



THE SHITF ANTHOLOGY

SURVIVAL LESSONS
FROM THE
BALKAN WARS

BY SELCO BEGOVIC

Daisy Luther
Media



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About this book

Selco survived the Balkan Wars of the 90s in a city under siege, without electricity, running water, or food distribution.

Over the past years, he has given an inside view of the reality of survival under the harshest conditions. He reviews what works and what doesn't, tells you the hard lessons he learned, and shares how he prepares today.

He never stopped learning about survival and preparedness since the war. Regardless what happens, chances are you will never experience extreme situations like Selco did. But you have the chance to learn from him and how he faced death for months.

Real survival is not romantic or idealistic. It is brutal, hard and unfair. He has generously shared a great deal of information with readers of The Organic Prepper blog, and one question he and I have heard a lot is whether or not we could put together a collection of this work. So, you asked, and we answered with this very special anthology.

We've been very clear about the fact that this is work that has already appeared on the website. Because of the PDF format, you can easily print this off yourself or even take it to a local Office Max or Staples and have it printed and spiral bound. PDFs can be printed in part or in full, so you can focus only on specific chapters or print off the whole thing.

In this book, things in italic print are written by Daisy and non-italicized sections are by Selco. Please note that English is his 4th language. The stories are lightly edited for contextual accuracy, but the authenticity of his stories remains intact.

We've added some additional notes to the chapters along with some questions you can ask yourself about your own preps.

We hope that this collection helps you to take your preps to an entirely different level.

Thank you for your support.

Daisy & Selco

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Part 1: The Basics

- A Quick History of the Crisis in Bosnia
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- Who Survives and Who Dies When the SHTF?
- Stories from an SHTF Christmas

A Quick History of the Crisis in Bosnia

Before we delve into the SHTF events in Bosnia, it's important to have a general idea of what led to the crisis.

First, give us a little bit of background. What was going on? Please describe the circumstances in Bosnia during this time.

War in the Balkan region (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia...) started during the 1991 and went on until 2000 (if you include war at Kosovo and NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999), but historians mainly narrow it to a period of 1991-1995 if you do not count Kosovo war and NATO bombing. In some literature, you'll find the name "Yugoslav Wars" which is same (all above-mentioned Balkan countries used to be states in Federation of Yugoslavia (Jugoslavija or roughly translated to English it is "country of south Slavs").

...Yugoslavia (as a socialistic-communist country) founded after WW2 in 1945, and stop to exist in 1991 with the start of the wars. Shortly prior the war socialistic system (communistic) fell apart as a part of bigger events (fall of Soviet Union, fall of Berlin wall...) and democracy came, together with democracy, rivalry between states that wanted to stay in the Yugoslavian union and states who wanted independence raised sharply, that resulted in riots and small and isolated fights, leading to full use of Yugoslavian army (JNA) which was 4th largest military force in Europe in that time.

Wars had all features: Independence fights, aggression between states, civil war, genocide, re-alignments, or switching of allegiances as the operational situational changed, backing up from foreign forces (Such as US and NATO)... through periods of it you could say that it was an ethnic war or even religious in parts, but in the essence, it was war for territory and resources between factions who were in power, based on personal gain of wealth and influence only.

I went as a civilian and later as a soldier through the whole period of wars, I was in different regions during that period. Harder period of those wars (because of numerous reasons) happened in Bosnia, and one of the main "feature" of that period were "sieges" of a couple of cities that lasted from few months to a couple of years.

Some of those sieges were complete, in terms that everything normal stop to exist in city- electricity, water, police, medical services and everything else that makes normal life, every normal service. Death from sniper or shelling was an everyday thing, but also death from gangs because law stop to exist, or death from malnutrition, lack of medicines or simply lack of proper hygiene.

I found myself in one of those sieged cities. I lived like that for a year and I survived.

Every day, for almost a year, for me was a constant fight for survival, I was constantly either trying to defend myself or to look for resources, for usable water, food or simply firewood. We scavenged through the destroyed city for usable items because everything was falling apart, and we have to "reinvent" things in order to survive, like the best way to stay warm, to stay clean and safe or simply to make home medicine for diarrhea or high blood pressure.

How the SHTF in Bosnia

I was recently emailing back and forth with Selco and we were discussing the situation in the US right now, with the political polarization, the rage, and the general cognitive dissonance. I asked him if he saw any similarities between our situation and the one in Bosnia when the SHTF there during the war. When he replied I knew I had to share this information with you.

While we might like to think it could never happen here, the current events here are eerily similar to what happened there in the 1990s.

When you read this. think about recent events. The anger about immigration. The destruction of Civil War monuments. The unease between the races. The deep rage about the recent presidential election. The scorn and derision for neighbors who think differently. The way the media fans the flames of dissent between our fellow Americans.

You'll realize that it definitely CAN happen to us...and there's not one darn thing we can do except to be prepared.

What parallels do you see with events in the US and Bosnia before the SHTF?

US and Yugoslavia (in 1990) on first look do not have anything in common because people are going to say, "The USA cannot have anything similar to any socialistic system."

This is true but only on first look.

Yugoslavia had somewhere around 20-22 million citizens, six republics (similar to states in the US), 3-4 main religions, and many national groups (ethnicity).

The official state policy was to build Yugoslavian "nationality" (from the end of WW1) and through different ways that effort was successful until the 90s.

We were "something big, united through differences with a strong connection to make something big."

And then those differences were used to make chaos.

In the late 80s and beginning of the 90s (when democracy came) the problems started and ended up in series of wars and cases of complete collapse.

Things that I experienced in my case prior to SHTF, and things that you might recognize:

- Things that make differences between people are more and more problematic (race, religion, political opinion).
- Polarization is getting obviously stronger.
- People want to come to your country, but they do not want to “assimilate” or contribute to greater good. They want to preserve their way of life which is often absolutely contradictory to the way that your country (society) works.
- The political way of solving those problems often fails, because, in essence, those problems are hard to solve in a democratic way (in the spirit of democracy).
- Your freedoms are “shrinking” as a result of that.
- Calls for “radical solutions” for the problems are stronger and stronger.
- The media is absolutely working a dirty job, and it is hard to find out what is the truth anymore.

Suddenly people and events from history are “brought back” so people can judge and argue about it, to write history again, to build myths sometimes.

Can you explain how the current political polarization could make matters worse when the SHTF?

Strong polarization eventually brings fear and hate towards “others”, and once you get into that state of hate and fear it is very easy to be manipulated, even though prior or later, it looks weird and funny how easily you were brought into that state.

I remember the exact moment roughly 25 years ago when I was brought in discussion and actually rioting over the statue of a general from WW2 which was about to be destroyed because for some people he was a war criminal and for others he was a hero and important political figure.

It was a big event, and people were brought into that event in big numbers, arguing and fist fighting and rioting...

At the same time, the wheels of big events were actually already starting to move, and if I were smart I would have left the country or bought a weapon instead fighting over a historical figure.

Does this sound familiar?

It was only one event that was used in order to polarize people more. "Us" and "Them".

It is so easy to manipulate people when you throw hate and fear in the game.

Polarization makes things worse when SHTF because it is easier to "dehumanize" others that are different than you. Through the fear and hate, groups are pushed to do whatever the people in power want them to do, even if that means horrible crimes. Remember, once some group of people (religion, political, regional, race...) is dehumanized (for example through smart media work) the rules are changing, and everything is possible.

For example, with careful media work even today (in time of the internet, social networks, and independent information) it is possible to make the prepper movement look like a terroristic and anarchistic movement and then it's open season on preppers.

Did political disagreements go away when it hit the fan, or did they intensify?

In essence yes, they went away because it all went to how much food, ammo, or whatever resource you had. You realized that big opinions simply do not matter, especially once when you realize that all was somehow planned, and especially once when you realize how foolish you were because you trusted some things.

But of course, rage was fed with again fear and hate for "others".

It is like that story about how they tried to explain to a conscript [someone who was drafted into the military] what is war all about: higher causes and honor and everything else, and he simply could not get it. Then later in the middle of a fight he suddenly understands everything and yells: "Oh I understand now - THEY ARE TRYING TO KILL ME."

When you strip everything down to the bare facts, he was right.

How does it move from political arguments to one day, it has all hit the fan and everything has changed? Is there something predictable we could look for?

Again, it is about dehumanizing, no matter who or what group. It is about adopting opinions like “they are so different that they do not deserve...(to live here, to have rights...)

Once that happens a whole new set of rules jumps in and those rules mean that lot of your liberties and rights gonna be taken too, and that is the problem actually.

When that happens, you will understand that it is not really important who is who. The only thing important is that somehow you do not have your rights anymore (for example the right to carry a firearm) and then you are in s**t.

You can be so mesmerized with “important political events” or something else that you might even not notice that you are suddenly not allowed to grow your own food or have a solar panel on the roof or carry a pistol.

You might say now “it is impossible in the US” but I think in this moment it is bigger news than if some reality show star had “spicy” video than to understand how food delivery in your city works and how much food is in one average store if everything stops moving.

Yes, it is possible.

Which events in the US have you seen that made you immediately flash back to your situation?

I do not follow politics too deeply even in my country, not to mention politics in the US, but what I do follow is people's reaction to political events. By that, you can sense where the majority of people's opinions go and what you can expect from that.

Maybe a year ago I did comment (through an article) on some events in the US and I got an excellent comment from one of my readers who said “My nation, America, is being abruptly dragged out of a deep and prolonged state of subconscious anxiety and depression. It is being assaulted with hope and this is beginning to produce a state of relief which will be managed into uncritical nationalism if at all possible. This euphoric state of national mind is the perfect

cover from which to ambush a nation. The pressing for a one world government did not die under Trump, it simply got a new face. The danger to America and to the other nations of the world is more real now than ever. Extreme sobriety is warranted at this time. Most people I have spoken with cannot see this..."

Hope in something new and something better was exactly what I was experiencing just prior SHTF, new leaders, new democracy, freedom...

It clouded my perception, I trusted too much.

What suggestions, if any, do you have to help us be better prepared for political upheaval?

As always, operate in "small circles" (your family, prepper group, network of friends). Learn useful skills, meet good and interesting people (in prepper terms).

That small circle is what it is all about and what is important when SHTF. Sorry, but your political opinion and worries about state policies are worthless and cannot change anything big- it is the big circle, and it is important only in terms of looking and recognizing signs of future events, so you may recognize the correct moment for bugging out for example.

Do not be pulled into general fear and hate because it clouds your judgment and it simply wastes your time.

Do not be pulled into it.

Do people start to realize that their opinion means nothing in politics or do they still hang on to their illusions even after it all goes sideways?

Illusions were the first victims when SHTF. Here are a few of many:

"There are police, this cannot happen. There is law, this is against the law."
Actually, the police are police when the system works. When it does not work, the police are just a bunch of trained people with weapons, and it is completely up to them what they are going to do.

"I have rights." Yes, when there is a system and law to protect those rights. If you want to have rights when SHTF you have to be ready to protect them.

"I have gun and lot of ammo. I will firmly stand my ground." Good luck with that. There is a huge number of people already organized in violent groups, ready and

skilled in violence, who wait for the system to collapse to jump in. People with more guns, more ammo, more skills than you, and less morals and ethics. You need to lower your expectations.

