

Survivalist – Then and Now

Recently the subject of “Survivalism”, if that is a legitimate word, came up. It reminded me of two men I was acquainted with some 40 years ago. Today they would be called Survivalists or Preppers. They did not view themselves as such in the conventional sense those terms are used today. They simply wanted to live their lives unaffected no matter what stupid thing some individual or group would do, no matter whether or not a break down in government or society. But you would have not known they felt that way unless they came to know you well. Now, some 4 decades since they initially shared some of their inner lives with me, I learned both have passed on to an eternal survival. They were nice, ordinary-behaving fellows, one married and the other a confirmed bachelor. I thought you might be interested in their take on how to live unaffected.

Them and Then

Through all of this keep in mind that 40 years ago there were no cell phones, no LED flashlights, no lithium batteries, no IPads, and no a-lot-of-things we have today. HP introduced their 9000 series computers in 1984 and IBM introduced its “PC” in 1981, so what computers there were not exactly “personal.”. What I share here is what these two fellows did to isolate themselves from the impact of errors by others – so no GOTCHAs please. Towards the end of this tale I’ll comment a little on bringing content up to current times. You can excite yourselves with your GOTCHAs then if you like.

Physical Fitness

Both men, made a point of being in very good physical condition. My impression of them was that in their minds mental and physical toughness was essential to all the rest. Memory, vague though it may be, tells me they were no more than 10 pounds over ideal Body Mass Index weight, no tube around the waist and no tummy pooch. [I was very much into team bicycle bike racing at the time so such matters as BMI were up-front in how I viewed matters. That is not so much the case today.]

These two men thought it in order to live unaffected they had to have the capacity to Get-Out-Of-Dodge (GOOD they called it.) I can’t say where they were going if they needed to GOOD but they did more than have a paper plan. They had actually made “test runs”, wearing the clothes, equipment, and supplies as they would in the real case. And they kept in condition by walking many multiple miles on weekends at a 15-minute mile pace. [The latter impressed me because as the head of a bicycling race team I conducted weekday road training rides for weekend racing.]

Equipment

They had two sets of equipment, one for GOOD and another for Staying-In-Tidewater (SIT they called it.) [Yes, they lived in Tidewater Virginia. And being a government worker causes a propensity for acronyms.]

The GOOD equipment was a backpack affair limited to 25-30 pounds and caches of resupply located along the way of getting out of Dodge. [No, I do not know where the

resupply locations were and if there were caches never used they have long since rotted away.] I do know the GOOD equipment in the backpack included (1) several ways of starting a fire (matches, a flint fire starter, etc.); (2) a 2-battery AA flashlight with one or more pair of backup battery pairs; (3) a heavy duty knife and perhaps a simple Swiss Army knife; (4) a rain-proof sleeping bag; (4) plastic/metal container(s) for water; (5) a wool blanket [I think that at some point they switched to space blankets]; (6) a small-size rifle and ammunition [Don't ask me the caliber – do not recall. I think it was bolt-action. I just recall it being physically small and there was only one between the two of them.]; and (7) a battery-powered radio. [It received short wave as well as AM and FM. It was not exactly miniature, but again only one of the two of them carried it.]

The SIT equipment was more elaborate. They used Aladdin Blue Flame Kerosene Heaters. [I know this to be so because the stove impressed me and I since had one myself.] Kerosene smells I know but that doesn't matter if it is cold and you want to be warm. They also had a small wood stove. [The SIT location was a two-room building in the backyard of the one who was married. One side of the building had an overhang under which was wood. I have no idea the supply amount but I suspect it was more than a several-months provision for a low-heat flow from the small stove.]

Do any of you remember kerosene lanterns? They used those for light. [As I recall, they did not use oil lamps because they thought they were not sufficiently durable or portable if needed. I suppose they also figured that they only had to keep one form of fuel.]

There were other equipment, such as axes, bow saws, tarps, candles, a large first-aid kit, water-proof boxes of matches, more sealed lighters, flint-based fire starters, D-battery flashlights and batteries, pencils, paper, duct tape, shovel, pickaxe, bunk beds in both rooms with a bunch of wool blankets and down comforters, several rifles and handguns with ammunition supply [I do not know the calibers, but I think they were larger than the one they had for GOOD.]; and large-gauge, double-barrel shotguns with shells.

Something else they had were Daisy, lever-action BB guns and lots of BBs. They used them for a low-cost method of maintaining shooting/aiming skills in their urban area without making a lot of noise that drew attention. [I agree, the BB gun is not going to kill anything but perhaps innocent birds, yet even birds can be food. But more importantly, even though the shooting range distance is probably no more than 15 to 20 feet the ability to maintain a tight cluster at the target is the same no matter the caliber. It is a matter of breathing, body posture, heart rate, etc.]

There were other pieces of equipment but I do not recall the details.

Clothing

For the GOOD situation they used what I would term as lightweight or medium-weight wool pants, socks, and sweaters. They used waxed, brimmed hats and leather high-topped boots that were treated with linseed oil or mink oil. [Sno-seal would also work and maybe they used it too.]

I think the shirts were wool, but they could have been cotton. [I think they used silk undershirts. If they didn't they should have because I used them for all-day skiing and they

work well in terms of warmth and moisture. They also hold up well under a lot of protracted, over-and-over wear.]

They used jockey shorts. [I have no intention of discussing the pros and cons of jockey verses boxer.] I know this to be so because they said body warmth and the need to and hold the parts of the body in close tact. Interestingly, they lined the shorts with wide strips cut from paper baby diapers that they could discard and replace as needed. [That should provide for plenty of discussion.]

