he would run into much trouble. But he'd break out weaponry once he crossed the Mississippi into Missouri. It would be less of a risk there, at least in the areas he'd be traveling.

Staying on the side roads to get to US 41, Greg got to the mini-warehouse he had set up as a temporary haven in Morocco, Indiana. It was just after midnight. The small storage room was lined with solid 4" x 8" x 16" concrete block, three rows deep.

Two by twelves were spaced on eight-inch centers with bricks stacked between them over the walls. On top of the two by twelves was a layer of 3/4" tongue and grove plywood. It supported three layers of the blocks. There were additional blocks to fill the doorway to the shelter, which was half filled with equipment and supplies. He had two other mini-warehouse rooms set up the same way, well outside Chicago. One on the northwest side and one on the southwest side.

He didn't really need anything from the storage room, but had decided to stay close to it for his rest stop, just in case Chicago did have a nuke and it went off. It was a pleasant night, so Greg threw his sleeping bag on the floor of the roof rack, climbed up and crawled in. The P-14 was concealed in a small bag by his head.

Bugging Home - Part 1 – Chapter 5

Greg checked the news as soon as he got up the next morning at six. People all over the country were still streaming out of the cities to small towns and rural areas. Most weren't going all that far, it seemed, but going they were. There was extensive looting in the cities and confrontations between evacuees and residents of the areas to which they were evacuating.

There was a service station open, with fuel available. Greg used the bathroom, got something to eat, and topped off his tanks. He didn't say anything about the dollar a gallon hike on the fuel. He didn't need that much. He paid with his credit card.

He had plenty of cash since the first thing he'd done after the announcement was go to each of the three banks where he had accounts and withdrawn half of the balances. That gave him a total of over three thousand dollars and he wanted to hang on to it for as long as possible. The price of everything was likely to skyrocket, despite any controls the authorities might try to put on things.

Traffic was erratic as he headed south for Kentland. Sometimes there would be very little traffic, then anywhere from one to a dozen vehicles would come whizzing up and past him. There were times when the traffic was barely moving. More than one vehicle was off the road onto the shoulder, apparently due to lack of fuel or mechanical failure.

Greg stopped and helped one family change a flat tire. They were in a minivan, and seemed to have no clue as to what to do. Pulling well off the pavement behind them, Greg changed the tire, which, fortunately, was on the side away from the pavement. The man had barely pulled off far enough to let traffic by.

It was obvious that other cars had been in accidents and pushed off the road. Greg stopped and helped where he could, giving rides to the next town available to individuals so they could try and get something done. He wouldn't offer fuel, but did give rides for people to try to buy a can and gas, and get a ride back to their vehicle.

He just made sure slow progress. The traffic on US 24 between Kentland and I-57 was light. Most people were trying to go south. When he got on I-57 and turned south himself, traffic was heavy, though moving well.

And unlike in and around Chicago itself, the northbound lanes were open. People had been using both sets of lanes to escape the city. Service stations at every junction were packed. Greg only stopped to use the restroom and check attitudes of other travelers. The attitudes were mixed. So were the destinations, though not many seemed willing to say where they were headed.

Greg started looking for a likely place to stop for the night. He was in the southern half of Illinois now. Every commercial campground was already packed. So were the parks and state and national forest campgrounds. The rest stops were also full of people camping out.

He turned off the interstate and went quite a ways away from it before looking for a likely farm. There had been many along the highway where people just stopped and set up camp. He wasn't going to be that way.

The one he decided to stop at seemed to be a small operation. He parked in front of the equipment shed where several people were grouped, talking. "Hello," he called, stepping out of the truck as the five men moved toward him. They were looking over his rig closely.

"We don't allow no huntin' on the property," said one.

Greg addressed his remarks to the man, figuring he was probably the owner or foreman, as he was the oldest. "I understand," Greg replied. "I'm not looking to hunt. I'm headed for the Ozarks and just needed a place to camp out for one night."

"Camp out? This ain't a good way to be gettin' to the Ozarks. And there's plenty of campgrounds along the interstate."

"Yes, sir. I know. But with what's going on, they're all full and I'm a bit afraid of what might happen in some of them. I'm looking for a safe place to stay. And I should warn you. I might not be the only one wanting to camp on your property. There are a lot of folks getting away from the cities and most of them are heading for the country. I'm more than willing to offer you something in return for you allowing me to stay.

"I pack out what I pack in. All there'd be left after I leave tomorrow is a pressed down area of grass. I have a portable toilet so you wouldn't have to worry about anything like that. If you don't want me to, I'll understand. I know it's an intrusion but I don't particularly want to trust camping out with the wild masses. Things are getting nasty."

"I don't know, fella. We heard about what's happening. Got a satellite dish. But didn't figure it would affect us none."

"It might not," Greg said. "Look, I know it's an imposition. I'll just go and look for another place."

"Now, hold on, young fella. Didn't say no. Just got to consider it a bit. Hang on there a minute." He turned to talk to his companions, softly. They seemed to reach a consensus quickly.

"Okay. You can leave your rig parked here and set up your tent over there by the fence. What's your name, anyway, mister?"

"Greg Eaken, sir." He held out his hand.

"Albert Waken. These two's my boys and them's my two hired hands." Greg shook hands all around. "What you think of all these goings-on? You think there's really atom bombs in the cities?" Albert asked. The other four went back to the equipment shed as Albert stayed with Greg while he went to the Rokon trailer and unpacked the tent that it carried.

"I don't know, Mr. Waken. I'm worried enough to get out of Chicago and head for the old home place in Missouri."

"We was thinking that maybe we should bury an old semi trailer we got out back and make a shelter. They blow up St. Louis, could get some of that radiation fallout. We got a bucket loader for one of the tractors. It oughta do it."

"That might not be a bad idea. I wouldn't wait too long." Greg could tell that Mr. Waken was more interested in his rig than he was in a bomb in St. Louis. He nodded with his chin toward the barge trailer as he set up the tent. "That's a Rokon bike. Custom built the tandem wheel trailer. The bike is two-wheel drive. Carry a thousand pounds or tow three thousand. Go just about anywhere, especially without the sidecar and trailer. But I wanted to be able to take my... camping gear, if the truck broke down or the roads get too clogged."

"Big ol' wheels though. Be lighter with spokes."

"Yes, sir. But they're hollow. Designed to carry fuel or water or whatever. I have fuel in them. I used the same wheels and tires on the I trailer I built. The side car is factory and it uses the same tire and wheel."

"Got gas in all of 'em?"

"Sure do. Over thirty gallons for the seven of them. I can go quite a ways with the rig if I need to."

"Int'resting."

"Got a complete set of camping gear in the sidecar and trailer and enough food and supplies to last a month."

"Month, huh? Well, I'm a wondering... you being so well heeled and all, if you might be packing heat. Just wondering, you know. It's okay, if you are. Me and the boys... wife and the girls, too, for that matter, are pretty handy with a rifle. I just feel like I should know."

"Considering things," Greg said, going to the cab of the truck, "I thought it wise. I'll keep it locked up here." He showed Albert the P-14, and then put it back into the locking box.

"Won't need it here, fer sure. We're a peaceable lot around here," said Albert. "Look see. I need to get back with the boys. We're working on the spray rig. You make yourself to home. If'n you need anything, come fetch one of us."

"Thank you, Mr. Waken. I'll do that. And thank you. Are you sure you won't let me pay you a little? Going rate for a campground, at least?"

"Nah," he said, waving a hand as he went around the tractor in front of the shed, "Wouldn't be neighborly. You just mind your manners, and everything'll be fine."

Greg smiled and finished setting up the tent, and then thought about setting up the privacy enclosure, useable as an outhouse, with a chemical toilet, or as a shower with the MSR ten-liter water bag and shower attachment. The tent was a Eureka with vestibule fly. The privacy enclosure he'd made himself, with aluminum conduit and pieces of tarp he'd had sewn up at an awning maker.

One of the advantages of his design was that it included a wooden grate floor over the tarp floor and a water hose connection to direct the shower water away from the enclosure. He wasn't desperate for a shower, so he didn't set up the enclosure. Instead, he put the chemical toilet in the tent's rear vestibule. It would give adequate privacy.

His breakfast and dinner had been convenience store snacks. For supper he took out a Mountain House two-person freeze-dried entrée, heated water, and prepared it. A Hershey bar was dessert. It was growing dark and the two hands left. Albert and his sons went to the house.

The previous night had been a late one. Greg let the Thermo-rest mattress inflate, and unrolled the Quallofill filled sleeping bag. His rolled up clothing was his pillow. A second P-14 lay under the bundle. He'd mentioned the first to Albert. He hadn't seen any reason to mention the second.

Bugging Home – Part 1 – Chapter 6

Greg was up and packed by five the next morning. He was sitting sideways in the truck, the door open, when Albert and sons came out of the house. He'd just finished eating a package of Mountain House scrambled eggs with bacon. He licked the spoon clean and put the empty package in the trash container in the console.

After stepping out of the truck, he walked over to join the three men by the tractor. "I just wanted to thank you for allo..."

All four glanced down the long driveway when the raucous sound of three car horns blared. Quickly Greg continued. "For allowing me to stay. I think I should be on my way so as not to give the others any idea that I stayed here, in case you want to dissuade others."

"Yeah. Sure, sonny. Have a safe trip." Albert began walking a ways down the drive to meet the others, his sons flanking him.

As Greg pulled around and headed down the driveway, he noted that all three of the men had some sort of pistol in a hip pocket. He grinned and waved as he passed the three.

"Knew the peace wasn't going to last for long," Greg said aloud as he headed back toward the interstate. He had a feeling it wouldn't be as smooth sailing as it had been the previous day. He was right. Traffic was backed up, and spreading around the local area.

He'd checked the map while he'd had breakfast and had an alternate route picked out. It would put him back on I-57 further south. The route took him a ways from the interstate, so he never found out what had slowed the traffic. Probably an accident. But traffic on I-57 was moving just fine when he picked it up just north of the I-24 junction.

It was smooth sailing from there to the border with Missouri. The I-57 Mississippi River bridge was a different story. Traffic was backed up at least a mile. Greg climbed onto the pipe rack and looked down the highway. People were being turned around at the crossovers by Illinois State Troopers.

When it was his turn the trooper asked, "You from Missouri?"

"I own a farm near Willow Springs."

"Let's see your driver's license."

"It's an Illinois license, Officer. I've been making my home in Chicago for a few years."

"Sorry then. They're only letting people into Missouri if they have Missouri ID. Missouri is doing the same thing on their side. You'll have to turn back."

"I see," said Greg. He wasn't going to push it. From the radio reports he'd been hearing this wasn't an isolated occurrence. All around the country borders were being closed. Not just state, but even some county borders and lots of small towns.

He headed back north on the interstate until he could get off onto a side road. After stopping he took out a large Tyvek envelope from the case behind the seat. Going through it, Greg removed a copy of the ownership papers for the farm, and returned the envelope to the lock box. Then he began looking for access to the river.

It took a while to find a suitable access site that was not easily visible from a main road, but he finally found one. It took only a few moments to get the barge trailer into the water and tied off. He moved the truck among the trees, threw camouflage netting over it and ran a heavy cable through openings on the front bumper and a thick tree, and snapped a lock shut in the eyelets in the end of the cable.

He fixed something to eat, then took a nap. When dusk was approaching Greg fired up the twin fifty horsepower Mercury outboards on the barge and headed across the river. He'd used a pair of Steiner ten power binoculars to scout several likely landing spots on the far bank and headed for the most promising.

Unfortunately the first place had good access off the river but was ringed with close spaced trees. He'd not be able to get anywhere without cutting a path through the forest. That could take days.