“This kind of chaos cannot happen here (in the US). We have the best political system in the world.” This is my favorite actually because in my case the S. did hit the fan. For some period of time I was repeating this to myself, and even more, something like “This can happen only in some country in Africa, not here. Somebody going to stop this.” It can happen, and actually, it would be very bad because fall is going to be bigger. It is going to hurt much more, and people are going to be shocked much more.

Anything else to add?

I have seen many people killed, a lot of women and children too, civilians. A huge number of people suffered, were hungry and cold and were terrified through that period.

But I can count on one hand the dead or hungry politicians in that time.

Things were good for them through that period. Some of them ended up even richer. A lot of them are still powerful in the same or different parties and are still talking about “their people” or “causes” or “fear from others”.

It is the way it works.

Notes:

Selco talks about the warning signs that indicate things could boil over soon into chaos and unrest.

- *Things that make differences between people are more and more problematic (race, religion, political opinion).*
- *Polarization is getting obviously stronger.*
- *People want to come to your country, but they do not want to “assimilate” or contribute to greater good.*
- *The political way of solving those problems often fails because those problems are hard to solve in a democratic way.*
- *Your freedoms are “shrinking” as a result of that.*
- *Calls for “radical solutions” for the problems are stronger and stronger.*
- *The media is biased, and it is hard to find out what is the truth anymore.*

As always, operate in “small circles” (your family, prepper group, network of friends).

Do not be pulled into general fear and hate because it clouds your judgment and wastes your time.

Never think it can't happen to us.

What an Average Day Is Like When the SHTF

Did you ever think about how different your day to day life would be after an SHTF event? The little things we take for granted now, like making a meal, staying warm, or having water to drink and bathe in would suddenly become a whole lot more complicated.

Who better to tell us what that is like than Selco? For those who don't know, Selco spent a year in a city in Bosnia that was blockaded. During that year, he and the other residents lived without our normal amenities like heat, running water, electricity, and supplies that could be purchased at the stores.

I asked him some questions about daily life after the SHTF. I think you'll agree that his answers are eye-opening.

What time did you usually get up? What woke you?

A few weeks after the collapse came, all aspects of our normal life changed based on the new reality around us.

One aspect was "sleep cycle " - the time when we sleep and when we were awake and active.

One of the most basic rules that jumped in was that most of the activities got done during the night.

Some reasons for that were obvious, like danger from snipers. But also, the other reason (maybe even more important) was that over time it becomes very important to hide your activities connected to gathering resources.

To explain it more, when you have a lot of people in a small area (city) and you have less resources that are needed for that number of people, the fact that you HAVE something (food, water medicines...) needs to be hidden from people who do not have that.

The system (law, police, etc.) was out, and it was important not to give reasons for people to attack you because you have something interesting.

So, anything connected with gathering resources (wood, food, trade...) was finished mostly during the night.

Of course, violence mostly happened during the night too (violence that included "close fighting. ")

Activities in your home and yard were possible to be done in the daytime. For example, we would spend the day fixing our water gutter that goes from the roof, so it can go in a big barrel, but if we needed to climb on the roof and fix holes with tarps or to "funnel" it to the gutter, that needed to be done in the night time.

There was no "usual" time to get up, at least not in hardest period. Even if we did not have anything particular to do we would be alert during the night time, simply because night time was full of different activities in the city, and you needed to be ready.

In our case (because we had more than 10 people most of the time in the house) we could do a schedule that meant not all of us needed to be alert all the night.

During 24-hour periods of time, someone was always sleeping, others were doing some job, but as a general rule, nights were much more active than days.

Messing up with normal sleep cycle was a problem alone, and it contributed to the stress, feeling tired and stressed because you did not have enough sleep or enough quality sleep was a normal thing.

Sometimes close detonation of shells would wake me up, sometimes my relatives woke me up because it was my guard shift, sometimes we would all be awake the whole night because of close shootings, and possible danger.

Sometimes I would wake up by myself because that day I did not have any particular duty to do, so I would stay home, checking things in the house, maybe trying to fix some things.

What did you eat for breakfast, if you had breakfast?

Traditionally here (in Balkan region) we ate a lot of bread, and we eat it with almost all food.

It is actually strange not to have bread on the table, no matter what kind of food you eat, or what time of day it is (breakfast, dinner...)

It is a Slavic tradition from ancient times to greet dear guests with bread and salt (and right after that comes alcohol).

I am trying to portray the importance of bread here, and then when the collapse came, suddenly it became scarce (just like everything else).

I believe it was the biggest problem when it came to meals, the lack of bread, simply because we used to eat it a lot.

It was kinda a psychological problem for us too, not to have enough bread.

That was first biggest change.

Second thing was that the usual "schedule" of meals was lost.

It was very rare when we could all sit together to have dinner or breakfast, simply because someone was sleeping or someone else was busy with something.

For breakfast, we ate whatever was there in the moment. If the day was good and we managed to find something like an MRE or canned meat it was good breakfast.

On bad days we usually ate "pancakes". "Pancakes" were locally picked greens, mixed with water and very small amounts of flour (just to keep greens connected). It looked awful and tasted awful too.

The greens that people picked from nearest hills were supposed to be edible, based on rumors, or older people who had some knowledge about edible plants.

Another favorite at that time was "tea". It was a big pot that stood on the stove, with water and local herbs inside, we called that tea or soup.

It was something like substituted for one of the traditionally favorite meals in this region - soup. Just like bread, here it is a tradition to have hot soup with your meal.

Just like with sleep cycles, times of meals were messed up. Also, the food that we ate for particular meals was messed up. We ate when we had the chance, and we ate what was available in the moment. For example, in normal times for breakfast here, we ate sandwiches or eggs. It was something to dream about during the collapse.

And yes, sometimes I simply did not have breakfast or dinner, or anything for a whole day or night.

Did you have a job aside from survival? Did people go to work each day like they do now?

No, in my case no jobs because in that hardest period the system was out completely. There was nothing like regular jobs in places that you worked prior to the collapse.

You could find a use for your skills if you had any, for example being nurse meant I had some knowledge and skills, and it was pretty valuable actually because I could trade it for food or other usable items.

When the system is out, any knowledge in some particular field is important. For example, being able to recognize a broken rib or infection, and being able to help with whatever is available in that moment meant a real value that you could sell.

An important thing to mention is that in some other cities in the region where war was at the same time, some kind of system and government was still there. In those regions, the government imposed something like “obligatory working”.

It worked in a way that, for example, if you were an electrician in a city company, the government could give you an order to work for free for some other company, military unit, or whatever.

In reality, it meant that some armed group or fraction could simply mobilize you and take you from your home.

My biggest skill in that time was my medical knowledge. Even when the whole system was out, even when there was no medication, there was use for my knowledge.

Did children still have school during this time?

No, there were no schools in that hardest period in my place. The system was out completely.

There were some attempts from family members to try to keep up some level of homeschooling, but pretty soon it was clear that we all had much bigger and more serious problems than homeschooling.

Kids simply lost that period when it came to school.

How much of your day was filled with chores like acquiring food, water, and firewood? Can you tell us about that?

A lot.

People do not understand how much hard work is needed to get done things like water, food, heat, security because the system is here for us to take care of those things, so we do not have to.

We were ordinary city folks who did not have a lot of knowledge about stuff like how to go find a tree, take it down, chop it into small pieces, and bring it home somehow. Or how to collect water from rain or bring enough water from the river when that is impossible.

So, we learned that, but it took us time to learn. We were not preppers in any meaning of that word.

If you wanted to go to a hill close to your home and take down a tree for firewood it was all night job for a few people.

The first problem was that we did it in pitch darkness. After that, the next problem was to either to carry it in bigger pieces (and be slow and vulnerable) or to chop it down into small pieces (and spend more time in that place, which also was not desirable), or to leave someone to guard it while others took down pieces, or to go all together and risk that someone else took the rest before we get back.

As a carrying system, people often used homemade carts, very rudimentary setups made from an old baby cart or a wooden box with wheels from a baby cart, or similar. Or we simply would carry it on our back in bigger pieces and chop it later in our yard where it was much safer to be.

It was a heavy job.

Yes, there were days when we were good, we would have enough water, food, and wood. We were good.

But usually, we were always missing something.

When the system is out, way too much time is needed to take care of everyday needs.

If we had enough food, we did not have enough rain for water, so we took trips to the river. If we had enough water, then someone had a serious case of diarrhea and we were worried about that.

Not to downplay the physical threat, but preppers today usually focus only on the physical threat, on fighting, weapons, and similar, while there is much more to everyday survival.

One good example of the effort needed to get something done is trade.

In order to do trade, first you would look for information about someone who had some goods, then you'd check and recheck that information, then you'd take into consideration the risk of going there, then you'd make a plan how many of us were going and what we are carrying there, and then you'd go and do that trade.

It was a complicated and dangerous process.

Where did you use the bathroom?

Close to our house, between a destroyed apartment building (we used that building sometimes as a guarding outpost or up-front layer of defensive ring of our house) and our house was something like a small park.

It was boxed (hidden) from 4 sides and pretty safe to use as a toilet by simply digging a hole in the ground.

After few months we built something like primitive latrine there. It worked for us during that time.

Toilet paper after some time become unknown, so we used what was available, clean rags and water and similar.

What did you do for personal hygiene?

If you look at it from today's perspective, we did not do too much.

Personal hygiene was a matter of taking quick sponge baths when we had time and means for that and rare real bucket showers. But those were really rare.

When it came to our home, we did try to keep it as clean as possible. For example, we used one room for sick folks, we did try to clean ourselves in the yard and to take dirty clothes there.

Soap was possible to get in that time through trade, and in some periods things like alcohol pads were traded, but again the biggest problem was not having enough water for all our needs.

When you live for a prolonged period of time in those circumstances you kinda get used to the lack of hygiene. You do not like it but you live with it, and even make fun out of it. Psychologically people tend to get used to the lack of hygiene, especially when everybody around you is in the same state like you.

It was again a matter of having bigger problems on our mind.

For the minor problems, there were things like fungus infections, very common simply because in some periods we did not have enough time to keep ourselves dry and clean. Small cuts were usually solved with alcohol (alcohol for drinking was more or less available).

Real problems were connected with bad food and water treatment.

There were days during the summer when it was almost unbearable because of the stench that was in the city. A lot of bodies were not buried.

How many family members lived in one home?

It depends, but the tendency was that when the collapse came, relatives got together in the better house (between two families of relatives). So, for example, your uncle and aunt would come and live with you if their house was destroyed, or if your home was safer and better, or if you simply agreed that it was better to have more manpower together.

In my case, through that period, not less than 10 people were in our one house.

Usually, prior to the SHTF, living conditions and the number of occupants per house or apartment were the same as in any other European country.

One difference was that traditionally (prior the war) we did bring to our home parents when they got old, or too old to live by themselves.

For example, if you were living with your wife and two kids, and your parents are 85 years old, and one of them dies it was common to bring other parent to live with your family, to arrange room for him and to take care for him until his death, if you had a house big enough for that.

It was not the rule, but it was common as a part of the tradition. Yes, we did have homes and pension centers for old folks where the state takes care of them, but it was kinda shameful to leave your elders there.

I am pointing out this as an explanation why when the collapse happened, people from the same family tended to quickly go together and form group. Suddenly you were in the same house with your grand uncle.

It was like that because strong blood tradition was present. It is not like that anymore. That tradition has faded away.

As a general thought, at first look more people meant more mouths to feed. But more people also meant more firepower, more working power, more support... It is about the skills, will, and mindset of those people.

How were responsibilities divided up?

