



Jerry D. Young

[www.jerrydyoung.com](http://www.jerrydyoung.com) • [jerrydyoung@hotmail.com](mailto:jerrydyoung@hotmail.com)



---

# Felix The Cat

Copyright 2008 by Jerry D Young  
All Rights Reserved

The following is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual names, persons, businesses, and incidents is strictly coincidental. Locations are used only in the general sense and do not represent the real place in actuality.

## **Felix The Cat**

Felix ‘the Cat’ Thompson was called ‘the Cat’ more for his ability to land on his feet, under any circumstances, than he was because of his name. Felix never thought about it much. He just did what he thought was right, whenever a sticky situation came up.

And things were getting sticky, for sure, for just about everybody. At least, that’s what Felix thought. “This must be how some people felt, a while before WW II started,” he said to himself as he helped get Mrs. Gunderson and her wheelchair up the steps to church.

The church used to have a ramp, but vandals had trashed it a few days before, the same night the cemetery was vandalized. That wasn’t the reason he was feeling the way he was... well... not the main reason... just a remote one... The real reason he was feeling the way he was, was due to the world political situation. It was bad.

The global warming was bad, sure. Especially since it seemed to be creating as much cold weather as hot. And the risk of Avian flu was higher than ever. Of course, volcanic and earthquake activity seemed to be on the rise. Not to mention the increase in the number and severity of hurricanes and tornados.

But it wasn’t those things on Felix’s mind. It was India versus Pakistan. North Korea versus South Korea. China versus Taiwan. Israel versus most of the rest of the Middle East. Nearly everyone versus the US.

Nukes in North Korea. Nukes in Iran. Nukes in Pakistan. Nukes in India. Nukes in South Africa. Nukes in Venezuela. Nukes in Israel. Nukes in Russia. Nukes in the Republics. Nukes in Great Britain. Nukes in France. Nukes in China. Soon to be nukes in Japan. Probably nukes in Germany. Likely Nukes in Syria.

Seemed like every country that had issues with another country also had

nukes and were just waiting for a good excuse to use them. Felix had read history. There'd always been wars. There'd always be wars, probably. And just maybe another one soon. Most likely China. They'd already tried to reduce the population of the United States with poisoned foods and defective products. And it looked like they might just try to destroy the US economy by manipulating the world financial markets.

Yes. Felix felt like there was a war coming. With China.

"Thank you, Felix, John," Mrs. Gunderson said when she rolled her way into the church after Felix and John set the wheelchair down.

"I'll have the ramp repaired by next Sunday," Felix told his minister, Malcolm Roberts.

"Thank you, Felix," replied the minister. "We are blessed to have you in our congregation."

Felix turned red and hurried into the church. Being the center of attention wasn't something he particularly enjoyed. Especially when he was the center of negative attention. Such as when he brought up preparing for the worst to the church elders in one of their open meetings.

"Come now, Cat!" Alissa Manchester said. "Our emergency preparations are perfectly adequate for our needs. We're too far inland for hurricanes to be a problem. Tornadoes are a risk, but minimal. We haven't had a flood in a hundred years. You don't really expect we'll have to deal with something like nuclear war, do you? And..."

"Forget I said anything," mumbled Felix. He left the meeting room, the sound of laughter ringing in his ears.

The reaction just reinforced his commitment to preparing himself. He'd always planned to have some extra supplies to share with church

members, friends, and neighbors. He didn't have any family to worry about.

Every day he watched the news networks and read the major online newspapers. "Why can't more people see what's coming?" he wondered often. There were some groups on the internet that did, and he spent much time on their websites and in their forums, picking up as much information as he could. He read the recommended books, and adjusted his lifestyle slightly to accommodate what he learned. And he spent every spare penny on preps.

With Joel Harrison's help, a local Amateur Radio Operator, Felix got his Amateur General License and put together a very capable radio shack. It wasn't limited to just Amateur gear. He could monitor every legal frequency from the lowest beacon frequencies to the Ultra High Frequency Band.

He could talk legally on the Amateur frequencies, along with CB, FRS, and GMRS. He had the two-way equipment for Marine, Aircraft, and Business Band, but was not licensed to use them for transmit. Felix decided that it wouldn't matter in a major catastrophic event if he was licensed or not.

As things continued to deteriorate, Felix realized his occasional attempts to get the church to do more preparations for its members had marked him as one that probably was doing it on their own.

The occasional comment about if something happened, "I'll just come to your house," was coming more frequently, and the looks on the peoples' faces saying it were no long quite as humorous as they had at first.

At least a few asked Felix his opinion on what they should do to get ready for some of the things he talked about. He gladly gave them his advice and web addresses where they could get more information.

Because of the comments, and those people that he gave advice to, Felix began reworking some of his prep storage. He kept his pantry pretty full, but moved much of the food and other consumables from where he had them stacked willy-nilly inside the house to at least marginally better hiding places in and around the house. His being an avid gardener made it easy to bury some rather large leak-proof containers in the yard, garden, and under the greenhouse floor.

Felix built false walls in the basement, just far enough from the existing walls to stack one tall row of boxes and buckets. Everything went into the cavity after the studs went up but before the finish wall was applied. To gain access to the stored items the walls would have to be dismantled, or more likely, just demolished.

A few of his buried caches were created with a double blind aspect, even third blind. They were smaller caches, made with six-gallon plastic buckets he obtained here and there around town for free or a nominal expense.

Instead of just burying a bucket full of supplies in likely places, Felix dug the hole somewhat deeper than would be need for a simple bucket cache would need to be. In the bottom, he placed a container just smaller than the diameter of the bottom of the bucket and loaded it with the waterproofed items he most wanted to keep hidden. A layer of dirt was added to the hole and then a bucket was set down on the dirt covered container and carefully filled around almost to the top.

Then, having measured the buckets carefully, Felix made up a packet that would fit in the space between the bottom of one bucket and the bottom of one inserted into it. With a bucket loaded with the rest of the things he wanted in the cache, he set it inside the first bucket and then filled the hole and camouflaged it as necessary.

The reason he did the caches as he did, was the fact that most people, if they discovered the cache by chance, would dig down to the bucket top

and, hopefully, just take the top off the bucket and remove the contents. The items cached between the bottoms of the buckets would likely be missed.

Even if someone did dig down far enough to pull the full bucket up, which was what Felix planned to do if he opened one of the caches; they would find the second cache. But it would be very unlikely for anyone to then take the difficult step of digging out the second bucket on the chance there could be something under it.

That third cache sometimes was a small container with precious metals. Sometimes a handgun and ammunition. And in a few cases, because of the possibility of a gun grab in the near future, a deeper hole would be dug with a posthole digger and a pipe-in-a-pipe cache made for long guns, instead of the shallower third level cache.

Though it increased the risk of finding the cache, Felix usually put enough metal in the top bucket to sound a metal detector. The thought was that if the cache was found, and a reason for the metal detector to have indicated the place, the detector wouldn't be used on the open hole after the contents of the bucket, or bucket itself was removed.

To reduce the chance of someone with a metal detector finding a specific cache, Felix salted the area with metal objects, and even occasional single bucket caches with only rice and beans in them.

Working for the city the way he did, Felix was able to put several caches on public property with no one the wiser. A few went up to the areas where he went hunting.

There was an overlay map for the caches around the house, one for those around the city, and three for the hunting areas. They were only good if used on specific maps, of which he had several copies hidden here and there in books and what not. There were plenty of other similar maps that it would take someone a significant amount of time to pin down

which overlay went with which map.

When Felix and a couple of the other members of the congregation repaired the wheelchair ramp, Felix took the opportunity to cache all the 6-gallon Super Pails of various items from Walton Feed he could fit under the ramp as it was built, with no one the wiser.

With an almost empty bank account, Felix, thankful his modest property and vehicles were paid off, hunkered down for the long haul. He converted almost every dollar he took home into more preps.

The city was cutting services, but his job as general maintenance man was fairly secure. Not only did he have seniority, but the job itself was critical to the operation of the city. The city fathers might not be doing any new projects, but keeping the city's infrastructure going was very high on the list of budgetary considerations.

Felix was very good at his job, and could stretch a city dollar further than anyone else, making him part of the essential personnel the city would keep, no matter how tough the times.

The regular times. Felix had no illusions about still having a job if one of the big balloons he was concerned about went up. There might come a time when the city had no dollars he could stretch. Oh, he wouldn't leave them in the lurch, but he wasn't prepared to try to support the whole city. Just a few of his friends and church members.

As the days passed, and then weeks, and then six months, Felix was getting more and more amused looks about his desire for the city to prepare for war. Possibly nuclear war. He wanted larger fuel tanks, extra tires and maintenance items for the city vehicles. He wanted the mothballed diesel fired city power plant activated. Among other things. He didn't get any of it and was at a point where some of his supporters in the city administration began to avoid him.

Felix, seeing the handwriting on the wall, gave up his campaign and simply did his job the best way he knew how. He continued to stretch the shrinking city budget dollars allotted to his department as the economy tanked.

Almost a year after helping Mrs. Gunderson up the steps at the church, some of Felix's dire predictions started becoming apparent to some of those around him. Fuel prices had skyrocketed, as had food prices. Rumors, some that even Felix wasn't sure had any truth in them, started becoming facts.

China was ready for war with the US over the control of the whole of the Western Pacific from just west of Hawaii to the shores of Asia. Including Japan, Indochina, and even Australia. Slowly, the US government began a campaign to prepare the public for war.

