

SURVIVALIST FICTION



THE WINDS OF CHANGE: The Beginning

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.

The Beginning

Sometime in the 1970's 12 hives of honey bees were imported from India by a bee keeper in Texas, who hoped to cross them with his "Italian Bees." It was later learned that these bees were infected with respiratory mites. Early in the 1990's the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that up to 98% of all the wild honey bees and many of the domestic hives had died due to respiratory mites. Where carried at all, this story was buried on the last page in the local papers. Few people even noticed, just as people failed to notice the absence of honey bees on their flowers or in their "hobby gardens." Few even cared. "I don't use that much honey anyway," was the standard response. The connection between honey bees and the pollination of food crops was never made by most people.

September brought a continuation of the two-year drought that had caused several states to be declared disaster areas as the drought wreaked havoc on agriculture. Hurricane "Floyd" caused the largest evacuation in U.S. history and more people began to give serious thought to preparedness in general. The headlines read "N. CAROLINA TURNS INTO '18,000-SQUARE MILE CESSPOOL."

Polls showed that 78% of Americans were pleased with how things were going, despite some questions of morals and ethics in Washington. The Dow Jones glimmered at above 10,000 points. The economy was strong and things would just keep on getting better. Times were good.

Japan, a country roughly the size of the State of Montana, had run up a national debt of 5.4 Trillion dollars in a failed attempt to restart their economy.

The famine in North Korea went almost unnoticed by well-fed Americans, but already the death toll had climbed above 3.5 million. Times were good.

By mid-October many of the people who had belittled others for preparing for Y2-k decided that maybe they should stock up on "a few things" and take a little money out of the bank "just in case." The Federal Reserve had printed extra money, so there were few problems with the banks. The "just in time delivery system" that most stores used was another story.

With increased demand, certain items became in short supply. Generators were scarce and the price increased steadily. Empty shelves could be seen where kerosene lamps once sat. People could be seen with their shopping carts loaded with toilet paper, matches, canned meat and containers of water. Few people seemed to understand the "just in time" delivery system or had even thought much about how and where all the stuff on the shelves came from. All they knew was that items they suddenly decided their very lives depended on were not available. While most of these people continued to state that y2-k would be "just a bump in the road" they searched from store to store in an increasing buying frenzy. Occasional news stories featured the almost bare shelves of some store, with glib remarks about how "the y2-k people" were causing shortages by hoarding necessary items. The fact that these items would only be "necessary" if y2-k was a problem was never mentioned. As more people made cash withdrawals, armored cars had to run day and night to insure that the banks could continue to shovel out the money.

With the increase of cash on the market and driven by the increased demand, inflation soon reached double digit levels. The new director of the Federal Reserve found himself caught between fighting inflation, or saving the banks. He suddenly had an uneasy feeling about the timing of the previous director's sudden retirement. The Fed supported the banks, reasoning that the country could live with inflation, but not a banking collapse. Even with armored cars running 24 hours a day, many of the smaller banks still had to limit withdrawals to certain days. This was not because these banks were in any way "insolvent." They simply had to wait for delivery of more money.

The more the Government said that y2-k was not going to be a problem, the more some people thought that it was certain to be. A rush to invest in gold drove the price of an ounce of gold to over \$2,000 and still people clamored and finagled to buy. The truth was that the value of gold was not increasing. The

value of the paper dollar, not backed up by anything except blind trust, was diminishing. Gasoline prices, already high, soon reached \$5.00 per gallon. For people trapped on a fixed income, life became an unending nightmare. As the cold of winter began to set in, many people found themselves having to choose between eating and heating their homes. Many older Americans, having worked, saved and invested for their retirement, watched as day by day inflation stripped away their future. By the end of November, with inflation rising, Congress voted a massive increase in payments to Social Security recipients and people receiving "Entitlements." This money had to come from somewhere, so the printing presses ran. City and State employees demanded and got pay increases, often to see the increasing prices eat their paycheck and leave them worse off than the week before.

December opened with a blizzard in the north that closed roads, shut down schools and generally made life miserable for the people who had to deal with it. With many stores already having problems keeping shelves stocked, trucks not being able to get through created havoc. Finding empty shelves caused more people to jump into the "y2-k panic", as it was now being called. When the roads were opened and the trucks arrived, items disappeared as fast as they were placed on shelves. While this was great for certain merchants, others, selling things that did not relate to the hysteria, found few buyers for their products. Firearms and ammunition sales set new levels despite the higher prices. The sale of new cars, computers, home entertainment centers, furniture, etc. on the other hand set new lows.

