

Bad Times Coming - Prolog

Roger Tanquirdy took the paycheck gratefully. Construction projects had been lean lately, and this job was going to get the family finances back in the black. He and Sally hated owing money. They'd had to a few times since they'd married fourteen years earlier. Not often, and not much.

Enough to put the down payment on the trailer they would live in until Roger could build the house, a little at a time. His father had almost lost the land that had been in the family for three generations. It was only fifteen acres, but it was important to Roger. His mother and father had preferred to live in town, in a hovel of a house, rather than on the land. And then in the nursing home.

The house on the property was even less fit to live in and Roger tore it down and recycled much of the lumber to build the new house. It took over a year of working evenings and weekends to get the two bedroom, two and a half bath house done, but it was done the way Roger and Sally wanted it.

A year after the house was done they borrowed a bit more to pay Sally's medical bills when she was pregnant with Amy. But it had all been paid back as quickly as they could.

Then, when things got tough they had to take out a loan against the house and property. They'd really hated doing that, but there really wasn't anything else they could do. There just wasn't any work for several months. They had to sell several things, and had beans and rice with cornbread for many meals. But they'd managed.

Now, with this paycheck they could start getting back some of the things they'd had to sell. Fortunately, they sold most of their things to friends and would be able to get them back. Mostly at what they'd got for them, but not in every case.

First, of course, came restocking the pantry. The income was enough to double buy for a while. The rest of the things would have to wait until they had a least a month of extra food, in addition to their usual one week normal usage supply.

Bad Times Coming – Chapter 1

“Thanks, Henry. I really appreciate you holding on to it for me,” Roger told Henry Bolton. Roger handed over the money and Henry handed Roger the Ruger 10/22.

“Good rifle. I used it some for fun. You should get you some of them long magazines for it. Ten’s good, but twenty’s better.”

“I’ll think about that,” Roger replied, not telling his friend that they had several of the high capacity magazines at home. They’d not sold them, because they were too difficult and expensive to get during the ban, and hadn’t come back down all that much since it ended. Roger had picked them up before the ban went into effect.

When he got home with the rifle, Sally said, “Good, sweetie. I feel a lot better having something in the house.”

“Me, too. We’ll get the other one back next week and the Stoecker the week after.”

Thirteen year old Amy came into the room. She saw her father holding the Ruger. “Can we go shoot it? We haven’t been shooting in such a long time.” Amy had been raised a shooter. She missed it when they had to sell both the Ruger 10/22’s.

“Sunday. After church,” replied Sally.

“You know,” Roger said to Sally as Amy ran out to play, “Henry has that old Savage 99A in .308 Winchester. He’s offering it at a good price. I’d like you to take a look at it and see if you think we should put it on the budget for after we get a few more things back. I’d really like to have a rifle more powerful than the .22’s, if you think we can afford it.”

“I know. We’ve talked about it before. Let’s wait until we’re back where we were before you lost work.” Sally leaned forward and kissed Roger lightly on the lips. He went to put away the Ruger, secure in the knowledge that Sally would judge things fairly. They talked everything over before they made decisions. And Sally had a very good eye for quality.

They couldn’t afford much, but when they got something, it was always of good quality. It was cheaper that way, overall, Roger knew. His father had been just the opposite. Always buying cheap. They’d never had much of anything when he was a child. It wasn’t going to be that way for his family.

He’d made foreman on this job, and the site boss had said it was likely to be a permanent position with benefits before the housing project was over. And the company had several more projects lined up.

Even with the good news, Roger and Sally waited until money was in hand before going out and spending any. But they finally had things back the way they were and were building up a tiny bit at a time.

“Hey, Henry,” Roger finally said one day, stopping at his friend’s small house. Roger had helped with the construction several years previously, when he was building his own. “You still wanting to get rid of that 99A .308?”

“I am. I’m getting old, Roger. Can’t do much shooting anymore. That’s a good rifle. I’d like to see go to a good home. You interested?”

“Yeah. If it’s not too much. I wanted Sally to take a look at it first. She’s got a good eye on bores and stuff I can’t see too well.”

“Sure thing. Go on out to the barn. I’ll bring it out.”

Henry met them at the old barn, that had been about to collapse for the last thirty years. It was Henry’s get away. Where he kept his tools, fishing gear, and reloading equipment. Though dilapidated looking outside, the old log barn boasted some very modern storage cabinetry inside.

He took the rifle from the case, and handed it to Roger. Roger opened the chamber to check to see if it was loaded. It wasn’t. He closed the action and raised the rifle to his shoulder for a moment. He handed it to his wife.

Sally also opened the action, not only to see if it was loaded, (it still wasn’t), but to check the condition of the chamber and barrel. She used a bore light to check from each end and then handed the rifle back to Roger. “Nice,” she said, tucking the small light back into her shoulder bag.

“How much?” Roger asked Henry.

Henry quoted the same price he’d mention previously and Roger agreed to it. Sally counted out the money.

It was a surprise to Roger and Sally when Henry said, “Might as well let some ammunition go with it. I’ve got more than I’ll ever need.” Henry opened a cabinet and pointed to two cardboard boxes. “That first one there is a two-hundred round battle pack of surplus ammunition and the one beside it is ten boxes of Remington hunting ammunition. Why don’t you take both of them.”

“Are you sure, Henry? We weren’t expecting to get ammunition free!”

“Like I said. I’ve got more than I’ll ever use. So take it and be happy.” Henry was grinning.

“We sure will!” Roger replied, handing the gun to Sally and stacking one box atop the other before he picked them up.

Roger and Sally walked back to the old service body truck. Henry walked along with them. When Roger had put the ammunition in one of the truck’s many tool bins, he shook hands with Henry. “Thanks again, Henry.”

“Sure thing, Roger. Glad to see that Savage get a good home. I know you’ll take good care of it.”

“That we will. That we will.”

“You know,” said Roger as he drove them toward home, “since we don’t have to buy any ammunition right away, we could go ahead and get the Williams peep sight put on. If that’s okay with you, Honey.”

“I think that’s a good idea. And we should have money left over for our next purchase.”

“Now that we’ve got both Rugers and the Stoeger Coach gun back, plus the Savage, that puts us in pretty good shape, except for a pistol or two. I’d like to get a couple, but there are more important things to attend to.”

“I agree, Roger,” Sally said, touching his shoulder. “Why don’t you drop the gun off Monday after work and check on handguns. We should at least find out what’s available in what price ranges we can afford.”

“Yes, dear.”

Roger was excited when he picked up the Savage with its new ghost ring peep sight almost two weeks later. “Sally! Good news!” he said, giving her a quick look at the rifle before he set it aside. “Juan, down at the gun shop, wants some work done. He’s willing to do some trading for it, plus enough cash to cover materials.”

“Will you have time to do it with the full time job?”

“I can do it on weekends and the holiday coming up. Two weekends and the three day holiday and I can have it finished.”

“What’s he willing to trade?”

“Well, he didn’t say, but I have my eye on an old beater of a Colt .45 ACP. It doesn’t look like much, but Juan says it’s in good shape internally. And there is an older model Ruger Mark II that would work for you and Amy.

“I’m hoping, if you think they’re in good enough shape, that I can trade for them, some accessories, and ammunition.”

“Let me check them out,” Sally said. “But remember, Amy has that party coming up and I really wanted to get her a new dress. I can make one, but with the other things going on I...”

“Oh, no. Amy comes first. I’ll make sure I get enough cash to get what Amy wants.”

“We still may be able to get one of them, Roger.”

“I know. But Amy has put up with the hard times as well or better than I have. I want her to have something nice.”

Sally grinned. “She’d probably rather have the Ruger than a dress, but she’s getting to the point where the dress might just come out about even. Especially store bought.”

Roger smiled in return. His little girl was growing up.

When it came down to it, Roger insisted Amy get two nice dresses, and for Sally to get at least one for herself. He still was able to trade for the Ruger Mark II for them to use. Amy was ecstatic. Sally compromised and got Amy one new dress and material and patterns to make three additional outfits. She also got additional material and made herself a couple of new things.

Things went well that fall. The garden produced enough to use on the table with enough left to can to get them through that winter and well into the following winter, even if the garden didn’t do as well the next summer.

They were able to buy a half beef and a whole porker. Some went into their freezer, but most was dried or canned. Much of the pork went into sausages for long-term storage. Some pickled and some smoked.

The chickens and Amy’s rabbits had also done well. The waste the rabbits produced easily supported a worm farm that kept the fish fed in a dozen old wooden whiskey casks Roger had treated to prevent rot and buried halfway down in the back yard near the rabbit hutches.

Much meat was canned and several dozen eggs were pickled. The two hives of honey bees that Roger kept had so far been untouched by whatever was causing the massive bee die-off in other locations. The family went into Christmas, after a heartfelt Thanksgiving celebration, in the best shape financially as they’d ever been in their life.

Their stocks of home canned and commercially canned and packaged food was enough to carry them for over a year, even without any production on their part. It was good that they did. The next year would not be so kind.

Bad Times Coming – Chapter 2

The new year started off just fine. Roger was still working, though at a reduced level, due to the weather. There was quite a bit of shop work to do, to prepare for the main building season that would start in early spring.

He was getting enough side work to make up for the lesser amount of income from the company. It seemed that many people were putting in shelves for storage. With the way prices were going up, people had begun to buy quantities now, before the prices went up again.

Fuel was the same way. When the trend started Roger and Sally talked it over and decided to get a gasoline tank and fill it over time buying an extra fifteen gallons every time they filled the tanks on the truck.

It took a while, but the money was there. For a while. The truck, a 1978 Dodge with the 318 CID engine, got good gas mileage, but it still burned plenty. They continued to buy fuel for it, and left alone the three hundred gallons stabilized with Pri-G.

Roger even got a raise that spring. But the money bought significantly less. Worried about the price of propane, which was going sky high, with rumors it was going to be hard to acquire, Sally suggested they get a wood heating stove and kitchen stove, as well. When Roger had built the house, he'd incorporated wood and coal compatible chimneys, just in case. They made a deal with Henry to thin out some of the trees on his acreage, for the wood.

Sally, with Roger's reluctant support, got a job as a clerk in the small local sewing shop to bring in extra cash. They reached a point where they could no longer increase their supplies. Amy started doing babysitting after school and on weekends as more mothers started working part time.

And still, the more they made, the less they could buy. The last sizeable purchases were rabbit feed and chicken feed. After that the money they earned went to necessities only.

It wasn't just one thing causing what was turning into another world wide depression. The ever quickening of global warming was greatly impacting, in a very negative way, food production around the world. So was the on-going problem with the pollenization due to the failing honeybee population.

The US pulled out of Iraq on schedule and the price of oil went up somewhat. When the Iranians invaded Iraq six months later, the prices went up even more. With Iran making a bid at reinstating the Persian Empire, Iran didn't stop there. A fundamentalist coup was successfully orchestrated in Saudi Arabia by the Iranians.

OPEC was now under the near absolute control of the Iranians. Under their influence the price of oil to the United States and Europe skyrocketed. That caused transportation costs to rise, and that affected food prices.

While he had no intention of buying any, Roger checked the price of gold and silver regularly. It was climbing steadily, a sign he took that times were bad. Roger, Sally, and Amy

discovered, to their total amazement, that they were suddenly better off than many of their neighbors.

They had learned to live within the constraints of their income. It was enough to get the basics they couldn't produce themselves. Besides hunting small game, migratory waterfowl, and deer, the gardens, rabbits, chickens, fish, and bees, were producing enough to provide for their immediate needs and putting by, with enough left over to sell. Actually, with inflation the way it was, Roger insisted they barter the food whenever they could, rather than take money that rapidly lost its value.

One of Roger's now regular customers was deputy sheriff Jim Kanaday. He had three kids to support on his salary, since his wife didn't work. The salary wasn't adjusted to inflation the way some companies were doing. He was struggling to make ends meet and was getting much of his food from Roger.

Roger picked up a nice Ruger SP101 .357 Magnum 5-shot double action revolver, with several speed loaders, two different holsters, four speed loader pouches, and ammunition from him.

Juan was still doing okay at the gun store, and hired Roger for some additional work on his house. Roger got the Colt 1911A1 he'd looked at before, with several magazines and accoutrements.