The recommended supplies for three days, in case of natural disaster, was upped to a full two weeks. Home gardening was touted as a way to reduce food costs for everyone that had even a couple of square feet of space on which to grow something. Fuel rationing began.

In no time the regular suppliers that Felix bought most of his supplies from were out of stock of just about everything, with literally a year or more of back orders, assuming production wasn't diverted to the war effort. Tires began to become hard to get. Tire retailers were instructed by the government to not change tires simply for tread wear, unless they were verging on bald. The old Lincoln penny heads depth of tread was reduced to half that before new tires could be installed.

Then the news broke that the Federal Government, in cooperation with State, County, and Local governments, were again evaluating buildings and structures for possible use as fallout shelters. The private shelter builders went the same way as the Prep suppliers. Sold out and back logged for years' worth of production.



Felix became the man of the hour. People that had openly ridiculed him for his beliefs were now begging for his help. But there was very little he could do. Advice to stock up long-term storage foods was useless. There were no suppliers that still had any.

And food rationing became the norm, at first by a few stores voluntarily, and then government mandated. People were struggling to feed themselves and families on a daily basis, much less store up two weeks more of food.

Felix was at his desk, doing some of the massive amounts of paperwork now required to order replacement parts for the city's equipment and infrastructure when the lights went out. He didn't think too much about it, since there had been rolling blackouts to conserve electrical power now for several months.

Then Felix looked again at his blank computer screen. "But they always announce those..." Hurriedly, Felix got up from the desk, grabbed his coat and hardhat, and went outside. Pandemonium reigned at the City Hall. Not only was power out, but so were the telephones, including cellular. And traffic had come to a standstill. Not because of the lack of working traffic signals, but because all most all of the vehicles on the streets had come to a slow rolling halt.

"EMP," Felix muttered.

Despite his early attempts to get the city to do what the Feds were now mandating, Felix had been left out of the sheltering work. "He was too valuable elsewhere," was the answer when he volunteered to help both in finding shelter space and utilizing it in case it was needed.

He could have gone to the shelter in the City Hall, which many people were already doing, but Felix decided on the spot he didn't want the hassles. He went to his old Chevy pickup and climbed in. It started right

up and he headed home.

Barely had he left the City Hall parking lot when the sky brightened to the north. The high altitude EMP weapons had been the lead to the rest of the attack. People froze at the sight of the mushroom cloud rising.

Felix slammed the brakes on and killed the engine of the truck. Opening the door he rolled out of the truck and under it, reaching up to close the door. He saw someone running toward the truck and reached into the pocket of his Carhartt jacket and pulled out the highly illegal concealed weapon he always had on him.

But he didn't have to use it. If the man was going to try to steal the truck, he didn't have a chance. The blast wave caught him and blew him several feet down the street. He didn't get up after the blast wave reversed and then stopped.

Felix had been lucky. Lying on the ground kept the blast wave from direct effects on him, but it pushed the truck almost four feet, the left rear tire nearly running over him. Scrambling up, Felix got back into the truck and started it up again. He headed home once more, dodging abandoned vehicles and dead bodies on the street.

A few people tried to flag him down, but Felix knew, deep in his heart, that he would be able to do a lot more good in the aftermath, than what he could do now. He ignored everyone and kept on the route to his home. He triggered the garage door opener and drove the pickup inside the garage when the security shutter and then the garage door opened up. The garage door came down when he hit the close button. So did the security shutter.

"Auxillary power is working," Felix muttered as he got out of the truck. He took a couple of minutes to take everything from the refrigerator and freezer down to the shelter before he locked himself inside, wondering about Mrs. Gunderson and several other people he knew didn't have

much of a chance to live through the attack and the aftermath.

Seriously considering going back out to try and help some of those people, particularly Mrs. Gunderson, the shelter shook for several seconds. “No way, now,” he whispered. Another nuke had hit somewhere in the general area. Going out would be suicide.

Felix put a fresh battery in the CD V-717 remote reading radiation meter. The needle leaped off the peg on the lowest range setting. The area was already getting fallout. After turning on the laptop computer kept in the shelter, Felix activated the surveillance systems. He had his fingers crossed. It didn’t help. There were more than a dozen people outside around the house trying to get in at every door.

“Criminey!” Felix muttered. “I guess some of them really meant what they said. Going to a large gun safe, Felix opened it and took out a Remington 11-87P riot gun. Taking an M-9 bayonet from a shelf in the safe, he locked it in place on the shotgun.

After throwing the strap of a musette bag over his head, Felix added a box of 00 buckshot to the pouch and then four magazines for a Glock 21. He took the Glock from another shelf in the safe and put it in the waistband of his pants at the small of his back.

Finally, after slipping a CD V-742 dosimeter in his shirt pocket, Felix left the shelter and went upstairs. He opened a window, and then a view port/gun port in the heavy laminated shutter. “Go find shelter! The fallout has started!” He yelled through the opening.

“Let me in, Cat! Please! You and I are buddies! You always said I could come here if something happened.”

“You told me that, too!” yelled someone else that was out of his field of vision.

“I didn’t tell anyone that!” Felix yelled back. “Some of you just assumed you would be welcome. You aren’t. I don’t have the space for all of you!”

“Take me, Cat.”

The voice startled Felix. It was just beneath the opening. He couldn’t see the person but he recognized the voice. It was Judith Wilson, one of the secretaries at the City Maintenance offices. You’ll be glad you did,” she said.

“No, Judith! I told you to find a place to shelter.” Then, louder, Felix said, “All of you need to go find shelter elsewhere before it is too late!”

“Let us in or we’ll break in!” screamed Joe Pulaski, one of Felix’s coworkers.

“Aw, Joe! Don’t say that! I just can’t jeopardize...”

Suddenly something hit the shutter just to one side of the vision port, causing Felix to lunge back. Someone had a gun and knew how to use it. If Felix hadn’t reacted to the first shot, the second would have killed him as it flew threw the vision port and put a hole in the wall on the other side of the room.

“Jeez!” Felix said, feeling a bit faint at first, and then more than a little annoyed as more shots rang out, banging against the gravel filled walls of the house and the laminated shutters, creating a huge racket.

But apparently no one had a very powerful rifle, as the shutters stopped everything fired at them. Felix wasn’t worried about the walls. With almost six full inches of gravel confined in plywood clad metal stud walls, it would take something extremely powerful to penetrate them.

“Everyone clear out of here or I start shooting!” Felix said, now using

the PA system from the kitchen. His voice boomed outside and was met with screams of rage and fear. Turning on the computer in the kitchen, Felix switched from one outside camera to another.

Suddenly Felix muttered a soft, “Oh, no!” Angela Fitzsimons and her brood of five children were out there, just standing and crying. And then he spotted Jeremy Hughes. He, too, looked dejected, but wasn’t involved in the wholesale attack on the house by the rest of the people.

Felix hung his head for a moment and then keyed the PA system again. “Jeremy! Angela! The two of you and the kids come up to the front door. The rest of you back off or I will start shooting!”

Felix stayed and watched for a few seconds until he was sure Jeremy, Angela, and the children were moving toward the front door. He ran into the living room and touched the front door security shutter open button and began to fire the shotgun from around the edge of the doorway after opening the front door.

Jeremy and Angela ducked down as shots passed back and forth over their heads. Half a dozen people charged the open door, several steps behind Jeremy and the others. Jeremy had picked up the smallest of Angela’s children and carried the screaming child the rest of the way into the house, followed immediately by Angela, ushering the other four children in front of her.

Steeling himself, Felix fired repeatedly into the charging group with the shotgun. Almost by a miracle, one man was on Felix, despite taking two pellets of the 00 buck. Felix thrust with the shotgun and the bayonet slid between the man’s ribs. The man screamed, but it was cut off when Felix fired the shotgun again, to free the bayonet from the man’s ribcage where it had lodged between two of the man’s ribs.

Firing the last two rounds in the extended magazine of the 11-87P, Felix dropped it and pulled the Glock from behind his back. Bullets were

whizzing into the house through the open door. Felix was still protected somewhat from the door facings as he fired the Glock until it was empty.

He managed to reload the Glock before anyone could get to the door, but it was a near thing. The second time he emptied the gun, there was no time for a reload. But there was just enough time to pull the little hideout gun that Felix carried illegally everywhere he went, except when flying commercial. He pressed it against the man's belly, tilting the little Beretta Model 21 up under the man's ribs that was on him, trying to push past Felix to get inside the house. Felix pulled the trigger three times before the man fell back, a surprised expression on his face, the three tiny bullets having punctured his heart.

Felix gave the man a little extra impetus with a kick to the belly, sending him clear of the door. With five more people approaching at a run, Felix slapped the close button for the front door shutter and then emptied the Beretta into those approaching. He wasn't hoping to stop anyone with the .25 ACP rounds, just slow them down until the shutter closed. He accomplished his purpose.

Falling back against the entry hall wall, feeling totally spent, the Beretta empty now, too, Felix blocked out the screams of the injured and those still trying to gain entry. After only a few seconds, Felix picked up the shotgun and reloaded it from the musette bag, and did the same with the Glock.

He took a magazine for the Beretta out of a pocket and reloaded it before dropping it into the pocket he'd taken it from.

Jeremy, Angela, and the kids were all huddled down on the floor, most of the kids crying and the adults staring in fear. "Okay. Everybody up and down into the basement. You'll be safe there."