About this time, many "level headed" people decided to sell "a few" of their stocks, just in case the stock market "fluctuated" after Jan. 1. With plenty of people waiting to buy these stocks, the market did a brisk business while retaining its high level. In fact the market rose 200 points. Slowly the tide turned and with more people wanting to sell than there were buyers, stock prices dropped. The market trembled and began to slide. At first it was a slow decline, but even this slight drop fueled people's fears and they rushed to sell. The stock market, which many analysts had said was "over priced" dropped like an anvil in free fall. Analysts talked about the market making a "much needed correction." To the dismay and horror of others, it was learned that many company retirement funds had been invested in the stock market and that now these, supposedly "safe" funds, were unable to continue paying premiums to retirees. The very air was ripe with tension. Fights broke out among people waiting in lines. "Home

invasions" became the number one crime in America, replacing "car jackings" for top billing.

With y2-k still days away, the U.S. found itself in an inflationary spiral, with a steadily collapsing stock market, while economists talked about a "Deflationary Recession", on the horizon. When y2-k finally arrived, it proved to be more or less the "bump in the road" in the U.S., that so many people had predicted. With the passing of Jan. 1, with few problems in the U.S., many politicians and analysts predicted a rapid recovery for the country.

Unfortunately the U.S. did not exist alone in a vacuum. Politicians and big business had for years pushed to get the U.S. involved in the "Global Economy." They had done their job all too well. Most other countries fared far worse than the U.S. from the "y2-k bug." Power grids went down, transportation systems failed, communication systems fell. U.S. plants abroad shut down when raw materials ceased to arrive. Many problems developed with the oil industry, from pipe lines, to refinery failures. Most of the "Super Tankers" that carried the oil to refineries in the U.S. had crews of less than 10 men and the huge ships were almost completely run by computers, that controlled everything from engine speed to steering. These huge ships now sat idle, waiting for programmers, or in some cases, computer chips that had been long since discontinued.

Well-fed men in Washington had decided that even the most fanatic terrorist, hating the U.S. from deep within his very bowels, would never "cut off his own nose to spite his face" and attack the oil fields. If these men had known a little more of hunger and frustration, perhaps they would have never made this mistake. The first clue that all was not well, came when a "suit case" nuclear bomb destroyed a section of a major middle eastern oil field. The President ordered an immediate mobilization of National Guard troops to protect the oil fields. Russia and China also sent troops in a "joint U.N. effort." In many of the "oil rich" countries, only a very few got "rich" off the oil, while most lived their lives in desperate poverty. These people felt they had little to lose if the oil stopped flowing and were easy to convince to do acts of sabotage. Also, the presence of large numbers of American troops in their country did not set well with many of these people. As with most "police actions" more troops had to be sent, leaving many states with very limited National Guard.

Rioting had long since broken out in many of the cities. State and local law enforcement, aided by what was left of the National Guard had not been able to

quell the riots. As soon as one area was quieted, another would erupt. They managed to hold the rioting inside the city, in most cases.

January set records for cold weather. Many States pushed through legislation that power companies could not shut anyone off for failure to pay during the winter. While this, like so much Government bumbling was well meant, it created huge problems for the utility companies that were already facing higher costs in production of electricity. Many people that would have otherwise found some way to afford their electricity simply stopped paying. When several large utility companies threatened to file bankruptcy and shut down, the States were forced to subsidize them. The various States turned to the Federal Government for help. Disaster areas were declared and Federal dollars flowed in. The printing presses ran 24 hours a day. Despite the inflation most people were optimistic that they were on the way to recovery. The attempt by the Federal Government to slow inflation by "price fixing" was a disaster. Many companies, which were already on the edge of bankruptcy, were forced to lay off thousands of employees. To keep these people working, subsidies were given to the large companies.

The President, caught between serious trouble at home and the need to maintain American presence in the oil fields called on the United Nations to "come to the aid of America, in her hour of need." The responding silence was deafening. Most other countries had problems enough at home and few really gave a damn what happened to America in the first place. Canada was the only country to send troops. They could only send one battalion, which was reportedly met at the border by a large number of the Michigan Militia and told to go home. They did.