All of Sally's money from her job was going into an envelope until they had enough to purchase the material for Roger to build a greenhouse. By the time fall rolled around, Roger, with Amy's help, was able to get the greenhouse put together and the first crops planted in it.

Amy went through a growth spurt that winter and needed a whole new wardrobe. But between what Sally could make for her, and the very well stocked thrift shop, it turned out not to be much of a problem. It seemed that quite a few formally well-to-do people were getting rid of anything that would turn a dollar. That included some very nice clothing.

Roger and Sally each got deer that fall. Sally a doe, and Roger a doe and a buck. They traded the buck to the butcher in partial payment for a half a beef and a whole porker. Roger got the limit of ducks and geese when the season was open, as well as five turkeys. When they had everything processed, they had enough meat for two years, with quite a little bit set aside for barter.

They weren't out to gouge anyone, but they were able to get premium prices and advantageous trades that winter and spring for their produce, eggs, and canned meats. It was primarily due to the absence of other sources of food that they were able to do so well.

One of their acquisitions was a pure-bred Airedale pup. Amy had been after Roger and Sally to let her get a dog and she got her wish. She took the responsibility of caring for and training the pup seriously. Other than paper training the pup, the first thing Amy taught the pup was that the other animals on the place belonged there and weren't to be bothered.

Even as a pup, Trudy was a quiet dog, only raising any sort of ruckus when something was actually wrong. Amy was careful to break her in as a gun dog, getting her comfortable with the sight and sound of the Ruger 10/22, before turning her over to Roger for more training with the Savage 99A and the Stoeger 20 gauge coach gun.

With interest rates rising, the housing and light commercial building markets slowed to almost nothing. Roger was laid off from the construction firm and had to depend on the occasional private work he got. That left him with a lot of spare time, which was put to good use. He made a few improvements around the house and property, bartering for most of the materials he needed.

He also started a project he'd wanted to do for some time, but hadn't had the time or wherewithal to do. One of the projects he'd taken on after being laid off was the demolition of the old shoe factory on the edge of town. He didn't come out with much cash, using it to pay off the laborers he had to hire, and for the equipment he rented to do the job.

What he did get was much of the interior fittings and furnishings, and several dump truck loads of salvaged bricks and concrete blocks. After the job, anytime Roger wasn't doing something else he was cleaning up the bricks and the blocks, getting them ready to use in his own construction project.

Roger had never given much thought to nuclear attack, but with the news being what it was, it was on his mind from time to time now. So, instead of the large, second root cellar he had planned, Roger decided to build a fallout shelter that would double as a root cellar.

With Amy's help on the computer, Roger found a design he liked, that would take full advantage of the salvaged materials from the shoe factory. Though the on-line booklet called it a double wall shelter, Roger considered it triple wall. There were two parallel walls of masonry, with the space between filled with earth.

Roger had recovered much of the sheet foam board insulation from the factory, and insulated the inside of the outside masonry wall. He had more brick than he did block, so the outside wall was made of salvaged brick, and the inside wall of block.

Another change he made was the size of the shelter. Not only did he want more space for sheltering, the use of the structure as a root cellar would take up even more space. Roger had the materials to make the shelter three times longer and twice as wide. He also made it somewhat taller, too, to give it an even more spacious feeling.

That did call for a row of columns to support the roof, but Roger thought the extra space worth it. With some of the steel members of the factory forming a grid, Roger used a triple layer of salvaged corrugated roofing to support the eight inch concrete roof. The walls extended above the roof line, and the area was filled with earth to a depth of three feet, the walls also having three feet of fill.

After Amy mentioned it to him, using the same construction method, Roger added an annex to one side of the shelter, with a dirt floor, for their livestock. By making it a bit bigger than necessary, Roger didn't have to move the fish tanks. He built the shelter right over them and

moved the rabbit hutches and worm farm after construction was complete. The annex had a common wall with the big shelter, and shared the main entrance.

The animal shelter, like the big shelter, had a series of roof skylights, each with a stack of sandbags handy to cover them if need be. Roger made the skylights himself with salvaged materials from the shoe factory.

All the dirt he got for free, at the expense of paying for the fuel for one of his neighbors trucks and backhoes to load it. Besides paying for the fuel, Dwight asked for a month's worth of food. Roger thought it was a good deal and paid up promptly when the job was finished.

The concrete for the floor and ceiling, and the rebar and welded wire for both of those and the walls, he had to pay cash for, which really strained the budget, but with Sally's and Amy's approval, Roger paid for it out of their small savings stash.

It had taken all summer and fall, into the early days of a late winter, but the shelters were finished. Roger had taken enough time off from the project to go hunting with Sally and Amy. Amy got her first deer, using the Savage 99A, much to the delight of mother and father. She also managed to get two turkeys during the season, using the shotgun.

When duck and goose season rolled around, she had some luck taking ducks with the Stoeger 20 gauge, but missed her only opportunity at a goose. Despite that, between the three of them, they took enough game, produced enough garden, and raised enough livestock and fish to once again fill their own needs, except for basics, put even more by than usual, and have plenty left to sell and barter.

What money Sally was making now went to basic supplies, such as flour, sugar, rice, beans, cooking oils and such. Amy often tried to contribute her small income to the family budget, but Sally and Roger insisted she keep it all for her own wants and needs, as they weren't able to give her an allowance the way they had at one time. And she did her chores religiously, anyway.

Things seemed to level off in the economy that winter. Inflation slowed, interest rates came down slightly, and the price of gold and silver both fell. Roger was able to pick up a bit of work and they finally had a cash reserve again.

But, as usual, the other shoe dropped. Avian Flu crossed the barrier and became human to human transmittable. And the crossing seemed to have made it worse. The death rate of those infected was over eighty percent. It rapidly reached pandemic status.

All across the US, various political jurisdictions began ordering quarantine measures. The states and federal governments weren't far behind. What had been a slow and erratic food and fuel supply system became all but non-existent. Medical facilities were overwhelmed. Not enough bed space, and even fewer of the critical respirators.

Sally and Roger pulled Amy out of school as soon as the Avian Flu was reported in the state. Sally took to wearing a P-100 particulate mask when she worked at the fabric shop. She didn't have to do that very long. The fabric shop closed early on in the pandemic.

Roger got a bit of work setting up safe rooms in houses, after researching it on the internet, with Amy's help. He, like Sally had done, wore an P-100 mask when he was away from the property. In addition, he wore a pair of surgical gloves under his work gloves, and he kept hand sanitizer handy so he could clean his hands whenever he had to take the gloves off for some reason.

The chickens normally had free run of the property, but Amy penned them up close to the new shelter and kept them fed. She used some of her own money to buy additional chicken feed and rabbit feed.

They had a family meeting and it was decided that they would try to help people out, making food available, but wouldn't let their own stocks fall under a two year supply. Roger talked to Deputy Kanaday and asked him to help keep an eye on the place, officially.

"I can't be your private security service, Roger," Jim said. Both men wore face masks.

"I know," Roger quickly said. "I'm not asking that, really. I just wanted you to be aware of the situation. I'm worried about someone deciding they need what we have more than we do. We're trying to help out people by making food available. And we aren't gouging..."

"I know," Jim replied. "You've kept us going a couple of times when things were tight. Like I said, I can't be your private security, but I'll do what I can. Okay?"

Roger smiled and nodded. "Thanks Jim. I just wanted to be on your radar and not off of it, if things get worse."

There was a worried frown on Jim's face. "Unofficially," he said, his voice lowering somewhat, "I've been told things are going to get worse. You are probably right about your fears. You keep your head down and your guard up."

The two men shook hands and Jim walked back to his patrol car. Roger turned back to the small display of food for sale on the tailgate of the truck. There were a few fresh items and two cardboard cases of home canned food in pint jars. He never brought in more than that at one time, just in case.

The Savage was in the cab of the truck, and the 1911A1 was in a holster in the small of his back, under his light jacket. But he felt easier knowing Jim was on the job. He sold out quickly and was back home by lunch time.

He'd noticed a gray luxury car behind him a couple of times. He tensed slightly when it turned into the drive to the property behind him. Roger stopped the truck and got out, drawing the Colt unobtrusively, and holding it concealed behind his right hip.

The car pulled up and stopped close behind the pickup. The window went down and Roger approached slowly. "Can I help you?" Roger asked as he cautiously approached the open window.

“I hope so,” came a woman’s voice. “We want to buy some food.”

Roger stepped up to the car and took a quick survey of the two women in the car. He holstered the Colt, being obvious about it and noticed the two women blanch. “I won’t have any more until tomorrow,” he said. “If you want to give me a list of what you want, I’ll try to have it set aside for you tomorrow.” He noted that neither woman was wearing any type of mask.

The woman behind the steering wheel frowned. “We don’t want to be seen buying food off the street,” she said. “We both have to keep up appearances. Why can’t you sell us the food from your home? And take off that mask so we can talk properly.”

“I don’t like visitors,” Roger replied truthfully. He didn’t add that the woman’s attitude didn’t set well with him. Nor did he remove the mask. “I’ll be glad to sell you some food. Tomorrow. At the regular place.”

“Oh, very well!” the woman said, quite obviously annoyed. “Here!” she said, handing Roger a typed up grocery list.

Roger’s eyes widened. It was a long list, and the quantities were large for each item. He wavered a moment when he looked into the car and at the other woman. “It is for two families,” Roger thought to himself. But for only a moment.

“Christine,” the driver said, “Give him your list.”

Barely able to keep his mouth from dropping open, Roger took the second list. It was neither as long or with as large of quantities listed as the driver’s list.

“Some of these things I don’t have,” Roger said carefully, controlling his temper. “This list I can fill about a fourth,” holding out Christine’s list. “Yours,” he added, speaking to the driver, maybe a tenth.”

The woman fumed. “We need everything on that list! If you don’t have something... Fine. But of what you do have, I want the amounts listed. And none of that wild meat. Beef and chicken only.”

Roger shook his head. “I’ll set aside what I can let you have. You can pick it up anytime at the vacant lot where I park. Tomorrow.”

“You are a very rude, callous man!” The driver said. She put the car in reverse and sped backwards down the lane, weaving wildly until she could turn around.

Roger talked it over with Sally after supper, Amy listening in, but not contributing to the discussion.

“I don’t know, Sally,” Roger said sadly. “I want to help people. But she’s asking... demanding, a month or more of food. And only beef and chicken for meat.”

“Sweetie, there are just people like that. We aren’t obligated to help any one specific person, though I think the Good Lord wants us to help where we can. Help those that can... and will, help themselves. I think that’s why we’ve been so blessed with what we have.”

“If you don’t think we should give them anything, I’ll support that.” Sally put her hand atop Roger’s, which was lying on the table.

“Me, too, Dad,” Amy finally said.

“I think... Well, the second woman, Christine, I think just didn’t really know what she was asking. The driver, on the other hand, I think fully understands. I’ll fill the orders the best I can, without depriving other people, or ourselves.”

That settled, the three cleared the table, washed the dishes and put them away, and then sat down in front of the television, with a bag of popcorn, to watch a movie.

Roger was at the vacant lot at his regular time the next morning. The luxury car was noticeably absent all day long. Roger was about to call it a day, after waiting some time after selling the last of the food he’d brought, with the exception of the two women’s.

But the gray car drove up, traveling too fast in Roger’s opinion. It slid to a stop and both women stepped out. The driver was frowning. Christine just looked apprehensive.

“Did you bring it?” the driver asked.

Roger slid the two cases of jars and the two cardboard boxes of fresh foods to the tailgate from under the tarp that was covering them in the bed. “Pop your trunk. I’ll load them for you.”

“Where’s the rest of mine? And what about Christine?”

“A box of canned and a box of fresh, each. That’s all I can spare,” Roger replied evenly.

“Did you sell other people food today?”

“Yes, of course,” Roger replied.

“Why didn’t you save it for us?”

“Julia,” Christine said, putting her hand on the driver’s shoulder. “Let’s just take this and go. Other people have to eat, too.”

It was a totally ludicrous statement, but Julia had no clue. She meant it. “We deserve it more!”

Roger almost backed out of the deal then, but the chagrined look on Christine’s face stopped him.

“Twenty-five dollars apiece,” Roger said.

“I won’t pay that much!” Julia retorted.

Christine was counting out bills from her purse. Roger noted that it was mostly ones. Somebody had been scrimping. “No, just twenty-five,” Roger said when she’d counted out the twenty-five and kept counting.