He headed for the next closest spot. Not as good of access, but there was the semblance of a trail out of the landing spot. It was bound to lead to a road eventually. He ran the barge against the bank and jumped off with the painter in hand. He tied off three corners of the barge to keep it steady against the current, then pulled to shore one end of the bridging planks he taken from the truck.

He had the Rokon rig unloaded and concealed a few minutes later. Like the truck he'd left, he secured the Rokon and trailer and threw camouflage over it. It was full dark when he got the truck moved over. But the truck had plenty of light sources, so he pulled the barge trailer from the water and reloaded the Rokon rig. Greg set up camp and settled in for the night.

It took a while, and backtracking a couple of times, but Greg found a road the next morning. He checked his maps and with a GPS reading, located himself in the somewhat featureless terrain. Traffic south (actually now west) on I-57 was light. When he got to the juncture of I-57 and I-55 what traffic there was, was stopped.

When Greg got to the head of the line, it was the same situation as that at the river crossing. Missouri State Troopers were only letting people with local business proceed. Greg showed the trooper his ownership papers.

He wanted to see Greg's driver's license, as well. When he saw that it was an Illinois license, he frowned. "How'd you get past the border? They're supposed to be stopping all non-Missouri traffic."

"Oh. I'm moving back to the old home place. Sure picked a good time, I think. I've been down on the river for a while since I don't get much of a chance to enjoy it up in Chicago. This

side of the river, obviously.” Greg was always careful not to lie, but he knew how to tell the truth the most effectively.

“Well, okay, then. I guess well let you proceed, based on the fact that you own property here. But get that driver’s license changed to here pretty quick. I’ll be checking up on you.” The trooper handed the papers and license back to Greg and waved him on.

Greg went in to Sikeston to see if he could top off his fuel tanks. There was fuel available, but the lines were long, and the price was high. He still had plenty of fuel, anyway. Taking US 60, he headed west. Greg had to show his ownership papers again when he hit the outskirts of Poplar Bluff. The city police had a roadblock up and were stopping everyone they didn’t know. He was able to find fuel in Poplar Bluff, and topped off the tanks. He also stopped at a restaurant and got a good meal. The prices were up, but not nearly as much as they were along the Interstates.

He tried to get a hotel room for the rest of the day and night, but there wasn’t a room to be had. A lot of St. Louis folks were in town. There were a couple of spots left in a campground in the Mark Twain National Forest. Greg set up camp and went to bed. He wanted to be fresh the next day. He should be home by noon, barring trouble, but the stress was telling on him.

He hadn’t run into any violence yet, but the radio was reporting isolated incidents all over the country. Mostly in the cities, where there was quite a bit of looting going on, but also in the rural areas where city folk were demanding accommodation beyond what was easily available. There were a few reports of rural locals waylaying and robbing people fleeing the cities.

Greg woke up the next morning with those thoughts in mind. He decided to go back in to Poplar Bluff to eat, but turned around when he saw the group at the outskirts. The line of cars was at least nine or ten long. He turned around and headed for the place he’d inherited from his father, and his father before him.

He was just east of Mountain Home when he started to pull over to see if he could help where a car was pulled over to the side of the road. There hadn’t been much traffic lately and Greg decided to help if he could. It turned out not to be a good idea.

Greg stopped with plenty of room between the truck and car, stopping well back of it. He had scanned the wooded area carefully as he was stopping. Greg started to step out of the truck. He saw the woman looking at him and moved toward the front of the truck. He had one of the P-14 pistols in a small-of-the-back holster.

When he cleared the front of the truck he saw the woman quickly look toward the woods. “Okay mister! Hands in the air!” One of the two men stepping out of the wooded area had a pump shotgun. The other a bolt-action hunting rifle. Both held their guns pointed toward Greg, but with muzzles somewhat lowered.

Greg’s left hand started to lift, but his right was going behind him. It caught the two men and the woman flatfooted. The two men had barely started lifting their weapons by the time Greg was in a solid Weaver stance, the P-14 lined up on the one with the shotgun.

“You drop ‘em!” Greg called. His eyes darted occasionally toward the woman, then back. For the moment she was standing still. Both men had stopped lifting their weapons, but held onto them.

“You,” he told the woman, “Move over there with them.” He’d only glanced at her, his eyes going back to the two men.

“All we want is your rig. We’ll let you go if you put down your gun.” It was the man with the shotgun speaking.

“And what if I don’t?”

This time it was the man with the rifle that spoke. “We’ll kill you, you SOB! Now put down the gun!”

“You’re going to kill me?” Greg asked, finger tightening on the trigger just slightly.

“You got that right, Yankee!” The shotgun man again.

“Did you hear that lady? They said they were going to shoot me.”

“If they don’t I will,” she almost screamed.

“That’s all I needed to know.” Greg squeezed the trigger twice in rapid succession, double-tapping the man with the shotgun in the chest. He shifted ever so slightly and double-tapped the rifleman.

The woman screamed, and then, as Greg turned the pistol toward her, yelled, “Don’t kill me, mister! Please don’t kill me!” She started backing up, then turned and began to run.

Greg went to the front of the car and put three rounds into the radiator. The woman ran faster. Greg ran back to the truck and pulled out a pair of jersey gloves after holstering his P-14. He quickly donned the gloves and ran over to the two men. Both were dead. Both had dropped their weapons. He noted the position of the two guns, then picked each up in turn and fired two rounds across the road. The woman had run into the woods so he couldn’t tell if she ran faster or just hid.

With the guns back on the ground in the same place as when he picked them up, Greg went back to the truck and pulled onto the road. He made sure there were no clear tire tracks on the shoulder and side of the ditch, then got back in the truck and took off. He never looked back.

Bugging Home - Part 1 - Epilog

Like the other towns along the way now, Mountain Home had people manning the road entrances to the town. Greg showed his ownership papers again, and reported that two men were dead back a ways and their car shot up. One of the guards was a deputy sheriff. He climbed into his cruiser, called it in, and headed back the way Greg had come.

Greg's hands started to shake a few miles outside of Mountain Home. He quickly found a place to pull off the road. Hurriedly he stumbled out of the truck, ran around it and fell to his knees. He vomited for what seemed like forever. But, finally, he got up, got a water bottle and washed out his mouth.

Leaning against the side of the truck, he stared at the forest for a long time, then got back into the truck and headed for home. He was only a few miles from Willow Springs and his place wasn't far from the town. It'd only be a couple hours more. A couple, since he was driving very slowly for a while.

Bugging Home - Part 2 - Prolog

It was just after 4:00 pm when Greg got to the small farm he considered home. He'd lived several places, but this was home. His grandfather Greg bought the undeveloped land in 1967 and began improving it. Trees were harvested to clear farm acreage and build a log home with a basement. The basement included a concrete shelter room under the patio at the rear with access from the basement and an emergency exit, based on Civil Defense pamphlets.

What wood that wasn't used in the construction was cut up for firewood for the fireplace and wood burning kitchen stove. Propane fueled a regular kitchen stove, water heater, two gravity flow wall furnaces, and a clothes dryer.

It was a working farm by 1971, when Peter graduated high school. Peter went off to college and Grandpa Greg hired a hand to help with the farm. When Peter came back from college four years later with a degree in agriculture and a new wife, an ultra-modern mobile home was placed near the log home.

With the extended family now, the garden was expanded, and a triple wall (block-earth-block) above ground much larger shelter was built behind the two homes. It was not only shelter, but root cellar and dry storage room for home canned and commercial food stores, too.

A small barn went up and they began keeping chickens for eggs and meat. They also began getting a calf and a couple of piglets every year to raise for meat, having the local butcher process the animals for them every fall.

After Little Greg came along in 1980, with things going well, a commercial green house was installed and salad and specialty crops were added to the other products the farm produced. Since Peter had taken on a teaching job, and Grandpa Greg was ready to retire, and Little Sis was off living her own life, they went to a share cropper arrangement with a local farmer and only worked the greenhouse and garden themselves.

Peter was into the relatively new home computer craze and took a few courses, making computers a sideline business that gradually turned into a full time internet business for him with the farm secondary. He quit teaching.

Grandpa Greg passed on in 1994 and Grandma Maggie a year later. Greg's mother and Little Sis died in a bank robbery when the perpetrators got in a shoot out with the police in 1997. Peter was never quite the same after that. He threw himself into his work and began to stockpile even more equipment and supplies

He got an offer on the now unused log cabin from some people from St. Louis that he couldn't turn down, if you know what I mean. The men had ties to Chicago and New York, too. The house was dismantled piece by piece and moved to Lake Wappapello near Poplar Bluff as a summer home for someone from St. Louis that wanted an immediately rustic place.

With the internet going great guns, and Peter working the way he was, there was income for a new home. Having seen information on concrete dome homes on the web, Peter researched it a bit more, then ordered a kit. It took the entire summer of 1998 to get it erected, but it was

done by Thanksgiving. With a few modifications to Peter's specifications. They also put up a smaller concrete dome utility building over the basement where the log home had been. The mobile home was used for storage.

Greg had suspected something was wrong with his father, but Peter wouldn't talk to him about it. He finally found out what it was when Peter collapsed and went to the hospital in Popular Bluff by ambulance. Terminal pancreatic cancer. He was gone before Christmas.

The life insurance paid off the house, provided for Greg's college education, and still left a substantial nest egg for Greg.

Bugging Home - Part 2 - Chapter 1

The first thing Greg did when he got home was to call Mr. and Mrs. Sarmento, the caretakers he hired after his father died. Mr. Sarmento was ex Marine Corps Force Recon and it was far better to let him know that Greg was going to be in residence. He'd not been able to contact them before he left.

He should have known they would be expecting him. "What took you so long?" were Alex Sarmento's first words on the telephone.

Greg smiled and said, "Had to make a couple of detours. How are things going in this area?"

"I'll be over in a few minutes and tell you," came the reply.

Most of the dust covers were off the furniture when Alex showed up and rang the bell. "Hey, boy! It's good to see you." Alex gave Greg a big bear hug, and then set him back down. "Figured you'd show up here. Sooner or later."

"Until NEST finds them and disarms them. Or declares Chicago as cleared."

Alex nodded. "Everything here okay for you? Maria has been cleaning once every two weeks and I come by regular like to check on things. I know Martin kind of keeps an eye on the house and outbuildings while he's farming."

It was Greg that nodded this time. "Thanks, Mr. Sarmento. I'll have to say thanks to Martin, too. It's made my life easy knowing everything was safe and secure here while I'm off working these good jobs."

"We're pleased to do it, Maria and me. Your father helped me out when I was hurting big time, and you right by his side. What you pay us to care for the place for you helps out on my Marine pension."

Alex grinned. "And I get to shoot whenever I want, as much as I want, on your range, very comfortable like."

Greg grinned as well. "Now, what is it you wanted to tell me in person you couldn't over the phone."

Now Alex was frowning. "Not so much couldn't, as I just wanted it to be face-to-face so you'd know how serious it is. You're pretty capable for someone never been in the military. Not really over confident, but still... Just might not think this is too important."

"If you say it is, then it is, Mr. Sarmento," Greg said quietly.

"Well, we got a pack of low lives hanging around the area. They're getting into minor trouble here and there. Sheriff thinks they're the ones doing some of the break-ins around the county, but hasn't got any proof. They haven't killed anyone, but there's been a couple farm boys

messed up pretty bad. Neither of them would press charges. Out of fear for their families, I suspect.

“I know how you are about standing up for people. You catch them hassling some farmer’s wife or storekeeper, you’ll step in. There’s at least a dozen of them. Face’s change from time to time, but there’s always a group. I think they’re into drugs. Definitely alcohol. About the only thing the Sheriff’s been able to get any of them on is some speeding and public intoxication violations.