Despite Government statements that the economy was stabilizing and the inflation was ending, the spiral continued. The pressure had eased up on the banks, not because people stopped wanting their money, but because fewer people still had any left in the banks. The Government printing presses ran day and night. They had stopped printing anything smaller than a twenty, which had more or less replaced the one dollar bill as a medium of exchange. Before the presses finally shut down they were only printing on one side of the bill to save the cost of the ink. One Senator, a long opponent of the President, was heard to remark, "This administration has done what no other has been able to do. They have actually put a stop to counterfeiting."

Many older people had their lives destroyed by the situation. Life savings would often not now even pay a month's rent. Many were starving. The times brought

out the best and worst in people. The staff of one nursing home simply walked out, leaving the old folks to fend for themselves. At another home the staff each took several of the people into their own homes. A news flash mentioned that the Branch Davidians had taken 12 residents from a local nursing home into their rebuilt church-compound, at the Mount Carmel site. With their retirement gone, hungry and cold, many people chose to "end their lives with dignity." The suicide rate rose by 600%. People responded differently. Alcoholism was up, while others, perhaps with a purpose in their lives for the first time, stopped drinking entirely and were able to help others survive.

A spokesperson for a large environmental lobby group stated that perhaps all this death was a good thing, because "now there will be room for our animal brothers." Their Washington, D.C. office was fire bombed the next day, by a 67-year-old man that made no attempt to escape. He had lost his life savings and retirement and his wife had recently died in their unheated apartment. He made the statement to the press that "I have never owned a gun, but by God I wish I had one now."

Despite the deteriorating conditions in Washington, D.C. most congressmen were reluctant to return to their districts. One unfortunate, nicknamed "Porky Pig" by his fellow lawmakers, because of his ability to get "pork barrel" projects for his district, was tarred and feathered by the same people that had claimed to love him just a few short months before, when he returned to his home state. With the collapse of the dollar, society broke down. Garbage lay uncollected in the streets. Some people without water to flush toilets, simply threw their waste out windows. People walking near an apartment building might suddenly be hit by human waste.

Having barely enough to feed themselves, but being unwilling to kill their pets, people turned thousands of dogs and cats loose "to fend for themselves." Cities had packs of starving dogs roaming the streets. Some of these packs soon located a slow moving, easy to kill food source in the homeless, the elderly and the young. Some people, more enterprising than their neighbors, found the dogs themselves to be a good source of food. It became a question of who would eat who first.

When the water stopped flowing through the pipes in the various cities, a mass exodus began. People swarmed over the thin police lines and headed for the countryside. Most were on foot, because only the strongest gangs could hold on

to running vehicles with gasoline. Struggling on foot, in the dead of winter, many having committed no crime other than trusting that strangers would always provide for them, untold numbers died. Those who remained in the city were the hopeless, the helpless, the sick and elderly, or their families who would not leave them behind.

They searched each day for enough water and food to face the next day, and waited for the help that would never arrive in time. If it had been only one city, help could have been sent, but it was too many cities.

While life in the cities was chaos, life in the country was far from perfect. Many people who had prepared for y2-k by storing food, water and gasoline now found themselves in a state of siege by their neighbors who had not prepared. Irrationally, the whole collapse was somehow blamed on these unfortunate people. These people were accused of "hoarding" and that they had destroyed the country, even though they had taken their money out of the banks slowly and months before the panic and had bought their food a little at a time when it was still plentiful. Houses were burned, people murdered, their stores looted and then fought over by the thieves. In a few areas, cooler heads prevailed and the people worked, for the most part, together. Some people had planned for lunacy by their neighbors, or rioters from the cities, and had fortified their homes. In many cases these people kept their food.

Feral dogs were also a problem in rural areas. Although there were fewer of them than in the urban areas, there was still much loss to livestock and few people would travel on foot alone, even when well armed. The Governor of Missouri was the first to call out the "Unorganized Militia" in his state. While many were poorly trained, unruly and poorly disciplined and in many cases lacking in matching uniforms, they made up for their lack of "military bearing" in exuberance. One crusty old Guard officer, having been pulled back to duty from retirement, remarked "I would hate to try to put them in a parade, but by God I would not hesitate to lead them into battle." Within two weeks a chain of command had been established, some basic training provided and the Missouri Militia was a functioning unit. This was mostly due to the volunteers feeling that they had something to prove to the nation. With Missouri's success other states followed suite.

Deciding the cities were a loss, at least for the present, the now legalized and recognized Militia turned to helping the refugees and policing the rural areas. Things were mostly organized along county lines, with as little gasoline used as

possible. This meant the militia often had to make a forced march to some trouble spot, often to find that the trouble had worked itself out by the time they got there.