“I’ll pay for Julia’s and settle up later with her,” Christine replied, with a careful look at Roger.

“As you wish,” Roger said, taking the money. “I’ll load the boxes.”

Julia clambered into the car and tripped the trunk release and then started the car. As soon as Roger closed the trunk lid after loading the four boxes, Julia drove away, spinning the tires as she did so. Roger shook his head and muttered, “People!”

When Roger got home his thoughts left the two women and went to Amy. She looked upset. Sally was talking to her.

“It’s nothing personal, I’m sure. Mrs. Stevenson has always liked your work babysitting for her.”

“What is the matter?” Roger asked.

Sally sighed and said, “Mrs. Stevenson doesn’t want Amy to watch her boys any more. Amy makes them wear masks when they go outside to play and the children don’t like it.”

“Oh, honey,” Roger said, taking his daughter’s hands in his. “You are only trying to do the right thing. Not everyone is worried about this Avian Flu. We are and must conduct ourselves in a safe manner.”

“I know,” Amy replied, sniffing back tears. “It’s just hard, sometimes, being different.”

Roger was at a loss as to how to respond, but Sally took Amy in her arms and held her. With a motion of her head, Sally indicated to Roger to leave them alone for a while. She’d take care of it.

Roger took care of his regular evening chores, and did Amy’s as well. It suddenly struck him that Amy had increased dramatically the number of rabbits and chickens they were keeping. And that was on top of what they were selling on a regular basis.

He checked the fish tanks. He’d been going about keeping the production cycle of the fish rather absently. When he really looked, the casks were pretty much maxed out. With the additional worm production from the rabbit droppings, Roger had gradually increased the number of fish he was harvesting, without really realizing it.

And Amy always did her chores without complaint and very seldom asked Roger or Sally for anything special.

Roger went back into the house. Sally told him Amy was lying down for a while. While helping Sally fix their supper, Roger talked to her about what Amy had been doing. Sally agreed with Roger's suggestion to give Amy a portion of the profits from their roadside food stand.

After supper Roger brought the subject up.

"You don't have to, Dad," she said when Roger told her what they were going to do and gave her a third of what he'd taken in that day. With Christine's and Julia's sale, on top of what he usually took in, it was a nice sum.

"I don't mind, really."

"We know you don't, Amy," Sally said as Amy tried to give Roger the money back. "And that is part of the reason we want to do this. You've used your own money, as little as it was, sometimes, to feed the chickens and rabbits. You deserve a portion of the return."

Amy quit struggling to give the money back to Roger. "I can spend this for whatever I want?"

"Of course," Sally replied.

"Within reason," Roger added. She was still only sixteen, after all.

Sally gave Roger a quick look and turned back to Amy. "We trust your judgment, Amy. Both of us."

"Yes, we do," Roger hastily agreed.

That settled, they sat back and watched a broadcast movie on the satellite TV system. Sally and Roger stayed up and watched the news after Amy told them something she'd heard on the radio that day.

"This is not good," Roger said.

"I know," agreed Sally. "With the pandemic still going, we sure don't need this."

What Amy had heard was a discussion about China and a future war. Perhaps in the not so distant future.

They switched between CNN, CNN Headline News, MSNBC, and Fox. The stories were much the same. Mostly speculation, slanted one way or another. The only thing of any consistency was the mood that war was coming. Not if. This was different from many of the times in the past when something happened.

The two stayed up and discussed the situation until well into the night. They ended the evening in agreement. There were bad times coming and they were doing about everything they could to be ready and stay ready for whatever the future might bring them.

Bad Times Coming – Chapter 3

It wasn't nuclear war that put the family in their new shelter. It was the worst outbreak of tornadoes in the area since records began to be kept. The severe weather began late one afternoon in May. Large gatherings were still against the rules due to the ongoing Avian Flu pandemic so Amy was home when the weather started getting bad.

She began to monitor the Oregon Scientific NWS EAS SAME receiver. She carried it with her when she went out to get the chickens from their large tractor to the chicken coop portion of the animal shelter. Trudy stayed right with Amy, and even helped a bit with the task.

With the animals taken care of, Amy turned to the house and began a safety shut down. She turned off the supply valve at the propane tank, and then made sure there was no fire in the wood stove in the kitchen. They weren't using it at the moment, but it was on the checklist the family had come up with for potential emergencies.

She turned off the main breaker in the electrical panel, after making sure the reserve water cistern was full and there were plenty of batteries charged and ready to go, including the battery in her cell phone. She went out to the pump house and unplugged both the deep well pump that filled the cistern, and the jet pump that pressurized the house water to diminish the chance of either of them getting struck by lightning.

Amy cranked up all three dynamo flashlights and the combination windup radio/flashlight with cell phone charger. She went back outside and secured all the outdoor furniture and took in the still slightly damp laundry hanging on the clothesline.

After reviewing the checklist in her mind, and deciding she'd done what she could, Amy got out her binoculars from her hunting gear and climbed up on top of the shelter to take a look around.

The heavy clouds were racing toward the farm from the southwest. She could see some rotation in a short wall cloud and began to worry about her parents. Amy knew they would take shelter in the best location wherever they were, and both had BOB's with supplies to last them three days. But it didn't stop the small tickle of worry she was feeling.

She need not have worried. Roger drove up, with Sally, while the wall cloud was still several miles away. Amy climbed down from atop the shelter. When she stopped him from going through the process of shutting down the place for an emergency, Roger went over the list with her.

"Good girl!" Roger said. "You remembered everything. Let's help your mother take into the shelter the things in the back of the truck.

"Wow!" Amy said, seeing the stack of boxes of canning jars in the back of the truck. There were two large All American Canners in the truck, as well as several boxes of other canning paraphernalia. That included several cases of jar lids, both regular and wide mouth.

The rain started as Roger got into the truck to move it after they'd unloaded it. He pulled it up alongside the shelter to give it some protection from the wind. It was pouring rain and hail when he entered the shelter a few seconds later to join Sally, Amy, and Trudy.

Amy was connecting the long wire antenna lead to the weather radio. As soon as she did, the SAME alarm sounded and a tornado warning was issued. Radar had picked up the signal of a twister.

Ever practical, Sally went about putting away the boxes they'd carried in, and cleaning the items that needed it while Roger and Amy listened to the radio. Inside the thick walls and baffled entrance of the shelter they couldn't even tell anything out of the ordinary was going on outside.

The skylights darkened and then lightened, but the warning was still active. There were tornadoes all over the area. Roger and his family settled in to spend the rest of the day and the night in the shelter. It would be a good test of how they'd equipped and supplied it.

Roger turned on the electrical system, which consisted of four six-volt forklift batteries that supplied twelve-volts for LED lights in the shelter, and a small inverter for 110-volts when needed.

The batteries were kept charged by a charger on the power grid when it was on. Roger had also salvaged a couple of small PV panels that would recharge the batteries, but only very slowly. The batteries would last several days from a full charge, but it took three weeks of good sun to recharge them fully with the PV panels. The batteries could also be charged by a 12-volt charging system built on an old lawnmower, using a 12-volt automotive alternator. In no way ideal, Roger had set up the best system he could.

Using a Colman two burner stove converted to propane, and equipped with a refillable cylinder, Sally and Amy set about making supper. It was a simple meal, little different from their normal fare. After supper and the clean up, the family each found a book they'd been meaning to read, sat down, and began to do so.

After reading for a while, the three made up the bunks Roger had built and went to bed. It was only the next morning, when they went outside to check around, did they realize the extent of the damage the storms had wrought locally.

It was with teary eyes they surveyed the house. They'd lost a couple of the metal roofing panels, but the roof decking was still intact. The front porch had been demolished and lay in pieces around the house. Three windows were broken, all on the front side of the house. The awning over the patio was long gone. No sign at all remained of it.

Their nearest neighbor to the southwest was a mile away, but much of his house was spread out across the Tanquirdy property. After surveying the damage of their own place, all three got into the pickup and went to check on their neighbors. They were all wearing the ever present P-100 masks.

The Meyers' place, as the family had suspected, was a shambles. The house was down, half of it, if not more, missing. The three car freestanding garage was missing its roof. The roof lay upside down across the fence that surrounded the property. As soon as they got out of the truck they heard cries for help. All three immediately began to move rubble to get to those calling out.

"We're here!" Roger called. "Is anyone hurt?" He looked at Amy. "911!"

After making the call and giving an account of the situation, Amy began helping her mother and father clear a path through the wreckage. The Meyers' house had a basement and much of the debris that hadn't been carried away was in the basement, trapping the family inside. Some of the debris shifted and screams came from the victims in the basement.

It was a few minutes before Roger could get a coherent answer to the question he kept asking, that being, "Is anyone injured?"

"I think something is wrong with my wife!" came the reply. Roger intended to get any injured out first. They went back to work more gingerly, carefully testing before removing a piece of lumber that might be supporting other parts of the debris.

They still had not cleared enough to get to anyone when a fire truck rolled up, siren blaring and lights flashing. The six firefighters ushered Roger, Sally, and Amy back, and took the recovery on themselves.

"Amy," Roger said, handing her the keys to the truck, "Go get blankets and water out of the emergency supplies and bring them back."

Amy nodded and strode toward the pickup purposefully.

With the equipment they had it was only a few minutes before the firefighters were in a position to start extracting the members of the Meyers' family from the basement. Amy drove up just as Henry, the youngest of the Meyers' children was carried out of the debris. An ambulance was right behind her. Henry clung to Amy after she wrapped him in a blanket, while the paramedic was giving him a once over. He ignored the bottle of water Amy held out to him. Amy had watched the children several times, and they were comfortable with her.

Billy, twelve, was brought out next, and put down beside his brother. Amy extricated herself from Henry and got Billy a blanket and a bottle of water. Sally came over to help when Marissa was helped out of the debris. The paramedics were checking each one, but none were taken to the ambulance for the minor injuries they'd received.

Clarence was next, as he'd landed on top of Michelle, his wife, when the house began to collapse. Clear of the debris, he shook off the firefighters' help and ran over to his children, checking on each one in turn. And then he ran back to the house to help with Michelle. She was being brought out on a back board and Clarence was ushered back out of the way as the firefighters carried her to the ambulance.

Amy gave Clarence a bottle of water and he drank it absently as he hovered around the ambulance, asking questions about his wife, leaving the care of the children in Sally's and Amy's capable hands.

Roger broke through Clarence's preoccupation with his wife and asked, "What do you want us to do with the children? We can take them home with us, or drop them off anywhere you want."

"What?" Clarence asked, and then turned his attention to Roger. "Oh. The children! Would you?"

Patiently Roger asked again, "What do you want us to do? Take them home with us, or somewhere else?"

"I guess there is a shelter somewhere," Clarence finally said. "Isn't there usually a shelter after something like this?"

One of the paramedics heard the discussion and said, "They're using the high school in town as a shelter for those whose homes were destroyed and can't make other arrangements."

"See. Would you take them there? Get them registered while I take care of my wife?"

Reluctantly Roger nodded. If it had been Amy in this situation he would have wanted her to be with someone he could trust, not a shelter. But it was Clarence's choice. He'd take the kids in to the shelter. Or let Sally take them. She'd be better at it than he. He went over to talk to her.

"I'll go, too," Amy said, when she heard the plan. "I can ride in the back with Marissa."

"Okay," Roger said. "If you're sure."

Amy nodded and then Sally asked, "You want me to run you home first?"

"No. I'll walk back. You guys should get going. There goes the ambulance now."

The firefighters were packing up their gear to leave, so Roger headed down the road toward his place. Two sheriff's cars flew past going in the opposite direction, sirens and lights flashing. Roger turned around and saw the fire truck lights and siren come on as it turned around to follow the police cars.

"Sure would be nice to have a scanner," Roger said aloud as he walked home. He was working on clearing the debris from around the house when Sally and Amy got back. It was obvious both were upset about something.

"What's wrong?" he asked as he followed them into the house.

"Oh, it's just awful at the shelter," Amy said.

“I know people are trying to help, and the victims are all upset, but Amy is right. It was a madhouse. People are already demanding trailers to stay in and MRE’s to eat, along with more water. It’s almost like it was in New Orleans, but on a smaller scale.”

“I was afraid of that. Now you know why I do everything I can to avoid being put in that position. We’re lucky our house wasn’t damaged any more than it is, but we would still have the shelter to live in if things had turned out worse.”

