

SURVIVALIST FICTION



THE WINDS OF CHANGE: The Winds of Winter

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 Winds of Winter

Life did not end in the urban areas after the collapse. Even with the mass exodus, urban dwellers still outnumbered the rural folks.

Some animals have sharp fangs, others large claws, still others the gift of flight, or great speed in running or swimming. Man has none of these things, yet man has survived. Where man lacks the fangs and sharp claws, he does have hands with an opposable thumb, and a creative brain. Man developed his own "fangs" until they far outstretched the rest of the animal kingdom. Although not as much as the ants or the honey bees, man is still a "social animal." Humans tend to seek out other humans and to form groups.

Those still in the cities suddenly found it necessary to redefine their priorities. Water, which had been taken for granted by almost all, was suddenly the most important commodity, followed by warmth-shelter, with food bringing up the rear. Tent cities and "Shanty towns" sprang up around water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Without electricity, people wanted to live close enough to a source of water to be able to haul water to their home. This was why so many great cities started as villages near water.

Even with law enforcement, for the most part nonexistent, the number of honest people still exceeded the number of criminals and punks. This also may have been because so many of the "criminal types" had "bailed out" of the cities earlier on. As is the tendency with humans everywhere, some form of order sprang up in the new "villages." Lacking paid police officers and anything to pay them, many of these villages went, unknowingly, back to the 1500's English system called "The night watch," where every able-bodied male was required to serve on the watch a

certain number of nights per month. The number in the watch depended on each village's size, situation and danger level. While many people owned guns, the weapon of choice for this kind of night work soon turned out to be another item from the 1500's, the spear. A long stout staff, with a solid sharp blade on the end was perfect for checking out dark niches, did not waste precious ammunition and was more than adequate in case of a feral dog attack, feral dogs still being a serious problem in many urban areas. In the Vietnamese communities, feral dogs did not seem to be as much of a problem. Also the spear did not "jam" or run out of ammunition and could be made by most people. The "night watch" would patrol the village during the hours of darkness, but during the day time the "Hue and Cry" was the system for dealing with crime. It is probable that almost no one had ever even heard of the "hue and cry" system that had been used for centuries in medieval Europe and that it developed here the same way it had there, so long ago. This system was simplicity itself. When somebody, or a group, tried to rob, rape, pillage, etc. someone would cry out "Thief!" "Stop Thief!" and point at the would be criminal. Other villagers would rush to see what the excitement was and they would also take up the cry. People would grab their weapons, from M-16's, to baseball bats with large nails driven through the head, and begin to chase the criminal or criminals. People knew that if they failed to support their neighbors, they would not be protected if they were being attacked, so they turned out with gusto. As more people spilled from shacks and tents, the criminals would soon find themselves badly outnumbered. Eventually, unless the criminal or criminals were able to escape, the crowd of angry villagers would surround them and justice would be fast, if somewhat brutal. In another time some people had opposed capital punishment and claimed that it did not deter crime. This may have once been so, with the long delays and the question of guilt or innocence often hinging on the price of the lawyers, but the older system now in use in many of the growing villages definitely did deter crime. At the very least the criminal, when caught, was permanently "deterred."

The real "first profession" was not prostitution, which came second, but the procurement of food and bartering it for services, sometimes of the second profession.

Fishing is one of mankind's oldest industries and wherever there was a large enough body of water some men began to fish, not only to feed themselves and their family's, but to trade.

Fuel for warmth and cooking became a very tradeable item. There was a great many burnable things in and around most cities. Some of these had previously been thought of as trash. Huge piles of rubber tires existed in many places. Soon enterprising people were finding ways to cut these into smaller more manageable pieces, which were used for heating and for trade. Old wooden buildings were torn down. Some of the lumber was used for cook fires and heating during the first and harshest winter. Some of the wood was used to replace tents with more solid, easier to heat, buildings. Most buildings had not been designed for "primitive" heating.