“I just want you to be careful until you have a chance to scope out the situation. These boys are plumb mean.”

“Okay Mr. Sarmento. You have my word. I’ll take it easy. But you be sure to do the same. You’d be a step in front of me if you saw what you were talking about.”

“Got to admit, I already had one run in with them. It was minor. They just called me some names for interfering in their fun, but nothing serious came of it.”

“I suspected as much. That’s why you’re warning me.”

“Careful who you’re sassing, boy,” growled Ales. Greg knew he didn’t really mean it.

“How’s phone service now? I want to try to call New Mexico.”

“Cellular is still up, and so is local twisted pair. Long distance has been hit or miss on both of them. Due to the situation, I presume,” replied Alex. “I’ll be on my way. Let you try that call. You just behave yourself. I’ll be around if you need me for something.”

Greg shook Alex’s hand. “Thanks, Mr. Sarmento. It’s good to be back.”

After seeing Alex out, Greg tried Audrey’s cellular phone number. He couldn’t get through. Mentally exhausted, he pulled some food out of storage, prepared a meal, and listened to the news while he ate.

There wasn’t much difference. More incidents, including the killing of two people east of Mountain home. Greg turned off the radio and went to bed.

Bugging Home - Part 2 - Chapter 2

Greg was groggy the next morning when he got up. He hadn't slept well, images of the shooting of the two brigands coming to him again and again. But he shook it off, showered, and made breakfast.

After breakfast he went out to talk to Martin Frobisher for a while to see how the farming and greenhouse activities were going. They were fine, as Greg had expected. Rather restless, Greg tried Audrey's cellular number again.

This time he got through. "Audrey! Hi. Are you okay? In a safe spot? I was worried about you."

"I'm fine Greg. What about you? I've been trying to get you on your cell phone, but about all I ever get is the system busy signal."

"I'm fine. I came down to the homestead. Now, what about you? Where are you?"

"Just outside Phoenix. There aren't any planes flying. I'm trying to get back home."

"Probably not a good idea, Audrey. At least not right now. Not until they find those devices. Or, God forbid, they go off. Are you sheltered?"

Greg heard the hesitation in her voice. "Well... sort of. Janice has a basement... but it's exposed on one side. And they don't have much in the way of supplies. You can't get anything in the stores now. And it's dangerous."

"Maybe I should come get you. And your sister and her family. Do they have a good vehicle?"

Greg had the satellite TV on, but it was turned down low. He actually heard the announcement through the telephone. Audrey's cellular was picking it up in the background. It was being announced that the President was about to address the nation.

"Hang on, Audrey. I'm going to turn up the TV. Let's listen to what is going on."

The phone still to his ear, Greg heard Audrey say an excited "**Yes!**" when the President announced that there had indeed been nuclear devices in several cities but they had all been found and disarmed.

"Everyone please return to your homes and lives. Homeland Security and the NEST officials have once again made this great country safe for its citizens. God Bless America."

Greg breathed a sigh of relief. The thought crossed his mind that it might not be true, that the government was just saying that, thinking it was better to get people back to their homes as crisis relocation wasn't working too well. But he dismissed it. The President had looked relieved. He wasn't that good of an actor.

“Audrey,” Greg said, “Are you still there?”

“Yes, Greg. Oh! Isn’t that good news!”

“Yes, of course it is. But I still don’t want you taking any chances. Look for better protection until you can get home. We need to talk about a few things when we both get back.”

“Greg... Thank you for worrying about me. I was worried about you, too.”

“I understand. Bye for now.”

He was feeling much better when he hung up. Then he thought about what had happened the day before. Greg decided he’d better get back up on that horse. He went to the large safe room within the house and unlocked it. It contained a security closet for the armory for the homestead with its own locked door. It also contained a high security fire rated safe for financial goods and important papers.

It took him four trips, but he carried several weapons up to the walled patio that topped the earth mounded concrete dome home. There was a raised heavy shooting bench near one of the patio walls. When he had weapons and ammunition moved, he picked up the P-14 he’d used the day before.

There was a bullet trap back top against the wide, tall, concrete chimney housing extending through the center of the patio. He moved forward to the twenty-five foot mark. He had no fear of missing the bullet trap, much less the chimney housing, for, even if he did, there was nothing but private forestland for a mile in that direction.

Greg raised the pistol up and took aim. He stood there for a long time before he finally pulled the trigger. But he did pull it. Then several more times before he dropped the magazine and inserted another in a fast reload.

After that first shot, he was okay. Greg reloaded the P-14 and put it in the holster in the small of his back and picked up an M1 Garand. It was one of two his grandfather had owned. He turned toward the rifle range which paralleled the high tension power line right of way that entered his property, made a slight turn, and then left his property.

There was over a mile of opening through the forest, before it went over the crest of a ridgeline. Over the years backstops had been raised every one-hundred yards all the way out to a thousand yards. And the ground rose in that direction, making a perfect long-range back stop, for shooting from atop the dome home. At every backstop there was a paper target holder and half a dozen spinner, reset, and gong type steel targets.

He fired several weapons acquired by his grandfather, father, and himself. He ran two en-bloc clips of ammunition through the Garand, and then two fifteen-round magazines through his grandfather’s M1 Carbine. Next he shot a Colt 1911A1 that had also belonged to his grandfather. One of four. Then came a few rounds through an old, but still very serviceable Remington 870 12 gauge shotgun. He didn’t shoot his grandfather’s Remington 700’s in .30-’06 or .243.

His father's acquisitions to the household armory over the years included HK-91's (3); Remington 700's in .223 (2), .243, .270, .308 (2), .30-'06, and .375 H&H Magnum all with Bausch & Lomb optics; a High Standard 10B shotgun; Remington 1100 12 gauge shotguns (2); an AR-15; Ruger single action convertible revolvers in .357 Mag/9mm, .22LR/.22Mag, and .45 LC/.45ACP (2 each); a pair of Ruger Super Blackhawks in .44 Magnum; Marlin lever actions in .357 Magnum, .44 Magnum, and .45 LC (2 each); a Browning Hi-Power and Beretta 92's (2), all in 9mm; Colt 1911A1's (2); Ruger 10/22's (4); Ruger MK II's (4); and Heckler & Koch HK-4's .22/.25/.32/.380 (2)

Greg's additions, financed with the income from the three annuities derived from the nest egg, included two additional HK-4's with all four barrels each, three additional HK-91's and six 75-round dual drum magazines, three Remington 11-87P 12 gauge shotguns, four Para-Ordinance P-14's, four Marlin .45 Camp Carbines, two Marlin lever actions in .45/70, a pair of Stoeger 12 gauge Coach guns, two Ruger .22/45's, two ADC derringers in .45 LC and two in .45 ACP, two Steyr AUG's, a Barrett Light Fifty Model 82A1 .50 BMG, and a Barrett Model 98 in .338 Lapua Magnum, both with Swarovski optics. The two Barrett rifles were worth as much as everything else combined.

In addition to his grandfathers four weapons, he shot one of the HK-91's, a Marlin lever in .45 LC, Marlin .45 Camp Carbine, Ruger 10/22, and the Barrett M82A1. But only three rounds of the .50 BMG. A magazine each of the others. Satisfied he could use a firearm again, if necessary, he cleaned everything and secured them again in the gun safes.

When he cleaned the P-14 he replaced the barrel and the firing pin with ones from the spare parts cabinet in the safe room. The ones he removed he dipped in axle grease, sealed in double zip-locks, and buried in the garden plot, just in case.

With the crisis apparently over and feeling better, Greg piddled around the property for a couple of hours, then serviced the truck and refueled it from the tank farm near the barn. He called the company and determined that he did not need to hurry back. They didn't expect to reopen for several days.

Greg didn't want to wait. He expected the trip back to be nearly as arduous as the trip down. Hopefully not as dangerous. But there was certainly no guarantee of that. He'd travel with the same caution with which he'd come down.

He closed up the house the next morning, and then stopped to see the Sarmentos on his way back to Chicago. The traffic was just as bad, if not worse, than the trip down, except not so desperate. Everyone just seemed angry, rather than frightened.

In no hurry to get back, Greg drove conservatively, stopping and helping those on the side of the road. The first time he stopped, like the first P-14 shot after the incident with the brigands, was difficult for him. But he stopped. And stopped several more times on the way. He still wouldn't give gasoline, but he did shuttle people several times to service stations and back for fuel.

He still found out of the way places to park and rest, though he didn't try to stop back at the Waken farm. Greg found a similar farm site, even further away from the interstate and stayed there one night. He was able to get a motel room one night, as well.

Things were more or less the way he'd left them when he got home. More or less. There was obvious riot damage here and there, though not downtown where he lived and worked. The area where his storage room was located showed signs of being the worse for wear. There were many small shops, particularly food stores and liquor stores, with boarded up windows.

Greg dropped off the barge trailer and Rokon equipment at the storage room, and then refilled all his fuel tanks. He had to go to three different service stations to get the fuel. Each one was rationing. According to the news, it was mandatory by FEMA/DHS edict. Martial law was being threatened if things didn't calm down soon.

He unloaded the truck and went to get a few fresh grocery items at one of the stores local to his apartment building. Prices were sky high, but he paid them without a complaint. It had looked like the store he normally shopped was boarded up when he went by it. He couldn't tell if it was the result of looting or as protection from it.

Deciding to take it easy the next day, Greg lazed around the house and put away the supplies he'd unloaded from the truck. He also called his normal supplier for replacement LTS food supplies and put in a big order and a smaller one. The big one for the homestead, the smaller for the apartment. It would be a couple of weeks, at least, they said, but they would ship the order. They were getting substantially more orders than normal, but were giving established customers priority.

He lived a rather frugal life and the homestead was paying for itself and generating a nice income. With the good income he was making as an IT specialist he'd built up quite a bit of savings. He already had significant precious metals holdings, but he used half of his savings to acquire more.

Having the annuities from the nest egg in reserve, Greg decided to use a quarter of his savings to start stocking up tradable goods. He had a bad feeling about the way things were shaping up and it had nothing, or very little, to do with the two brigands he'd had to dispatch. He suffered from the same family trait that his grandfather and father both had lived with. When things looked bad, they stocked up.

Bugging Home - Part 2 - Chapter 3

The situation at work was pretty much as he expected it to be. He'd shut everything down before he'd left, and no one had done anything to bring the systems back on line. But since the Feds had shut the markets down, it really hadn't mattered. They weren't scheduled to reopen for another two days, so he should have plenty of time to get things checked out and going.

Greg worked as he always had, the way his father and grandfather had taught him. Carefully, and as quickly as he could without jeopardizing safety or quality. The company relented and let him order an additional server pack to act as the back up for the critical mission 24/7 tasks, with an associated extended capacity UPS.

They expected the markets to very active when they reopened. Good or bad, they'd be making money either way. They wanted to be able to handle the volume without any possibility of failure.

Greg didn't care about the stock market or the commodities market. Nor very much even the metals market or diamond market. He bought gold, silver, and diamonds as hedges. They were worth what they were worth when he used them. What he paid for them would be meaningless if he actually needed to use them.

He couldn't really figure out why he was feeling so restless. At least, not until Audrey showed up at his office at quitting time three days after the markets opened. He had her in a bear hug before he realized it.

After long moments, he suddenly released her and stepped back, his face red. "Audrey... I'm sorry. I was just so glad to see you made it back safe and sound."

Audrey was smiling. Greg hadn't really been aware that she'd been hugging him back just as industriously. "That's okay, Greg. I'm really glad to see you, too. I take it everything has been going okay?"