Through the socialistic-communist society doctrine (in society before the war) it was strongly pushed that females and males were equal in any field of life, and people had that kind of mentality built.

But when the SHTF, pretty soon a traditional way of life jumped in. Women were staying home, taking care of kids and food, and men were going out more actively.

It was not rule, but it was usual.

Usually, women were the ones who knew how to make food from something that did not look like real food or to make it edible, or to comfort sick or frightened kid.

Women were the pillar of everything.

I would say that we simply did things that each one of us was best in. It was not democracy. The person (not necessary the oldest) who had most organizational

skills was in charge, simply because it make sense like that. Duties were divided between other members based on skills, strength, and sense of fairness.

But things had to be done if you wanted to be part of everything.

As I said, we were family, so we were closely connected from before, so we did not have any big surprises. We were not preppers, but we had that bond from before.

People of younger age would do the guard job, but a man of 85 years would not do that because we would do it much better then him. He would stay home that day and maybe take care of fixing the tarp that needed to be used for roof hole.

What were some tasks that you had to do on a regular basis that we may not have considered?

You could call it scavenging.

When SHTF in a serious way, you were simply always missing something. Of course, you also missed important things, like food, water etc.

But you also missed (especially if you are not prepper) a whole bunch of small things that could make your life easier.

Some of those seem ridiculous. Like shoelaces, not only for shoes but also for oil lamps. But then you need shoelaces of a specific kind because the "bad kind" kinda melted and turned off the lamp.

You were looking for a simple crowbar because it is a great tool for taking down wooden door frames or similar. You needed small pot with lid on it because you want to take fuel from an abandoned car by making hole in the tank.

You were looking for spare batteries in abandoned houses, candles, wires, ropes, soaps... anything that would make your life easier.

And it is a process because you need to be sure... Is that house empty? Is it safe so it will not collapse on you (roof looked partially collapsed maybe)? Are you suspicious about booby traps because you do not know?

Simple things like a multitool (Gerber or Leatherman style) would make life so much easier in those days.

Any other stories you'd like to share?

In that time, for a light people usually used homemade lamps. A simple glass with small amount of cooking oil, shoelace, and a tin bottle cap and you have lamp.

It burned with a "dirty" flame, with a lot of thick black smoke, but the real problem was that it smelled bad. But at the same time, it smelled like doughnuts.

At least it smelled like that to us in that time. We had a lot of hard times sitting in the room, discussing something in very bad light, hungry but feeling like doughnuts are almost ready for eating.

Then I was imagining doughnuts because of that smell. Now, whenever I eat doughnuts I always remember those survival lamps.

Notes:

Do not underestimate the power that food has not only in calorie terms but also in psychological terms. Having and eating food that you love makes things much easier. Store food in your prepper storage that you LIKE to eat.

Very soon people (when they had all ingredients) started to make bread in small pots right on the stove, it didn't need much fuel was easy to make

Finding firewood was a constant job, so often while they were doing other jobs, they collected it on the way, things like wooden windows and door frames from destroyed buildings. Be sure to have a system for carrying heavy things, like a cart or wagon.

Selco always advocates building your group way before SHTF, because that way you get to know folks that your life may depend when SHTF.

Simple things like a multitool (Gerber or Leatherman style) would have made life so much easier in those days.

Who Survives and Who Dies When the SHTF?

Did you ever wonder about the differences in how people behave in a crisis? Why some people survive, and some people die? Are there characteristics that we can nurture now in good times that could help see us through bad times?

I'd talked with Selco previously about who lives and who doesn't in a long-term emergency, and a great determiner is a flexible mindset. In this interview, we go deeper into who can withstand the stress of an SHTF event and who crumbles. Today he shares his insights from the Balkan War.

What were the worst mental stressors during the situation in Bosnia that are probably common in many long-term scenarios?

Obviously, it was a situation when violence was very widely used and in a sporadic way (very often without any logic) so people lived under constant physical threat, and also in very poor conditions.

On first look that was mental stressors, but this part or field of survival is in my opinion very important and commonly overlooked in prepper community, and there is much more to it.

It is a huge topic, but we can touch on some of this in the article. I researched it a lot. A few factors were important, and will be important in any future collapse event:

#1) Loss of control

If you are living a normal average life with your family, you have a job, kids go to school, you go to the physician when you are sick, kids eat their favorite foods.

There are police for problems, there is law and order, everybody knows its place more or less.

You feel that you are in control of your life and lives of your family.

And then one day all that is gone. You find yourself in the world where very often things of life and death are a matter of pure coincidence or luck if you like, or a matter of event. For example, is there going to rain that day for enough water?

People had a very hard time of dealing with it, you can be prepared very well to some extent, but also you need to be prepared that for a number of things (big number) you are simply not in control anymore.

#2) Hopelessness

Hopelessness is the big word when it comes to survival, and from my experience, it is hard to beat it.

A survival event that lasts for few days, even a week or two, is like a camping trip, something like people go together, share food, help, there are nights spent next to lamps, violence is possible but not widespread because people see that event gonna last only for week or two.

Some people gonna take chance and do violence or stealing but the majority is gonna keep it together to the end of SHTF.

Events that last for month or two are harder, more violence and harder time, but still, people see that everything gonna go back to normal.

When you are thrown into an event that looks (or you think) like it is gonna be a permanent or very prolonged condition, rules change.

From one side you have people that are not gonna be so nice and helpful to each other simply because they see this is gonna last and they gonna be forced to fight for resources and from the other side you gonna have hopelessness.

Most humans need to see cause in order to operate on the proper way, or in other words, in hard conditions people need to see 'light' no matter how far it is, otherwise, you might just mentally "surrender" because it is hopeless to push on.

#3) Re-setting of the values

In normal life, you are, for example, lawyer or clerk, or teacher, or famous writer and then one day the world collapses (let say because of EMP).

In 20 days you find out that you are living in the world where you are valuable if you can quickly and efficiently chop the trees, or pickle vegetables, or repair weapons, or invent a setup to charge car batteries, or simply shoot from the rifle.

I am not saying a teacher or writer is useless in SHTF, but values are "re-set" and simply if you do not have any immediate useful skills you'll be forced to learn it,

and you'll be forced to understand that your values (knowledge and skills) that you had prior collapse simply may not be valuable anymore.

People had problems with this new "value system".

#4) Responsibility

People have responsibilities in normal time taking care of their families. Those responsibilities are still there when some serious collapse come but because the system is out, all help is out too.

For example, you are responsible for your old mother who has high blood pressure problem and there is no doctor anymore, there is no medicine. There is no help from the system for your kid who has special needs, for example.

You realize that everything is up to you.

Some people simply could not take that. People could not watch their sick kids because they could not help them.

Some people would simply "surrender" or leave everything.

#5) Bending the rules

Most interesting is actually how people would (or not) bend the rules that they had prior to the collapse.

A majority of us live by some rules (mental and moral rules) that tells us what is right and what is wrong.

It is wrong to steal, it is wrong to harm people. It is right to take care of sick and elderly.

When SHTF you'll be in a position to "bend" these rules, simply because you'll be faced with lot of tough decisions and choices.

For example, is it right to steal from others if that means my kid's not gonna be hungry or die from infection?

Is it OK to harm other people because of that?

How are you gonna mentally live with that?

I am not advocating anything here, and I cannot give you suggestions but be sure that you'll have to bend the rules, and that you gonna be faced with tough decisions.

It is up to you how much you gonna bend it.

All of the factors mentioned above are examples, and usually, you meet all of them more or less, and in combinations.

What kind of person tended to do better when everything went belly up?

First, we need to formulate a definition of "person who tended to do better when everything went belly up."

I know people who were powerful in that time because they had manpower, a role in the black market, for example, they'd sell baby formula to people (sometimes mixed with plaster), or simply rob the people.

When war stopped they ended up very powerful and they are still (years after) very powerful.

But they are not in my definition of normal people.

We are talking now about ordinary folks, and I use the term "small circle" when describing how to live in those times.

You need to mentally adapt to the fact that you're gonna have to overcome some serious problem, but what is more important you need to adapt to the fact that some of the problems cannot be solved, some people will not survive, and you still will have to move on.

That small circle is your family or your group, and while the world outside is falling apart that does not mean your family needs to fall apart. You will just have to adapt to the new world.

Many people survived hard times, some of them by doing bad things. Other survived but fell apart when they found themselves back in normal times.

One thing about who did mentally well in that times is that those who had support from other people (family, friends) in that time went good.

It is very hard to be alone during events like that, especially if it is prolonged, of course, because obvious reasons for example security reasons (guarding home) or simply resources gathering. But when it comes to the mental aspect you need to have support from trusted people (just like they gonna need that support from you) otherwise resetting the values from topic above is much harder, or hopelessness will kick you harder, or simply bending the rules may kick you in a way that you bend the rules too much, and at the end turn yourself in something that is more animal than human.

Do you remember any stories you can tell about specific people who thrived?

Ordinary folks usually did not thrive. We all dragged ourselves through that way-too-long period feeling lucky if we were alive, with all parts of the body still there, and with families alive.

Everything else was day by day.

I remember this guy, I'll call him Ed here, he was the man with information.

You need to know that it was complete information blackout, and even if you could somewhere find radio most of the stuff that you heard on it (on local languages) was pure propaganda junk.

When you find yourself cut off from real information, all that you're gonna have is a whole bunch of rumors and misinformation, and only then you realize how bad we people are used to having information.

I cannot even remember what kind of ridiculous information I have heard in that times, and I believed in many of them because I kinda needed to believe in that.

I have heard (and believed) probably 100 times that peace is coming in 3 days, or new big UN convoy with food for everybody coming to the city tomorrow, big enemy movements there.

People need to know. It is human nature.

And during very hard times people are simply ready to believe in a lot of things that look like clear nonsense in normal times.

Note: have a means to communicate with other people, CB, radio, satellite phone, ham radio. To hear correct information, it is valuable because of many reasons, and also it is mentally very valuable

Ed was the guy who spread rumors-information-news, and people would give him food for that information.

I believe we all deep in ourselves knew that it is probably just rumor, but "Ed said yesterday" was some kind of information, something to talk about, something to hope for.

Ed survived alone whole event (pretty rare) thanks to the fact that "he had information."

What kind of person suffered the most?

Survival is about being able to adapt to new things, and those new things are bad mostly.

There are many factors here that are influencing how you gonna mentally cope with collapse. A few of those are:

- how prepared you are (how many preps you have like food, water, medicines...)
- how many usable skills you have (natural remedies knowledge, gardening, technical skills, fighting skills...)
- how dependent you are of the system (you are living in city apartment building or in small rural communities)
- what kind of group (or family) you have around you, what kind of skills those people have, how close (trusted) those people are...

These are just a few examples, and even if you have everything above you still need to have mental strength.

Or in other words, you may be perfectly prepared survivalist when SHTF just to find that you are falling apart mentally because this new situation is simply not for you.

In my case (I am talking about people who were not preppers at all) people who suffered most were people who failed to recognize the new rules.

We had (in that time, in my family) college professor, man that was pretty important in normal times. Students were kinda trembling when they use to see him.

When SHTF he mentally fell apart and become useless because he felt that suddenly he become nobody, completely unimportant.

Every scum with a rifle was more important than him.

It is not about that we could not find a use for him, it is about fact that he was "plugged" so heavily in the system and when that system was gone he felt there was no sense to anything.

He did not want to try to be useful in any other ways.

