



THE WINDS OF CHANGE: Countdown – 102 Days Before Y2K

by Old Bear

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

Countdown: 102 Days Before Y2K

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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