“And I love you for that,” Sally said, stepping up to Roger to give him a hug. “Among many other things.”

“Me, too, Dad. Only a couple of people besides Mom and me were wearing any type of mask. If there is anyone in that shelter with the Avian Flu, it will be all over town.”

“She’s right,” Sally said. “I hated to do it, but we got the kids checked in and made sure someone would keep an eye on them until Clarence could get there, but we left as soon as we could. I remember the days when we’d be there helping. I feel bad not, but...”

Roger nodded. “I know. But the risks are just too high.”

“There is some good news in all this, I suppose,” Sally said. “For us, anyway, since we didn’t suffer that much. There is going to be some construction going on here pretty soon. We heard on the radio coming back that the whole area of the tornado outbreak is being declared a disaster area. That opens up the FEMA funds to help.

“I just hope people that suffered loss were insured. I had Amy call our agent and he’s coming out this afternoon to take a look at the house. We shouldn’t do too much to it until he gets a look at it. Thank the Lord we kept our insurance up.”

It had been one of the things they had struggled with. Keeping effective insurance on the property. They’d had to put other things off to make the payments occasionally, but both Sally and Roger had agreed it was important. When Sally had taken the last quarterly payment in, Ben Hawkins had mentioned he’d lost quite a few customers as things got bad. And other agents had told him they were as well.

As soon as Ben had taken pictures of the damage and left, assuring Roger and Sally that they would have a check in a few days after their claims adjuster went over the pictures and Ben’s report.

Roger didn’t wait for the check. After he had cleaned up the property with Sally’s and Amy’s help, he began the repairs himself, using what money they had on hand to buy the materials they needed.

He had the worst of the damage repaired, plus the roof panels replaced when he got a call from his old boss. The company needed him back as a foreman to get a building crew up and running. People were looking for work, including many of his old crew. He was able to get enough people together to get started the next week.

Everyone seemed to be in a rush to rebuild, despite the economy. It was the lure of the FEMA and insurance money, Roger thought. Get it while the getting was good. Roger was putting in twelve hour days, six days a week, working on the house on Sunday.

It was the best money Roger had ever made, even with inflation as high as it was. But it didn't last as long as it might have. The economy just wasn't in good enough shape to support the building. Roger's company had six houses started, after having completing several, when the bottom fell out. Those six houses would not be finished any time soon, if ever.

Part of the reason the economy tanked locally was the fact that Amy had been right about the Avian Flu in the temporary shelters. Over sixty percent of those that had lost their homes and gone into the shelters had died from the flu, often wiping out whole families.

Roger, Sally and Amy stayed close to home, only going out for sheer necessities. That included picking up and turning in Amy's school work. With the partial quarantine still in effect, the high school came up with a system to allow all the students that were willing to do a modified form of home schooling, under the school district's auspices.

Amy was careful to sanitize the materials she got from school, and wore surgical gloves to boot while she was using them. Amy had it a little easier than some. The internet was still up and some of the classes were being conducted through it. She should be able to graduate the next spring with enough credits to get her into college. Her grades were certainly adequate to get in.

With fewer people for the infrastructure to support, the available supplies of food and fuel seemed to stretch further, though they certainly had not come down any in price. Roger continued to sell their surplus food, but there was less competition for it, which actually made it easier. Instead of turning away a dozen people at the end of the day when he'd sold out, he occasionally took a few jars of food back at night, though the fresh foods still continued to sell out consistently.

He still bartered and did trades for some of the food, but he was getting some cash. Just enough to pay the bills that they had. They seldom had little left after everything was paid shortly after the first of the month.

Hanging onto the insurance money tightly got them through a couple of rough spots, with quite a bit left in reserve. Roger and Sally had talked it over and decided to keep as much as they could so they could help Amy get set in college come the next fall.

Sally had found another job, as checker at one of the grocery stores in town. The pay would have been nice three years previously. Now the salary she was drawing was a pittance for the hassles she had to put up with.

Not the least of those hassles were the ones about her wearing a mask and surgical gloves all the time. It made many of the customers uncomfortable as well as a few of the store management. But the store needed her and she was allowed to continue wearing the protection she provided herself.

But it was income and the family needed all they could get. Amy still did a few babysitting jobs, but had a regular part time job at the feed store. She made a small wage, but it was made up for by the discount she got on products since she was an employee. Along with the two years worth of people products, Amy managed to get the stock of rabbit feed, chicken feed, and dog food to the same level, at the level they were now feeding the animals.

The family spent quite a bit of time in the shelter that spring and summer. Other places were in the midst of significant drought. There in central Missouri they were getting hammered with storm after storm.

The first tornado turned out to be the closest to the Tanquirdy place, but they took shelter nine more times when warnings were issued. They learned much during those short stays and all three made a few changes to their area of responsibility in the shelter.

Roger usually picked up a little work doing cleanup after each event, but many people were leaving the area rather than rebuild. Wherever possible, Roger salvaged what useable materials he could during the clean up process, careful to never take personal belongings. He also was able to add significantly to their firewood stockpile, keeping all the wood from the trees he removed that came down during the storms. He even made a few bucks doing it.

He was a builder at heart. Doing a garden and raising fish were necessary chores to help sustain the family. Sally pretty much took care of the greenhouse chores, and Amy was responsible for the rabbits and chickens. But Roger needed work. With eighty million dead from the Avian Flu in the United States alone, there were some critical jobs begging for employees. One of those was farmhand.

After discussing it with Sally, Roger decided to take one of the jobs with a local farmer with a large operation that was desperate for help. It meant an hour commuting each way, every day except Sundays. But the pay was good for the times.

With thoughts of Amy needing a vehicle when she went off to University of Missouri – Columbia, Roger watched the want ads for used vehicles. When a Volkswagon Bug came on the market, he and Amy went to look at it. It was old, but had been restored to original condition with a new engine and transaxle, and fiberglass body parts.

Despite being so well restored, the Bug came relatively cheap. Many items that had once had a premium for collectibility were now priced solely for their inherent usability.

He would use it until Amy went away the next fall, and then look for a fixer-upper to use on his commute. That way he would be able to be sure the Bug was in as good of shape as it appeared, and give him time to look for something more suited to his use.

The man wouldn't take a check, so Roger put down a payment with the cash he had in his pocket. He would get the cash and pay the man off and pick up the Bug the following weekend, after he got paid.

They had to pull some of their reserve, in addition to Roger's paycheck, to pay for the car, but all three were happy. All four if you included the seller. When they got it home, Roger

showed Amy how to service it and they sat down together to come up with a set of maintenance items and spare parts they would keep in the Bug. It was all done, including a BOB for the Bug, that weekend. Roger took it to work the following Monday, and back, without a hitch. It would be a good car for Amy at the University.

Bad Times Coming – Chapter 4

With Roger getting a steady income again, things were looking better for the Tanquirdys. But that didn't last long. It had been out of the news for over a year, and the Yellowstone Caldera seemed to be dozing once again, with only the 'normal' level of activity. But it was only an illusion. On Thanksgiving Day the Caldera came alive, with minor eruptions here and there over the entire area of the Caldera. Two days later it blew its top.

Roger was at home for the holiday weekend and was thankful he was. He monitored the news after the first small eruptions were announced. He was watching a Fox News report, the news readers speculating on the chances of a major eruption when it happened. The background to the debate was a live camera shot from Cody, Wyoming.

The five small columns of smoke from the small eruptions suddenly disappeared as the entire area seemed to just lift up, higher and higher. The television screen switched to the background shot. There were streaks of lightning in the growing darkness. The entire upper half of the screen was now black and seemed to be growing rapidly. A few seconds later the screen was dark, except for the lightning flashes. And then the picture went static filled white, followed by black. A second later the news readers were on screen again.

"Sally! Amy!" Roger called out. Both came running. Sally from the kitchen and Amy from her room. "Look at this!" he said as the two sat down beside him on the sofa.

"Oh, My Lord!" Sally barely breathed out.

"This is bad," Amy said, "Very bad! Have they said how fast the ash cloud is traveling?"

Roger shook his head. "It just happened. Just now. Wait. They're saying something now."

There was another background shot behind the news readers. It was obviously from a great distance, but the movement of the huge black cloud was discernable.

"Yes," said one of the newsmen, holding his earpiece in tightly, his eyes focused off the camera. "Yes! We are getting more information. The ash cloud is spreading rapidly. Everyone should take cover immediately within one hundred miles North, West, and South of Yellowstone! East of Yellowstone... How far did he say? But... Yes, down wind of Yellowstone, the ash will travel for hundreds of miles over the next several hours. Everyone east of..."

The screen went white. Roger waited for a long minute, expecting the signal to resume. When it didn't, Roger changed the channel. CNN was reporting in the same, nearly hysterical manner, their disbelief evident. Suddenly the screen went white again.

Roger tried all the news channels, and then the other channels. Nothing was on the air. Amy hastily turned on the radio. It took her a while to find a station broadcasting. There was a note of panic in the man's voice.

“We have... We have information that the falling ash in the immediate area of Yellowstone has shorted out many of the substations in the area and that has cascaded across the country. Only those areas with locally produced power outside the ash fall area have power. We are running on our backup generator. As soon as...”

The signal went off the air. Amy tried several more, but all she was getting was static. She looked around at her Roger. Then they lost power. “Dad...?”

“We’ll be all right. Didn’t you say that there is a limit to the ash, when you looked it up for me on the internet?”

“We could still get some,” Amy replied, visibly relaxing. “It could be hours, maybe even a day, before we get any here. How much... It just depends on how big the eruption turns out to be. Might just be a dusting. Could be feet, I guess, but from the research I did, this far east it was only inches.”

“That will be bad enough,” Roger said. “There’ll be a volcanic winter, too, won’t there?”

Amy nodded. “Probably.”

“What should we do to get ready?” Sally asked. “We don’t really have a plan for this.”

Roger thought for a moment and then said. “I think we’ll be better off in the shelter. If we stay in the house the ash is bound to get in. I think we should seal up the house the best we can and take to the shelter. It has the gravel pre-filter, and then the regular furnace filters. And we have plenty of those. And the main entrance is air-locked. We should be able to keep most of the ash out, if we are careful.”

Roger stood up and continued. “Sally, you move everything you can think of that we might need in the shelter for... a month, anyway. Amy and I will start sealing the house up.”

The three jumped into action. The house was very tight. Roger had built it that way. It was so tight that it required a heat and humidity air exchanger to keep fresh air circulating. It had filters, but Roger made a point to turn it off so it wouldn’t pull any of the ash in.

He capped the chimneys so no ash could enter that way while Amy did the same thing with the two roof peak attic ventilation turbines. Roger gave Amy money, and sent her in to town to get all the furnace filters she could find that they used, along with more air and oil filters for the Bug and the work truck, and all the face masks she could find, despite the fact that they had several boxes.

With some of the salvaged lumber and other materials, Roger quickly put together an airlock for the back door of the house. Undoubtedly they would need to get into the house before the ash was gone and he wanted as little of it entering the house as was humanly possible.

He built it on the ground behind the house. When Amy returned Roger noticed her annoyed look, but waited to ask her what was wrong. She and Sally helped Roger carry the airlock up onto the porch and held it in place while Roger fastened it into place.

When it was in place and secured, Roger looked over at Amy and asked, “You look like something might have happened when you went to town. Were you able to get the filters?”

Amy nodded. “But it was a madhouse. I was the only one getting filters, until people saw me with them, and then there was a panic rush as a bunch of people realized why I was getting them and tried to get their own. I almost had to fight to keep the ones in my cart. People were acting crazy. When I went by the grocery store there were at least three fistfights going on in the parking lot, apparently over shopping bags of food and supplies. I’m glad I didn’t need to try to get food.”

“Honey,” Roger said, “I’m sorry I sent you into that mess. We have some spare filters, you know, but I didn’t stock up for something like this.”

“It’s okay, Dad. I managed okay. But it’s going to be bad, isn’t it? Like some of the stories in the forums?”

“I’m afraid it is. I wish I could have done more. If only...”

“Don’t think that way, Roger,” Sally quickly interrupted him. “You’ve done everything you could to prepare us for emergencies. We might not have much monetary wealth, but we have what we need to take care of ourselves for a long time, thanks to you.”

“That’s right,” Amy said, agreeing with her mother.