Trusting in the construction of the house, Felix led the way. "Now, you've all been out in the fallout and will need to decontaminate." He

opened a cabinet and said, “There are plenty of towels in there and some lightweight coveralls.

“Use the bathroom through there, and everyone shower and put on a pair of the coveralls and then we’ll run your clothes through the washer and you can put them back on. Make sure you wash your hair really well. I’m going back upstairs to keep an eye on things.”

“But the radiation...” Jeremy asked.

“At the level we’re getting right now, you’re perfectly safe for the moment. Help Angela with the kids, will you?”

Jeremy nodded. He was still shaking.

Thankful the computer was still working, Felix checked around the house using the camera system. There were still people outside, live ones as well as dead. The fallout was coming down hard enough now to be able to see it on the monitor. Felix wanted to use the PA to tell everyone out there that they needed to get into shelter before it was too late. But he was afraid it would just lead to a more concerted attack.

Finally, after a few more futile attempts to broach the shuttered doors of the house, those still living and able began to leave and look for shelter elsewhere.

It was some time before Jeremy came upstairs rather tentatively and told Felix, “Cat, we’re all showered and changed.” He was wearing one of the simple coveralls Felix had acquired at the thrift shop for such situations.

“Okay. I’ll come down and we’ll get your clothes washed.”

“Are you going to be all right?” Jeremy asked. “Will you die from all the radiation you’re getting?”

“The way the house is built, even up here there is significant protection. In the basement, much more so. And in the shelter proper, we’ll pick up little, if any.” Felix took a moment to look through the dosimeter. “I’ve only picked up a tiny dose. Nothing to worry about. However, the rest of you were in that fallout for some time. I don’t know what the consequences will be. I’ll try to figure it out based on the averaged radiation level during the time. I don’t think you’ll have serious effects from the exposure. At least for many years.”

Jeremy paled slightly, but nodded and went back down to the basement, with Felix following behind, carrying the shotgun. He had to be careful not to poke holes in the ceiling with the bayonet.

Angela was sitting on the sofa in the family room, the children grouped around her. They were praying together. She jumped up when Felix came into the basement. “I don’t know how to thank you, Cat, for what you’ve done. I didn’t know what else to do...”

“It’s all right, Angela,” Felix said. “I have the means to take care of a few people. The problem was how many wanted in. I just couldn’t let everyone in.”

Angela bit her lower lip and nodded.

“Come on. I’ll show you the washer. Can’t use the dryer, as it’s electric and I don’t want to overload the power system.”

“How can you have all this working? The power is out everywhere else...”

“I was wondering that, too,” Jeremy said.

“I have a power system that can go entirely off grid. It’s a combined system of photo voltaic cells on the roof, twin generators, three battery



banks, and a controller system. I could actually run the dryer, but would have to turn every other thing off. But we can hang dry the clothes, here in the basement with a fan on them. The dehumidifier will remove the moisture from the air in the basement.”

“What about water?”

“I still have the old well before this area was annexed by the city. Not legal, but I keep it in good shape and it is fine. The city sewer here will be all right for several days, and then we’ll dig out the old septic tank and hook back to it.”

Felix smiled. “I cheated somewhat when we got city services here. Septic tanks were supposed to be removed or filled in. I filled mine in, all right, but pumped it out and cleaned it thoroughly first. Then filled it with sand. I can dig it out in a couple of days and then hook back up to it. The disposal field was in really good shape at the time we got city sewer, and should still be.”

“Wow!” Jeremy said. “Cat, I knew you were kind of preparing for the worst. I had no idea you had something like this. And Cat... Thanks for letting me in.”

“It’s okay, Jeremy.” Felix smiled again. “You’ll be working your tail off because of it, after we get out. Now, let’s get the laundry started and get everyone in the shelter.”

Felix took a shower after showing Angela the laundry. They’d barely entered the shelter after starting the first of three loads of clothing, when the youngest of Angela’s children, Sally, four years old, said, “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

The other children chimed in. Felix showed Angela the kitchen area of the shelter and the food supplies immediately available. Happy to be doing something to take her mind, and the children’s minds, off the

situation, Angela settled in and became the domestic engineer for the shelter.

Using up the fresh foods Felix had brought down to the shelter from the kitchen refrigerator freezer, Angela made a typical lunch for herself, the children, and Jeremy and Felix. Jeremy and Felix went over to the counter and got their plates from Angela. The children were taking up all the small table space so the two went back to the communications desk to eat.

Felix began to do some calculations on the computer, using the first radiation reading he'd written down, and the current level. It was with some relief on his part, and much on the part of Jeremy and Angela, when he told them that their exposure levels were light. They would probably have some symptoms of radiation sickness, but they would be minor for the two adults. Possibly more serious for the children.

Angela paled. Felix hurriedly explained further. "Just some minor symptoms, Angela. Nausea, maybe vomiting, a little loss of hair, nothing we can't deal with, and not life threatening, as long as they stay in the shelter until the radiation is quite low."

"How long?" Angela asked. "They are so used to playing outside..."

"Don't know for sure, yet. We haven't peaked on radiation yet, and I can't figure the decay rate until an hour after the peak. But just as a guess, a couple weeks in here, and then they can go into the basement for some of the day, but they'll need to sleep inside a shelter for months."

"Months?" Angela asked.

Felix nodded and Angela turned away, to fuss over the children, to get her mind off the idea of being cooped up for such a long time. And where her husband might be right now. If he was even alive.

Jeremy, like Felix, with no immediate or close family, was worried more about his long term future and the ability to have children sometime in that future. Felix was trying to deal with what had happened at his front door earlier. He had killed. Killed people he knew. And probably sentenced many others to death by radiation poisoning. It hung heavy on his mind, but he could find no other way in his mind to have handled the situation. There just wasn't enough space and supplies to shelter and provide for thirty or more people.

As the day wore on, the children were put down for naps, and Felix showed Angela and Jeremy the rest of the features of the shelter. It didn't take long.

"I had the shelter poured and plumbed in the same time as the basement, and then filled over it and poured the garage slab before the house was built. I put in an escape tunnel that leads from that opening to the rear fence. It's concrete culvert sections that lead to a small chamber you can get in to open up the top hatch and push it through the grass.

"Had a simple ventilation system at first, and then, when they became available, I added an American Safe Rooms system. I'd already allowed for expansion by having larger than normal at the time air inlets and outlets.

"The kitchen you've seen. The toilet, both sinks, and the shower in here are on a holding tank with automatic pump, since the original septic tank couldn't be deep enough. And when the city sewer was run, I decided to keep the original system, rather than spend the money to try put in a gravity flow line to the main sewer line. Just not enough advantages.

"The basement bathroom, laundry, and wet bar are on another holding tank and pump. The basement as a whole as a couple of floor drains in case of a flood or water leak. They, and the outside drains around the bottom of the basement are gravity flow to the low point at the corner of

my property. I've got repair parts and spare motors and pumps to keep them operating for a long time.

"The shelter was wired with future solar panels in mind, but I didn't get them until I had to change the roof a couple of years back. Had a small generator, but got a much larger dual system when prices came down. Had to put in a battery house to keep the batteries protected and I didn't want them in the basement.

"Made it big enough to hold the gensets, too. There is a door from the basement into the battery room, and then into the generator room. I had two one-thousand gallon fuel tanks put in when the original septic system was put in. I don't think anyone is aware of them. I've been able to keep them full using five-gallon cans since the first fill up before the house was finished. Keep the fuel doped with Pri-D.

"Now. Sleeping arrangements. You saw them when you put the children down for their naps. Six bunks, each with a locker for a few personal possessions. Not much privacy, but the bunk room does have the curtain you see there. Jeremy and I will hot rack on the bottom bunk on the left, if that's okay. That'll give you the three upper bunks and two lowers for you and the kids, Angela. I figure the two smaller children can share one."

"What's hot racking?" Angela asked.

"Two or more people sharing a bunk when working in shifts. I want an adult up at all times to keep a watch. Jeremy and I will take the evening and night watches. You'll be on daytime watch. You'll be able to take care of the kids. It's just a matter of watching the radiation meter and the monitors for any kind of trouble. I don't expect any more until... Well... I don't expect any trouble."

"When we can expand out to the basement, and only fix meals and sleep in the shelter, things won't be nearly as crowded.

“The communications desk there, a tiny bit of living space here, the activity area with a couple of chairs and the bench seat, which has storage under it.”

They were standing in the center of the shelter. “Now, unless you have some questions, I’m going to lay down for a bit. Keep an eye on the CD V-717 and write down the readings every fifteen minutes or so.”

Jeremy and Angela both nodded and Felix went into the bunkroom, pulled the curtain across the doorway and more or less collapsed on the lower bunk on the left side of the room. Curled up in a fetal position, Felix tried to put the sights and sounds of what he’d done at the front door of his house out of his mind.

Felix was able to finally fall asleep. He woke up and went to the bathroom in the shelter.

Jeremy and Angel looked at him with worry in their eyes, but it faded as Felix seemed just fine. “What’s the radiation reading?” Felix asked Jeremy. “Has it peaked yet?”

Jeremy nodded. “Little over an hour ago.”

“Very good,” Felix said. “Let me have the desk and I’ll see when we can get out of here, based on the info we have.”

Using a computer program provided by an internet friend that Felix had modified to his own needs, Felix plugged in the numbers and studied the results. “Well, it’s not looking as bad as possible. As long as we don’t get more radiation from another hit to the west of us, we can start using the basement in a week, and go outside occasionally after a month.”