They carried rain jackets, of some dark color that, at some point in time used Gore Tex. The jacket served as a windbreaker as well as protection from rain.

They used multi-layers mittens. When I first came to know them well the outer layer was heavily-oiled wool and the inner a light weight wool glove. [At some point I introduced them to a Gore-Tex mitten shell inside which I used a wool glove. Their adoption of the shell used an inner wool mitten whose end portion over the fingers folded back to expose a glove configuration that left the tips of the fingers exposed.]

For the SIT situation I don't think it was different except they used more cotton shirts. And yes, they used the baby diaper liners. [The idea was that the diapers absorbed sweat and odors thus making the necessity for bathing and clothes washing less frequent. I suppose that is bit of explanation is also good for some protracted discussions.]

Food

The food I thought was interesting. They did not depend on being able to kill for protein. In fact, they did not include meat as a core necessity – but rather as something to enjoy when it could be had. No, they were not “vegetarians.” Their thinking was that complete protein could be had from a mixture of foods that did not depend on either refrigeration or special preparation such as freeze drying, jerky, etc. The same foods also provided carbos. I do recall some of their combinations because I grew up eating some of the same and because I backpacked along portions of the AT and my bike racing.

I suppose the most popular and well-known combinations were beans & corn and beans & rice. I grew up on pinto beans and cornbread. But instead of cornbread for the GOOD situation they used a corn mush, which is cornmeal cooked with a little salt and water. Corn mush can also be used for a breakfast, particularly if you have a little sugar to add. These guys mixed the beans (pintos, navy, black, etc.) with corn mush, or rice, and then cooked the mix up in large batches sufficient for several days or they soaked the beans and corn/rice in water during the day as they trekked from one location to the next. Soaking for the day meant that little time over the fire was required. [At the same time too much soaking on a warm day can lead to souring. This mix, so prepared, is not exactly the best tasting food you ever ate, but it worked well for nutrition. It also minimized the time and amount of fire needed. The two men thought campfires should be only be used only for special warmth situations or recovery from getting wet. Otherwise fires were to be avoided because they were visual and odor signals of your location.]

They used other mixes, such as pasta with dried green peas and cracked wheat or wheat germ with peanut butter [Most of their food stock was bulk food that could be stored for

long periods of time, if kept free of moisture, without using any form of refrigeration. I never saw them place a cache of food of this type in retrieval locations but I do know they did so. They maintained large bulk supplies of these foods for both SIT and GOOD.]

One mix I did not see was that of nuts, with or without fat. They never said why they did not use such mix and I never thought to ask. Fat would have been a good thing in cold weather. So speculate on your own about this. I also do not recall the use of soybeans. I would have used them in a raw form because they are a complete protein and contain fat. They did use powdered milk and there were some very-dry cheeses in their supplies. They did not use spices. Their foods were bland. Perhaps that served to reduce the complexity of food preparation.

The two men never used coffee, tea, or other additives to water. I don't think that was because they would not have enjoyed the taste but rather because it greatly simplified what to drink.

Us and Now

There is much about what I have described that works very well today. Frankly, I do not see the merit of specialty packaged survival foods. If you keep a pantry of food, bulk and otherwise (but not refrigerated), that would provide for over a period of 6 to 12 months then you do not need to go out and spend a lot of money. A pantry that contains pasta, rice, beans, powdered milk, flour, baking soda/powder, peanut butter, preserves, coffee, teabags, spices, salt, sugar, pepper, grits, potato flakes, canned soups, dried cereal, oatmeal, olive oil, vinegar, canned vegetables (watch the salts) and fruit is more than adequate. Arrange each on the shelves with the oldest at the front and the newest at the back. If these foods are a part of your every-day diet then as you eat the oldest and replace it at the back of the shelf. That way you always have a 6-to 12-month supply that is not out of date.

Whether you use wood, kerosene, propane, or something else for food preparation practice using it for a period of several weeks so that you know what fuel supply to maintain for food preparation and warmth for say 6 months. In other words know your needs and store them. That includes water, toilet paper, paper towels, etc.

Today we have LED lights and Lithium batteries. That is a big advance in technology and it makes that part of survival more possible. If the power goes out there isn't electricity to provide recharging so consider a hand-crank battery charger such as at [K-Tor Human Energy](#). Supposedly this device will provide recharging not just for AA and AAA batteries but also for smart phones, PDAs, flashlights, GPS devices, tablets, etc. [I feel certain there are similar devices made by other companies. If the world does go to heck in a hand basket then in the cold of the night you can keep warm by hand cranking to provide recharging.] There are also [hand-cranked radios](#) that provide AM, FM, and SW.

The list of what you can or should have for surviving is huge. Some of the things that make sense but not discussed here may be found by clicking [HERE](#), [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#). Actually the list is probably endless. My opinion is that should the situation become seriously bad and reduce to circumstances of our worst fears then much on the lists you read

are frivolous for actual survival. The most valuable thing on the list is yourself, physically and mentally. Which brings us back to the two men I once knew.

These two men were prepared. In truth when it came to the essentials probably much of what they included in their supplies of food and equipment was not absolutely required. They were capable of improvising and they were mentally and physically tough. They were far more prepared than any other survivalists I have encountered. Both the sad and good part was the situation never deteriorated to the extent to which they prepared. Sad because they gave up much of their life style and of family preparing for the worst but never having to use it. Good because they never had to use it.

Could I do what they did? NO. I have no recommendations to make for what you do. If you do not think any preparation is necessary, either because you believe circumstances will never cause the need or you simply do not care, then okay. If you have made plans, great or small, that too is okay. What you do or do not do is your business, like mine is mine.