One definition would be that people who are "plugged" or depended too much on the system had worst time when system disappeared (SHTF).

What are some things that can help a person who is having a difficult time during a crisis?

I mentioned that you need to have support from other people, but also you need to have peace of mind.

It is easier said than it is done, but yes, faith and religion, or kind of spiritual-mental order helps a lot.

I cannot say that religious people had less hard times, but I am sure that religious people went more peacefully through that hard time because it helps you to make sense of everything.

Personally, I had kinda "philosophy" over the time that went something like "I'll do whatever I can, and the rest is not in my hands anyway."

Over the times it grew into "It will be whatever it has to be." It worked for me at that time.

It sounds simple, but this philosophy helped me through some of the hardest periods because I understood that I can do only "this" amount of effort, but there were so many things that were way out of my control, and way random. If I worried too much about it, I might lose my mind.

It worked for me then but remember that I was not prepared. Preppers today are more prepared, and by combining that prepping with peace of mind, it makes even more sense.

Remember that you need to find sense in life when SHTF. You need to have reasons to push on and on.

God, faith, kids, love... you need to have some reason and to stick to it.

It can be things like teaching others about herbs, or food growing.

If you do not have good reasons you either end up dead because you stop caring, or simply you turn to an animal just following the most primitive instincts.

What are the things that made people feel better and helped recapture some normalcy?

I have to say that drugs and heavy alcohol drinking were in use very much, but not as a mean to recapture normalcy, it was more to get lost - to forget reality.

You need to have a "vent"- it is different for different people. As I said, for a lot of people it was alcohol or drugs, for me it did not do the complete job and often it was dangerous to get "lost" in times like that.

It was very usual to see people smoking marijuana, people who never even heard of it prior the SHTF.

For me, two things were like "charging my mental batteries" - music and reading.

Music was rare, and it was actually if you stumble on someone who plays guitar, reading was more available, and for me, it was like I was still there, but I had escaped to a better place while reading or listening music.

In some bad situations I did find myself singing songs, maybe I looked retarded in that moment because that, but actually it helped.

When you are dirty, hungry, frightened for security, worried for your family, and when all that goes for months, you need something that gonna make you feel fine for some time, not to forget all troubles (like with heavy drinking or drugs maybe) but more like to push all worries aside for a bit.

Note: do not mix alcohol abuse with fact that it is a great idea to store alcohol for SHTF. Have alcohol for a trade, or drink, but do not try to solve heavy times with alcohol abuse. It does not work.

Small snacks, like candies, are precious things as a mental help.

Check today what kind of small things comfort you when you are down or having problems, and count that when SHTF those small things will probably comfort you 10 times more.

Are there specific personality traits that we can focus on now which would help us through a situation like this?

A sense of humor!

In that time friend with a good sense of humor for me was worth like 5 rifles or 50 MRE.

A good sense of humor is an important survival skill and often overlooked. I am not joking.

And storytelling.

We had in our family old man who was guerilla fighter during WW2, and he combined both of these qualities.

In hard times, when we were more or less desperate he would tell us stories of his fighting in WW2 - how they fled from the Nazis, how they starved, how they froze in the woods.

And over the time it helped. For example, one of us would comment "Oh, there is only one can [of food] today for 5 of us" and then he would say "Oh, you wimps, it is piece of cake, during the WW2 in the German encirclement I ate my shoe for a week."

And for whatever hard time in our SHTF, he would have a story of "Oh, you wimps, during the WW2 I..."

Over time it became partly a joke, but also partly a serious thing.

Even between each other, when we saw it is a hard situation, we would joke "S**t, this is bad, we are in serious trouble now, call grandpa with one of his "oh, you wimps, during the WW2" stories.

That old guy knew exactly what kind of mental relief we needed - joking and storytelling how someone else had hard times and how he managed to survive.

He had a sense of humor, a gift for storytelling, and he had spirit.

Thanks to him I grew the habit of using humor in hard situations.

Notes:

These are the things to watch out for mentally:

- *One of the biggest things that will affect your mental health is the fact that you will no longer be in control of your life.*
- *When people realize that things aren't going to go back to normal anytime soon, they begin to feel hopeless, which is another factor in declining mental health.*
- *The increased responsibilities can be overwhelming.*
- *Skills that are valuable now will not be useful when the SHTF.*
- *You'll have to adjust your thoughts on "the rules." Things that would have been unacceptable before will suddenly be the things you have to do to survive.*
- *People who depended too much on the system had worst time when system disappeared.*
- *Keep your sense of humor.*

Remember:

It is very hard to be alone during events like SHTF for obvious security reasons or resources gathering. But when it comes to the mental aspect you need to have support from trusted people otherwise resetting the values from topic above is much harder, or hopelessness will kick you harder, or simply bending the rules may kick you in a way that you bend the rules too much, and at the end turn yourself in something that is more animal than human.

Stories from an SHTF Christmas

Have you ever thought about what an SHTF Christmas would be like after an end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it event? I'm not talking about a minor issue that just affects a few people, but a full-on disaster that changes everything.

Selco shared some really interesting stories about a normal Christmas in Bosnia versus how things were when the SHTF.

I read over the answers to his questions at least a dozen times and thought about how fortunate we are. Even our most difficult times here, in our society, would have been the height of luxury during the war in Bosnia.

But will we always be this lucky?

When Christmas rolled around, it was obviously very different than any other holiday people had ever experienced. Can you tell us the usual Christmas traditions in Bosnia BEFORE this all happened?

As said, I grew up in Yugoslavia, which was socialistic and communistic country. One of the thing in that country and system was that religion was not forbidden, but it was strongly, let's say "advised" that religion is way down in the list of life priorities.

On the other side, it was strongly "advised" that we put aside our differences (we had many different ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, and a couple of main religions) in order to build one "ethnicity" - Yugoslavian. As the result of that all different religions kinda know each other very well, and people from different religions celebrated more or less or know all religions.

Christmas for most of the folks was very much connected to the New year holiday (again something that is connected to the official socialistic system) and it was just like everywhere in the world I guess, holiday of presents and gathering of family. For example, going on midnight mass was matter of being together with family and friends, and meeting each other-not so much matter of religion not too many "real" religious people).

I was a teenager more or less, but my memories of that holiday prior the war are: peace, good food, family gathering and presents, and of course Santa. It was huge and "mandatory" thing that kids gonna get big presents then.

I'm sure that then, everything was very different. What were some of the changes? How did you celebrate?

Everything was different when SHTF, yes. Living was hard, comfort was gone and everything was stripped down to the bare survival. Lot of small commodities that we usually do not think about (we take it for granted) was simply gone because of obvious reasons (the whole system was out) but also because simply life becomes full of hard duties, to finish simple tasks and obtain resources becomes hard, dangerous and time-consuming.

Celebrations become rare and not so happy and big (not even near) but in the same time they become more precious and needed too.

Get-togethers (family) become even more important because people lean much more on each other between group or family, simply because they needed much more support - psychological. too - than in normal times.

A lot of religious people lost their faith when they saw family members dying. On the other side lot of people found God in that desperate times - as an only hope.

Being together with family members for small "time off" become almost like small rituals, like a ritual of finding inner strength and support in order to push more through hard times.

Yes, religion was a big part of it, but it was not only about religion, it was about finding strength in you and people close to you - family and sharing it between each other.

Without access to store-bought presents, what kinds of gifts did people give?

It could be divided in two groups:

Things that help you in the new reality:

All kind of things that helped you to solve all kind of problems that SHTF brought. For example, people who were skilled in handcrafting used to made cigar holders out of wood and bullets casing, it was very popular for smokers and the reason for

that was because cigarettes were rare, and people usually smoked bad tobacco rolled in bad paper and good cigar holder (as a combination of cigar holder and pipe) was essential for smoking that stuff.

It was small thing but really important if you were a smoker in that time.

Another example was small handmade stove. It was made from thin metal, and in some cases, it was portable. Point was that kind of stove needed really small amount of wood (fuel for fire was important and hard and dangerous to get in urban settings) to make it really red hot and cook something quickly or boil water.

So cool and usable kind of inventions.

Things that connect you to normal

In this other group were all kind of things that connect you to the normal (prior SHTF) life. It was not only cool and nice to have those presents, but also it was important psychologically to taste something that actually makes you feel normal again.

For example, after living for months through collapse, one simple bottle of beer could make you feel human again, and it would somehow gave you strength.

Sweets (candy), beer, spice, or even few songs that someone play on guitar for you were precious.

What did you do for the children at Christmas to make it special?

Kids were somewhat "forgotten" in the SHTF times. Quite simply not many people paid attention to them other than keeping them safe from dangers.

People did not have enough time to take care about their needs.

During the holidays people usually wanted to give some kind of joy for them, or to "keep the spirit" of holiday alive for them.

In majority of cases it was very poor imitation of holidays in normal times, for example I remember that making pancakes (jam was made out of tomato juice and very expensive sugar) was considered alone like a holiday. Special food, or attempts to make some special food, for kids, were usual holiday presents for kids in that time. Today that kind of food would look ridiculous and not even edible probably, but in that time, it was precious.

What did families serve for Christmas dinner in Bosnia during this time?

Traditionally for Christmas and New Year holidays in this region here, we ate huge amounts of meat, and drink wine, so people during the collapse tried to keep that tradition.

Again, it was mostly unsuccessful in terms of normal, but in that time having hot stew kind of meal from MRE was considered holiday dinner, and actually it was very, very tasty and a "holiday spirit" dinner considering what we usually ate.

Wine was out of the option most of the time, but hard alcohol was there.

In general, were people happy and joyous to find a chance to celebrate, or was it grim and depressing because it was so different?

General picture looked like this: we were cold, more or less hungry, dirty, tired and unsure in future, but yes, we appreciate feeling of getting together for holiday and we were trying to keep "spirit alive".

Truth is that sometimes it worked, sometimes not.

But generally, yes, psychologically it was important, it had its place, it had a sense to get together, take some time to try to feel normal again, to remember that we are still humans.

Definitely those moments were not bright and happy, like in normal times but on the other hand those moments were appreciated and were much more real than in peacetime.

Do you have any holiday stories you can share from this time? (Doesn't matter if they are happy stories or sad - I'd really like to show the reality of post-collapse holidays.)

It is big thing (I guess just like everywhere) to leave presents under the tree for Christmas and New Year here.

It is custom here to buy big bags (kids motifs of cartoons, fairy tales and similar) and fill it with favorite snacks, sweets and toys of each kid and leave that bags under the tree (we did not had custom of socks and similar, we had those bags, to literally translate the name would be "kid package").



Of course, it was out of the question to have the bags and sweets and toys in the middle of SHTF.

My uncle in that time came into an opportunity to make a deal with local small "warlord" or gang leader if you like.

The deal was about giving some weapon for food (the guy had a connection with outside world) and my uncle "made a condition" on the whole deal with the term that he will give a weapon for food, but the additional deal was that he also need 3 "kids packages."

In that time and particular moment, taking into consideration with what kind of people he was making a deal it was like he was asking a serial killer, to his face, to sing a gentle lullaby, and my uncle said that those guys simply could not believe what he asked.

Everybody was looking for or offering weapon, drugs, violent contract deals or even prostitutes from those people but he was looking for "kids packages".

But they indulge him, and my uncle said that he thought they indulged him simply out of the fun, and out of the fact that it is gonna be a very interesting urban legend that someone could obtain kids packages in that time.