He nodded and forced himself to sit down. At least sit on the edge of his desk. "And you? You still have your job, don't you?"

"Yes. Technically I was on vacation, even though I was doing some work for the partners." Audrey frowned. "They made 'allowances' because of the 'little' problem. I seriously need to think about finding another job. With everything going on I'm getting worried about someone trying to rob the place. Things just seem so... lawless... now."

"I know. I'm really being careful wherever I go. Even the three blocks to and from work." Greg smiled. "Why don't you try the bookstore in the building next door? That shouldn't be too dangerous."

Audrey snorted. "Yeah. Unless there's another gas attack or nuke threat or something else they haven't got around to doing yet."

Greg's smile faded. "I know. Wouldn't be making what you're making now, either, I imagine."

"Still might be better than dealing with Lowenstein and Weber. I think I'll actually check and see if they have anything. It's bad enough dealing with some of the customers that come in, but Lowenstein is worse now with the uncertain replacement costs of gold, silver, and gems. People are buying jewelry as investments for times like these. I just want to scream out they're making a mistake, but I can't. I knew that before I ever met you. It's not that good jewelry isn't a nice investment, but some of these people seem to believe if they have a nice ring, earrings, necklace, and bracelet, they're set for life."

He let her rant for a moment, and then was caught by surprise when she suddenly stepped forward and hugged him much as he'd hugged her, saying, "Oh, man! I am so glad you are okay!"

She stepped back, her eyes down, and added, "I think I should be going. I need to pick up some things at the store and I want to be there and home before it gets dark."

"I'm done here. I'll go with you."

Audrey looked up then. "Would you really? That would make me feel better. But how will you get home?"

"The same way we get to the store and get to your apartment. The bus."

"That is awfully out of your way. Are you sure you..."

Greg cut her off. "Let me grab my jacket and we'll go."

"Jacket? It's warm out."

"Sometimes I get a chill." Greg liked and trusted Audrey, but considering the laws in Chicago she didn't need to know, that besides the weapons he normally kept in the city under lock and key, he'd brought back the two ADC .45 ACP derringers. One was in an ankle holster, the other in his jacket pocket.

Neither derringer was needed. They made it to the store and to Audrey's apartment without incident. Audrey was laughing at Greg's antic of staggering under the weight of the two paper bags, and two plastic bags he was carrying, to her one paper bag. She'd decided, since she had help carrying, to get a few 'extra' things.

When things were put away, and Greg was ready to leave, Audrey put her hand on his arm at the door. "Greg," she said.

He turned and looked at her. "Greg," she continued, "I really like you. I'd like to see you regularly, if you feel the same way." A faint smile curled her lips. "And not just to get preparedness advice."

“Well. I believe I’d like that very much, Audrey.” He smiled broadly and asked, “Does this mean I get a goodnight kiss?”

“Why sir! You’ll make me blush!” Belying her words, she stepped up to him and tilted her head, her eyes closing.

Not one to waste an opportunity, Greg leaned down and kissed her. But just a courtly good night kiss. Though, with that first kiss, he knew he wanted more kisses. Less courtly.

“Good night, Greg. And thanks for seeing me home.”

“It was definitely my pleasure.”

They went out on an actual date that Friday night after work at a nice restaurant near their work building. They walked to Greg’s, and Audrey got her first ride in the Chevy. Already well on the way to becoming a preparedness oriented person, she asked Greg a million questions about it, it seemed like to him, as he drove her home. Greg was feeling fine when he got home himself.

The two saw one another regularly for the next month. Greg always went with her when she went shopping, just in case. Things were still unsettled, though martial law had not been imposed. City, county, and state authorities were cracking down heavily. While prices were still up, they were not at the sky-high levels they had been. Things were getting back to some reasonable sense of normal.

Bugging Home – Part 2 – Chapter 4

It was a warm September Sunday when Greg and Audrey went grocery shopping. Audrey had been following Greg's suggestion to buy a little extra each week until she had a month or more supply of the foods she ate on a regular basis, as well as household item. They were in the grocery store Greg used when Greg got a craving for ice cream. There was a Dairy Queen in the complex and they decided to get something there. Audrey would go get it while Greg took the purchases to the truck.

Greg had put the last of the purchases in the truck when he saw the man that looked similar to the one he'd seen on the news months before. Very similar. He too was pushing a cart loaded with groceries out to a vehicle in the parking lot. A large sedan, Greg noted, with two men and two women in it.

Pulling out his cellular phone, Greg got into his truck and started it, intending to go pick up Audrey at Dairy Queen. It took only a moment to dial 911. "Look," he said when the operator answered, "I don't think this is an emergency, but just in case, I wanted to report seeing someone that looks like one of the terrorists everyone is looking for. They're... **Criminey!**"

The man, putting the groceries in the trunk of the car had seen Greg looking at them and talking on the phone.

When the man pulled out a pistol and pointed it toward him, Greg bailed out of the truck, phone in hand, and dove behind the vehicle parked beside him.

"They've got guns! They're shooting!" Greg yelled into the phone and scrambled further away, keeping the car in line with the terrorists, staying low. He heard at least one more weapon firing and the sound of projectiles ricocheting off the parking lot pavement. A tire popped on the vehicle he was trying to get behind, so he changed direction.

Now behind a motorhome, Greg chanced a quick look as he drew his gun. Everyone was climbing back into the car. The car pulled away with a squeal of its tires. Greg quickly returned the pistol to the holster under his jacket, and then he ran over to where he'd dropped the phone in his scramble to get behind some decent concealment and cover.

"They've stopped shooting and are in their car making a run for it," he told the 911 operator. Greg gave a description of the car and the direction it was headed when it left the mall. He heard multiple sirens in the distance. One seemed to be approaching the mall, rather than heading for the area to which the car had headed.

Greg, using the truck as a shield as people began to gather, quickly took the holster and pistol from behind his back and locked it into the tall, narrow storage box behind the seat of the truck.

He sat in the truck and waited until the police arrived. One officer questioned him and he showed them where the vehicle had been and where he'd gone to get out of their sight as the other one began to flag off the area and get people moved back to keep them from disturbing the crime scene.

Audrey ran up, tossing the ice cream away when she saw that the commotion was centered around the Chevy. She told the officer setting up the crime scene that she was with Greg and he let her pass.

“Greg, are you alright? I heard shooting.”

“I’m fine. Some people didn’t like my looks, I guess.”

Audrey was sure there was more to it than that, but she kept silent, just holding on to him for the moment.

Greg quickly agreed to go to police headquarters and give a more detailed report the next day, when asked to do so. The media was beginning to show up and Greg preferred to avoid them if he could.

But apparently some of the spectators had pointed him out and Greg and Audrey were met at his truck by three camera crews and a dozen reporters. He tried to give a short, concise account of what happened, but between the abrasiveness of those questioning him, and the discovery that the windshield pillar now had a large dent in it from one of the rounds that had been fired at him, Greg got a little annoyed. He managed to get himself and Audrey in the truck and leave. Besides, it was no longer bright and sunny. A storm had blown in off the lake and the cold rain was getting heavy.

By four they had unloaded Audrey’s things and they were back at Greg’s apartment and everything he’d bought was also put away. Greg turned on the TV and they watched, amazed, as the story unfolded. It bore little resemblance to the actual events that had occurred. About the only thing that was probably as it actually happened was when the terrorist’s car was finally cornered and the terrorists chose to shoot it out rather than surrender. That was caught live by a news helicopter cameraman.

Greg was glad the terrorists had only pulled their handguns on him. They had automatic weapons in the vehicle and used those against the police. Greg wasn’t sure what would come of the incident, since all five of the terrorist were killed in the exchange of gunfire.

Finally able to convince Audrey he was all right, she let him take her home, and he returned to his apartment and went to bed early.

By the next morning it had stopped raining, the sun was shining, and it looked to be pretty for at least three days. But shortly after he got to work after stopping in at police headquarters, things took an ominous turn.

The first inkling came when the receptionist transferred a call to his office. The caller wouldn’t give his name and insisted on talking to Greg. All the caller said was, “You’re a dead man,” and hung up.

Greg called the police immediately. He told the responding detective what had been said. He was told to keep a low profile and stay alert. Also to call them again if anything else happened.

“That’s it? Can I get any protection?”

“This could be a crank. Until we have more to go on, there isn’t much we can do.”

All Greg could say was, “Okay.” He began to sleep with the P-14 on the nightstand top, rather than in the drawer.

Two weeks later the fire alarm in Greg’s office building went off slightly after noon. He started the shutdown process and headed for the stairs. But something didn’t seem quite right. As the rest of the crowd pushed past him out the main doors he hesitated, then moved to one side of the streaming people.

Going to a window, he began to scan the gathering crowd of both occupants of the building being evacuated and curious onlookers. He was looking for Audrey, in part, but also for anything out of the ordinary. He finally decided he was being silly when the window shattered before him.

He dove to the floor and scrambled to the side, out of view of the outside. The pandemonium got wilder. Greg saw Audrey out of the corner of his eye as she was swept away in the crowd scrambling even more frantically out of the building.

When he was away from the window, he stood and ran toward the stairs. Because of the still rampant lawlessness, several of the tenants of the building had insisted that a metal detector be installed at all the entrances. Guards were hired to man the facilities. The guards were assisting in getting people out of the building and did not even see the man come through the window frame and run after Greg. But there had been people that saw it and they alerted the guards that a gunman had run into the building.

Unfortunately, once the metal detector was installed, Greg had to quit carrying a conventional weapon on him to and from work. What he had started doing was carrying a stout walking stick with a solid brass ball head back and forth. What it would do against a firearm, he wasn’t sure, but he had the advantage of knowing the building. It was doubtful his attacker would.

Greg took the stairs at a fast pace, to stay ahead of the pursuer, but not wind himself so much he wouldn’t be able to function once he got to the office. When he did arrive, breathing heavily, he grabbed his stick went into the computer server room.

The computer room had an elevated, panelized floor, for the cabling of the computers. Greg quickly lifted several of the panels and turned out the lights in the room. He went out the other door and waited for the attacker. If he didn’t find Greg, so much the better. If he did, at least Greg had a plan.

The man must have done at least some research on the building before he attacked. Greg heard the man breathing hard as he came down the far corridor. Greg knew he had to take a chance. He eased down the hallway, to get a few steps from the door.

He prepared himself, ready to run as soon as the man made an appearance at the juncture of the two corridors. Greg felt the tug of the bullet on his shirt as it grazed his skin when the attacker fired.

But Greg was into the room leapfrogging the opened floor panels. He looped around a server stack and waited behind it, walking stick held like a baseball bat.

All the attacker had seen of Greg was his running back. The assumption he made was that Greg was still running. That is exactly what Greg was hoping he would do. The attacker ran into the computer room and fell into the very first floor opening. Greg heard the gun go flying. There was just enough light from the indicators on the computer banks for Greg to see his target as he stepped forward and swung the brass ball end of the walking stick.

Greg heard the bone crunch when the ball connected with the attacker's back, between his shoulder blades as he lay half in and half out of the opening. The man went limp. Keeping the stick ready and an eye on the man, Greg took out his cell phone and dialed 911.

The man's breathing became labored and Greg, still cautious, knelt down some distance away and told the man that help was on the way. He could barely see the man's eyes, but they seemed to glare with hate as he lifted his head to speak.

"You will die, American! Just like you caused my brother, sister, wife, and two cousins to die. All of America will die. Soon." He coughed once, screamed at the pain that it caused, and then his head hit the floor with a thud. The man was dead.

Greg stared at him for some time, then moved to the door between the computer room and his office and waited for the police. He notified the 911 dispatcher that an ambulance and coroner would be needed.