“Well, either way, we’ve done all we can do for the moment. I suggest we enjoy the outdoors for as long as we can. It could be a long time before being outside is any kind of fun. Oh. Wait. The bee hives. We need to move them into the animal shelter and set out sugar water for them.”

That last task done, the three of them entered the shelter and set up for a long stay.

It wasn’t the end of the world, but it was a big balloon that went up. Ash rained down for days, accumulating totals of many feet in the states close to Yellowstone, and in a few feet in places further away. The Tanquirdys had several inches accumulation before the major ash fall stopped. Lighter particles would continue to drift down for months.

Without the luxury of special clothing and fancy respirators, Roger made do with his oldest pair of coveralls with a hood, long cuff gloves, a dust mask, and good goggles when he went out to clear the ash off the roofs of the house, shelter, and utility/storage building. He would remove the overalls and safety gear in the airlock of the shelter entrance and hang them up for the next trip out.

Even so the fine ash filtered through the cloth and he would walk gingerly to the bathroom to shower clean. Fortunately they had plenty of water. Roger would go out every few days and use the hand pump on the well to add water to the cistern so they could draw from it with another hand pump in the shelter.

Roger had to clear the roof of the shelter more than the other buildings because the skylights were mounted low, to make it easy to cover them with sand bags for radiation protection. They didn't need the protection from radiation, but did want the daylight, such as it was, the skylights provided. Roger kept them as clean as he could, taking care not to let the abrasive ash scratch the glass.

He began to clear pathways and the driveways when the ash fall lessened, working only a couple of hours at a time. Christmas came and went, and then New Years Day.

To conserve energy, Roger only turned on the old 12-volt CB radio every four hours, on the hour. It was connected to a simple 108 inch stainless steel whip antenna mounted on one corner of the shelter building. The welded wire, plus the rebar in the roof of the shelter acted as a ground plane.

They heard nothing on the CB for over a month. On the other hand, the old Hallicrafters SX-42 shortwave receiver, using the long wire antenna, started picking up signals, besides static, thirty-six hours after the eruption. Roger had picked up most of the radio gear he had at an estate sale several years earlier when he'd had an idea he would get an Amateur Radio license. It was one of the very few tasks he'd set for himself that he had not followed through.

He wasn't getting much in the US on the shortwave, but Europe was buzzing with traffic. Most of it was not in English, but there was enough for Roger to learn what was going on outside the United States.

It wasn't good. The US was hardest hit, especially the midsection of the country, but the ash was evident all around the northern hemisphere. Trace amounts mostly. But the ash haze was everywhere.

He listened to some foreign Amateur Radio traffic. But he did start to hear some Amateurs on both coasts of the US after a couple of days. The west coast was basically untouched, except for the haze caused by the fine ash high in the atmosphere. The east coast was also affected by the haze, and some very light ash fall. But large areas of both coasts were without power, which the lack of caused many other utilities and services to go down.

The reports coming out of the heavily affected area, carried by evacuees with enough foresight and preparations to get out of the area after the ash fall started, were all bad. Massive destruction around Yellowstone. Millions of deaths. Many of those that managed to get out of the area, some even wearing masks, died later from inhaled fine ash particles.

The only reason Roger could think of he wasn't hearing locals on the CB was that there weren't that many people left in the area. Which he found hard to believe. But finally he heard someone. The signal was fairly strong, so Roger knew the transmitter was close by. He answered the call and identified himself using the handle he'd picked in the early days of his CB use.

"This is M O Triple Seven. M O 7 7 7. Do you copy, Harbinger?"

"Copy, Triple Seven. I copy! Man it is good to hear someone. Are you here in town?"

“Negative, Harbinger. I’m outside of town a few miles. How about you?”

“In town. Hey! Triple Seven! I know you! You used to be on some. In construction, aren’t you?”

“That’s affirmative, Harbinger. I’m afraid I don’t recognize your handle.”

“I just started using Harbinger after the big blow up. I was Charlie Tuna, before.”

“Oh, Charlie. Yeah. I remember. How are you making out, there in town?”

“It’s rough, man. Nothing working. City is trying to clear some of the ash, but they ran out of diesel the first week. Hasn’t been any deliveries for a month. Of anything. People are starving. Water is the worst, though. They’re rationing it at the city well. A gallon a person. Babies get more. How are you doing? Didn’t you sell some food a while ago, because of the shortages then?”

There was a hopeful tone in Charlie’s voice. Sally and Amy were sitting near him now, listening. Roger couldn’t bring himself to lie. Not directly. “Yeah. I did. Had to quit. Got down to just what me and the family could use.”

“Come on now!” another voice made itself heard. “This is Chief of Police Smithers. You’re going to have to share what you have with the rest of us. We’re getting desperate and not hearing anything from FEMA.”

Roger didn’t respond.

“Triple Seven. Triple Seven! Are you listening? Come back, now! I’m ordering you to respond! This is the Chief of Police!”

Charlie was speaking as soon as the Chief stopped. “Come on, Triple Seven! You’re a good guy! You have to share!”

“I’m not telling you again, Triple Seven! Come back, now. If you don’t reply I’ll have to come out there and you won’t like it if I do!” The man was verging on hysteria.

Roger, Sally, and Amy exchanged looks. This was not good. Roger hesitated, but when it looked like he was going to key the microphone again Sally said, “Don’t Roger. We need to think about this. We can’t feed the whole town. Maybe the babies... But we just don’t have enough to go around, much less keep anyone going for any length of time.”

“I know. But what about the babies? I’m the same way. I’d be willing to give some to those with babies.”

“What about older children?” Amy asked. “I agree about the babies, but parents are going to want food for all of their children, even if not themselves.” Amy rubbed Trudy between the ears. She was sitting beside Amy’s chair. She seemed to pick up on the tension in the air.

Roger sighed. "I know. I don't know what to do. I think I made a mistake getting on the air."

The three sat silently, the CB chatter continuing, with several more people on the air now. All were begging for food.

"It would have happened eventually," Sally said. We would have gone out and contacted the city in some way, at some point, anyway. We just have to deal with it now, rather than later."

Roger looked at Sally. "I may have to shoot someone over this. You, too. Even Amy." He looked over at his seventeen year old daughter. She looked at him grimly. So did Sally.

"We'll do what we have to do," Sally finally said.

"We need to come up with a plan," Roger said. "Very soon," he added when the Chief made another threat.

"One thing. We don't want to communicate with them much. What they don't know won't hurt us. We can't afford to give any leads as to what we are going to do, or when. The lack of communication and not knowing will keep them off stride."

The three talked for hours, Amy included in the discussion as an adult. Every so often one of them would go up on the roof of the shelter and take a look down the road. Roger was sure nothing would happen that day, but he wasn't going to take any chances.

They finally came up with a plan, and Sally and Amy went to bed. Roger stood watch. They weren't going to be able to maintain effective watches for more than a few days, and the plans they'd made took that into account. Roger started the battery charging generator he had made. He wanted the batteries charged up to their maximum.

The next morning they took turns eating breakfast, one always on guard for anyone approaching. Roger took a short nap and then he and Amy began setting up some additional defenses. They concentrated on the two open sides of the property. All four sides of the yard were fenced, with lightweight chain link, six-feet high.

There was a back gate that opened to a trail into their patch of the woods. The rest of the north side and all of the west side had blackberry bushes growing wild, intertwined with the fences. The south side had a driveway gate and a man-gate for the driveway. The east side had only the fence, with fairly open woods beginning some distance from it. That section of the woods Roger had been thinning out for firewood.

Roger had Sally marking down the ranges to various points of the property, from the top of the shelter. He pointed out carefully where he planned to be, when trouble started. It was fortunate they did what they could while they could. Sally called down that a small string of vehicles was coming down the road and would be at the driveway in a few minutes.

Amy scrambled up to the top of the shelter, carrying her Ruger 10/22 and the Ruger Mark II pistol with lots of ammunition.

Sally had her Stoeger double barrel 20 gauge coach gun and the Ruger SP101, both with plenty of ammunition. She quickly got down and crawled into the crawlspace under the house, going to the far side to cover any approach from that side.

Roger, with the 99A and 1911A1, a dozen magazines for the .45, and two crossed bandoleers, Pancho Villa style, of .308, ran out through the man-gate of the front fence and took up his hiding spot in the open woods.

The plan was simple. No negotiations. No giving in. If the approaching group didn't turn around and leave when they got no response from the house, Roger would open fire, and Amy and Sally would follow suit.

It was several tense minutes before the group of six vehicles pulled up and stopped at the driveway gate. One of the vehicles was the town's only police car. The Chief got out of it, with a bull horn in his hand.

With no hesitation he lifted the bull horn to his lips and began speaking. "This is the Chief of Police. I am ordering you to surrender yourselves and your goods immediately or they will be taken by force and you and your family will be shown no mercy."

Two or three of the men standing around behind the Chief stirred uneasily at the Chief's threat.

"I'll count to ten and then we're coming in."

The dozen men all gripped their weapons tightly, waiting. They were armed mostly with hunting guns, shotguns, and the occasional pistol.

"One.

"Two.

"Three.

"Four."

There was a hesitation and then the Chief set the bullhorn on the hood of his car. "Screw it. Let's go. Light 'em up." The Chief held out a canning jar filled with amber liquid, a rag stuffed in the top. One of the other men lit it with a lighter, and then the other three that men held.

Roger waited until the Chief was inside the fence, his service automatic in one hand, the jar in another. Then he fired the Savage. Roger was a crack shot, having hunted since he was a boy. He didn't miss. The Chief went down, dead, the jar of gasoline catching fire and exploding next to him.

Sally held her position. She was sure there had been seven vehicles.

Amy began to fire. Quickly, but sighting before each shot, just like Roger had taught her. Roger and Amy's shots caught the men off guard. One man had already followed the Chief through the gate and turned to try to run, but the gate had swung shut, the automatic latch working. He went down. Amy wasn't sure if it was the three rounds of .22 that she'd fired, or one of her father's rounds that had killed the man, and didn't care. She had a pretty good idea what would happen to her if the men won the battle.

She changed aim and kept firing, changing extended magazines as needed. The men with Molotov cocktails threw them, but they were much too far away to be useful. Even when the men took cover behind the vehicles, she fired at every motion they took in trying to fire back. It was some time before the men realized some of the shots were coming from their side. It just wasn't expected.

Roger had killed three more before the rest discovered it, and shifted their position. One of the men broke for the other woods and Amy fired half a dozen times. The man finally fell, well short of the protection of the woods.

Their movement to get away from Roger's aim had put a couple more of the men into Amy's line of sight. "No mercy", he said," Amy said softly and poured round after round into the two men until both slumped over.

Finally, two of the men managed to get into a vehicle. Roger was reloading and Amy's .22 just wasn't effective against the glass in the windshield. She changed aim and began peppering the driver side door and window, until her father began firing again. Three shots from the Savage and the man in the passenger seat was dead.

The driver's window had finally shattered, and Amy had an easy shot when the car backed into one of the others and stopped. A .22 in the ear is as effective as a .308 to the heart, just like her dad had told her.

Sally was about ready to crawl out from under the house to help in the front when her peripheral vision picked up movement in the woods on her side of the house. She waited until one man came into view and approached the fence. He was holding a rifle in one hand. But she held her shot. The man was looking over his shoulder, talking to someone else.

A second man came out. He was holding a Molotov cocktail, with the fuse already lit. A little too hastily, Sally sighted on the man and fired the twenty-gauge. The first load of #4 buckshot missed. By the time she fired again, dead on, the man had thrown the Molotov cocktail. He was much closer to the house than the other men with the flame devices, and had a very good arm. The jar sailed up onto the roof, broke, and began to dribble burning gasoline down the roof.

Calm now, Sally reloaded and shot the other man as he turned and tried to run back into the forest. He was still moving, trying to crawl away, when Sally gave him the other barrel. The same thoughts Amy had thought to herself, Sally had thought, too.

She waited as long as she thought prudent, waiting for someone else to come out of the woods, but finally she turned and crawled to the exit of the crawlspace and clambered out. She reloaded the shotgun on the run to the pump house. She reached inside and turned on the twelve-volt pump and opened a valve.

The simple PVC pipes Roger had drilled holes in and mounted on the peak of the roof, and under the eaves, began to spew water. The metal roof was scorched some, but the spray of water all around the house kept the damage to almost nil. She ran to check the other sides of the house to make sure, and saw Roger approaching the vehicles.