The guy even wrote down the list of sweets and toys that my uncle asked from him.

I think those sweets and toys when they came were one of the most unreal items in that time and place, but they were worth the effort.

It really gives you something to think about.

Notes:

What a reality check. And how fortunate we are. Our version of "things were really tight this Christmas" is laughable in comparison to what is described above.

I've often recommended prepping with things like cake mix, birthday candles, extra Christmas cards, and items that support your family traditions, and after reading what Selco had to say, I believe it's even more important. You can't overstate the psychological aspect of being able to provide that sense of normalcy.

Part 2: The Specifics

- The Dirty Truth About Water and Sanitation When the SHTF
- What We Ate and How We Got Food When the SHTF
- The Reality of Barter and Trade in an SHTF Economy
- How to Stay Warm During a Long-Term SHTF Situation

The Dirty Truth about Water and Sanitation When the SHTF

The biggest concerns in any long-term emergency are water and sanitation because the lack of these things can cause serious illness or even death. Because water and sanitation aren't nearly as glamorous as guns and gadgets, they're often overlooked in a preparedness plan. I asked Selco some questions about these important issues in this interview. The truth about it is dirty, unpleasant, and something for which you absolutely must plan.

Once there was no more running water, how did you get drinking water?

Just like most other things (especially when it comes to non-preppers) it was a matter of levels and layers.

The tap water was going on and off for a few days before service went completely off, so people had a few bottles of drinking water stored. But of course, most of us thought everything going to be restored very soon so nobody had thought about storing big amounts of water.

When it comes to lack of water and being unprepared, the levels and layers that I am mentioning meant that you first looked and asked for tap water (clean) for drinking. Then collecting water from rooftops sounded like a good idea. Then drinking directly from the river was good if there was no other source. And then, finally, when there was no other source. you simply drink dirty water even when you were sure it is quite dirty.

It was a matter of low resources, desperation, and of course low skill levels.

Our main sources were rain and the river.

Can you tell us about your rainwater collection system?

It was not anything smart, especially in the beginning.

The gutter system normally took water from the roof through pipes into the underground collectors and sewers. When we concluded that the running water was not coming back, we simply sawed off a piece of gutter and pushed it inside

the main gutter that led from the roof system (on the side of the house that looked inside the yard). Then we collected water inside a barrel.

We just used the water direction system that was existing there already, and just cut it off at a lower point, before the water was "lost" and redirected the water into a barrel.

It is actually pretty amazing how much water you can collect from the roof during one summer storm. A lot.

When it comes to that system of water collecting our main problem was lack of containers, because even if there is a huge amount of water to "catch" from the rain, we did not have enough adequate containers for that.

Probably if we were prepared in a smart way for that, our water problems would have been easier.

How did you purify/filter water for drinking and cooking?

Two main ways: boiling and filtering.

Filtering of the water was very rudimentary. We did not use any real filters, and people did not know how to make anything too complicated.

The most complicated filter that I saw in those times was a slightly changed version of a "bottle " filter with rocks and sand with added cloth inside.

We used cloths for filtering, or gauze. If water was visibly contaminated (particles) we would repeat the procedure until the water looked satisfying for us.

Boiling was a widespread method of making water drinkable, and often the quality of stoves and fuel for it were "measured" by the time needed for water to boil.

Were the rivers and streams contaminated? If so, how quickly after things went bad?

River and streams in cities were polluted (if we talk about drinking) before the war because poor care was taken of it, and it was mainly because of industry.

When SHTF that kind of pollution went down because of obvious reasons (everything stopped working) but other kinds of pollutants were there. City

services did not work, and many people lived next to that river (upstream too). So it was polluted with everything, including bodies from time to time.

We drink it, sometimes even without boiling and filtering. I survived it, but I was sick many times, probably because of that.

How did you keep yourself clean?

By the standards from before SHTF and standards today we were not clean most of the time, because most of the time we did not have enough water for that.

By the standard of that time (SHTF) we managed to use very small amounts of water to keep ourselves as clean as possible.

Most of the time it was something like sponge bathing with a bottle of water.

It was a joke at that time. Often people would say, "I just had shower using wet napkin only (from MRE)."

Years later I saw a similar scene in a movie, and it brought memories back.

And actually, it is a great thing to have a huge stash of those ready for SHTF.

When it was safe, we used the river for that, or people sometimes simply get naked in their yard during the rain.

What did you do for a toilet?

Very close to our house, through the destroyed building, there was small piece of land, which was "hidden" from all sides. We used that as a simple "dig a hole" latrine. Later we built something like primitive field latrine.

It was a simple hole in the ground covered with wooden boards, with channels leading away.

It worked more or less, but we had the good luck of having that place with enough "ground" close to home where it was pretty safe for spending that time there.

Folks use toilet everywhere that was available. Inside toilets were mostly out of use mainly because of the lack of water.

Of course, it contributed greatly to the city being a very dirty place.

Did you see an increase in sanitation-related illnesses like typhus, cholera? How did you treat those illnesses?

Everybody was at least once really sick from diseases that probably were caused by lack of hygiene, bad water and bad food.

Diarrhea, vomiting, exhaustion...

A lot of people had a couple of times heavy episodes of that, because simply, the whole chain of hygiene was really bad and broken.

Either you had problems with waste disposal, or bad water, or bad food, or simply you lacked personal hygiene.

It was a constant problem.

Sanitation problems were solved in a way that people would just throw away garbage from their own houses, as far as possible, or burn it when it was possible.

Because the system was out (of taking out garbage from that point) the result was that city was suffocating in garbage.

Diseases were inevitable.

Just like any other diseases they treated depending on knowledge and resources. In essence, people would try to cover it with medicines if possible and available, and with natural remedies.

Also, the sick person would be separated from other folks if possible.

Often method (and pretty stupid in that time because other bad factors) was to just leave a sick man to clean on itself, without food or anything, just a really small amount of water.

Do you have suggestions for some ways we can prepare for water and sanitation needs?

People usually do not understand how much consideration they need to take into solving the problem of a working toilet.

It is partly because it is maybe not a cool topic to discuss, but also it is something that we have taken for granted for many years.

Forget about jokes like, "If the SHTF forget about the toilet, it will be all over the place."

If you are living together with 4 members of your family and one day the SHTF and your toilet is not working anymore it is quite a big topic to think about because you suddenly realize how often you need to go to the toilet and problems that it can bring. (However, that may sound funny now).

With improper toilet techniques you are at a high risk for diseases, and when the SHTF, any kind of disease or illness will cripple you because you might need to perform heavy tasks.

Not to mention that "a small cut can kill you" because most probably, you are going to be your own physician, pharmacist, nurse etc.

There is lots of advice about how to deal with human waste: portable camping toilets, digging a latrine, even using it as a fertilizer or using it as a fuel (drying it) etc.

Some of this advice is clearly from people who do not have a clue about urban SHTF. Others are cool, but they are like more advanced solution (still the basic problem exists), and some of them work only in a wilderness situation.

I like to start with a very basic solution that solves my number one problem: what to do if my toilet does not work in my house or my apartment in an urban area.

A very cool and simple solution (and no, I did not "invent" it, it was there for quite some time) is having plastic buckets (the size that a toilet lid can be installed on it) and many plastic (heavy duty) bags that can be "installed" inside that bucket.

You still need to get rid of those bags later, but it is doable.

That is your immediate urban survival latrine. You can add some ash inside to make it more usable.

Often people if you ask them "how will you use the toilet when SHTF?" they talk about composting human waste, but your real problem is what do you do if SHTF and your toilet is not working, and you cannot go out in woods (remember, you are in the city) or anywhere because it is not safe.

People often mention the fact that your toilet might work even when SHTF, you are just gonna need water to flush it.

That is actually a problem and the reason why you need to look for alternate ways. Water is going to be a big problem, and it is gonna be hard to get for other even more important things not to mention toilet. (Unless you are living right next to a river or similar).

Try to figure out today how much water you "spend" daily for flushing the toilet and you'll get the point.

And do not forget that there is a chance that your toilets might be flooded, depending of what kind of collapse it is, and area where you live.

So, the "bucket toilet" technique is a start. Everything else is an upgrade if you have the means, space, and solutions.

If you have close space to your home where it is possible to dig a hole and make outhouse it is a good solution. Again, it will work for some time.

We are talking now about urban survival, and no matter how wrong or funny it looks to you, the point is to get it done in the fastest and cleanest and simplest possible way, and in a way that is the easiest possible to get rid of that waste.

By that, you are minimizing the risk of many diseases.

Go with simplest solutions first and then upgrade on that.

All of you can figure pretty easily how much water you spend every day for all of your needs.

Then use that number when you plan how much of water you need to acquire per day when SHTF (through rain, river, wells, your already "stashed" tanks of water etc.) and you'll see that there is probably scary difference between liters (or gallons) that you are using today and what you are going to be able to get when SHTF.

That means few things.

First and actually most important that you need to understand differences between necessity and comfort, in a way that for example having hot tub is great

thing, but you won't die if you do not have it, while not drinking enough water will get you killed.

So, using water when the SHTF gets a new dimension if you think in that way. Maybe you are not gonna be able to be clean all the time, but you'll survive.

Another thing is that you need to have a stash of water. Often people forget it and concentrate on food only (not to mention weapons only).

It is really cheap and easy to store some amount of water in canisters or barrels and keep it fresh by "refreshing it" on schedule.

There are calculations of how much time a man can live without water, but usually, there are no calculations of how much time a man can "operate" in hard conditions. You need to be able to run, hide, fight, be scared, be under stress, work hard. So, you need to have a stash of water immediately ready when SHTF.

Collecting water from your roof collection system and purifying it sounds cool maybe but try being thirsty for a week looking at the sky while you are waiting for rain.

I use 50-liter barrels and 20-liter canisters for water stash, on the balcony and in the basement. And I have small bottles of water everywhere. Nothing smart or spectacular but it will do the job, at least until rain falls.

Pay attention to water containers, not only that they need to be usable for water, but also that you need to have them in big numbers and not only big barrels.

Big stuff is hard to move, and once you fill it (for example from the roof system) you may find out it is not possible to move it.

Also having too much "manipulation" with big containers means more chance that you are gonna pollute the water, so think about that too. For example, find a way how you are gonna fill your bottles from big containers and similar.

One more thing that comes to mind when it comes to water collecting is tarps.

Tarps (nylon) are something that you absolutely need to have in order to help yourself during water collecting (collection and also for directing what you have collected).

Tarps have many uses in survival, so you should have decent amount of them anyway.

It all comes to the levels and degree of SHTF that you might experience but know that in some periods you'll be forced to use a very low amount of water for hygiene.

A good method is using a sprinkler watering can and sponge for a bath.

Also, have other methods as a means of water-saving for hygiene for when times get really hard with water (like wet wipes, and hand sanitizers).

Ways to disinfect water to make it usable for drinking are numerous and all around the web. Sometimes the discussion about best method is so fierce that remind me of "best caliber for SHTF" discussion.

It is important to understand that some of the methods kill germs but do not make water completely safe for drinking.

I personally prefer a few ways for making water safe (or safer) to drink: bleach, iodine tincture, boiling ,homemade filters (sand, stone, charcoal...).

I did try few portable purifiers like the Steri-pen and hand pump filters during the physical survival courses)and they worked (I did not get sick). It would be interesting to test it in a long-term situation, and yes, it is good to have them.