“What do you think we’ll find?” Angela asked. Sally had come over and Angela picked her up.

“It won’t be good. And not conversation for little ears,” Felix said, smiling at Sally.

“Do I have little ears, Momma?” Sally asked her mother.

“Yes you do. Just the perfect for the size of your head.”

“Good.” Sally wiggled to get down and she ran back to join her brothers and sisters watching a Disney movie DVD on the television that was part of the small activity center.

“We found the DVD’s,” Angela said. “I hope that’s okay.”

“Of course,” Felix replied. “There are some board games, too. And plenty of paper and crayons. I always thought I might have children someday...”

“Thank the Lord that you did,” Angela said. “The children can be a handful. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t let us in.” She turned away from Jeremy and Felix, and began to cry softly.

Jeremy went to join the children and keep them occupied. Felix turned back to the computer and communications system to give Angela some privacy. Felix heard the bathroom door open a few seconds later. And then, after a couple of minutes, Angela came back out, composed now. “What do you want for supper, Felix?”

“Just whatever we have that the children will eat,” Felix said absently. He was using a small wind up radio attached to a wire antenna that led outside the house. All the rest of the communications gear was still disconnected and inside the faraday cage incorporated into the console on top of the desk.

Suddenly he started. “What’cha doing, mister?”

Felix looked down. It was Aaron, Angela's oldest, at ten.

"Trying to see if I can get a radio station."

"Can I watch?"

"I guess... Sure..." Felix wasn't too experienced with children.

Without asking, or any hesitation, he got onto the other chair and watched mesmerized as Felix checked station after station that he knew he could receive, if they were broadcasting. They weren't.

"The TV works," Aaron said. "Why doesn't the radio?"

"The TV is playing a DVD. The radio station isn't transmitting."

"What's transmitting?"

Felix found himself immersed in a somewhat one sided conversation with Aaron about electronics, and was soon joined by the other children, the movie forgotten. Sally climbed up into his lap without hesitation as he illustrated something to the others.

Angela, when she noticed the children gathered around Felix started to shoo them back to the TV, but since Felix seemed okay with it, she left them where they were. Keeping five children occupied was a near full time occupation. Anything that kept their attention that allowed her a little peace and quiet to get housework done was welcomed.

She was able to have supper prepared and put on the table before the children tired of Felix's explanations of the equipment he had. "Okay, children. Time to eat."

Felix was slightly amazed at the sudden and total disappearance of his

temporary charges. They were there one second and gone the next. He looked around. They were all at the table, ready, as Angela began dishing out portions of food.

Angela looked over at Felix and Jeremy. "I'm sorry. I've found it easier to feed the children before the adults."

"It's okay," Felix laughed. "I think it might be safer, too."

After a moment's hesitation deciding how to take the comment, Angela smiled and nodded, and then turned back to the children.

That was the routine for the first week in the shelter. Jeremy, Felix, and Angela taking turns keeping the children occupied when they were awake. Felix and Jeremy both napped during the day when the children were, to be able to stay awake on their night shift watching the radiation meter, listening on the one radio Felix kept hooked up, and watching the monitor for the outside cameras.

Neither Felix nor Jeremy mentioned to Angela, and certainly not the children, what they saw going on at night. It was gruesome. After a few days without their owners to feed them, pets that were outside when the attack occurred, or managed to get out afterward, fed on the dead bodies laying on Felix's property.

After an extra day in the shelter, the group moved to the basement, with only sleeping and cooking taking place in the shelter. Felix was glad it hadn't been longer. The children did well in the shelter, but they were still children and being cooped up all day in the small space wasn't easy on them.

Having the large basement to play in made life quite a bit easier, and allowed everyone to have much more private time away from the others. Requests to go outside became nearly continuous as the weeks in the



basement passed.

Finally, with the radiation level under 0.10R, Felix and Jeremy suited up in hooded Tyvek coveralls, rubber boots and gloves, and Millennium CBRN respirators and went outside to survey the area for dangers and start decontamination. They went armed.

Felix had talked to Jeremy extensively during the shelter stay about the possibilities they might run in to once they left the shelter. Jeremy, rather reluctantly, accepted the lessons on gun handling that Felix gave him when the children were asleep.

So, over their Tyvek coveralls, each wore a gun belt with holstered pistol with spare magazines. In addition, Felix carried slung over his back a Fulton Arms M-14, with two double magazine pouches on his belt.

Jeremy carried the Remington 11-87P shotgun slung over his back with two belt slides on the pistol belt with twelve shells each.

The first order of business, after a quick walk around the house, was the disposal of the dead bodies. Using a game cart taken from the garage, each of the bodies was taken to the last house on the street. It was unlocked and the inhabitants were dead, when Felix checked.

Felix was careful to hose and scrub down Jeremy, and have Jeremy do the same for him, more to get the blood and gore off them than the small amount of fallout they'd stirred up. It had rained a few days previously and the most of the fallout was already washed down into the storm sewers.

Angela didn't say much to either man when they returned to the basement, seeing the haunted looks on each face. She made a point to keep the children busy and let Jeremy and Felix relax quietly after their ordeal.

Over the next few days, the main floor of the house was again put into use, though the children were not allowed outside at all, yet, and still slept in the shelter. Jeremy and Felix decontaminated the yard areas that the rains hadn't washed away.

Finally, after another month, the children were finally allowed outside to play, as long as they stayed within Felix' fenced yard and wore long sleeves and pants, with plenty of sunscreen, and UVA/UVB protective sunglasses to protect against the higher levels of those frequencies of solar radiation making it through the much thinner ozone layer.

They'd had no direct contact with anyone during the shelter stay, and only a few contacts on the radio, as they again became useable after the fallout lessened and the skies became less ionized, allowing radio waves to travel more than just a few miles.

When he felt the time was right, Felix took out his city supplied handy-talky and turned it on. "Anyone still alive on the city frequencies?"

The answer was immediate. "Sure am. And who would you be, and where did you get the radio?"

"It's me, Mary. Felix Thompson."

"Cat! You're alive! Are you all right? Can you get down to the City Hall? We really could use some more help here."

"Take it easy, Mary. I'm okay. And I can get to City Hall. But not today. I'll be in tomorrow. What's the biggest problem?"

"You mean besides the nuclear war?" Mary was known to be rather acerbic when she wanted to be.

"Come on, Mary. Give a guy a break. I'm alive and well and willing to

help. If I can, and I don't lose my vehicle or my life in the process. I have some civilians I'm taking care of and have to know they'll be all right while I'm at work."

There was silence for some time, but Mary finally answered. "Okay. The Mayor says you can keep your own vehicle, despite the martial law requirement for all working personal vehicles to be turned in to the government for their use."

"One other thing, Mary. Let Mayor Lindsey know that I will be traveling armed, city ordinances or not, martial law or not. Or I stay where I'm safe."

Again the silence. Felix was trying to imagine Mayor Judith Lindsey's reaction to his, essentially, ultimatum. She was rabidly anti-gun, and had a sore spot about Felix because he had billed her on behalf of the city for work done on her street that she ordered, that benefited only her.

"She says that is up to the National Guard. They are the ones enforcing Martial Law."

Jeremy and Angela had been listening. "Will you be all right, Cat?" Jeremy asked. The ongoing feud between Felix and Mayor Lindsey's was common knowledge to most that worked for the city.

"Oh, I think so," Felix replied. "The old adage, 'they need me, more than I need them,' is operable here."

"I guess I should check in, too..." Jeremy mused.

Felix caught the look on Angela's face at Jeremy's comment. She looked scared.

"I think one of us should be here until Angela finds Tom."

It was the first real acknowledgement that Tom hadn't been with Angela and the children when the attack happened. Angela had handled the children's questions about his absence.

"Do you think he might still be alive?" Angela asked softly.

"There is a chance," Felix said. "A good one. Tom is smart and adaptable. Smart enough to figure out what to do. We talked sometimes about a situation like this..."

"And he never really listened," Angela said. "Always, 'Things will be fine, dear. Just trust me.'" There were tears in her eyes and she turned away, gathering the children around her to go inside.

"You really think Tom could still be alive?" Jeremy asked when Angela and the children were out of earshot.

"It's possible. If the plane was already on the ground, he could have found shelter. He would have needed to stay in it until just recently. Getting from the airport over there, to here, would be difficult, with little transportation working."

"Yeah. About that. Your truck works?"

"Yes. It's old, but with a non-electronic diesel crate engine put in. The EMP didn't stop it. Didn't actually fry the radio. It may or may not work."

"And you said you had diesel stored. Wow! You really did prepare for the worst. Again, Cat, I want to thank you for taking me in. I really wasn't going to ask, or even come over here, but when it happened I didn't know what else to do."

"It's all right, Jeremy. Believe me. I would have asked people to come, but there was no way to limit it, so I said no to everyone. Until it

happened. I just couldn't leave Angela and the kids out in the fallout like that. And you... You're a good guy. You weren't trying to get in. And I thought you might be useful."

Felix grinned and continued. "Going to need a lot of labor over the next few months and years. I figured you'd be up to it."

"Just tell me whatever you want me to do until I can make other arrangements."

"You can plan on staying here for some time to come. Until things settle down and some government rebuilding activity is instituted, I can keep you busy enough to earn your groceries. I suspect, after a while, that your labor will probably be required by the powers that be for the rebuilding."