It took hours to sort everything out. Greg gave statement after statement. He thought he managed to evade the media, but they were waiting for him at the apartment building. Audrey was with him. They managed to push through the crowd and Fredrick locked the doors until Greg and Audrey got on the elevator. Fredrick refused to tell them which apartment Greg was in.

Greg got a visit from the FBI and Homeland Security the next day at work. The locals had passed on Greg's statement to them. There was very little Greg could add to what he'd already told the locals.

The two men left with the admonishment to contact them if he was contacted in any way in the future. It was their job to handle it, not his. When he'd asked them about the five terrorists that had been killed, and the sixth man, they'd told him it was a matter of national security and they couldn't comment on it.

Was the terrorist serious, or was he just being a terrorist, trying to instill fear in Greg? He'd done that with the phone call. While by no means terrorized, Greg had thought about the threat often. It had changed the way he went about things. Of course, the man had followed through on the threat. Was the threat against him and America just rhetoric? Or was it real, too? Greg thought about that question occasionally over the next few weeks.

In his mind, he went over his preparations at the apartment, at work, and at the homestead. What else should he do, in case the terrorist's words were a promise rather than a threat. Well, for one thing, he could get another well drilled, as back up to the original well and the cistern system.

Greg also decided to update a few things and upgrade a few as well. He was hoping Audrey could take a couple weeks of vacation time, but Lowenstein and Weber wouldn't let her. Maybe that wasn't such a bad thing. Greg was seriously thinking of asking Audrey to take their relationship a step further and he needed to think about it.

Breaking up with Beverly had not been that difficult. Losing Audrey, if things didn't work out, would be hard. He had to decide where his life was going. He'd had it easy, in some ways. But he'd always worked hard. On the farm when he was young, in school, at college and as an IT professional. What did he want to do with the rest of his life? And with whom did he want to spend it? Those thoughts were on his mind when he set off for Willow Springs in the truck after Thanksgiving.

The well driller wasn't too enthusiastic about drilling a well in the unseasonably cold weather, but he did it. For a slight premium. Greg kept an eye on the three-day process as he also looked over the property, with an eye on physical security measures. The place had been developed with security in mind, so there wasn't much to do. He decided to strengthen the gates on the main road in and arranged for that.

The house was a fortress, with its foot thick reinforced concrete dome and earth cover. The windows and doors all had three-quarter inch cold rolled steel shutters with an inch of lead lining them. Each had an operable peephole or two suitable for use as a firing port. The utility building was built the same way, and had a covered, walled patio topping it.

The top of the old aboveground shelter was flat. Wouldn't hurt to put a wall around the top of it and add a set of stairs to it. He set that project in motion.

The distances from the house, shelter/storage room, and utility building, weren't that great, but there was no good way to get from one to the other without fully exposing oneself. Greg decided to do some decorative landscaping that provided bermed walls that could act as protection in traveling from building to building. There wasn't much to be done about access to the barn and the green house.

He also ordered a thousand sandbags and a truckload of sand with which to fill them.

Solar power technology had come a long way since the original system was installed. Greg upgraded it significantly. Everything needed was in stock in St. Louis and the contractor could do it before Christmas. Greg gave the okay.

Having done what he thought he could, and having come to a decision about Audrey, he headed back to Chicago, with Alex Sarmiento supervising the projects yet to be completed.

Bugging Home – Part 2 – Chapter 5

When Greg got back to Chicago, he arranged a date with Audrey. They had a long talk and decided not to move in together just yet. Audrey had seemed inclined, but wanted to be cautious. Her last relationship had not ended all that well. Disappointed, but more than willing to continue the relationship, Greg and Audrey went about getting ready for Christmas. And watching the news.

It seemed trouble spots were popping up all over the globe. Pakistan and India. China and Taiwan. Japan and China. North Korea and South Korea. Israel and most of the Arab world, the Russian Republics and internal strife. The US was having diplomatic clashes with just about everyone.

The one thing that troubled Greg the most was the new Chinese-Russian cooperation. Not just Russia but several of the other republics, as well. They had joint winter exercises scheduled for just after New Years.

While Greg normally didn't pay much attention to the markets, despite working for a large brokerage firm, a few things he started hearing from some of the brokers began to bother him. Many big investors, supposedly with ties to either China or the Russian Republics, began slowly liquidating paper and going into hard currency.

It was still happening the first business day in January. Then trading slowed down significantly. On the spur of the moment Greg went down to see Audrey. He wasn't sure Weber was going to let him see her, but he finally relented.

"Audrey, I have a bad feeling about things. I'm going to take a few days off and go down to the homestead. I want you to come with me."

"Greg, I can't," she said. Audrey looked at Greg's determined look and got one on her face as well. "They owe me more vacation time. Things are slow now. They'll either give me the time or I'll quit."

Greg waited for Audrey in the reception area of the jewelry store. He heard some shouting, but Audrey came out of the office area with a smile on her face. "Still have my job, and I got the time. When do we leave?"

"As soon as we can get ready. There is a big storm brewing on Lake Michigan and I want to get going before it hits. I'm going up to let them know I'm going. I'll meet you in the lobby in a few minutes."

Greg had no trouble getting the time off. With the increased activity over the last two months, they'd added another IT person, so Greg's presence wasn't as critical as it had been in the past. He grabbed his coat and went down to the lobby. Audrey was bundled up, waiting near the doors.

"Audrey," Greg told her, "I want you to take the bus home and get things together for an extended stay."

“Extended stay?” She laughed and asked, “You aren’t kidnapping me and holding me until I agree to move in with you, are you?”

Greg managed to smile back in return. “No. I would not do that to you. Tempting as it is. You’re your own independent woman and will decide in your own time. I really do just have a bad feeling about things. I usually just buy more supplies, but I want out of Chicago. I want you out, too.”

Audrey put her hand on Greg’s arm and looked into his eyes. Softly she said. “Okay, Greg. I trust you. Now walk me down to the bus stop and then go get ready. I should be ready by the time you show up at the apartment.”

They left without another word. Greg couldn’t explain the urgency, but as he watched the news coverage of the remarkable event of the joint maneuvers in Asia and in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans of the Chinese and Russian Confederation it suddenly jelled. He quickly turned on the laptop and connected to the internet. He knew a website, one of many, that maintained the DHS alert status. It was up a notch, though it had not been announced. Or at least, he had not heard about it.

Another site was speculating that the White House would up the Defense Condition a level, due to the maneuvers. It could all be a big bowl of snow cream as far as he was concerned. He’d bugged out at the other threat, he was bugging out now, on the perceived threat.

It took him a while to load everything into the back of the truck, but he did the same as he’d done for the terrorist nuke scare. Greg thought about just leaving the equipment and supplies at the storage room, but decided to take the barge trailer and Rokon equipment with them. If nothing happened, they wouldn’t be needed. If something did happen, they might be vitally important.

He picked up the equipment before he went to pick up Audrey. She was as good as her word. She had three suitcases and a trunk packed. They were weatherproof cases, so Greg maneuvered them onto the deck of the pipe rack and lashed them down with a cargo tie down net.

“I want to make one stop besides the banks before we leave town,” Greg told Audrey. “I want to get you a bike.”

“A bike!” Audrey laughed. “In this weather?”

“I know it seems silly, but my third to last bug out transportation is a mountain bike and trailer.”

“Oh. Okay, then, I guess,” was Audrey’s reply.

Greg had checked the phone book and before he left and found a large bicycle shop that was on their route out of town. They stopped at Greg’s three banks, then Audrey’s bank before going to the bike shop.

Knowing exactly what he wanted, it didn't take long. The clerk got the bike set up to fit Audrey, and then attached the trailer hitch to it for the trailer Greg had picked out. Though he had spare parts for his bike and trailer, which were identical, he bought a separate set for Audrey's rig. They loaded the bike and trailer next to Greg's on the barge trailer and set out on their way.

"See if you can get some news on the radio about the joint maneuvers," Greg asked Audrey as they got onto I-57 and headed south. Since there wasn't a panic as there'd been the last time Greg made the trip, traffic was moving well. That, despite the storm that was catching up with them.

They saw a whole section of the city behind them go dark suddenly. Another one of the blackouts caused by the abused and overloaded grid. Probably storm related. They were quiet as Greg put the miles on the truck. They finally began to get some distance from the storm, though it was still blustery and cold. They didn't hear anything further on the maneuvers.

Greg had taken this route several times. He knew a good motel to stop for the night. A place with a building nearby that could be adapted as a shelter if it became necessary. Audrey protested slightly when Greg paid for both rooms. But he insisted that since he had convinced her to come on the trip that he would be paying. She finally relented.

They were taking their time, and Greg, beginning to feel a little foolish since nothing untoward had, or was happening, decided to stop in Poplar Bluff for the second night rather than driving straight through. Though he wasn't sure of a good building in Poplar Bluff, though there were bound to be some, he did know where an excellent lumberyard was. It had plenty of block, brick, timbers and gravel and sand. He could put together an expedient shelter in the matter of a few hours.

It was good that he did. For at 1:13 AM on the 12th of January, civilization as we know it came to an end.

The commotion outside woke Greg up and he looked out of the motel room window. People were scurrying around frantically, shouting, trying to start vehicles. There were no dusk-to-dawn lights burning and when Greg glanced around the clock on the nightstand was dark. He tried the light switch for the room. Nothing. "Uh-oh! EMP," he said aloud. "Nuke attack."

Greg got dressed hurriedly, then woke Audrey and had her get dressed as well. He explained quickly what he thought had happened and then went back to his room to wait for her. When she came in a few minutes later Greg said, "I want to get our things in the truck, get in, get it started, and get out of here before someone can stop us."

"Do you think your truck will start? It doesn't look like any of the other cars are."

"I prepared the Chevy with EMP in mind. I can't guarantee it, but I'm pretty sure it will."

"And why would anyone try to stop us?" Greg just looked at her a moment. "Oh. Never mind. Well. I'm ready if you are. I take it you have a plan."

“I do. Let’s go.”

They went out to the truck, hurrying the way the others were to blend in. Other people were still coming out and trying their cars. Greg secured their two bags and had Audrey get into the truck.

He quickly unlocked one of the toolboxes, and then unlocked the gun case fastened inside it. He removed a Steyr AUG, and a second P-14 and several magazines for each. So far, no one had paid them any undo attention. He put the pistol and carbine on the console when he got into the truck.

A few people turned to look when Greg started the truck, but the truck ran very quietly and not too many noticed. Those that did started to move toward the truck. When he turned on the headlights and auxiliary lights, people did notice. Many people. And they all started toward the truck.

Greg had used two parking spots for the truck and barge trailer. He sounded the horn and pulled forward. People started yelling at him and running to the truck. Audrey heard him mutter, “I did not want to do this!” He’d rolled down his window when he got into the truck. He picked up the P-14 and transferred it to his left hand. People were beginning to crowd the truck.

As much as he hated to do it, Greg extended his arm out the window and yelled, “Get back!” He fired two rounds into the pavement between two people in front of the truck. They scrambled out of the way.

Greg goosed the engine and pulled forward more quickly, setting the gun back on the console. People were still chasing after them, yelling, when they pulled onto the street. “You okay?” Greg asked Audrey. She was white as a sheet.

“Scared. Just scared,” she replied. She had her hand on the AUG to keep it from sliding off the consol as Greg accelerated and then took a turn at speed. They were the only vehicle on the road. “Where are we going?”

“Building supply outfit. Going to make a quick shelter. At least I intend to.” They rode silently until they got to the large establishment. It was three o’clock in the morning.