In the end, your plan all comes to the availability of water. For example, if you live close to a creek or river it changes your perspective completely in the long run.

Notes:

*Have a way to collect water and **enough containers** to store it.*

Be prepared to purify water.

Waterborne and sanitation-related illnesses are a fact of life in a long-term scenario.

A stash of wet wipes can help with sanitation needs.

Have a bucket toilet and heavy trash bags to use until you create a longer-term solution.

You can't have too many tarps.

What We Ate and How We Got Food When the SHTF

If a disaster is bad enough and lasts long enough, it isn't going to take long before there is no food to be had. In this interview with Selco, he shares his real-life experiences and explains how people kept from starving to death when there was no food in the stores.

How do you get food when there are no stores?

At the beginning of everything, most of the people did not have any significant “stash” of food in their homes.

In other words, the majority of common folks had food a or couple of days in their pantry and that was it. There were exceptions to that because the process of collapse did not happen in a few hours (in terms of suddenly there is no food in the stores).

When the chaos started, people looted stores after a short period of everyone buying things in a panic. Still, the majority of folks did not manage to get a decent stash of food from stores. Some did not want to believe that they were gonna need a stash. Others did not want to go out and participate in looting because it was dangerous. But I think the most obvious reason was that all food from stores was taken very fast.

In beginning period of SHTF, events unfold at a very fast pace. Actually, events go one after another so fast that if you find yourself lost in one event at the end of several events, you ask yourself, “Why in the name of God I did not go out and buy a whole bunch of food while I still could do that?”

Was gardening an option? If so, how did people protect their gardens?

Yes, it was an option, but the percentage of food from a garden was low because of a few reasons.

It was a city, without enough land for significant food growing, and the second reason is that even people who had some land (small gardens near houses) needed time to grow food there.

People usually did not grow food there in normal times, flowers, tea, maybe some particular kind of tomato, salad greens, and similar.

I remember going and checking gardens for tomatoes because people had tried some new sort of tomato close to their home, not as a way to have food, but as an attempt so they could see if it was OK to have it somewhere before they had a bigger piece of land for growing (before SHTF in a peacetime).

So yes, gardening was an option, people used every part of the available land, but that was not enough, and it was like you are checking every day how your tomato is growing, and you wait for it, but then you pick it and realize you have food for only a couple of days.

We were not prepared at the time to use every piece of land for food growing. It takes time to establish that.

Still, it was precious, and it was protected of course, just like your home, in the same way.

How often did MREs get dropped?

There was no schedule for food drops, at least no real schedule because it was all based on rumors like, "Tonight they are gonna drop food from airplanes." If you asked, "Who told you that?" the answer was "a guy who heard it from guy who heard..." So, of course, it was completely based on luck.

MREs were meals all in one package: food, sweet stuff, matches, even that hot sauce that was pretty handy when we want to add taste to some weird food that we ate or to mask a bad taste.

Sometimes, it would "fall down" every second night, or you heard it had fallen somewhere, it would be "I heard it from a guy who heard it..."

Sometimes it was 3-4 times per week. Of course, they dropped it, but that does not mean we could find any of the food. Other people would simply grab it before you.

Some folks headed for the hills every night in order to wait. People would choose one guy from family to go up every night and wait.

If those food drops had any schedule there where they loaded planes (as I understand later, the place was in an air base in Italy) it was completely lost on us down in the city in the chaos and empire of rumors. But very early we learned to recognize the low humming sound of food planes, distant but powerful.

You need to understand that in that time those planes were not the only ones to fly, so sometimes we were out waiting for food, but actually other planes bombarded us.

Now when I look back, it is weird how we trusted some of that information. For example, if we heard that food was gonna be dropped that night in some particular part of the city, some small area of some hill, people would go there. A reasonable man would have thought, "Oh, so some poor ragged guy in the middle of civil war and information blockade suddenly has info on where several huge military airplanes are gonna do some operation?" Not to mention the fact that the whole city together with all the hills looked to those people in the airplanes like small dots.

It was nonsense. But we were hungry, scared, and in the middle of chaos without any real information, so people trusted in a lot of things, especially in good news. **Do not underestimate the power of rumors in hard times.**

"Food drops" were performed for many cities in this area during the hardest part of the war. They helped on different levels.

Even today I find one of the happiest sounds to be the sound of MREs raining on a hard surface. I did not know the technical details (and still don't) of how exactly that worked, but most of the things that were dropped would break apart in the air, so on the ground, it would "rain".

It was like a lottery to be in the middle of that rain because the MREs were good stuff, and valuable, but some of the bigger stuff coming down could kill people. (It happened with bigger packages).

What food were you able to forage?

When it comes to foraging for plants, I know it is a popular opinion in some circles that you can survive and live by foraging.

In terms of urban survival, it is, in my opinion, overestimated if you are an average man.

Maybe it would work if you have lots of knowledge about edible plants, and maybe if you have many resources of those plants and are in the wilderness.

We were average urban folks. Our knowledge about edible plants was limited to the one or two usable plants that could be used for homemade tea.

For example, yes, we used pine needles for tea. It sounds great today, it is good healthy tea with vitamins and so on, but you cannot live on it, it can be in addition to your food, but not your main resource.

Older folks jumped in with their knowledge. They were folks that in those times remembered WW2 and hunger, and people usually listened to them when it came to what plant you could use for food.

Plants like nettle and dandelion were used, and in the worst periods, people simply started to use any available grass mixed with small amount of flour. Eating plants and herbs in that time was not a case of healthy living. It was a matter of not having anything else to eat.

Were you able to scavenge for food from deserted buildings?

Yes.

When the SHTF, especially in the beginning, some houses became empty. People left or died inside (for whatever reason, for example, shelling). Then folks would go through the empty houses and scavenge for food.

One memory from that time is the endless stench of rotten food (there was no electricity for the fridges). In the beginning, you could find food on that way.

If you were lucky sometimes you could find a bigger amount of food. Sometimes you came upon a house where the ex-occupant clearly hoarded food in the first days of rioting.

That period of time did not last for long. The stench of rotten food was pretty much substituted with another kind of stench. Soon there were more dead people than spoiled food in the city.

But even later, you would never know what you could find in destroyed and abandoned houses. Maybe few cans of food hidden or forgotten somewhere under the rubble, or in a destroyed fridge.

One thing interesting from that period (when it comes to scavenging) and also very important in prepper terms is that I witnessed and was part of something that I can call the transition of scavenging or maybe resetting the values of goods.

It goes something like this:

First people ran riot on stores and looked for valuables like gold, money, TVs, stereos, cars...then as they realized the situation, they looked for weapons, fuel, then candles, batteries, and food, then they'd dig up some gardens for few potatoes.

People needed some time to realize what was really important. It didn't take very long but sometimes even a few days or a week is important.

I have seen people running from a mall with items that, in few days, would become most ridiculous items to possess (and to take from a burning mall) in the middle of a collapse, things like a TV or a laundry machine or a music collection of a famous band.

The majority of people could not imagine what was coming, so they could not fathom that a bag full of AA batteries was gonna worth more than 50 laundry machines.

For example, the laundry machine was usable only to plug a hole in the wall from shelling or to reinforce the door.

I am not advocating that you go out rioting and taking stuff from malls and stores when SHTF, but let's say that if you find yourself there, think about what is useful to take in prepper terms.

Here is one example: if the SHTF again here, there is parking machine in front of my home that gives you an automatic ticket when you sin here insert coins. As soon as I see someone busting it open to take money from inside I will go and take the small solar panel from it (it is solar power operated). While other people think about money inside, I am thinking about solar power on the outside of it.

Where you able to hunt or trap anything for meat?

It was the city, so hunting or trapping anything more complicated than a pigeon was not really an option. The other reason was that it was city in the middle of a war, so real trapping had its own complications like shelling, constant noises, and similar.

If your situation is extreme, hunting or trapping can be about trapping pigeons or shooting a stray dog.

What are some things you can eat that most people wouldn't think of as food?

It is a matter of levels. Sometimes I get questions over mail asking if we had cases of cannibalism, and the answer is no. People need to realize that the road to that extreme is very, very long.

There are many bad things to eat before getting to that extreme (even if you are willing to go there) and people do not realize that.

I ate spoiled and old food of different kinds, expired food (cans of cookies from military storages that were expired for decades), food with worms (cooked together with those expired cans), grass that was boiled in water, leaves from trees. We ate different kind of meat, pigeon for sure, and I am quite positive cat meat once, and rat meat once probably.

How did you extend food to make it feed more people?

Over time, it gets important to have some food, or in other words to have your belly “full” of something so easiest solutions were to water food down, or to mix it with plants.

In other words, we ate a lot of “soups.” For example, if we had a small amount of meat and rice, but we have water and some plants, we would make a big pot of soup.

In some cases, it looked more like tea (a lot of hot water with a small amount of food inside) but it solved the problem of how to make something big out of small amounts of something.

When a situation is hard - when it is hard and demanding on both psychological and physical way - you cannot really ration yourself. You need to eat something, because of the simple fact that you cannot operate if you are not fed.

So, we ate a lot of very low-quality food, and yes, we were always more or less hungry.

How did you cook food without power?

We cooked with fire, a stove that used wood, and often an open fire in the yard. It was a constant equation of heating and cooking with low wood resources.

For example, if we needed to get a fire for heating it was used at the same time for cooking.

A small open fire on the yard was used in weather when there was no need for heating.

Was there a black market for food?

Of course, and it was matter that changed all the time based what was available in the city at a given moment.

For example, if food drops that week were good you could find MREs cheaper. Other times, all you could find was suspicious-looking meat cans without manufacture or expiration dates on them.

Nothing was fixed and for sure on black market, not even fact that you gonna survive the trade not to mention other things.

Again, it was a matter of levels, so there were people who “owned” the black market (people with strong organizations, firepower, and connections). Sometimes they dictated the “pricing” of food in the city, and sometimes there were common folks who could offered you few cans of meat or two MREs from their stash.

Sometimes you could run into a man who was offering you “powdered eggs” but in a dark, not secure environment (you are trading with unknown armed people for example), you needed to be sure it is not some useless powder.

There were scams and you needed to be sure who you were trading with, how secure the place was, and what you were actually trading for.

How much of your time was taken up with acquiring and preparing food?

It was a matter of economic thinking. It was not about making it delicious because we had scarce resources like wood for fire. and simply because often it was impossible to make it delicious.

It was brought down to the level of getting your stomach full of something, so you can continue to operate one more day.

Things to know about eating when the SHTF

- There are options of foraging for edible plants and hunting or trapping some animals in the city when the SHTF, but do not count on that as the main resource for your food, not in the long run.
- Acquiring food in urban settings comes down to the idea of taking food from other people - either people that are not there anymore (empty houses) or people that are still there (through the trade or attack).

All of the above options (just like lot of other prepper activities when SHTF) usually are not fancy and romantic/friendly.

When scavenging through deserted places, you can get injured and that injury can get complicated when there is no medical care. During a trade, you can get scammed, ripped off, or simply attacked and injured or killed because of the resources you possess in that moment or due to a lack of careful planning.

By attacking other people to get food (if you find yourself that desperate or if you wish to go that way) you are risking, of course, being killed.

In the end, it comes again to the idea that you need to be prepared very well for SHTF with your stash of food or your small garden where you are gonna choose what to have and how to use it in the most efficient way. You should minimize the need to go out and scavenge, at least until, you figure out some things.