"Slave labor?" asked Jeremy, obviously shocked.

"Maybe not. Probably not. But possibly something close to it." Felix left it at that and the two went back into the house for supper.

Felix was up at his normal work time the next morning. Jeremy was on watch, in the kitchen with the computer on so he could monitor the cameras. "I made coffee," he told Felix. And then, rather sadly, "I'm going to miss coffee when it runs out."

"Yeah. Me, too. Maybe someone with more greenhouse space than I have will grow some."

"Could someone do that?"

"No reason why not, that I can think of. Needs pretty specific growing conditions, but they can be created in a greenhouse with some effort."

"I didn't know that. Something to think about."

Felix nodded and went about fixing a quick breakfast, and then a lunch to take with him. Before he went out to the garage, he told Jeremy, “Keep a close eye out. No one gets in except me. Just lock the place down if trouble comes this way.”

Jeremy looked surprised. “You expect more trouble? I thought it would be over with Martial Law and everything.”

“At the moment, Martial Law is an unknown quantity. May be our savior, could be more problems than we want to deal with.” With a wave, Felix went out to the garage and fired up his truck for the first time since he’d parked it after the HEMP attack.

He smiled at the throaty sound of the diesel engine. Touching the remote on the sun visor, Felix opened the garage door and then the security shutter. He backed out onto the driveway and closed the door and shutter with the remote, and then headed for City Hall.

Felix could see some signs of activity. Mainly the lack of bodies. He didn’t expect very many just out in the open, but he did expect some. There weren’t any. When he was within two blocks of City Hall he saw the first National Guardsman. Guardswoman, actually.

She raised her hand and Felix came to a stop and rolled down the driver’s side window. “Sir, I’m afraid... Wait... Are you...” She looked at a clipboard. “Felix Thompson?”

“That I be. Got some special instructions for me...” Felix looked at the woman’s nametag. “Corporal Higgins?”

“Yes. You are to go directly to your regular parking spot in the employee parking lot. Not the public City Hall parking lot.”

“They tell you why?” Felix asked, keeping his cheerful mood.

“No, sir. Just that you are to report there and not the public lot. And if you have any weapons, they are to be in plain sight on the seat of the truck.” Corporal Higgins looked up from the clipboard. “You must be someone important. We’ve been collecting working vehicles and guns.”

“Yeah. I thought you might be,” Felix said. “I’ll be on my way, then, if there is nothing else.”

“No, sir. Please drive carefully.” She waved him on past and Felix went the rest of the way to the City Hall. He saw immediately why he wasn’t to park in the public lot. It was a bustling National Guard camp that spilled over into the city park in front of City Hall.

Felix drove into the City Hall employee parking lot, which had quite a few more vehicles in it than he expected. Rather than take his regular slot, Felix drove over and parked near the furthest exit.

Slinging the M-14 over his back, after he got out of the truck, Felix reached under the dash and flipped a switch. Then he closed and locked the doors with the key fob remote. He stood relaxed when two National Guardsmen hurried over. “Are you Felix Thompson?”

“I am, for a fact. What can I do for you two fine gentlemen in uniform?”

“You can come with us, Sir. We’ll relieve you of your weapons now.”

“Nah. Don’t think so. Get on your radio and have someone tell the Mayor I’m here. Just as I said I would be.”

One of the men didn’t look like he liked being instructed by a civilian. But the other raised the mike of a walky-talky on his web gear to his lips and keyed it. He turned away and carried on a conversation that Felix couldn’t hear while the other Guardsmen watched Felix warily.

“Okay, O’Connel. We escort him to the Mayor’s Office. Captain Johanson will meet us there. He keeps his guns.”

“I don’t like this,” PFC O’Connel said. “Civilians don’t have any need for guns now that we’re here.”

“Very many of you feel that way?” Felix asked the other Guardsman.

The man cut a glance at O’Connel and said, “Just some.”

“That’s good. Would hate to see a civil war start after all the country’s been through.”

“What’s that supposed to mean, Civilian?” barked O’Connel.

“That I would hate to see a civil war start after all the country’s been through. Simple as that.”

O’Connel didn’t like it, but the other Guardsman gave him a look and O’Connel kept whatever reply he’d planned to make to Felix to himself.

A few minutes later Felix stepped into the Mayor’s office. The Mayor was there, with her primary aide, and a National Guard Captain.

“Mayor. Alice. Captain.” Felix said in greeting.

“So this is the Felix the Cat Thompson I’ve heard about. You don’t look as big as your reputation.”

“People seldom are, Captain Johanson. But I suspect you know that. How is this going to play out? Do I get to help the city get some services back, or do I go to a detention camp to be reprogrammed?”

“We’re not doing that,” Captain Johanson said. There was a small smile on his face. “But don’t give me any ideas. Now the Mayor has stated



that you have insisted on carrying firearms while doing your work. Is that really necessary? We have people all over the city in case of trouble.”

“And if one of them is the trouble? Say, PFC O’Connel?”

The Captain frowned. “He making noises again?”

“Very much so.” Felix finally looked over at Mayor Lindsey again. “He and the Mayor have a lot in common.”

“Now, see here! I will not be spoken to in this manner!” the Mayor protested. She glared at Felix for a moment and then looked at Captain Johanson. “See what I mean? He’s trouble. Should be ordered to do the work and kept under guard the rest of the time before he spreads his poison to others.”

“That the way you do things, Captain?” asked Felix. “Slave labor? Incarcerate anyone that disagrees with you and force them to work?”

“No, that is not how I do things.” The Captain’s voice was adamant and he gave the Mayor a hard look. “And please remember, Mayor Lindsey, this city is under martial law, under my command. Your position as Mayor is dependent on my whim. I suggest you keep criminal thoughts like you’ve just suggested to yourself.

“Now, you’ve said yourself that this man is the key to getting the city back to even a semblance of its prewar situation. It’s a situation where we need him more than he needs us. He wouldn’t have that rifle, handgun, working truck, and no signs of radiation sickness that I can see, if he didn’t have the skills and mindset to do us some good.

“Thompson, you can go armed. Any of your crews you can vouch for that are working directly with you, may also. But you won’t have an escort the way I planned. We’re spread thin, and my troops are needed

elsewhere, if you can manage on your own.”

“Thank you, Captain. Where do we start?”

“Now see here!” the Mayor said.

“You and her, I can’t remember your name, Miss, are dismissed. This is an engineering matter, not a political one.”

Mayor Lindsey stomped out, muttering, followed by Alice. Alice hesitated just a moment and told the Captain, “It’s Alice. My name is Alice Meyhew.”

“See what you can do to calm down your boss, Miss Meyhew.”

“I will.”

Referring to maps that were already in the room, Captain Johanson and Felix began discussing what needed to be done to get the city some workable services and provide as much normality as possible to the survivors of the attack.

Felix dived into the work with a vengeance. He wasn’t adverse to dropping a zinger now and again about how much easier things would be if preparations had been made in advance. His first task was to get the diesel power station back into operation. It was something that Felix had campaigned for several times.

Felix had to admit they were lucky. They found the parts needed to get the one megawatt plant running again, and enough diesel from the local truck stops to have power for a couple of hours each morning and each evening in selected portions of the city.

With the power plant online again, the next order of business was the water system. It was more difficult than the old power plant that had

been isolated from the power system when the EMP occurred. But, through Captain Johanson's auspices, the replacement parts were obtained from somewhere Felix knew not to ask about.

The water from the city's deep wells needed little treatment, and Felix soon had the city water tanks full. Like the power system, the water was only on for two hours in the morning and two in the evening.

The third system brought on line was the city sewer system. Mostly a gravity system, it was still dependant on half a dozen pumping stations, plus the treatment plant, to handle the city's sewage. One of the few things Felix had been able to get the city to stockpile were repair parts for the sewer ejectors, with two complete motor assemblies available.

They were needed. With them, and the repairs on three others, five of the six pumps were made operable. Unfortunately, the treatment plant was beyond Felix's abilities to patch together a working system. Two pumps were pulled from the system and used to pump the raw sewage from the treatment plant holding tanks to a huge pond, quickly built to hold the sewage until the treatment plant could be made useable.

Jeremy spent many hours while Felix was working on the city services to get Felix's septic tank emptied of sand. When it was ready, Felix hooked the house sewer line back to it and was good to go. It was none too soon. The section of the city where Felix lived was not one of the ones provided with services.

With the various primary systems unable to service the entire city, many areas were evacuated to the parts that made best use of the available resources.

In four months, as an early fall turned into an early winter, the city, now more town, in terms of population and services, than city, was as prepared for what came next as it was possible for Felix to make it.

During all the work, Felix and his crews had not needed their firearms. Felix was pretty sure that it was because they were armed, and not for a lack of people willing to attack an unarmed party.

Outside the city, things were different. There was much raiding of the outlying farms and ranches that had made it through the attack on their own. The National Guard tried, but was unsuccessful in catching any of the three known gangs doing the damage.

Despite that fact, Felix, feeling the existing city crews could handle maintenance on the systems, decided to go looking for Tom Fitzsimons. Since he was a known entity, and could pretty much go anywhere he wanted, any way he wanted, Felix left one morning at his regular time. But instead of going to the City Hall to check on things, he headed out of town, straight for the large airport in the next city.

He didn't get very far. The National Guard didn't stop him. A gang of bandits attacking an overnight refugee camp did. He heard the shooting and stopped well before getting to the fight. He set the security system and then locked the truck before going through the trees the road curved around.