In the early days, after the collapse of the dollar, many fires had broken out, due to the use of candles for lighting and various forms of heating-cooking that most people were not experienced in the use of. Many fires had also been set during the rioting. Along with the night watch and the hue and cry, volunteer fire brigades were formed. Based on the hue and cry, the call of "Fire!" would bring people scurrying from their shelters to join in extinguishing the fire. "Bucket lines" were formed, to bring water to the fire. In some villages older fire fighting equipment was put back into use, but most had been designed to hook into existing water supplies, which now seldom worked.

Whenever large masses of human beings came together, waste disposal always presents a problem. Overall "the system" in America had worked so well that most people barely noticed that it existed. Mail was delivered promptly, garbage was collected, the sewers worked, clean water flowed with the turn of a knob and electricity was always there. Most people had grown totally complacent about all of these things. For all of their lifetime, this was how it had always been and this was how it would always be. Despite its efficiency, huge cracks had been forming in the "system" years before the collapse.

Water had already become a problem. Political battles had been fought over water, often resulting in the area with the most population taking the much needed water from the more rural areas. It was only by bigger and better water purification plants that the growing needs of an ever increasing population could be met. It was claimed by water purification engineers that a drop of water falling in the Great Valley of California, would pass through the kidneys of six people, before returning to the sea.

Disposing of waste had already become a nightmare for the engineers and politicians. Modern packaging and the increasing population were the cause of

most of this. People were used to placing their trash on the sidewalk and it would "magically" disappear. So even after the collapse, many people continued to haul their trash to the side walk and add it to the ever growing pile, in the hopes that "the system" would start working again and make the trash go away. In some places this garbage formed huge "walls" that ran for miles. Once ignited, these smouldered for weeks, giving off continuous foul-smelling smoke that made the cities seem like something out of "Dante's Inferno."

Human waste was another problem, which was taken for granted. Simply move the handle and clean water would wash the awful smelling stuff out of your life. When the water stopped flowing, the toilets stopped flushing. This did not deter many people from continuing to use them however. Some dumped ever more precious water down them to make them flush, while others simply let the pile grow until the smell drove them from using that room. Around this time people begin to find inventive ways of dealing with human waste. Some simply threw it out their windows. Others buried it. A few built the old fashioned, but sanitary "out houses." Some dumped it in the gutter for rains to carry to the nearest creek or river. Rats, who always live side by side with men, increased in numbers suddenly as they found huge piles of food on the sidewalks. Old diseases made comebacks, as people began to make the same mistakes as their ancestors. Typhoid and Cholera, both connected to unsanitary conditions, killed thousands before simple waste disposal rules were again enforced.

The number of survivalists living and secretly preparing within the urban areas had never been known. These prepared people now proved to be the backbone from which rebuilding could begin. Along with food and water, gasoline had been stored, often in violation of existing fire codes. Many more people had made preparation than was ever suspected. While these people had planned for their family's needs first, most were far sighted enough to realize that in order for them to survive, they would have to help their neighbors. Much of the early organization came from these people.

During that first winter, most people struggled to get through each day, but some found uses for their knowledge and began to ply a trade. A doctor was always in demand, although many had become so specialized that without modern equipment, they were almost useless. Old-fashioned soap making became a worthwhile business. A gunsmith could make a living.

With the approach of spring, many of the people accepted the fact that "something" had gone wrong and that "Big Brother" was not going to be there, taking care of their every need. These people cultivated the soil to plant gardens. Because of the labor involved, many of the gardens were community efforts. Packets of seeds were found, many much older than the recommended planting date. Many people had enthusiasm and the necessary energy, but lacked the practical knowledge of growing food crops.

A great and, until now, totally unvalued source of knowledge was found in the old. Having lived through so many major changes, the older people most often had answers, to a world that somewhat resembled that of their youth. Sought out for their knowledge, the old were suddenly respected and valued once again, as people began to look past each day and toward the future. Despite the stress and rigors of life in the new villages, many people found that they had more energy and actually "felt better" than before the collapse. This was because the collapse had brought one blessing with it. Television was gone. Many people had been suffering from "sensory overload." When the power grid shut down, it took the TV's and computers with it. People suddenly found that they had more time to do the things they wanted and needed to do. Families actually had meaningful conversations together. Living in the raw present, people found their lives full. No longer did they need to live vicariously to find meaning. The rebuilding had begun, but it would be a long road back.