She slowly approached, too, Amy maintaining her perch to keep an eye out for movement. Sally held the shotgun ready as Roger began to check the bodies. Of the twelve that had come to the front of the house, ten were dead, from a combination of various wounds.

Sally watched the two live ones, as Amy finally came down and went with Roger to check the two men outside the fence on the other side of the house. They, too, were dead.

When they returned to join Sally, Roger saw the look on Amy's face. "Are you okay, Honey?" putting his arm around her shoulders.

"I think I'm going to be sick," she said, one hand going to her mouth as she heaved slightly, and leaned forward. But she didn't, as Roger and Sally both comforted her. It was only after Amy had straightened up and Sally got a good look at Roger, that she noticed the blood on the left arm of his shirt.

"You're hit!" she exclaimed and moved to check the wound.

"Like they say in the movies," Roger said, "It's only a flesh wound." He grimaced. "Sure hurts like the dickens, though."

"Amy," asked Sally, "Can you watch these two while I tend to this. And keep a lookout for more?"

Amy nodded, her .22 sliding off her shoulder, so she could point it at the two injured men.

"What about us?" one of the men asked, holding a bloody hand against an equally bloody shoulder. The other man was breathing, but had his hands clutching his stomach. He wasn't saying anything. Only moaning.

"In due time," Roger said. He looked at Amy. "If they try anything, or anyone else comes up, kill them and take cover."

Again Amy nodded.

Roger insisted on checking the house for fire, and then shut off the pump when he found none, before he let Sally take him into the shelter to treat his wound. "I can't believe they shot up the house," Roger mused. "Bunch of dummies. Wasn't anyone in there to shoot at. I'm going to

have to replace three windows and patch at least a dozen bullet holes.” He finally fell silent and let Sally finish.

Arm bandaged, Roger went back out to the driveway while Sally cleaned up the mess she’d made working on him.

“You decided what to do with them?” Amy asked, nodding toward the two men.

“Well,” Roger said, squatting down to check the man clutching his stomach. “This one gets buried with the rest. He’s dead.”

Roger stood up, and looked down at the other one. “This one... I don’t know. Maybe if we take him back in to town he’ll try to escape and we can shoot him again and finish the job.”

“You can’t do that!” the man said, nearly crying now with the pain he was feeling as the shock began to wear off. “I have a family! Some of these other men did, too. We were just trying to take care of our families.”

Coldly, Roger said, “You know, we had discussed it and agree to provide some food for the babies and small children. You never asked. You just tried to murder and take.”

“It wasn’t my idea! I just came along because...”

Roger had made a terrible mistake. He moved the visible weapons away from the two men, but hadn’t checked them thoroughly. The wounded man had been maneuvering very slightly ever since he’d been captured.

Amy and Roger had both slung their rifles and were distracted by the man’s whining when he reached for a gun he had in a small-of-the-back holster. But the mistake Roger had made paled to the one the man made. He hadn’t noticed Sally come back outside, the Stoeger in hand.

She put a load of #4 buck into his face before the man could raise the pistol. “Well,” Amy said, shaking slightly, “I guess that takes care of that.”

This time she did throw up, falling to her knees a step away from the man without a face. Roger comforted Sally, who was trying to comfort Amy. Sally looked as green as Amy did. Roger was having some difficulty himself, though he didn’t show it.

Amy finally climbed back up onto the roof of the shelter and kept watch while Roger and Sally stripped all the bodies of anything useful, mostly their firearms, though that was no great haul. They loaded the bodies into the bed of Roger’s truck, and Roger disappeared for three hours.

Sally took the opportunity to clean up while he was gone. Her clothing was covered with blood and ash.

It was Sally’s turn to keep watch as Roger and Amy shuttled the vehicles away from the farm, dumping them here and there between town and the farm, after stripping them of useful

items. That included several of their tires and wheels that were compatible with those on the farm, and all the gas in the fuel tanks.

It was midnight before the chore was done and Amy and Roger cleaned up. Amy and Sally were exhausted and went straight to bed. Roger stayed up and kept watch until daylight. With Sally and Amy up, Roger took a nap.

That afternoon the three loaded up several boxes of jars containing food suitable for babies and small children. Sally saw where the cars had been abandoned. She and Amy never asked what Roger had done with the bodies. And Roger never said.

Using the CB in the truck, Roger announced that he had the food at the store and anyone that came in with a baby would get a share. He asked that the word be spread around. He was parked well down the street, where he could see the store front. As he suspected, a mob showed up. Some had babies. Most didn't. Again he let silence do the talking for him.

The next day he went back to town and made the same announcement, stressing that it was food only for babies. This time there wasn't much of a mob. Those with babies were desperate for the food and showed up out of desperation. Most of the rest of the previous mob weren't going to be played for fools, chasing after something they wouldn't get, by some jokester. At least, that was what Roger heard some time later.

There was much speculation about what had happened to the men that day, for a long time. When the remains of fourteen naked bodies were found after months of rain finally cleared the deep accumulation of ash in one of the really deep local drainage ditches, people finally knew that something had happened, even if not the details. Roger, Sally, and Amy never said anything about what had happened. They kept a stony silence when the subject came up.

But they didn't have any more problems with people trying to take things from them. At least not the locals.

Bad Times Coming – Chapter 5

When the ash fall stopped to the point that only a full day's exposure would coat something left out in the open, the family moved back into the house, after Roger made the needed repairs.

It was good that the family hadn't given much of their food away. People died from starvation, and starvation related violence. The Tanquirdy's were one of the few families in the area that made it through the first year. The sky had been too dark, and the ash too invasive, to grow crops. Even the greenhouse produced only a tenth of what it normally did.

Many people also died by freezing. The constant haze of ash had kept the temperatures down several degrees from normal, resulting in a volcanic winter of bitter cold and terrible storms.

Amy's hopes for college were put on a back shelf. She'd acquired the textbooks and other learning material she needed for collage, a little at a time, so she had what she needed, for the most part, for her first year. She studied on her own, using the materials at hand. It kept her busy. As did the chores she continued to do. But Roger and Sally could see the wistfulness in her eyes sometimes when she looked out at the Volkswagen.

They made only a few trips into town that first year. The Federal Government had finally responded in the area, in the form of FEMA. There was no money to go around. The disaster had been too massive. About the only help was assistance in relocating outside the stricken areas. That and some basic foodstuffs. Roger and Sally probably wouldn't have taken any if it had been handed out in town.

But the food distribution was done as part of a census and gun round up. The National Guard came directly to the Tanquirdy's home the middle of January, took the head count, verified the Ruger Mark II and Colt 1911A1 that showed up on the gun sales records, took Roger's word they didn't have anything else, dropped off the food allotment for three people, and marked the family off their list. FEMA had done its job. The Tanquirdy's were on their own for the duration.

Roger was prepared to lose the two pistols, though he didn't want to. But it wasn't a complete gun grab. Each citizen over sixteen was allowed one weapon each, if they already had it, and it wasn't on the Assault Weapons Ban. None of the weapons the Tanquirdys had were on the ban list, but that didn't matter. They would have been allowed to keep one more firearm, but the rest would have been seized.

They had heard what was going on over the Amateur Radio network and Roger had buried everything but the two guns that were registered and a little ammunition. Everything else had been purchased face-to-face, with no paperwork involved. The National Guard hadn't pressed for a thorough search. They'd already lost a few people to people with the stated attitude of only giving up their weapons from their cold dead hands. That happened, too.

The food they received was basics, much of it humanitarian shipments from Australia. Beans, rice, lentils, flour, sugar, cooking oil, powdered milk, powdered eggs, granola cereal, and salt. There was also a small allotment of things like cocoa, spices, and hard candy.

It was all food they could use to help vary their diet, and add to it. It was supposed to last the rest of the winter, spring, and summer, until a new crop could come in the coming fall. Roger wasn't sure how other people were going to cope, without the reserves the Tanquirdys had put by over the years.

With the staples they had, to stretch their own supplies, the greenhouse again producing, with more light available now, and the rabbits, chickens, and fish doing well, the family talked it over and decided to start supplying food to the town again. On their own terms.

They were very cautious at first, with two of them going to town on each trip, with either Amy or Sally staying behind to watch the property. With the losses over the past year, there weren't that many people left in town. But the episode shortly after the eruption seemed to have been forgotten. No mention was ever made of it. Those needing food were more interested in the food than bringing up old history.

Those left in town had pretty much cleared out everything useful in the homes of the dead, and those that left the area. People had things to trade that the Tanquirdys could use. Things that they couldn't grow or make themselves. But they were also offered some of the staples that had been distributed, in exchange for the fresh foods they could provide.

Roger was more than willing to accept them. Despite what they were trading away, Roger, Sally, and Amy were still putting food back, canning what they didn't sell fresh, using the oldest foods they had in storage. He couldn't explain it, but he wasn't prepared to give up his family's state of preparedness. Sally and Amy didn't argue.

That was the status quo for another year. The only real change was the three hundred gallons of gas was about gone, and Amy had started seeing one of the boys she'd dated casually in high school before it was shut down.

Amy was careful not to give away any of the family secrets, and Jack learned not to pry. He was living on his own in town. His parents had died, one in the Avian Flu Pandemic, and the other from lung problems due to the ash.

Like Amy, he was now eighteen and wondering if he'd ever get a chance to go to college. Amy let him help some in the greenhouse and with the animals, but he wasn't permitted in the shelter proper. Amy had made it clear that it was an out of bounds subject, as well as being physically off limits. That was fine with him, as long as he got to spend time with Amy.

With the fuel almost gone, Roger had used some of his salvaged materials, and some items he traded for, to build a handcart. They took it once a week into town loaded with food, and brought back what they'd acquired in it.

Jack would come out with them one week and go back the next, working on the place with the family during the week he was there. That lasted almost a year, and then Jack became part of the family, moving into Amy's room in the house.

Things seemed to be settling down. Places with smaller amounts of ash were starting to be farmed, to supplement the massive growing campaign that had been started on the east and west coasts, outside the ash covered areas.

A limited transportation route was developed, again outside the worst of the affected areas. The route included a main route through Missouri, Interstate 70. The town was able to begin receiving shipments of goods again, primarily food. Distributed food was under strict price controls, though locally grown food was not.

There weren't that many ways to earn a dollar, except for basic services subsidized by the Federal Government. It was a new program and many people jumped at the chance to earn enough to feed themselves better than they had eaten in literally years.

Roger continued to listen to Shortwave Radio and monitor the Amateur Bands. He didn't like what he was hearing. The United States had been hit hardest, by far, by the Yellowstone Eruption. But other countries were affected, primarily by the severe winters that ensued. With the East Coast, West Coast, and Southern States barely able to produce enough for themselves, and the surviving population of the interior and northern states, US foreign aid came to a halt. The US even received some aid from overseas. But Great Britain and Japan didn't have that much to spare. Neither did Germany. Only Australia was able to help in any significant degree.

The administration had recalled nearly all foreign deployments, leaving many places around the world essentially defenseless, and without the massive income the presence of American Forces guaranteed.

With the major countries of the world occupied with surviving the weather and protecting their own borders, little help was available to keep the third world stabilized and fed. Local internecine wars erupted all over Africa.

The Mid-East was ready to explode, as the new Persian Empire controlled all the crude oil production in the area, and influenced most of the rest around the world. With the loss of the umbrella of protection provided by the United States, Israel became a nation sized bunker, with armed troops on every street corner, and people desperately digging in, expecting war with Persia at any minute.

Only the known presence of the nuclear weapons controlled by Israel had prevented the invasion of Israel by Arab forces. With the US out of the picture in Taiwan, China invaded and took control of the island in the matter of a year and a half. The US did nothing. Neither did they interfere when North Korea invaded South Korea again. That brutal fighting was still going on, two years after the invasion started.

A new Soviet Union was coming into being, as the volcanic induced weather played havoc with much of Russia's arable land. China had closed its borders during the Pandemic. There was little information coming out of the country.

Roger found it hard to believe that any country would start any type of war, considering how difficult it was to just make a living and find enough food for most of the world. But believe it he did, despite how hard it was. Sally, Amy, and Jack agreed with him. They didn't let their reserves of supplies drop, even increasing them as they could.