“We have a little time. I really don’t want to break in. But be assured I will if no one shows up pretty soon.”

“What are we going to do?”

“We are going to buy, beg, borrow, or steal the components to make a shelter, right here on the premises.”

“You think they will let us?”

Audrey heard the steel in Greg’s voice when he replied. “I’ll convince them.”

As Greg had suspected, someone showed up not much later. He was riding a dirt bike style motorcycle. Greg had exited the truck earlier for a few minutes to make a few preparations. One of which was to strap on a gun belt and hip holster for the second P-14. The first stayed in the behind the back holster under the leather jacket.

“Do you want a pistol? Could you shoot someone if they tried to take the truck?”

Audrey looked grim. “I’m not sure, but I think so.”

Greg got out of the truck and opened the case behind the seat. He handed Audrey an HK-4 and four magazines. It was set up to fire .380 ACP. He gave her a quick run through on its operation. After hesitating a moment he got back out of the truck and opened the gun case again. He went through the operation of the Marlin .45 Camp Carbine with her.

Taking the AUG, with it slung over his back, he went through the slightly ajar gate and then into the building. He saw light from a flashlight and tracked it down. “You opening up, or just pulling assets?” Greg asked, flipping on his Mag-Lite flashlight and shining it on the guy. He kept it out of the man’s eyes, but held it steady in his left hand, his right on the grip of the still slung AUG.

“What do you want?” the man asked, his voice frightened.

“Just some supplies. I’ll pay. A premium.”

The man was incredulous and it showed when he responded. “You want to buy stuff? Now? We’ve just been nuclear bombed!”

“That’s why, actually. I want to build a shelter. How about it? Ten grand for the items to build a shelter and I’ll even build it here so you can have everything back when we leave in about two weeks.”

“Ten grand! I won’t take checks.”

Greg felt a little bad about trying, but did so. “No checks. They’ll be worthless. Do you have a manual credit card machine?”

“That’s right. The phones are out. Yeah, I do. But I don’t know... What if they won’t pay on the receipt?”

“That’s a good point,” admitted Greg, a bit amazed the man was even considering it. “I’ll give you half in cash and put the other half on my American Express.”

“American Express? Okay. What all do you want?”

“Just what we need to build it. It’ll depend on your layout. I can assure you the total won’t be more than even the five grand. And you do get it all back.”

“Okay. But what if someone else wants stuff? I wasn’t going to open, just get the cash out of the safe, but now... maybe people will want things and pay a premium, like you.”

“That’s up to you. But what we use, we’ll protect. And I’m willing to lend you a hand if there is trouble with people showing up.” Greg lifted the AUG. “But you should know, you don’t have much time. You should consider getting to shelter... probably at the courthouse... within an hour or two.”

“Oh. Yeah. I didn’t really think about where. Just get the money so I’ll have it after. You really think we’ll get a bomb here?”

“No,” Greg replied, again amazed at the man’s lack of knowledge. “But we could get fallout from Whiteman. Maybe from Springfield if they hit it. Even some from some Arkansas cities and the nuke plant.”

“Oh.” The man looked thoughtful. “You think the courthouse had a shelter?”

“Don’t really know,” replied Greg, “But they’re usually built pretty sturdy. If you have a basement you can just dig up dirt and put it in drawers and boxes and stack it on the floor above the deepest corner of the basement, if nothing else. What do you say? Do we have a deal?”

“Yeah. Let me get the machine.”

Greg stayed ready, when the man went to an office to get the manual credit card machine. Greg handed the man his card and said, “I’ll go get the cash out of the truck.” He was back in a few minutes with fifty one-hundred-dollar bills. Not taking any chances, he approached quietly and carefully, ready for an ambush.

But the man was standing there, waiting a little impatiently. Greg counted out the bills, slowly, so the man could see each was a hundred in the illumination from the flashlight.

“Okay. Now, you promise you’re going to leave the stuff behind when you leave?”

“I promise. You have my word. I’ve never broken it.”

“Okay. Use what you need. I’m not hanging around. I’m going to find shelter myself. I think you’re crazy to try to build one. You’ll be dead by the time you get halfway done.”

“Could be. If I am, you can have my stuff. Okay?”

The man’s eyes widened. “All right! The gun, too?”

Greg nodded.

“Okay. I’m going to hold you to that. Now, I’m outa here.” The man stuffed the cash and credit card slip into the pockets of his heavy coat and literally ran out of the building.

Greg shook his head. He wondered if the man was like that all the time or if it was shock because of the situation. Either way, Greg had what he wanted. Now it was just the matter of some very hard work, done quickly.

He took a minute to look for a key rack with the keys for the forklift and skid-steer loader he knew the place had to have. A gate key was there as well. When he found them, he hurried back out to the truck.

"I was getting worried," Audrey said. "You went in with a lot of money and he came running out and you didn't come out and..." She slapped his shoulder. "Don't do that again!"

"I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. He hopped back out of the truck and opened another toolbox. When he climbed back into the truck he handed Audrey an FRS radio. "We'll use these from now on to keep in touch when we're apart."

He'd pushed open the gate when he'd come out. Greg drove the truck inside the compound and parked it out of the way. Saying, "Come on," he handed the flashlight to Audrey. They found the forklift and skid-steer parked just inside the indoor lumberyard.

"Please, God," he whispered and tried the skid-steer first. It started. So did the forklift. The building was metal and the ignition systems were simple. The EMP had not damaged them. He turned on the lights on the Bobcat. "Okay," he said. Follow me."

He drove the Bobcat out of the building and headed for the bins that held the stocks of things like mortar sand and gravel. It was a big operation, so they had several large bins and they were all nearly full. Greg told Audrey, "Go close the gate and lock it. Keep an eye out from a hiding place and call me on the radio if anyone shows up." Audrey nodded and ran back to where she could act as lookout.

Greg emptied two of the bins side by side, filling the bins on each side full with what he took out. Next, Greg used the forklift to bring a pallet of retaining wall blocks back to the bins. He stacked the blocks a few rows high and filled the cavity with sand and gravel from the other bins, until they walls were the same height at the bin walls.

Greg then parked the Bobcat out of the way. He hurried to the lumber shed and climbed up onto the forklift. He found the long, heavy timbers and used the forklift to place them across the tops of the bin walls, making two layers, with three-quarter inch plywood on top. When each row of plywood was on, he used the Bobcat to layer sand and gravel to the depth of two feet on the top.

He used the forklift fork to knock a large notch in the front of the wall between the two bins, and then went to get several more pallets of retaining wall blocks. These he stacked facing the bins, right against the ends of the bin walls. He'd left the plywood extending a foot and a half past the timbers and stacked the block up until they touched the plywood.

Before he closed the face of one of the bins he set a pallet of solid concrete block inside. He made two L-shaped walls framing a thirty-inch gap as an entrance to the one of bins. After

that, he moved all the remaining material from the other bins and piled it against the back of the retaining wall and on the top edge of the roof.

It was well past dawn and still no one had shown up at the building supply building. With Audrey still on watch, Greg pulled the truck over by the newly constructed shelter and began unloading the equipment and supplies into it. He didn't quite have everything moved when Audrey called him on the radio to say some men were approaching on foot.

"Come on back and finish unloading the truck," he told her. He grabbed the AUG from where he had it sitting on a toolbox of the truck and headed for the front of the compound.

"What do you want?" he asked through the gate.

"We need some stuff. Where's the manager? I'm sure he'll let us get some things."

"He's not here. I'm going to tell you right now, that if you leave me and mine alone, I won't interfere in anything you do as long as you don't try to hurt anyone. But you need to be aware that fallout could start at any time. You guys aren't going to get much out of here on foot."

"Tommy's got a pickup that will run. He'll be here in a few minutes. We just want a few things. Mostly waterproofing and doors." The men were eyeing Greg's weaponry warily. "We're digging trenches with a backhoe that runs and will put doors over the trench and cover it with the dirt, but we need something to cover the dirt so the rain doesn't wash it away."

"Like I said. I'm not going to try to stop anybody, but I'm not going to aid and abet anything either. I paid for what I got. A lot. The man drove a hard bargain. And I'll protect what I've got."

"Okay with us. Besides, you've got the guns."

"Yeah, I do. But I notice a couple of you are carrying, too. So just don't get any ideas. I'll leave you to your work."

Greg backed up, right hand still on the grip of the slung AUG. It would take only a moment to lift it slightly and fire. There was a cartridge in the chamber and the safety was off. The two men carrying pistols in their pockets would take the first two rounds if they tried anything.

One of the men began to climb the fence. Greg continued to watch as while he backed up. The man ran over to the building, broke the glass in the door with a handy piece of landscaping rock and entered. Greg shook his head. The door was unlocked. The man came out a minute or so later carrying a pair of large bolt cutters. He cut the lock off the gate and the men all entered.

Audrey, Marlin Carbine in hand, watched from behind the row of pallets of concrete blocks that Greg had stacked several feet in front of the shelter and as high as the bins. The row extended out past the shelter one bin width on one side, and well past the bins on the other side. Greg had used all the heavy palletized material in the compound to make the barricade. There was a stack of pallets making a short L-shape in toward the bins on each end.

When Greg got into the truck, Audrey understood the reason for the barricade. Greg pulled the rig around behind it. All but the top of the cab and pipe rack was protected by the wall or the bins.

While Audrey watched from behind the edge of the wall, Greg went into the shelter and arranged things to his liking. Then he fixed them a Mountain House breakfast. He stood watch while Audrey went in to use the chemical toilet located in the second bin, and then ate her breakfast. Greg ate his while he watched. They couldn't really see much from where they were, at one corner of the yard. They mainly watched just so no one would approach them.

They saw the pickup come and go. Greg cautiously approached the building and watched it for a few minutes. When he didn't see anyone he went and closed the doors the men had left open, again shaking his head at the broken glass of the unlocked door. He closed the gate and locked it with a lock he'd taken from the store.

He carried back two fabric and metal rod folding chairs. He stacked a few of the blocks so he had a protected area where he could sit down and keep an eye on things. They'd seen a few more people come and go. Someone else had apparently broken through the gate again. Greg didn't bother closing it this time. He took a portable multi-band radio from the supplies in the shelter and tried to find a broadcast or shortwave station. All he got was static.

He had a Nuk-Alert key fob clipped to his jacket. No sound came from it until almost nightfall. Greg and Audrey took the chairs inside the shelter. Greg unrolled the cable from the CD-717 survey meter, taped a zip-lock bag over the probe, and set the probe on top of a concrete block he put in front of the entrance. Playing out the cord, he took the meter into the shelter.

He'd already run a heavy twelve volt power cord from a connector on the truck into the shelter, and a length of insulated wire that he laid on top of the shelter.

It took a little while, but they stacked all the solid concrete block from the pallet across the doorway of the shelter, slightly away from the wall to allow for air circulation. Greg had stood a ten-foot piece of six-inch sewer pipe in the corner of one of the bins before he roofed it. There was a tee on the top of it, crosswise. He'd cut the pipe and put a tee in it just below the height of the bin wall, and an elbow at the bottom. The tee and the elbow had cleanout adapters and plugs inserted so they could control the airflow.

Greg had left a layer of sand in the bottom of both bins so they weren't on hard concrete. They laid out Therma-Rest pads and Quallofill sleeping bags and settled in for an extended stay. They had sanitation, food, and water for well over a month. Greg was sure they wouldn't need to stay anywhere near that long, but the CD-717 would determine when they went outside again.

Bugging Home – Part 2 – Chapter 6

Sometime during the night of the second day in the shelter the dose rate peaked. It had been 280 roentgens per hour and climbing very slowly when Greg and Audrey went to bed. It was 280 again when they got up, and had dropped slightly by the end of the day. It continued to drop.