When he saw the camp, it didn't take more than a few seconds to see who was attacking whom, and which side he wanted to be on. He lifted the M-14 and began to fire, targeting the group attacking the camp. Five men dropped, dead or severely wounded, before anyone located the new source of rifle fire.

With the attacking force starting to withdraw, the National Guardsmen that were with the refugees set out after them. Felix walked into camp, careful to call out so he wouldn't get shot. Though he only saw a couple of the refugees carrying arms. The National Guard had been doing most of the fighting, but the two men looked like they'd been trying to protect the camp, too.

Felix had to take a closer look to recognize the man he'd come searching for. Tom Fitzsimons looked different than Felix remembered him. Sleeker. Harder. Armed. That was what caught Felix by surprise. Tom was one of the two men armed that had fought back when the attack started.

"Tom! It's Felix!"

Startled himself, Tom hesitated, but then walked over to join Felix while the others tended to the wounded.

The two men only knew one another through Angela, who worked as a City dispatcher during normal times. They'd talked a few times, but couldn't be called friends. "Your family is going to be so glad to see you!" Felix said, holding out his hand to shake Tom's.

Tom took the hand and the men shook hands for a couple of seconds as Tom studied Felix's face. No one would be cruel enough to joke about something like his family's health and welfare.

"They're okay?" Felix nodded. Tom knelt down suddenly. With the rifle lying by him, he bowed his head and prayed for a long time, giving thanks for the survival of his family.

"How do you know?" Tom asked, standing back up. "Have you seen them? Was there any radiation sickness? Are they getting enough to eat?"

"Slow down!" Felix said, putting his right hand on Tom's shaking shoulder. "Yes, they are okay. I saw them last night. They didn't suffer any radiation sickness, despite a little exposure early on. And, yes again, they are eating okay."

"But how? We didn't have anything... Like you always tried to get us to do... You don't know how often I've thought back on what you tried to

guide us into, and kicked myself every time for not following the advice.”

“Angela and the children walked to my house. I have a shelter. They stayed with me. Along with a young man named Jeremy Hughes. I don’t know if you know him. He’d only been working for the city a few months.”

“I didn’t think you’d take anyone in,” Tom said softly. “You always told people that said they were going to go to your house if something happened that they’d best not.” Seeing the strained look on Felix’s face, Tom asked, “What? Others did come and want in?”

“I couldn’t leave the kids out in the fallout. And Jeremy wasn’t trying anything, just looking hopeful. There was a battle... I only took in your family and Jeremy.”

“I’m sorry you had to go through that, man,” Tom said. “I don’t know if I could have turned people away...”

With a tight smile, Felix replied. “You would have. It meant the difference of life and death for your family.” Felix looked pointedly at the M-4 carbine Tom was carrying.

“Yeah. Now. Then... I don’t know. Thank the Lord I didn’t have to make the decision. But I’m glad you made the one you did.”

Leaving the topic behind, Felix asked, “What’s with the group? You’re traveling on foot?”

“Yes. I don’t know what would have happened if the Martial Law representative hadn’t given permission to some of his men to escort us from there back home. We were all at the airport when the attack came and took shelter there. I guess we’re lucky we didn’t get hit. Of course, it’s only a regional airport. Not much of a target, I’m told.

“But with the radiation as high as it was, we had to stay in the shelters until all the food that was in the airport was used up. Fortunately it was enough that the radiation was down enough for us to go looking for food we could salvage.

“A few weeks ago, right after we could leave the shelters, and found some more food, I petitioned the Colonel in charge of the Martial Law for a convoy to get us home before winter hit. He finally said yes a few days ago, and even offered to let a detail escort us. But we couldn’t take any operating vehicles and only enough food for a few days. We’d have to try and find enough to get us the rest of the way. None of the adults have had anything for two days. We gave the last of the food to the children this morning. I’m not sure everyone will make it.”

“They will, if I have anything to say about it.” Felix lifted his walky-talky to his lips and called for City Hall. When Mary answered, Felix told her the situation and asked to talk to Captain Johanson.

Felix wasn’t displeased with the response. The Captain himself came with enough vehicles to get everyone the rest of the way to the city. Felix was talking to the Captain when the National Guard detail showed up. They were in high spirits and quickly explained to the Captain that they caught up with the bandits and they would no longer be a threat for anyone.”

“Is Colonel Watkins sending someone to get you, or are you supposed to walk back. We can give you a few rations...”

“Uh, Begging the Captain’s pardon, Sir, but we’ve been reassigned to you.” The leader of the detail, Sergeant Robert Jenkins, added, “I think the Colonel is worried about having enough food to feed everyone this winter. Sir.”

“He’s not the only one,” Muttered Captain Johanson when he took the

papers handed to him by the Sergeant and read through them. “No wonder he didn’t radio us about your trip so we could watch for you.”

“I guess so, Sir,” the Sergeant said. “Not my call. Officer stuff.”

“Yes, it is, Sergeant. So be it. Take charge of the move,” Captain Johanson commanded. He looked at Felix, who had been taking it all in. “And you. I need to talk to you.”

The two stepped out of earshot and Felix listened a bit inattentively as the Captain chewed him out for leaving the city without permission, and thanked him for helping rescue the embattled group.

“And on top of that, Cat, we need to decide what we’re going to do about feeding all the survivors. That Mayor Lindsey hasn’t got a clue. How’d she get elected, anyway?”

“Long story. You wouldn’t be interested. But you can believe me when I say I certainly didn’t help her get the job.”

“We’ll, I’ve learned to trust you. I’d make you Mayor, but that would probably cause more trouble than it’s worth.”

“Sure would be for me, Captain.” Both men laughed.

“Seriously, now, Cat. How are we going to feed everyone in town? Most of the farms that survived are going to be okay, but I’ve already decided not to clean them out of next year’s seed and what not, which we would be if we ask for any more from what I plan on next week.”

“I think most will give what they think they can spare, Captain. And I take it from what you just said, that there won’t be any more MRE’s and Tray Packs.”

“We’ve got one more convoy coming in. That’ll be all of it until crops



come in next fall. That convoy gives us a month to figure out what to do.”

“This,” Felix said, holding out his palm to catch a flake of the snow that was starting, “isn’t going to give us a month.”

Sergeant Jenkins came up and saluted the Captain. “We’re ready to go, Sir.”

“Carry on. Have someone that knows the way, lead.”

“I know it, sir. I’m from here.”

“Very good. Mount them up, Sergeant, and head them out. We’ll pull Tail-End Charlie.”

Sergeant Jenkins saluted and ran off. “Get in,” the Captain told Felix. “We’ll drop you off at your truck. If it’s still there.”

“It will be,” Felix said confidently.

And it was. Felix unlocked it and turned off the security system. He followed the convoy into town, and then picked up Tom before the group was carted off to be fed. “How can I ever thank you?” Tom asked as Felix drove him to be with his family.

“Just be a good husband and father, and take care of your family to the best of your ability. Oh. Yeah. And help me put in a garden. A really big garden.”

“Of course,” Tom replied. “A garden, huh? Guess they are going to be really important now.”

“Life and Death important. All farming and animal husbandry will be important in the next years, until some balance of people versus

resources is reached.”

“More people are going to die before then, aren’t they?” Tom asked softly.

“I’m afraid so, Tom. I plan to do everything I can to minimize the deaths, but I can’t save everybody.”

Felix and Jeremy gave the family privacy for their reunion. A few minutes later Angela came out to the greenhouse to give Felix a hug and thank him for bringing Tom back to her. Felix tried to minimize what he’d done, since Tom had made most of the trip on his own, but Angela wouldn’t hear it. She thanked him one more time and then hurried back to Tom and the children.

Tom, Angela, and the children stayed another week, but went back to their own home after that. It was in one of the sections of the city that had power, water, and sewer operating. Jeremy stayed a week after that, and then went to one of the barracks set up to house those that didn’t have a place in one of the areas with city services.

But Tom and Jeremy both came to Felix’s house at least three days a week to help with the greenhouse, taking back any excess production that Felix couldn’t, or chose not to store. But then the first blizzard of the winter set in and put a stop to all travel for several days.

When travel was again possible, Felix went in to the City Hall and again picked up his duties as Chief of Maintenance for the City. Despite strident objections by Mayor Lindsey, Felix took his pay, including back pay for the work he’d already done, in diesel fuel.

Captain Johanson had managed to get four railroad cars of diesel diverted to the city. They couldn’t really go anywhere else, due to the destruction of the tracks elsewhere. It would provide fuel to the power plant through the winter, even if it was a long one. The Captain okayed

the refilling of Felix's fuel tanks, over the Mayor's objections.

It didn't take much, as the PV system had provided most of the power requirements during the early days after the attack. Felix would need to run the generators to charge the batteries more during the winter, due to lack of sunlight.

Felix continued to work, with a small crew, to keep the services that the city did have going. They ran out of spares and had to let one of the five sections of the city that had been livable go dark. Everyone living in the section moved to vacant houses in the other four sections.

Though it was the middle of winter when Malcolm Roberts was finally able to conduct services again, everyone in Felix's church that had survived showed up for the first service. Malcolm didn't look good. He was still suffering the effects of radiation poisoning.

Though the church had decent shelter space in the basement, the Minister had gone out often to find food and medical supplies during the time the fallout was falling and just afterwards. The service was short, but heartfelt. People headed for home right after the service, except for Felix. The snow was starting to fall again.