Small amounts of fuel were starting to become available, and the family was able to slowly bring back their reserve of gasoline. Not only did they refill the 300-gallon tank, but had an addition three hundred gallons in drums and jerry cans.

Roger and Jack built a second, larger, greenhouse, using salvaged materials that Roger had been collecting for years. The regular garden was expanded in order to produce more potatoes and corn. The number of beehives went from two to six. Jack's family had once raised goats, and he knew quite a bit about them. He managed to trade for a buck and three does and the family added goat meat, milk, and cheese to the items they traded or sold on a regular basis.

The additions called for another structure to house the goats, so Roger designed and built, with Jack and Amy's help, a small barn for the goats. He had enough materials left from the old shoe factory to build it as another annex to the shelter, using the same construction techniques, except for the roof. It was too hard to get concrete, so Roger used old railroad ties as a roof to support the earth fill on top.

The family went into the winter in as good of shape as anyone in the area, and better than most. There was talk of lifting the martial law and having national elections. Australia had dispatched another convoy of seven ships to the west coast of the United States with aid to help the country get through the forecast even worse winter.

It came as a complete surprise when the Chinese Navy intercepted the convoy and forced it to change directions and head for China. The Australians, as could be expected, lodged a formal protest with what was left of the UN, and sent their own navy to intercede.

The Chinese threatened the use of the nuclear weapons as soon as the Australian Navy approached the Chinese escorted convoy. The Australians, after getting assurances that their people and ships would be returned to them, backed off, and let the Chinese have the food. They did continue their protest in the United Nations.

The United States also protested in the United Nations. When the appeals failed and the food out of reach on the Chinese mainland, the United States declared the UN no longer welcome in the United States and withdrew its support. Delegations were given a month to vacate the UN building, and six months to get the last of their people out of the United States.

There wasn't the outrage some expected, though there were members that did protest loud and long. France immediately offered to host the United Nations, for a fee. It seemed many nations were not as infatuated with the UN as had been thought.

China got away with the play, and many people thought that the Chinese would be satisfied with what they had done. With their taking of Taiwan without outside interference, and

now no major result of their newest adventure, there was no doubt that China was now a Super Power, and the United States a Second World country.

But it became apparent that the hardliners in the Chinese political system were just getting started. As it turned out, the supplies, mostly food, they had taken from out of the American's mouths, was going into the mouths of soldiers, not private citizens in China. China attacked Japan after declaring a war to right the wrongs Japan had done to China over the centuries, particularly World War II.

Despite their long protestations against nuclear weapons, the Japanese had conducted their own Manhattan Project. In total secrecy they had managed to develop, obviously with outside help, a nuclear weapons program. When it became obvious that they were not going to get enough help from the rest of the world to stave off the invasion, Japan used her newly produced nuclear weapons.

It came as a total surprise to the Chinese, and the rest of the world. The disbelief might have been the reason the first launches of Chinese missiles were not directed at Japan, but the United States.

The president hesitated, even after more than thirty missile tracks were spotted originating from China with destinations on both coasts of the United States. But she hesitated too long. It was possible that she would have ordered the launch, but the opportunity was lost when she was killed where she stood and the vice-president ordered the retaliation.

Whether the leaders of the Neo Soviet Union actually thought they were being attacked when missile tracks showed up on their radar originating from the United States, or just decided to use the opportunity, is unknown. What is known is that most of the remaining nuclear assets in Russia and the Republics were used to attack the United States and China. With the trigger pulled, and communications down due to EMP, the loss of satellites, and atmospheric interference, the other nuclear powers didn't take any chances of being hit before they could detect incoming missiles. They launched at known and perceived enemies. Every nation with a nuclear capability used it.

Australia's national pride had been shattered when China had taken her ships without consequence. Australia joined the sea war, on the United State's side, attacking Chinese and Soviet submarines and surface ships. It cost them nuclear attacks on their largest cities.

Great Britain attacked the Neo Soviets and China. France did so, as well, though some of their medium range missiles landed in Germany, either because of targeting failures, or the repaying of some old debts.

It was global nuclear war. And Roger, Sally, Amy, and Jack found themselves right in the middle of it.

Western Missouri had Whiteman Air Force base and lots of empty missile silos. The base was targeted, and from the amount of fallout that fell on the Tanquirdy farm, probably the silos, too.

Roger's first inkling that something was up was the sudden hissing coming from the Hallicrafters SX-42. It had been moved into the house and was often as not the evening's entertainment, since there still was no satellite TV or internet access. He tried a couple of other frequencies and got only the hissing. Roger couldn't be sure of anything, but he wasn't going to take any chances.

Sally and Amy were in the kitchen, fixing supper. Jack was out tending the animals. "Sally! Amy! The shelter! Get to the shelter! I'll get Jack!"

They'd had drills before, at Roger's insistence. This could be another one, both women thought, but as always, they took preparedness seriously. If Roger said they needed to get in the shelter, they would go to the shelter. Taking only the time needed to put out the fire in the wood stove.

Roger was already going out the back door of the house, having taken a moment to disconnect the Hallicrafters from the inverter and battery, and unplug the antenna. Roger yelled to Jack as soon as he was out of the house. Jack was out in the goat pen, feeding the goats. "Get the goats in the shelter! Hurry."

Jack had been through the drills, too. Drill or not, Jack knew better than disregard Roger's orders. He quickly began leading the goats into their barn and Roger was there helping. Amy was checking the rabbits and making sure the waterers and feeders were full, in case it was some time before they could do it.

Sally was waiting at the entrance to the shelter, ready to close it up and bar it when the others came in. She closed the door when the rest of her family came inside. She waited patiently for Roger to tell them what was wrong. So did Jack and Amy.

They were all looking at him expectantly. "I don't know," he said, raising his hands and letting them fall back to his sides. "The radio went static. No signals at all."

"EMP?" Jack asked.

"Possibly. That old Hallicrafters is pretty resistant. It might have taken a jolt without destroying it completely. I unplugged it and shouted the warning. Let's give it a few minutes. If nothing else happens we'll go back to the house."

Roger went to the NOAA radio and turned it on and attached an outside antenna. There was nothing on it, either. "I changed my mind," he said, gathering the others to him. It may be just a false alarm, but let's go ahead and get set up here in the shelter for an extended stay."

They all began to take items they needed and wanted from the house to the shelter. Jack helped Roger with the heavy Hallicrafters Shortwave Receiver and its inverter and battery. They set it on the communications equipment desk but left it unhooked. It took a several minutes for the two to cover the skylights of the shelter with the sandbags pre-positioned by each one.

Everyone would pause occasionally and take a look around, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. They continued working until they had everything they might need in the shelter.

“Let’s put out the rad meter and button up,” Roger told Jack, as Amy and Sally prepared to finish up the supper they were cooking.

Jack unwound the probe cable from the CD-717 and took it to the outside entrance of the shelter. Roger installed the battery and turned the meter on. No motion or sound, even on the most sensitive setting. Roger set it down and went to set the table for their supper while Jack latched the doors into the shelter.

With nothing to really make this any different than the drills they had done, the conversation at the dinner table was rather routine. After the meal and the clean up, Roger hooked up the Hallicrafters again and turned it on. He still wasn’t getting anything except static. Worried, Roger unhooked the radio again and turned around.

“Still nothing,” he told the others. “I don’t know. I just don’t like it. Maybe it is Yellowstone again.” He shook his head. “But that didn’t affect the foreign signals for several hours.”

The four settled in for the evening. Sally and Amy were both sewing, and Jack was studying one of their several books on self-sufficiency. Roger had their old laptop he’d traded for years earlier. No internet, but he had volumes of CD-ROM’s filled with preparedness information. He was reviewing the information on fallout. He’d just shut the computer off when he heard a ticking sound. It was a few moments before he recognized it.

When he did, he leapt from his chair and went over to the CD-717. The others were right on his heels. All four blanched when they saw the needle slowly creep up off the peg. They were getting fallout. Just a trace at the moment, but fallout, none the less. At first the needle rose slowly, a needle width at a time, but suddenly climbed rapidly. The level went up to 235r and held there.

“I guess there is no question now,” Roger said softly. “We must be in the middle of a nuclear war. I guess TOM was right. There are three.”

“Who is Tom?” Jack asked.

“T-O-M. For Tired Old Man. He used to post stories on one of the preparedness forums I frequented, in the old days. He always said disasters come in threes. Well, we had the Pandemic, then Yellowstone, and now this. That’s three.”

“Oh,” Jack said. He obviously didn’t believe in the law of threes. But it didn’t matter to Roger. He was a good man and was good for Amy and more than pulled his weight on the farm.

They began to hear some Amateurs a few days after they entered the shelter. The news was very scarce, but there was enough for the family to figure out that it had been a widespread event, not just some local episode.

They settled in for the long haul. They stayed in the shelter, only going to the entry hall to get to the animal annexes to take care of them. It was three weeks before they started going

outside to begin the decontamination process and check the green houses. They were extremely careful to wear safety goggles and P-100 masks when they went out. They didn't have some of the equipment Roger would liked to have obtained before everything started, due to lack of money.

But, as he'd done when the ash fall had taken place, he made sure he and the others protected themselves as well as they could when they went out of the shelter. It was two months after they began spending time outside the shelter that Roger started up the truck and he and Jack went into town to see what was what.

They'd not heard anything from any locals in all that time. Not even Deputy Kanaday, who had become a good friend, as well as loyal customer. Not expecting any real trouble, but not one to take chances, Roger and Jack went armed on the trip.

Roger had his Savage 99A and Colt 1911A1. Jack had not had any weapons of any sort when Amy began dating him after Yellowstone. But Roger had armed him with a couple of the weapons he had collected when the farm had been attacked. So Jack had an Remington 7400 .30-'06 rifle and an old Browning Hi-Power 9mm. Roger had worked with Jack enough to know he could trust him to do what was necessary in case they ran into trouble.

But they didn't run into any trouble. They found scenes of death everywhere they checked. Roger wondered if many of the people in the area had assumed that the fallout was just more ash and had not sought shelter at all. Whatever the reason, there were dead everywhere. Many of those in the open had been savaged by wild animals, or, more likely, feral cats and dogs.

Most of the dead were inside, however, the bodies with signs of radiation poisoning. But violence had killed more than a few. Some had gunshot wounds. Others signs of being bludgeoned to death. Where they found violent deaths, they usually didn't find any type of usable supplies, particularly food.

Feeling ill from the exposure to all the death, Roger started to turn the truck around and go back to the farm, but he stopped. "Can you take a bit more?" he asked an ashen Jack.

Jack nodded and Roger turned the truck toward Deputy Sheriff Jim Kanaday's house. There were signs of life at the house, which was good. The signs of death, on the other hand, weren't.

Roger stopped the truck on the street in front of Jim's house. There were three decomposing bodies in the front yard, and the house was boarded up. Jim's patrol car was parked in the driveway. Roger stepped out of the truck and called out. "Jim! Jim! It's Roger Tanquirdy! Is anybody in there?"

There was definitely someone in the house. Jack saw the gun barrel poke out of a broken window, between the frame and the boards covering most of the opening.

"Roger! Look out! Someone's got a gun on you!" Jack stayed in the truck, but pulled the Hi-Power. He was afraid to open the door of the truck and get out, in case the movement and appearance of another person would prompt whoever was holding the gun to fire.

Again Roger called out, holding up his hands to show that they were empty. “Jim! It’s Roger! Is everything all right in there?”

The gun barrel disappeared and the front door suddenly opened. Roger recognized Jim’s oldest child. Samantha. She’d be twelve now, if Roger was remembering right. She looked a fright. “Daddy says you can come in. But just you.”

“Stay here and keep a sharp eye out,” Roger told Jack. Roger headed up the walk, avoiding the bodies.

Jack slid out of the cab of the truck on the driver’s side, pulled his rifle over to him, and took up a guard position.

Samantha began to cry, the tears cutting creases through the grime on her face. “The rest are down in the basement. Can you help? Do you have any food?”

“Of course I’ll help. And I’ll get you some food as soon as I can.” Roger followed the girl down the stairs into the basement. The scent was nearly overpowering. Seeing Jim lying on a pallet on the floor, his wife Audrey sitting on the floor beside him, Roger hurried over. He saw the bloody bandage on Jim’s left shoulder and Audrey’s nearly hairless scalp. Both had huge bags under their eyes and looked near death.