What do you do for nineteen days in a small shelter while waiting for the radiation levels to drop? Talk a great deal, for one thing. Greg and Audrey knew more about each other by the end of that time than some couples ever find out about one another.

You play poker until the lady figures out how to read you like a book and starts winning every hand. Then you play Gin Rummy for a while. You sleep a great deal, especially when it's cold outside. Of course, they had good sleeping bags, wearing apparel, and heated water two or three times a day to make coffee, tea, and hot chocolate. And fired up the stove to cook two hot meals a day. So they stayed warm enough, if bundled up most of the time.

If you have at least some twelve-volt power, some DVD's, and a computer to play them on, you watch them. Several times each. Until you could almost say the dialogue along with the actors in your sleep.

You read if you have a few books on hand and a couple of hand crank flashlights. And you start a journal of what you do while you're waiting. You do isometric exercises to keep fit, individually, or with a partner.

You check the survey meter on a regular basis to see if you can go outside yet. You rearrange and count everything you have with you several times. And you learn all about several weapons but don't get to shoot any in the shelter.

You wonder for hours on end how it all happened. You laugh, and you cry, and you pray. But you endure. Because there is life after a nuclear war. For those that are prepared and just a little bit lucky. Or just plain lucky.

How did it start? Except for those than initiated it, the survivors would never know. It would be almost a hundred years before historians pieced together from old recovered documents what had transpired up to the January night and ensuing two days.

The Russians never really trusted the Chinese, when the cooperation turned to conspiracy. But it looked like there would be a chance to regain some of the glory of becoming a major power again. And gain resources at an acceptable price. So the plan was planned, and then put into place, and then executed.

During the joint exercises, with troops and equipment deployed away from their regular bases, the Russian Republics would hit Western Europe and Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. China would hit the United States with everything they had. It would be a sudden

attack. No warning. No indication there was anything brewing, other than two nations cooperating after a long history of conflict.

The goals were relatively simple. The new Soviet would get Europe, the Middle East, most of Africa, and control of the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. China would get all of the Far East, Indochina, Malaysia, Australia/New Zealand, a portion of Africa, and control of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

South America, Central America, and Mexico would be divided up however that worked itself out. America and Canada would be fourth world countries for generations and would be taken over as time and resources permitted over the years, after radiation levels abated somewhat. The new Soviet would get the eastern half to the Rockies, the Chinese the rest. Eventually.

Sure, there would be losses. Big ones. But survivable losses. They couldn't activate their own Civil Defense sheltering until just before the launches, but the people were trained. They would shelter quickly when the word was given. With the massive first strike, America's retaliatory power would be minimized. That was the plan. It worked. To a degree. As was mentioned, the Russians didn't entirely trust the Chinese. They held onto a few assets, targeted on China.

With China, it wasn't a matter of not trusting the Russians. The Chinese planned all along to attack the Republics once they launched against the west. They launched their attack on the Russians fifteen minutes after the first missile launches. Well, not trusting the Chinese paid off. The Russians were able to get off their remaining assets to hit China.

What did America do when NORAD gave the warning? The president didn't trust the Russians or the Chinese. The military had been on standby since the maneuvers started. America struck back. Hard.

And the rest of the world? Well, gee, if someone was going to have a nuclear war, didn't everyone have to participate? Each country with an enemy attacked said enemy. Every country with nuclear capability used it. It was a true World Nuclear War.

It was the morning of February 1st when Greg and Audrey un-stacked the blocks shielding the doorway of the shelter. The CD-717 was showing less than 0.3 roentgens. AUG in hand, Greg eased out and took a cautious look around. It was cloudy, with a light snow falling. It had just started, for there was no accumulation yet. While Audrey stood watch with the Marlin Carbine, Greg checked over the truck and trailer. Everything was intact. No one had bothered anything while they'd been in the shelter.

After checking the truck, Greg took a quick, cautious look around the compound. No one was around. After putting the distributor parts back on the engine, Greg started it. They began loading the truck with the items from the shelter.

Greg took a few minutes to take the chemical toilet into the building and dump it down a toilet. He did the same with the waste from the toilet they'd triple bagged in the shelter when it filled the first time. He threw the accumulated waste, kept policed up in the shelter in a couple

more trash bags, into the dumpster. Things might be different, but he wasn't going to start being a pig because of it.

They climbed into the truck and headed, once again, toward the homestead. Poplar Bluff didn't look much different. They saw a few people moving about, and a couple of older model vehicles were on the street. There were several small tractors being used for transport, pulling trailers.

People stared, but Audrey and Greg waved, and the others waved back. For the most part. Some just glared. A few ignored them. It was the same way all along US 60 through the small towns. There were no checkpoints. No interference with their travel.

They didn't stop to have lunch, but drove straight through. Greg got out of the truck to open the gate at the end of the drive. Audrey saw him suddenly crouch slightly and look around at the surrounding forest, then hurry back to the truck.

"What's wrong?" she asked him when he got back in the truck and started turning it around.

"Different lock on the gate. Something is wrong at the homestead."

"Oh. Maybe your friend just had to change it, or something," Audrey suggested.

"He would have put a similar lock on it. That one is just a cheap grocery store lock. I want to get to my backup shelter, and then go check with Mr. Sarmento. Maybe he did have a reason to change the lock."

"You have a shelter besides the house?" Audrey asked.

"Yes. Out in the woods a ways. Basically, a hunting cabin I let a few guys use when they hunt on my land. That's what it is supposed to look like. But it is made the same way as the old aboveground shelter at the house.

"Just bare block inside, with block and concrete benches and counter. Nothing to vandalize. We occasionally get some obnoxious hunters that don't pay much attention to postings out here. Like I said, I let people hunt on the property, but they have to arrange it with me first."

Greg traveled until he saw the spot he wanted. Audrey didn't recognize it for what it was until Greg pulled into the faint track. It was snowing heavily, but had just started accumulating here. The snow would cover the slight tracks they were leaving within a few minutes.

It took almost a half hour to wend their way through the forest. Greg stopped the truck and asked Audrey to stay in it while he checked the location out. She handed him his radio with a telling look.

Greg smiled and climbed out of the truck. He'd left the AUG in the truck and took the time to extract an HK-91 from the gun case, along with a musette bag of magazines. Audrey

watched him move off through the forest. After a few moments she picked up the AUG and held it at the ready.

“Everything is fine,” Greg said when he came back a few minutes later. He climbed back into the truck and drove forward a ways, then looped around, heading the truck back the way they’d come in. Audrey didn’t see the structure at first, even when Greg stopped the truck, it blended in with the surroundings so well.

“We shouldn’t need them, but I have several caches hidden around here with equipment and supplies for the shelter. Help me unload the Rokon. I’m going to take it over to Mr. Sarmento’s.”

“We’re going to take it over to Mr. Sarmento’s,” Audrey said in a voice that brooked no discussion.

“Oh. Okay,” Greg said. They released the tie downs and security cable. The bike started right up and he rolled it down the unloading ramps. It took a few minutes to unhook the tandem wheel trailer and take off the sidecar, but Greg wanted to take just the bike.

He secured the truck and the trailers, then threw a camouflage cover over them. “You ready?” Greg asked, swinging a leg over the bike. He had both P-14’s on him. A Remington 11-87 was slung over one shoulder and the HK-91 over the other, along with the musette bag. Audrey had her HK-4 and the AUG with a half dozen magazines in another musette bag. She climbed on behind Greg, wrapped her arms around him, and lifted her feet.

The Kohler four-stroke was muffled well. They made very little noise as they traveled through the forest. Greg seemed to know exactly where he was going, guiding the Rokon amongst the trees and over and around obstacles.

They both heard the sound at the same time. Greg stopped the bike. “Was that a shot?” whispered Audrey.

Greg whispered back. “Yeah. I think so. Hard to tell direction, but I think it is ahead of us. I don’t like it. Why don’t I leave you here and go check it out?”

Audrey’s arms wrapped more tightly around Greg. “Not on your life.”

Going very slowly, Greg edged the bike ahead. They would hear a shot every few minutes, almost like clockwork. The forest seemed to lighten ahead of them and the shots were much louder now. Greg stopped the bike and indicated he wanted to get off.

“That’s Mr. Sarmento’s place just ahead. Now I want you to stay with the bike while I go get a closer look.”

This time Audrey didn’t object. She flinched slightly when the next shot came. They were close and it was a powerful rifle. Greg un-slung the shotgun and handed it to Audrey, then he crouched down and began to move toward the clearing.

Audrey waited, impatiently, until Greg returned several minutes later. “I can’t believe it,” Greg said, crouching down. Audrey did the same. “Looks like two guys have them penned up in the house. There’s signs they’ve firebombed it, but the house is made of rock and has a metal roof. The fires didn’t catch. Someone is shooting back from the house, every once in a while.”

Greg took Audrey’s shoulders in his hands and looked deeply into her eyes. “Audrey, I’ve got to try to help them. I’d like you to help me. Back me up. But it means I’m going to have to kill those two men. Do you think you can do it? It’s okay if you can’t. I can do it alone, I think. But having you watch my back would make me feel better.”

Swallowing a lump in her throat, Audrey nodded first, and then whispered. “I’ve got your back. Just tell me what to do.”

“Okay. We’re going to sneak up there and I’m going to put you in a safe place, but one you can see the area. Then I’m going to move around and get to the side of those guys and take them out. If you see anyone else outside of house, you call me on the radio. I’m going to have it on, but don’t call me unless one of us is in danger. They will probably hear it. If something does happen, just do the best you can to protect yourself. Okay?”

Again Audrey nodded. She rose and copied Greg’s motions as he began to creep back toward the clearing. When they got there, he settled her into position beside and behind a large tree. She could see the black marks near the door of the rock house, and the two men sitting in lawn chairs behind a barricade made from the remains of a pickup truck.

With a hand motion for her to stay where she was, Greg began moving away. He disappeared from her sight almost immediately. She saw one of the men raise up slightly and fire at the house over the barricade.

A few minutes and two shots later, a motion beyond the men caught her eye. It was Greg at the edge of the tree line. She saw him lay down and extend the bipod of the HK-91. Moments later a shot rang out and one of the men fell from the chair. A second later another shot sounded and the second man, who had leaped from his chair, also fell.

Audrey saw Greg stand up and look all around. She quickly did the same. Staying half behind the tree he was using for cover, Greg called out to the house, “Hello the house. I got two of them? Do you think there are any more?”

“Greg! Is that you?” came the reply from the house.

“Yeah, Alex! It’s me.”

“It’s just been two guys. I’m coming out.” The door opened and Audrey saw an older gentleman limp out. He had some kind of bandage on his leg, stained red.

Audrey stayed where she was when Greg ran over to the man and helped him back into the house. A moment later Greg stepped outside and called to her. “Come on over!”

When she scurried to the house, Greg introduced her to Alex Sarmento and his son Junior. “Where’s Maria?” Greg asked, looking around the home.

“They got her,” Alex said, his voice cold. “Shot her right out front. No warning. I got hit dragging her in. Got her in the freezer, waiting to get out of here to bury her. Run the jinny a couple hours every evening to keep it cold.”

“I’m so sorry,” Greg said, putting his hand on his friends shoulder.

“Let me take a look at his leg,” Audrey said. “I’ve had a little training.” Junior was watching out the window.

While Audrey tended to Alex, using their extensive first aid kit, he explained what had been going on.

“I’m glad you stopped here first. The Wild Bunch is holed up at your place.”

“We didn’t,” Greg interrupted him to say. “I knew something was wrong. A different lock.