Felix was there when Malcolm checked for donations. There was a box now, as well as the regular collection can, for food donations. There were only a couple of cans. Both green beans. Malcolm smiled wryly when he took the lid off the can.

"More money than we've ever collected before, and from a smaller congregation," Malcolm told Felix after counting the cash. "It just isn't worth anything," he added with a sigh.

"Look at the coins close, Malcolm," Felix said. "Some people might have left pre-1965 silver coins or even some gold coins."

Giving Felix a quick look, Malcolm counted the coins, checking the dates of the dimes and quarters. There weren't any halves. But there was the gleam of gold in the bottom of the can. "Your contribution, I take it?" Malcolm asked Felix after taking out a five-dollar gold Eagle and a ten-dollar gold Eagle.

"It's an anonymous donation," Felix said. "Malcolm, when was the last time you ate?"

Malcolm shook his head. "I'm not sure." His faint smile was back. "But tonight it's green beans," he said, taking the two cans out of the box sitting beside the can. "The gold and silver will come in handy, I know, but one can't eat it."

"That's true. You might want to hang on to it until next summer. There should be more things available for trade or barter. I know for a fact some people will take gold and silver in exchange for their products."

"All very well, Cat. But I'm not sure I'll make it until then."

"You've been giving your share of the rations the National Guard brought in to others, haven't you?"

"It is my Christian duty to help my fellow man, especially those in my congregation that need the food more than I."

"We need you alive and well, Malcolm. Come on. I want to show you something."

Slowly, the minister followed Felix outside and down the ramp. Felix turned toward the building and went down the narrow space between the ramp and the wall of the church. "What is this, Cat? There's nothing here."

"Ah, but you're wrong, Malcolm. Take a look." Felix removed the panel

he'd built into the side of the ramp."

"Plastic buckets!" Malcolm said in surprise. "What are a bunch of plastic buckets doing under the ramp?"

"Not to be repeated, but I did. When we rebuilt the ramp, when no one was looking."

The minister had a little color in his cheeks suddenly. "Can I guess what is in them?"

"No need to guess, Malcolm. It's food. Not all that much, and certainly not fancy, but food to keep you and those in the congregation that are struggling alive until next fall when the crops come in."

There were tears in Malcolm's eyes when he looked at the buckets again, and then at Felix."

"Thank you, Cat. You are a prayer answered."

"No. Just someone that believes in being prepared. And this is an anonymous donation, Malcolm. I don't want people to know where it came from. I've had a little trouble already with people wanting what they think I might have. If they find out about me having this, things could get ugly."

"But people should praise you for your foresightedness. Give thanks to you."

"Guide them to give thanks to the Lord, Malcolm. That is who should get the credit. I'm just sort of a deliveryman."

"Well, bless you, Cat. Your work won't go unrewarded, I'm sure."

"Yeah. Well. That's up to God. Because I want no earthly reward for

this. Please keep that in mind, Malcolm.”

“As you wish, Cat. But if it was up to me, I’d shout it to the heavens.”

“Uh... Don’t even go there...”

Malcolm laughed. “Your secret is safe with me. Now. What do I need to know about what is here?”

“There are several cook books on cooking with storage foods. You might want to have a class for people to learn and copy off some recipes. I stored wheat, not flour, since it stores better.

“There is only one grinder. It’s a very good one. A Diamant 525. I wouldn’t loan it out if I was you. Either set it up here for the church, or if you’re inclined, the civic center, either place with a designated user or users. The burrs can be ruined if they are clamped too hard. It’s not hard to adjust, but I’d hate to see it ruined by carelessness.”

“I understand, Cat. What else?”

“Well, the foods are basics. Wheat, rice, beans, powdered milk, powdered eggs, instant potatoes, yeast, corn meal, granola, rolled oats, sugar, salt, baking soda, baking powder, butter powder, shortening powder. Uh... Let’s see... Dried cheese, textured vegetable protein. Popcorn. Soup mixes.

“And some things you’ll really have to keep a handle on or they’ll be gone in no time. Freeze dried and dehydrated vegetables, fruits, and real meats. The TVP will go a long way. The freeze dried meats won’t. Same way with the brownie and cookie mixes. That’s all I can think of off the top of my head. There is a list...”

After pulling a small windup flashlight from his coat pocket, Felix shined it into the opening and looked around. “Here it is.” Felix handed

the slim three ring binder to the Minster. It's all listed. I'll come back after dark and help you take what you want first inside."

"Oh, Cat! Do you really think it is necessary to hide the fact like that? We could get several people to help. It wouldn't take very long to move everything."

"I honestly think it would be an unmitigated disaster. You are free to do what you want. The food is yours now. But I can tell you, there will be a riot, hopefully small, when you first start giving out the food. I think you should wait some time before you do. People need to make do with what they have for as long as they can before they are simply given food. There will be a time when they expect it and will get ugly when there isn't any more."

"Yes. Yes," Malcolm said softly. "Unfortunately, I think you might be right. There was some evidence of that trait during the shelter stay."

"That settles it. Be very careful when you start handing things out, if that is the way you choose to do it. And Malcolm, the first thing I'll move is a couple of boxes of freeze dried foods that are for you, personally. You need to get your strength up, and only rest and good food is going to do that."

"But the others..."

"Will have basic nutrition. You need more than that. And you need easy to prepare food, from both time and resources standpoints. With Cathy gone... Well... You just keep the one supply separate for yourself." Felix looked at his watch. "I'll be back in two hours."

"Thank you, Cat. I don't know what else to say," Malcolm said.

"That's all that needs to be said. I'd have done it anonymously to you, if there weren't so many complicating details."

“Well, I’m glad you didn’t. I’m proud to have a friend like you, and a member of my congregation.”

Felix put the panel back in place and hurried away as the snow got heavier. It would be dark in less than the two hours with the weather coming in the way it was.

Four hours later, Felix and Malcolm had moved everything Malcolm wanted to start with, and the snow was covering all evidence of their work. Felix went over the freeze dried Mountain House foods he’d picked up especially for Malcolm and his wife Cathy. With her death for lack of medication during the shelter stay, it gave Malcolm a full year of food. If he didn’t give it away.

Felix was actually surprised and quite pleased when Malcolm held onto all the food for over a month before he started quietly handing out small amounts to those most in need. Word got around, as Felix knew it would, and more and more people started going to Malcolm for food. He said no a few times, and at first there was no trouble.

But at Christmas, during a welcome break in the weather, Malcolm set up a soup line for a non-denominational dinner at the civic center. No turkey, goose, or ham, but plenty of hearty food. The church members moved along the line quietly and thankfully. But as the pots began to empty, and some people came back for third and fourth servings, things began to get ugly. Mothers and fathers hurried children into coats and family after family left, leaving a group of about fifteen young men and a few women behind.

Finally, after standing there talking amongst themselves, one of the men stepped forward and said, “Okay. Where’s the rest? We know the priest here is holding out on us. He’s been giving food to those that need it for some time now.”



“I’m a minister, not a priest,” Malcolm said. “Come. Have a little more. But that’s all there is.”

“You’re lying.”

“That’s all there is,” Felix said, moving to stand beside Malcolm. “You going to call me a liar?”

“Take it easy, Cat,” Malcolm said. “We can work something out, I’m sure. The Lord provides for those that seek shelter in his house.”

“We’re not in God’s house, if you didn’t notice,” said the first man, amongst murmurs behind him.

Two of the women and one of the men moved away quietly and left.

“Anything I can help with?” asked Captain Johanson when he walked up and put his bowl in the clean up tote.

“Stay out of this, army. We got no quarrel with you.” Felix finally placed the man. It was Henry Smithe, Junior. Smithe with an ‘e’. Son of the town’s former banker, Henry senior. Henry had died in the attack, and Henry, Junior, quickly learned that all that cash sitting in the bank was of very little use.

“Martial Law is still in effect,” Captain Johanson said calmly. A couple of the other Guardsmen moved up to stand behind the Captain.

“Well, then, you do something. They’re holding out on food. Been giving to church members only.”

“I know for a fact that isn’t true,” said one of the Guardsmen. “Lady in the next house to where we’re bivouacking got some. She isn’t a member of his congregation.”

“If he’s giving to others, then,” Henry said, “He should be giving to all. It’s your duty to confiscate his supplies and hand them out to everyone. We’ll help, won’t we, guys?” Henry frowned when he turned around and saw his force weakened by four more people that were walking away.”

“You don’t need to tell me my duty, Son,” Captain Johanson said, his voice cold. “The food has come from an anonymous donor. Don’t know who it is. The Minister, being a man that we can all trust, was given the most difficult task of sharing it with those that need it. I have no intention of tearing this town to pieces looking for what might not even exist anymore. This could very well be the last of the food, unless the donor gives more. Isn’t that right, Minister Roberts?”

Felix knew Malcolm wouldn’t lie, but he surprised Felix by saying, “We used all we had in the church for this meal.” No mention of the remaining buckets of food still stored under the porch and ramp of the church. “That’s not to say the donor won’t help with more food, but I have no way of knowing. And I will distribute per his wish of giving to those in need. Not to some slacker that refuses to go out and hunt, or work at any of the jobs that have to be done in the city to keep it going.”

“Well said, Minister Roberts,” the Captain said. “It would be a shame to have to start Shanghaing able bodied workers.”

“You wouldn’t dare! Mister Army.”