The other two children, Becky and Sam, ten and eight respectively, were sitting together in a chair nearby. They looked as gaunt and haggard as Samantha.

“Jim...” Roger said, choking back tears.

“Roger,” Jim managed to say trying to rise up slightly, his voice weak. “My family. Please! Take care of my family.” He sank back, exhausted from the effort of talking.

Roger knelt down and began to examine Jim’s wound, removing the bloody mound of makeshift bandages. “What happened?” he asked Audrey.

Her voice was as weak as Jim’s had been. “People came... they wanted food... we only had a little and Jim told them no.” She looked down at Jim’s face and touched his forehead. He was out of it for the moment.

“But they tried to come in and Jim shot and then...”

“It’s okay, Audrey,” Roger said quickly. He could get the story later. Right now getting the family out to the farm was Roger’s first priority. “Okay, look,” he told Audrey. “Are you strong enough to get out to the truck?”

“But Jim...” she started to protest.

“We’ll bring Jim out. I need you to take the children out to the truck and send Jack in to help me with Jim.”

Roger could see the struggle it was for Audrey to get up and gather the children to her. Samantha had to help her mother up the stairs. Working quickly, Roger arranged Jim on the blankets so he and Jack could carry him using the blankets as a makeshift stretcher.

It was difficult getting Jim up the stairs, and Roger knew they hurt him in the process, but they got him out to the truck and he was still breathing, but unconscious. They put him in the bed of the truck.

Roger ran into the house again and came out carrying Jim's small arsenal. He put everything in the back of the truck. "Jack," Roger said, "You drive. Audrey, you, Becky, and Sam ride up front with Jack. Samantha, you have to ride in back with me and your father."

Audrey tried to protest, but Roger and Jack got her into the cab of the truck after getting the two younger children in. Samantha climbed into the bed of the truck with Roger and Jack headed back to the farm.

Jack took as much care as he could, but the ride was hard on Jim. Samantha was holding his hand the entire way, trying to brace him against movement, as was Roger. When they were close enough to the farm Roger keyed the FRS radio he took out of his pocket and called for Sally.

"Sally! I've got Jim and his family. They're in bad shape and Jim is wounded. Get things ready for them."

"Okay," was the only response. Sally and Amy immediately set about getting ready for the Kanadays.

When they reached the farm, Amy took the three children under her wing and set about getting them fed, then bathed, and into clean clothes. Sally attended to Audrey while Roger and Jack got Jim onto a bed, stripped him, and spread a sheet over him up to the middle of his chest. With several towels handy, and the large pan of hot water Sally had made, Roger finished taking off the bandages on the front and rear of Jim's left shoulder.

He was no doctor, but he had, like Amy and Sally, taken several of the free first-aid courses the county had offered from time to time. There was an entrance wound and an exit wound. And since Roger could move Jim's arm without a problem or making Jim do more than moan slightly, he decided that Jim was in the condition he was in because he probably had not had much, if any, food in some time, and not so much from the wound, except he'd lost blood at the time. Audrey probably hadn't had much food for a while, either.

Roger cleaned the wounds up and applied fresh bandages from the first-aid kit. He then cleaned up the rest of Jim's body the best he could. Jim regained consciousness for a minute or so and Roger quickly reassured him that his family was here at the farm, safe. Roger was sure that Jim fell asleep then, and didn't fall unconscious.

Audrey wouldn't eat until she had seen that Jim was now resting easy. It was all Sally could do to keep Audrey from gorging herself when she sat down at the table and began to eat. Amy had had the same problem with the children.

"I'm sorry," Audrey said, slowing her eating. "I'm just so hungry. It's been a week since I had food. Longer for Jim. The kids..." Audrey started to cry. "They've only had a little the last few days. I don't know how we can ever repay you."

"Don't worry about it," Sally said, sitting beside Audrey and touching her hand. "You're all here, safe now. We have food so you don't have to worry about that."

"But how can we pay you for..."

"Now don't worry about that, I said," reiterated Sally.

"Thank you," Audrey said, and let the discussion drop.

Though it was still fairly early, the Kanaday family members went to bed without protest at Sally's urging. They were all out like a light as soon as they were in the bunks. Roger and Jack told Sally and Amy what they'd seen on the trip into town.

"There probably are other people around, but they didn't let us see them. There was a lot of violence, from the evidence we saw," Roger said. "People may be laying low because of it, or just on general principles."

"Do you think we're in any danger here? Like after Yellowstone?" Sally asked.

"I don't know," Roger replied. "We could be. But there are definitely fewer people around now than before. You've heard some of the Amateur and Shortwave reports. The world has lost as much as ninety percent of its pre-pandemic population."

"At least people won't be going to war again, anytime soon."

"Don't jinx us, Jack," Amy cautioned. "There are big wars and then there are little local wars. People wanting what others have. Like what happened to the Kanadays."

"Yeah," Jack said softly. He'd been told only a minimum of what had happened here at the farm after Yellowstone. Amy wouldn't discuss it with him. All he'd gathered was that people had attacked and the Tanquirdys had prevailed.

Jim was the first of the Kanadays to wake the next morning. Roger had to help him to the bathroom, but he was moving a bit more easily when he came out. Jim was slender, like Jack, and was able to fit into a pair of Jack's jeans and a flannel shirt, again with Roger's help.

He was at the table in the kitchen area of the shelter, eating a bowl of instant oatmeal when the rest of the group began to get up. Sally and Amy busied themselves with getting breakfast for everyone while Roger and Jack took care of the animals.

When they returned to the main shelter, Roger and Jack found Audrey helping Sally and Amy, and Trudy keeping the three children entertained and out of mischief. She had taken the kids, and the adults, for that matter, as part of the family as soon as Amy had indicated they were welcome the previous day.

After they'd all had breakfast, and the children had cleaned up the table and done the dishes, at Audrey's insistence, she took the children to a quiet area of the shelter, along with Trudy, leaving Jim to tell their story to Roger and his family.

"We got hardly any warning," Jim said, savoring the second cup of coffee he was now drinking. "The radio went down first thing, and I got no response on the hand-held radio. I went out to the patrol car. No luck on that radio, either, and the car wouldn't start.

"After I got Audrey and the children down into the basement I hoofed it to the city police station. The night shift dispatcher didn't know anything either. We assumed there'd been an EMP attack and tried to start warning people. On foot, going house to house. Some didn't believe it and some immediately panicked. I was trying to deal with one of those situations when we started getting fallout.

"Everyone just thought it was more ash and that Yellowstone had blown again. But it didn't look the same to me and I decided not to take any chances. I headed for my house, warning as many on the way as I could. I told anyone that would listen to head for the City Hall. They have a good basement.

"But... Well, because of you and your help, Roger, I'd put back some food and stuff, just in case. Hadn't really made any changes to the basement to make it a better fallout shelter, but I knew it was the best we could do. I locked up the house and went into the basement."

Jim's face had a strained look on it for a few moments as he paused. "I feel bad about not trying to do more to help the community, but I didn't see how my getting exposed to fallout would be a help. I intended to go out after two weeks and see what I could do then.

"The two weeks were up and I was getting ready to go out. As soon as I got out of the basement to look around, I checked the radios again. The car radio wouldn't work. I didn't think the hand-held would either, but I tried it anyway. And got a response. Someone in the City Hall had a radiation meter and things were still hot. Someone knew at least a little about radiation and said we'd need to wait at least another two to four weeks before anyone got out much. So I went back to the basement. We started rationing our food then.

"We were able to manage another six weeks, but were getting really low on food. We still had plenty of water. So I decided to go out and try to make contact again. It was a different voice on the radio. I guess I made a mistake when I said I was almost out of food and wanted to know if they had any to spare. They didn't, they said. I went back into the basement to talk things over with Audrey again, planning on going looking in the nearby houses.

“When I went upstairs again about an hour later, I found half a dozen men approaching the house.” Jim shook his head. “One of the men called out and said, ‘Let us have the food and no one gets hurt.’”

“Another one seemed to have a different opinion and just started shooting. Well, I’d armed myself with the intention of going looking for food and I shot back. It seemed like it went on forever. It was only when there were three men on the ground in front of the house, and three more running away, that I realized I’d been shot.

“I got off another couple of rounds with my patrol rifle and think I hit one of the men again. He fell down, but was crawling away when I guess I passed out. When I woke up again, I was in the basement and Audrey was bandaging my arm.

“I was able to get around for a while... but then Audrey and Samantha had to start looking out for our safety. We were lucky, I guess, that nothing else happened. That was about a week before you found us.”

“You and Audrey quit eating to preserve the food for the children,” Roger said. It wasn’t a question.

Jim nodded. “I was hoping to start feeling enough better to be able to go out and find more food. I just... just never could.”

“It’s all right now,” Roger said softly. “You did everything you could and you did keep your family safe. You’re all safe here.”

“The food we’re eating... I don’t know how...”

“Audrey already brought it up, Jim,” Sally said. “Don’t worry about it now. When you’re better we’ll work out something. Right now it is important for you to take it easy and get better.”

“I guess that is all I can do. I need to get back to bed now, if that is okay. I’m feeling kind of weak.”

Roger and Jack helped Jim back to his bunk and Amy went to see about the children while Audrey went to sit with and talk to her husband for a while.

Jim regained his strength quickly, with the quality food he was able to get now that he and his family were at the Tanquirdys. Samantha, Becky, and little Sam pitched in and helped with the chores without complaint, as did Audrey. As soon as he could, Jim was up helping, too.

With Jim up and about, able to lend a hand in the defense of the farm, Roger planned another trip to town to check on the City Hall. He also wanted to check on Henry Bolton. See if the old man had survived the war. He’d made it through the Pandemic and Yellowstone okay, if a bit worse for wear. He was a tough old man, but Jim was a tough young man and had nearly been killed.

Though they had driven by the City Hall on the other trip and not seen any sign of life, this time Roger stopped and he and Roger entered the building, rifles at the ready. The smell after they got in was worse than the one at the Kanadays. They only got halfway down the stairs into the basement when they stopped, gagging. "Anyone down here?" Roger called. "Anyone?"

Roger started to go back upstairs but stopped. "You go back up, Jack. I can't leave without being sure."

Jack started to protest but he gagged again and then hurried up the stairs. Roger took a breath and hurried downwards. Bodies were everywhere, and in various stages of decomposition. He made a quick, but thorough search. The only things alive were rats feeding on the bodies.

He couldn't help it when he got back out into fresh air. He gagged again, fell to his knees, slipped his dust mask down and began to throw up. Jack had to swallow a couple of times and step away, or he would have joined Roger.

Roger finally got up, rinsed his mouth with water from his canteen, and spit it out. He rinsed and spit again, and then took a small sip of the water. "Okay," he said. "If we do anything about this we have to find some respirators. These masks just won't cut it. Let's go check on Henry and then get back."

His hopes faded when Roger saw the burned barn and house. They looked around a bit in the house, expecting to find the bodies of Henry and his wife, but there was no sign of either one. Roger was careful about entering what was left of the barn, insisting Jack stay outside. He found Henry and his wife. Their burned bodies were lying side by side near the workbench.

If Roger was right about the condition of the barn, the workbench, and the cabinetry, the place had been thoroughly searched. He couldn't tell because the bodies were so badly burned, but Roger suspected both had been shot before being left in the barn for their bodies to burn. He had a feeling that whoever had done this hadn't got much from Henry.

Henry had implied that when the gun grab came he'd 'sold' all his guns but one or two, along with most of his ammunition. If he had some time in the future Roger would check around the property and see what he just might dig up. He and Jack took the time to dig graves and bury the two corpses before they went back to the farm.

Bad Times Coming – Epilog

Jim was back up to nearly full speed, with no apparent lasting effects from the gunshot to his shoulder. With his help, Roger and Jack foraged the area and recovered a couple hundred gallons of gasoline. They ran across a few people, but there were no confrontations, only offers to trade. Roger gladly traded food for the things they couldn't make themselves. He wasn't much of one to be a scavenger, other than the gas early on. If other people wanted to do it, that was fine with him. His family had food to trade.

Besides the gasoline, the only other thing they took without trading for it was a mobile home they could move out to the farm for the Kanadays to use. It had been decided they would stay on at the farm and help, for a share.

They didn't have much, but they did have enough. It was years before the area began to repopulate to any extent, but the Tanquirdys and Kanadays were there to see it happen.

End *****

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