“Good for you. You’d have walked right into a killer’s nest if you’d pressed it. I was checking on the place two days ago. Saw them coming up the lane and warned them off. I had to get back to Maria and Junior and let them know what was going on, but we were going to move over there and keep an eye on things for you. But they tracked me down first.

“Maria was taking a couple things out to the truck when they roared up in that big, high lift Ramcharger they drive. Don’t know how they got it running after the EMP. Probably new parts.

“Well, they shot Maria and I jumped out to get her. Junior was laying down some cover fire. We both had weapons ready to go over to your place. They laid into us like there was no tomorrow, but we gave back pretty good. Nailed a couple of them. They dragged them off and took off in the truck, leaving a few behind to harass us. They burned the truck and tried to burn the house. But you know this old place. Pretty much fire proof.

“Me and Junior been keeping a six and six, just to make sure they don’t sneak close enough to put one through the gun ports. They just rotate a couple guys out here every few hours. They seem to take it as sport. A couple of them got to telling us all about themselves. How smart and resourceful they are.

“When things went bad, the big store in Willow Springs was just getting a delivery. That band held them up and took the truck of food. Mostly canned goods. They hit the bank and took it over, killing a bunch of people. They holed up in the vault with all that food until they thought it was safe to come out. Stayed the full two weeks. Then they went hunting.

“Anyone that’d ever given them a hard time, if they survived the nukes, they wiped them out.” Alex looked down at Audrey, and then said, “I’m not going to tell you what they said they did to some of those people. Especially the women and girls.

“They’d probably have got around to me, anyway, but running in to them when they were out looking for your place just set them off. Somebody on one of the places around here must have mentioned how nice a place you have.

“One of the guys said they’d moved in and taken over.” Audrey taped the new bandage in place as Alex finished the tale.

“I see,” Greg said thoughtfully. “Can’t have that. I’ll have to take it back.”

“Boy,” said Alex, “We’ll rightly help you, of course. But that is a passel of mean ones. Getting meaner by the day, from the sounds of it. The few days they’ve been out and about they’ve hit liquor stores, cleaned out the drug store of hard drugs, gathered up all the loose food they could find. Not to mention the guns.

“Don’t know if you noticed, but the gun they been hammering us with is Clyde Willingham’s Weatherby .375 Magnum. Speaking of which, we need to get them boys out of sight. The next shift will be coming by soon.

“But trying to take them on, holed up they way they are in your fortress... I don’t know, Greg. That might be impossible.”

“It’s not,” Greg replied. “There’s a few things you don’t know about the place. You think you can make to the hunting cabin on the Rokon?”

Alex nodded. “Yeah. I can make it.”

“Okay. We’ve got supplies, so grab your gear and let’s go. We’ll let them wonder what happened. Junior, if you would, get anything useful off those two guys, but leave them where they lie, and then we’ll get going.

Greg looked at Audrey. “We’re going to have to walk back.”

Audrey nodded. “I can make it.”

It took longer to get back to the cabin than it had taken to get from it, but they all made it all right. Alex was hurting, so they got him lying down on one of the sleeping pads. It was afternoon, and Greg said he was going to scout the homestead.

All three of the others protested, but Greg was adamant. “Audrey, I want you and Junior both here to look after Mr. Sarmento, and keep a watch. I want to find out approximately how many there are and how well prepared they are. The sooner we strike, after we get a good plan, the more likely we’ll be able to route them.” The others finally acquiesced.

Bugging Home – Part 2 – Chapter 7

Greg had debated with himself about leaving Alex's place unprotected, but shortly after he got to the edge of the forest in a position where he could watch the compound, the orange four-door Ramcharger came roaring up, horn blaring. Four men got out. Greg hoped they'd seen the bodies and scooted back here to report it.

He couldn't get a firm count, but at least sixteen people ran out of the house and were milling around the truck. One man was sitting up on the roof of the aboveground shelter. Greg didn't see anyone else around, but there could be hidden guards and more people in the house. There were twenty-one, for sure. Probably several more. He watched until the light began to fade, formulating the details of the plan in his head.

As soon as he was some distance away from the compound he called Audrey on the radio and told her he was on the way back, and asked her to get some food started for all of them. When he got back to the shelter, he outlined the plan as they ate. Audrey blanched when she realized the implications of what Greg was saying. But based on what Alex had said the gang had told them, it was necessary.

They were up early the next morning, before first light. Greg suggested they forego breakfast. No one commented. Again Alex rode the Rokon, as the others walked, following Greg's lead. It was in the twenties, according to the Brunton weather instrument.

Greg placed each of the others in spots he'd picked out the afternoon before at the edge of the tree line, with good fields of fire. He then made his way to an old burned out wreck of a Ford Model A truck several yards deep in the forest at the back side of the dome home.

The truck was on its side, the bottom toward the house. Both doors were missing, and windshield and back glass were long gone. It took a minute to remove some junk lying on the ground inside the cab. Greg lifted the trap door now revealed. He dropped into the pit below the truck and began to pull the rope looped around a pulley on the wall away from the house. A couple of minutes later a small trolley arrived at the pit.

Greg lay down on it with his gear and pushed his way toward the house through the thirty-inch culvert pipe that was the escape tunnel from the house. The rubber wheeled trolley rolled silently on the guides made from angle iron.

When he got close to the end of the tunnel Greg slowed and very cautiously moved to the pit that was located under the floor in the safe room. The dark was a good sign. That meant the door to the safe room was closed and the lights were out. They might not have even found the door, concealed as it was behind the bookcase in the library.

Greg silently moved the modified joint of the HVAC system so he could look through the vent into the room. The vent was on the wall facing the door, right at floor level. It was totally dark. Easing the trap door open, Greg climbed into the room and turned on the Photon red LED micro light. He went over to the ammunition cabinet. Greg took the thirty round magazine from the HK-91 and inserted one of the 75 round dual drum magazines and re-slung the rifle.

Setting aside the remote control unit he'd brought with him since he had full access to the safe room. Greg went to the small desk in one corner of the room and turned on a CCTV monitor. He flipped through the various cameras. Everyone still seemed to be sleeping. There'd been some sign of one guard outside, but that might be him in the kitchen.

Greg pulled on a Millennium respirator, and then flipped a switch on a small control panel next to the monitor. Moment's later, as he flipped through the cameras again he saw people begin waking up, gagging, and start running for doors as acrid smoke dumped into the HVAC system and was carried throughout the house.

He checked each room with the monitor and when no one else was inside, he opened the door of the safe room and stepped out, HK-91 up and ready. It took a few moments to lock down the house, then he went to the front door opened the gun port and began to fire.

As the coughing, retching members of the gang ran from the protected area between the three buildings due to Greg's attack, they ran into the withering fire from Alex, Junior, and, from the sound of it, Audrey.

After a full minute of silence, Greg went outside. He saw the others start to approach, cautiously, checking each body in turn. At least Alex and Junior were. Audrey just ran to Greg and threw her arms around him, her head buried against his shoulder, crying.

Alex limped over, and Junior came over to join them after he checked the last of the bodies. Greg managed to remove the respirator, despite Audrey clinging to him. "I'll clean out the gas in a few minutes and we can go inside."

Audrey composed herself in another minute or two and stepped back. "I'm sorry," she said softly, eyes downcast. "I've just never..."

"It will be hard for a while," Alex told her. "Something like this stays with you. Talk about it when you need to. It helps. Take it from one that has gone through it before."

"I'm not feeling so good, myself," Junior said. He did look a little green, where Audrey was pale.

"I'll go clear the house and we can get inside." Greg was putting the respirator back on when Audrey said, "Thank you for not letting us have breakfast." Greg simply nodded.

It took a little while for the exhaust fans to pull the sickening gas out of the house to the point the others could go in. Audrey sat off by herself for a little while, but came over to join the others when Greg motioned them over. The gas mask was hanging from his hand. "A trace," he said, "but I'm not gagging. Fans are still going. Cold inside now."

They went inside and Greg went ahead and started the heaters. The place was a mess. It would take several days to get it cleaned to his satisfaction. After giving Junior a few minutes more rest, Greg went over to him and talked quietly with him for a few moments. They both went outside.

Audrey started to follow, but Alex said, “You don’t want to go out there. They’ll be moving the bodies. Would you mind checking my leg again? You’ve got a nice touch.” He told her where Greg kept one of the first-aid kits.

Both men were pale when they came back inside. “They’re in the back of the Ramcharger and the old Ford they had with them. If someone can drive me back, I’ll shuttle them in to the police station. See if I can explain this away.”

“You won’t have to explain much,” Junior said. “One of the women in the bank when they took it over was the Police Chief’s wife. From what one of them was bragging about, they shot up the police station pretty good on their way out here. One of them was sure they got the Chief.” That was the most Junior had spoken since Audrey had met him.

“I aim to keep them two trucks, seeing how they burned ours.” Alex said. Me and Junior’ll drive them in like we own ‘em. If there’s any problems, better all of us are there. I don’t aim to have much discussion about this. With anybody. They’re the county’s responsibility.”

“No one else really has to get involved,” Greg said.

Alex grinned. “You’re good, Greg. I’ll give you that. But you’re not that good. They might believe me if I said it was just me. Certainly me and Junior. But no one would ever believe you took them all out. But I sure got to hand it to you, that was some plan. I had no clue there was an escape tunnel, much less that little trick with the banana oil.”

“Daddy was a thinker. You know that.”

“Yeah. I knew that,” Alex said. “But your family has always been so peaceable, it never occurred to me that you would be prepared for something like this.”

Greg smiled. “This and more. What Grandpa and Daddy didn’t think of, I did. I’ve added a bit to the defensive possibilities of the place over the last few years. Always coming up with new scenarios and ways to make improvements in relation to them. I’m just glad I hid the door to the safe room. Things might have been different if they got to the armory.”

“I don’t know,” Alex replied. “Less than half came out with weapons, and most of them didn’t get a shot off.”

Audrey finally spoke. “I only shot the ones with guns. I couldn’t shoot the unarmed ones.” Greg took her in his arms again and held her for a while.

“Let’s get this done. I want to get back to my place and see if they did anything to it last night.” Alex stood up and headed for the front door. “You sure Audrey shouldn’t stay and keep an eye on the place. Not going to get that door locked till you replace the knob set and other locks.”

“I’ve got what I need to fix it, but I seriously doubt any other survivors are out and about this far from wherever they sheltered, other than to food stores and such. I’ll fix it when I get back.”

Hand on the door,” Alex said, “We’ll meet you at our place.”

Greg nodded. “We’ll go get the truck and be along shortly.” After Alex and Junior left Greg turned to Audrey and said, “Are you sure you want to do this? You can stay here. And I don’t expect you to guard the place.”

“No. Mr. Sarmento is right. We’re all in this together. We should stand together.”

“You know, I’ve said it before. But I love you. I’d let you cover my back any day.”

“I kinda do you to. And you know, not that I’m doing this to get free preparedness help, but I think it would be a good idea to move in together.”

Greg leaned down and kissed her. He thought that was a pretty good idea, too.

Bugging Home - Part 2 - Epilog

Alex was right. There was no trouble when the bodies were delivered to the Willow Springs police station. The Chief, wounded, was still in charge. He said he'd just add them to the stacks they were acquiring as they cleaned up the fallen due to the attack. The plan was to get what ID they could and bury people in mass graves. "We'll start a Boot Hill section for these guys. Things are different, now. We're going to need people of strong will for the community to survive."

Greg, Audrey, Alex, and Junior were four of strong will. They were not the only ones in the northern sections of Missouri Ozarks. The region would survive as an entity through the hard times following the attack. Then they would prosper as the nation began to recover.

End *****

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