Notes:

In the early stages of the collapse, events move very fast. Add to your stockpile then as much as you possibly can because you may not have another chance.

Be prepared to garden (and protect it).

Aid will not come on a reliable schedule (if at all).

Your desperation can make you a victim of people who lie to get others to a place at a certain time.

You will eat things you never would have considered eating before. Think now about what could potentially be considered "food" in a desperate situation.

Think about ways to extend a small amount of food to feed more people.

Half multiple off-grid ways to cook and be sure to have fuel for them.

Acquiring food in urban settings comes down to the idea of taking food from other people - either people that are not there anymore (empty houses) or people that are still there (through the trade or attack).

The Reality of Barter and Trade in an SHTF Economy

Barter is a hot topic in prepper circles, so I thought Selco, with his real-world experience with trade in a dangerous situation, would be able to provide some extremely useful information.

How quickly did people turn to barter once your city was locked down?

It was a matter of a few weeks.

Actually, for ordinary folks, it was a matter of few weeks because we did not get the new reality right at the beginning of everything.

Later when I remembered that period, I realized that even right at the beginning of SHTF there were people who did not want to take money for goods. They asked for valuables like gold, jewelry, or weapon for goods that they had.

Some of them were smart enough to realize that money was gonna become worthless really soon, and even gold and jewelry were only good in the first period, and then only if you had a connection to outside world to exchange it for something useful.

Ordinary folks needed few weeks. It was a process that went from buying goods with money, then buying goods from people who still wanted to take money (at outrageous prices) to the moment when money was worthless, and only goods for goods were accepted.

It was rare, but sometimes you could find someone who would sell you something for foreign money but at the 20-50 times bigger prices.

For example, if a pack of cigarettes cost around 1,50 German Mark (outside of the war region) we could buy that pack for 40 German Marks.

US dollar and Canadian dollar had even worse value.

Obviously, people would accept that money had connection to the outside world, and some of them ended up as millionaires because of that.

Same ratio was for precious metals and jewelry.

For small and quick trades, the usual currency were cigarettes, because of the percentage of people that smoked.

Even values were expressed often like "Oh, that's worth 10 cigarettes." In other situations, it was ammunition/bullets.

How were trade items valued? If someone wanted to make a trade, who set the terms?

Nothing was fixed.

Through the whole period, the value of goods went up and down based on a lot of things.

For example, if a UN food convoy managed to enter the city and some local warlord (usually) took it all, and the majority of the food was cans of fish, you could count on the fact that that month those types of cans gonna be cheaper than the month before. Or if that day's US airplanes managed to "hit" with airdrops in our area then MREs were going to be bit cheaper to find.

Sometimes a simple rumor (planted by rival groups) for example about "poisoned" cans of cookies meant that people did not valued it so highly anymore.

Some things did not change value too much during the whole period, like alcohol, simply because it was available.

Other things' value was a matter of the situation.

For example, if you had a sick kid at home, and you needed antibiotic and you spread that word, you could expect high price simply because you give that information that you need something really hard and fast.

But usually, we knew the value of things (goods) for that week for example, at least approximately.

What were the general rules of trade during this time?

The value of things and trading "rules on the ground" were similar to trade rules at normal life flea markets.

A few of those "rules on the ground" during the trade were:

- If YOU need something, then the price is going up. (Do not look like you desperately need something.)
- Do not offer all that you got in "one hand" or on one try. (Do not go to trade with your best shots all together, it looks desperate, and you are losing all the advantage then.)
- Do not ever give a reason for someone to take the risk of attacking you because you have way too cool stuff (or way too much stuff) with you. (Have some amount of food, or ammo, or whatever, do another trade at another time with more of that. Remember people will take chances if they calculate it is a risk worth taking.)
- Never give info how much of the goods you actually have at home. (The reason is same as above.)
- Never do trade at your home (unless you trust the person 100%) because you never know to who you are giving valuable information about how much you have, what your home look like, how many people are there (defense) etc.
- Doing the trade in other trader s home might mean that you are at his "playground" (or he is stupid) so you are losing the edge. You are risking of being on unknown terrain. Always try to choose neutral ground somewhere that you can control the situation, giving the opponent the chance to feel safe. (But not safer than you).

It is most important that you understand when SHTF (for real) system is out, and only thing that protect you from losing everything is you.

Trade is gonna be a matter of carefully planning. It starts with information about who has something that you need, then checking that information, and rechecking, and then sending information to him that you want to trade, then setting the terms about the place and number of people where you're gonna do the trade.

Usually, there was a rumor or information about who was safe to trade with. There was information about people who like to scam other people during the trade. If you did a good and fair trade with a man you could "save him" as a safe trader (to some extent) for future trade.

Everything else is matter of trust and skills.

Maybe, just maybe, if you are living in some nice small town there is gonna be something like a market, where people freely gonna exchange their goods between each other.

I never saw anything like that because it needs some kind of system to back it.

Trade when SHTF is a high-risk situation simply because it is about resources, and there is no law, no system.

Are skills or products more valuable?

In the long run, skills were more valuable, simply because you cannot "spend" your skills.

If you had medical skills you could expect that people over the time (through the word on the street) will hear that, and that you simply will have opportunities to get something for that skill.

When a serious collapse happens, things fall apart around you fiscally. There are no services, so skills for "repairing" were valuable, and so were technical skills.

Medicines were substituted with home (natural) remedies so knowing that stuff was valuable, making simple cloth pieces was good, and repairing weapons. I knew people who did good because they made very basic cigar holders from wood and empty bullet shell simply because people smoked bad tobacco hand rolled in paper.

Skills made the new reality easier.

Skills were also safer to trade simply because by attacking and killing you, the attacker cannot take away your skills from you.

What were the top physical items for barter? Do you recommend that people stock up on things specifically for barter? If so, what kinds of things?

In my case those were MREs, meat cans, alcohol, batteries, candles, cigarettes, weapons and ammo, drugs, and medicines... but if we are talking about the future, preparing, some things need to be mentioned.

There are lists about "100 things to store for SHTF", and while they are good lists, they may be completely different from "100 things to trade when SHTF."

Obviously when SHTF you will miss everything, because the "trucks are stopped" and there are no stores and normal buying.

The basics that you need to cover are something that every prepper already knows: food, defense, water, shelter, fire, medicine, and communication.

Out of these essentials, you go in deeper. Like under medicine you'll have antibiotics but also some knowledge about natural remedies. Under food, you'll have cans but also some way to produce food like seeds or hunting or whatever.

If you are PLANNING to store things for trade, then you need to have a strategy for that.

Let's say you are storing huge amounts of food for you and your family for SHTF but you are also planning to trade that food for other items when SHTF.

Some advice for people who are counting to store things for trade are:

- **Store things of everyday use**, nothing too fancy. For example store rice or pasta (if that food is common in your region), lighters, batteries, or candles.
- **Store small things, or in small packages**, stuff that is gonna be easy to carry hidden on you, in your jacket, for example, lighters, spices, cigarettes, quick soups... not canister of fuel, bags of wheat. I am not saying not to store fuel. I am saying it is much better to carry 20 AA batteries to trade then a 20-liter canister of fuel especially because value might be similar. Remember, do not give reason to anyone to take the risk of attacking you because you have something.
- **Think about things that are cheap today**, may have multipurpose uses when SHTF, and do not take too much space to store (alcohol pads or condoms for example).
- **Think about things that you can "sell but keep"**. For example, a solar panel with a setup for charging batteries for people. You are selling charging of batteries to people.
- **NEVER be the "big trader" or the person who has a lot of interesting stuff.** Be the small person who is gonna offer good things through the network of a few people. Being big trader means attracting too much attention with too many cool things that you have. Hide your trading activities through a network of other traders.

- **Understand today's value and the value when SHTF.** Think about the small things that save lives, antibiotics, anti-tetanus shots, povidone pads [iodine]. For example, candles are really cheap today but will be rare when SHTF.
- **Do not underestimate things that are people addicted to,** no matter what you think about it. Cigarettes, alcohol, or coffee (or whatever is case in your region) - the value will go way up.

"Store" skills and knowledge. It is best investment. Learn skills that are gonna be valuable like gardening, shoe repairing, clothes making. Maybe you can be the person who has knowledge about natural remedies.

Should you have precious metals as a means for buying goods when the SHTF?

Through human history, gold and silver were valuable. They were used for getting goods in all times, including hardest times like wars and similar.

Having precious metal for SHTF is big in the prepping community but I need to point out some things.

The value of gold went down during SHTF so much that you need to think about it very hard.

For example, in normal times (I am using these numbers as an example) you could buy with one gold ring 300 small cans of meat. When SHTF you could buy 20, and you could buy 20 if you could find a man who wanted to take that ring from you.

He did not usually want to take it because he could take stuff that he could immediately use, like weapons, drugs, or medicines.

He simply could not do anything immediately useful with it.

Having precious metals is a great idea for later, when some kind of system jumps in, because they are gonna be again precious.

Right in the middle of SHTF, the value of it is poor.

That is one of the reasons why some local warlords came out as very powerful people after everything. They simply took precious metal from folks for a "can of the soup" value (or sometimes for nothing) and they had enough power to store that metal for the time when it would be valuable again.

Do not throw everything into precious metals. Store immediately useful things.

What were the top skills?

It was simple: skills that you might use to kill people or to heal them.

So, fighting, security, medical skills, knowing herbal remedies, repairing a weapon, making a new one.

Right after those skills were skills about food.

Knowing what kind of herbs around us you could eat, or even knowing what kind of tree bark you could eat maybe, how to make some plants edible mixed with other ingredients, how to repair clothes and things in your home.

Were there markets for bartering or did people mostly do this in private?

In one period of time there was something like a market, but it was strictly under control of local warlord, so it was not smart to go there since you really could not know what to expect.

Almost all the trades were made in private arrangements after you got information about someone who had something that he wants to trade.

The best situation was if you knew that person prior the war, so you had already built trust from before.

Scams were usual, attacks during the trade happened too, especially if the value of goods was high.

If you need to trade for something, do that in advance. In other words, do not wait to be completely without food and then go to look for food through the trade, because you are under pressure, you are desperate. It is not a good setup for trade.

How did you remain safe when trading goods and services? What were the risks?

The basic rule is not to go alone to trade.

The reasons are very simple because you have resources with you for trade, you are a possible target, so you need more security - more people.

The trade place usually needed to be checked for possible ambush or scam setup. You needed people for that.

You needed a guard during the trade, someone to check up things during your negotiation with the other trader, someone who was going to watch for things.

The ideal number of people was 3.

The risks are scams (bad goods) or an attack.

You could lower that risk by trading with known people or simply by showing enough force so that they understand it is not worth the risk.

Scams were avoided by checking goods of course. If you are buying batteries you need to check them all. You need to taste coffee - is it mixed with old coffee that was used and dried? Cigarettes packs were carefully opened and 1-2 cigarettes could be missing and the pack glued again.

It was like a chess game.

What are some myths about barter that most people think are the truth?

Trade is probably the survival topic with largest number of myths.

It is partly because we like to think that somehow the world will collapse but the majority of people will live by the rules from normal times, and partly because we are influenced by movies, shows, and fiction books.

"When SHTF people simply get all together and help each other, and that goes for trade too."

No, actually when times get really hard people jump into survival mode or perish.

For you it may mean that you 'll be nice, and do only good things, for another, it may mean that he will do whatever it takes so he and his family survive.

That may include killing you over 3 MREs during the trade.