“Oh, Son,” replied Captain Johanson, “You really don’t want to use that argument with me. It is not only within my authority, but it is, suddenly, my inclination.”

“You’ll regret this! All of you!” Henry stomped out of the civic center with the few people still with him.

“Minister, let me know when your donor comes through again. I’ll furnish a couple of troops to keep the peace.”

“Surely that isn’t necessary, Captain!”

“Cat?” asked the Captain.

“Well, Malcolm, it’s either his people or me. Someone is going to be there when you have food available for distribution.”

“Well... All right. But I don’t want you at risk, Cat.”

“Nor do I; I like operating electricity, water, and sewer almost as much as I like to eat. We’ll handle the security. You keep yourself in good shape to keep things running, Cat.”

Felix frowned, feeling a bit ganged up on. He said as much. Captain Johanson replied, smiling, “That Shanghai stuff applies to everyone, you know.”

Felix muttered something and walked away. He went into the civic center kitchen to help with the clean up.

Captain Johanson was waiting for him outside the church, smoking a cigar, an hour later when Felix came out.

The good weather was over. It started to snow again. “Walk with me to the turn, Cat?” the Captain asked.

“Sure. What’s up?”

“How much food is left at the church?”

“What do you mean?” Felix asked, doing his utmost to sound and look totally innocent. It didn’t work very well.

“You know. That LTS food under the porch and wheelchair ramp at the

church. That you put there when the ramp was rebuilt just before the war.”

“Oh. You know about that, huh?”

“It’s my job to know things, Cat.”

“Well, there’s enough to get the truly needy through the winter and early spring, if it’s not too late of a spring.”

“I see.”

The Captain stopped at the corner. “Don’t do anything that would cause me to interfere in Roberts’ distribution plans. With him doing it, I don’t have to mess with all the hassles. And do trust me to keep him safe. I don’t want you gunning for anyone if something happens.”

Felix frowned. “If something happens, I’ll deal with it then. And woe to he that perpetrates the acts, whatever they might be.”

“Rather biblical. Keep a low profile for a few days.” With that, Captain Johanson walked toward City Hall.

Knowing he probably would have anyway, it grated on Felix to follow the Captain’s more than a suggestion to stay out of sight for a few days. But after just a few, he was over at the church again, shortly after nightfall, during yet another snow storm.

“Where’s the guard Captain Johanson put on you?”

“What guard? What have you two been up to?”

“Nothing. You’re looking stronger, by the way.”

“Nothing, I’m sure. And yes, I am stronger. Both physically and in will.

Don't worry about those bullies. They won't deter me from my Christian duty."

"I know that, Malcolm. That's part of what has me worried. Now, here. You can carry two pails now."

Malcolm chuckled and took the two buckets. Again, by the time they were finished, all trace of their footprints in the old snow were covered with new snow.

Just about everyone but Felix, Jeremy and Tom and his family, were on short rations the next July. But early crops were coming in after a late planting due to the extended winter and heavy snows it brought.

The upside of the long winter was the ground had a chance to absorb plenty of moisture and was ideal for growing crops again when the last of the snow melted. True to their word, Tom and Jeremy put in long hours with Felix and by themselves gardening Felix's entire yard, as well as the greenhouse.

Felix helped all he could, but he was struggling to keep city services up without any reliable replacement parts sources. Captain Johanson did all he could to get parts salvaged elsewhere brought to the city.

Despite his and his crews' best efforts, they again had to reduce output and shut down another section of the city, leaving only three areas that had full services. But there were still plenty of vacant homes in the three sections and just about everyone lent a hand in getting families moved from the dark section to the other three.

Having found Captain Johanson to be a man of his word, doing everything he could to make life easier for the city citizens, Felix quit carrying his rifle and holstered pistol, trusting in the peace the Captain maintained.

Felix pulled into the garage after a very aggravating and disappointing day working on one of the generators at the power plant. It would be at least two more days before the parts could be brought in to bring it on line. In the meantime, everyone was reduced to one hour of power and water morning and evening to keep from damaging the generator beyond repair.

It wasn't until he got out of the truck, with the garage security shutter almost down, that he saw the three men. All slid under the shutter before it closed. Felix reached for his hip, but realized there was no weapon there. Before he could do anything else the three men were on him.

He fought, but he was already tired and eventually two of the men were able to get his arms behind his back while the third man pummeled him in the chest, face, and stomach. Felix's eyes finally adjusted to the dark in the garage and he saw the man beating him. It was Henry Smith.

"Where is it?" Henry finally asked, rubbing his fists.

"What?" Felix asked. Henry belted him again in the solar plexus and Felix would have gone to his knees if the two men weren't holding him up.

"The food! You idiot! Where does the old man have the food hidden? I know you know. You're the one that gave it to him. He told us that much."

At Henry's last statement, Felix felt his blood run cold and then hotter than it was before."

"If you've hurt Malcolm..."

"Don't threaten me!" Henry screamed and threw a flurry of punches. Many of them were only glancing blows due to Henry's rage.

“Easy Henry,” said one of the men holding Felix up. “Kill him and we may never find that food.”

“Wait a minute,” said the other man. “What if he has it here?”

Henry looked surprised. Felix having the food hadn’t occurred to him. “Tie him up. We’ll search the house. Starting here in the garage.”

Despite the pain, Felix swelled himself and his arms as much as he could without the two men noticing as they tied him up. Henry was going through the shelves at one side of the garage, mumbling incoherently. But the foods that Felix had used first were the ones in the garage. There was nothing edible left stored in the garage.

Henry’s two cohorts entered the house behind Henry and Felix immediately began working his way loose. The two men that had tied him up had never been Boy Scouts. Though it did take some time, Felix was able to get himself loose.

But not before Henry and the other two came back into the garage. “You either tell us or you die!” Henry screamed. “Where is the food?”

Felix, unable to act before the two men were ready to grab him, waited until they got him up to his feet. And then he broke loose, slamming one of the men hard against the side of the truck with a knee in his groin as he turned and his right hand went to his right hip pocket.

A quick kick to the side of the knee of the other man and he went down screaming. Felix’s eyes cut to Henry. Henry was trying to pull a pistol from his waistband, but the front sight hung up on the cloth. With the little Beretta Model 21 pointing at Henry, Felix yelled, “Hold it, Henry! Don’t try...”

But Henry was out of his mind with anger. He jerked the pistol free and pointed it at Felix. Knowing the limitations of the diminutive .25 ACP

cartridge, even with Hornady jacketed hollow points, Felix fired five rounds in rapid succession, all aimed at Henry's eyes and nose.

It was enough to bring the fight to an end. Henry dropped the pistol and fell to the floor, his hands going to his face. Felix turned on the other two men, the Beretta ready for three more shots, even as his left hand fished a spare eight round magazine from his left front pocket.

There were suddenly hammering noises on the garage security shutter and Felix heard Malcolm calling his name. Felix managed to trigger the shutter before he went to his knees, and then fell forward on his face, totally out of it.

It was a couple of hours before he came to. A quick, painful, glance around and he decided he was in his own bed in the house. Malcolm was sitting in the side chair, reading his bible.

"I hope I don't look as bad as you," Felix said through split lips.

"Worse," Malcolm said, closing the bible and standing up. "Henry really did a number on you. Can you move?"

Felix tried to set up and groaned, easing himself back down. "Oh, I can move. I just don't want to."

Malcolm managed a small laugh. "Doc Hutchinson says you'll be okay. May pass some blood in your urine for a couple of days. If you do more than just a couple of days, she said see her immediately."

"Henry..."

"Is very dead. His two buddies are in the jail, under guard, awaiting a Martial Law tribunal for attempted murder."

Felix sighed. "Why, Malcolm? Why? We are on the verge of regaining a



semblance of order. The crops are coming in. The farmers that were prepared are producing enough meat now to provide everyone with meat at least once a week. Those with little or nothing to trade are working their tails off helping with gardens and on the farms. Things were... are... working.”

“I know, Cat. I know. There was just something in his system that drove him to have more than anyone else. He couldn’t seem to stand the idea that his family’s money was worthless and he had to work for what he received. Now, I’ll leave you to get some more rest.”

“Malcolm, about the rest of the food...”

“Don’t worry, Cat. You can be very proud of me. As much as I wanted to just hand it all out, I’ve really been conservative with it, even the last few days. I still have a month’s worth to fill in the gaps.

“I’m glad I did. I’m afraid I kept thinking you would come forth with more when this ran out. The two men with Henry said they tore the house apart and didn’t find a thing. It made Henry even more furious than I guess he already was.”

“No. I meant...”

Malcolm waved his hand. “Doesn’t matter, Cat. I don’t think I’d ask for any more, even if you had it. Though Henry was the worst, I saw people accept what you provided and come to depend on it rather than on their own hard work and the blessings of the Lord.

“I’m even starting a campaign to put aside a portion of all we produce as a reserve, just in case something else was to happen. God forbid.”

“Really?” Felix asked, pleased. “People are actually putting things by?”

“Some. The trend will grow as we produce more. I’m sure of it. I think

most people have learned a hard lesson from all this. Those that survived, anyway. I know I have.”

Felix didn't respond. If people were looking toward the future, and preparing for what might come, a helping hand in a pinch might come in handy. The foods hidden behind the walls of his house would keep for years. Perhaps generations. Might as well leave it there. For whatever the future might bring..

End \*\*\*\*\*

Copyright 2008  
Jerry D. Young