"When SHTF I will thrive because I stored a lot of things for trade, and I will simply be the biggest trader."

It is possible. People did that and survived. And even got rich after everything was over.

But they had gangs around them, enough manpower to protect the goods, the control to not be overrun, and they were ruthless.

Most probably, you are an ordinary person who just wants to survive SHTF. You do not have 100 armed people with you. You just need to be small and careful.

You are not a warlord.

"When it comes to trade it is all about weapon and force."

Actually, it is not.

It is about the correct mindset to decide what makes sense in that moment and what you really need (and what you do not). Weapons help a lot but do not solve the problem alone.

It is very similar to bargaining at a flea market with the possibility of violence.

Anything to add?

After years of being in the survival world, talking with other preppers and writing my articles I found out that a great number of people think something like "I cannot wait to go to trade when SHTF!"

In reality, one of the points of careful preparing is to delay the moment when you need to go out and trade as long as you can.

Why?

Because you're gonna need time to scan what is going on and who is who in the new collapsed world. You need to gather information about who is good and who is not, who is trusted and who is a scammer, what area is safe

If you need to go out on the 10th day in order to trade something maybe you are doing something wrong.

Notes:

Don't overestimate the usefulness of precious metals. They won't be easy to trade during an SHTF event.

Rules of Trade:

- *If YOU need something, then the price will go up.*
- *Do not go to trade with your best stuff. Start low and work up.*
- *Do not ever give a reason for someone to take the risk of attacking you because you have way too cool stuff (or way too much stuff) with you.*
- *Never give info how much of the goods you actually have at home.*
- *Never do trade at your home.*
- *Doing the trade in other trader s home might mean that you are at his "playground" so you are losing the edge.*
- *Always try to choose neutral ground somewhere that you can control the situation, giving the opponent the chance to feel safe.*

Useful Barter Items:

- *MREs*
- *Meat cans*
- *Alcohol*
- *Batteries*
- *Candles*
- *Cigarettes*
- *Weapons and ammo*
- *Drugs*
- *Medicines*

Skills and knowledge are the best barter items. The top skills:

- *Fighting*
- *Security*
- *Medical skills*
- *Knowing herbal remedies*
- *Repairing a weapon*
- *Making a new weapon*
- *Knowing what kind of plants around us you could eat*
- *How to make some plants edible mixed with other ingredients*
- *How to repair clothes and other things*

How to Stay Warm during a Long-Term SHTF Situation

As America seems to deal with a record-breaking cold snap and a weird storm every year, some folks end up having to handle the whole thing with the power out also. But we all know that at least this time, our situation is temporary. Most of us have power, and those who don't will have it restored within a few days. But what if you had to stay warm during a long-term SHTF situation?

In this article, Selco shares with us what it was like to try and stay warm during an entire year in a war zone without any type of utilities. It's a lot of information, and we can apply this to our preps.

When the US was dealing with an extended cold snap, it got me thinking about your SHTF year in Bosnia. First of all, what is the winter like there? How cold does it get and what is the climate?

In a small part of the country close to Adriatic Sea. it is a Mediterranean climate with mild winters and temperatures then goes just below 0 or -5 Celsius (32-23 Fahrenheit) and in other parts of country it is a Continental climate with temperatures during the winter -10 or -18 (14-5 Fahrenheit), with cold waves down to -26 (-15 Fahrenheit) and a lot of snow.

Very usual are periods of strong cold wind (Bora) that actually can lower your body temperature very fast and complicate things.

Sounds weird but after experiencing snow and -20 during SHTF and Bora at -2, I had most problems with that wind and -2 Celsius simply because it lowers your body temperature fast and suddenly.

Did you have any public utilities at all during this time?

All public utilities went off during the first few weeks, one by one. Electricity, water, heating (city central heating service) and phone lines, etc.

Did most people have homes with fireplaces or off-grid heating methods before this time period? Or were the homes modernized to the point that they were not functional?

During the late 70s and early 80s in the region, there was huge effort in modernizing cities heating services (partly because pollution) so majority of city apartment buildings and part of private houses were "connected" on a public central heating system, either on natural gas or oil fuel (hot water system in radiators, through piping system)

As a result of that, building apartments had no fireplaces, even if they had places for smoke exhaust (vertical flue that provides a path through which smoke from a fire is carried away through the wall or roof of a building- exhaust) they were not in operating condition because nobody needed it for 20 years or so. They were clogged, destroyed, blocked, or similar.

Because that lot of home fires happened in first period of SHTF in apartment buildings simply because people wanted to install some kind of wood fire stove and send the fumes through an exhaust system that was not in use for decades.

I live in an apartment building now, in a building block of some 800 apartments. Again, the buildings have fireplace exhaust systems, but nobody used it for last 20 years, because the central heating is working perfectly.

So, they are clogged, blocked, or destroyed.

Mine is in perfect operating condition and ready all the time because I keep it like that.

In private houses, the situation was bit different. Yes, people rely a lot on heating through electric heaters, but most of the houses still had fire wood stoves of some kind and operating exhaust system partly because tradition but also for heating.

Still, a lot of the homes that even had a fireplace (way and place to start a fire either for heating or cooking or both) they had it in, let's say, not an economic way. Nobody thought that firewood was gonna be so expensive and hard to get. A lot of people simply had fireplaces as a decoration, not in a way to heat house in most economical way (in terms of used-fuel-heat-given ratio)

How did people stay warm?

We can say that first step was that people simply "shrunk" their living space.

For example, if a family of people had a house with six rooms they simply stopped using four rooms, and they lived in two rooms only, because of a simple reason - it was easier to heat two rooms only.

To get wood for heating was a hard process and often dangerous, so how much fuel you spent in your home was a matter of staying alive.



Old style wood stove with a smoke-exhaust-pipe (that would be put through the hole in the wall to outside - if a chimney-exhaust system was not existing in that room).

Comfort was completely forgotten because of necessity.

Also, people insulated their homes with what they had. A majority of windows were crushed (glass) because of detonations (shelling), so people blocked window openings with what they had.

Blanket, pillows, nylons, and tarps were used for that. Also, duct tape was a very useful item.

Homes were kinda rearranged in order to make it more energy efficient in very rudimentary ways. For example, if a house had smoke exhaust just in the kitchen but that kitchen was not good for having wood stove there, then simply stove was moved from that kitchen into the desired room. A hole was made in that room (for smoke exhaust) and the stove was put there.

You need to understand that homes (houses, apartments) when SHTF were very fast to deteriorate. There was no service to call, remember. Leaks from the roofs, freezing temperatures... all that makes your house quite problematic to live in. We were trying to fix what we could, but insulation was problematic very quickly. A lot of problems could have easily been solved with simple items like insulation foam (in spray containers) for example, but nobody was prepared for SHTF. (Yes, I have it now).

Leaving some room out of use was not only because heating, often some rooms were not used because they were exposed to firing. (Choosing the part of the house that will be not used - or at least not used often - was also based on from what direction you could expect gunfire or shelling.)

Sometimes rooms weren't used simply because there were not enough people to watch that space for outside threat.

Parts of the house that were too exposed to threat (let's say close to the street, or rooms with too many windows) were simply blocked or not use. Or in other case if enemy position were from south we simply did not use rooms on that side for sleeping because chance was bigger that side was gonna be hit with grenade or smaller size bullets. And on top of that, we needed to take care about heating not necessary space.

So, in short "rearranging" living space was mainly depending on:

- **Immediate threat** (physical threat - let's say someone could enter your home through the room close to the street because you cannot watch that room all the time.)
- **Shelling threat** - taking into consideration from what direction most of the bigger caliber things are coming
- **Cutting off unnecessary parts of the house** to save heating

I can say that living inside a home during winter was subdued completely due to the fact that fuel needed to be saved.

Did people make any types of heaters? Can you please describe them in detail so that we can try to duplicate what you did?

First people remodeled our existing stoves. For example-stove from the picture above was remodeled in a way that the black plate on the top was removed and much thinner material would be put there (any kind of thin metal) so that stove would take much less wood in order plate be red-hot. If you wanted to boil water on it, it was a huge difference whether it takes two pieces of wood or six.

Also, an internal exhaust pipe (pipe that goes from stove to wall) was something that was quite cool to find somewhere, because if you have it enough you could firstly put stove away from chimney in the wall (in desired room) without need to drill new hole, and secondly, more of that pipe meant more heating surface, because the pipe was radiating heat: more pipe, more heat.

A lot of the old-style stoves were built for cooking first, heating was a secondary role, so we also changed that in a way that we removed internal plates for example so basically less heat was going through the chimney and more into the stove.

Very soon people started to make their own stoves (in some periods even small stoves were smuggled in and exchanged on the black market).

Very popular was a "drum stove." People made it from very thin metal. The point was, it was small, you could install it close to any opening and it required a very small amount of wood to get it red hot.

I needed 3-4 small tiles from a wooden floor or one big book to make it very hot (and boil water and cook something fast).

Another favorite was a "pressure cooker stove".

A pressure cooker was a "must have" item in every home prior to the war.

For example, if you find yourself in apartment building in the middle of SHTF without heating in winter, you would take pressure cooker (upside down) drill

hole for exhaust, use some metal to form an exhaust pipe, then make a hole in wall.

More thin metal bending and you made door and ash-tray.

Most of these homemade stoves made lot of smoke inside the home, they smelled a lot. Luckily, not too many poisonings occurred because insulation of the homes was really bad.



War handmade stoves (the second one on photo is pressure cooker stove) If we had only small made stove we surrounded it with bricks in order to retain heat for more time (in the bricks), and later bricks could be taken in bed.

Today I would not suggest that you make a stove from a pressure cooker or similar. The point is to have stored way somewhere to heat yourself with firewood in the most economical way, no matter if you do not need that today because you solve your heating with electricity.

Where did you get fuel for fires?

It was taken care of in layers and depending on the security situation.

For example, if the situation was good, you would go out and chop trees from park or nearest hill with trees. If the situation was bad, then we burned furniture, books, shelves.

By the end of the worst period, people took down all available trees in town, wooden door and window frames from destroyed and abandoned houses, pieces of furniture, wooden floor tiles, and similar.

Over the time we learned value or caloric value of fuel, so, for example, wooden floor tiles were great (especially if the polish coating was good) because it caught fire easily and burned good with lot of energy. Or I used to know that I could make a quick meal out of firing old shoes if they were of particular material if I manage to start fire. (Yes, it smelled awful.)

Finding fuel for fire was an ongoing, time-consuming process, and never-ending.

It was a mess having a whole bunch of people trying, for example, to take down a big tree, then chop it in small pieces, and then to transport it in some way back to home.

Some of use never used an ax before that.

What about winter clothing? Were you just stuck with what you already had? Did people make their own during this time?

Yes, more or less we were stuck with what we had, and people do not actually realize how much their clothing is based on fact that they are living in a system that takes care of them.

Again, comfort and how does it look became not important (if did not attract unnecessary attention).

People again "rearranged" their stuff in order to make it useful so you could see all kind of weird things like ponchos or vests made from blankets (simple hole in blanket, and pieces of rope) or nylon in boots, or paper inside jackets and pants, raincoats made from pieces of nylons or pieces of military tents (taken from abandoned barracks), but most important thing was dressing in layers of all kind of different clothes.

If you had, for example, an old granny in your family who knew to knit (it was kinda tradition here) and if she had enough material it was very precious because you had source for gloves, socks and similar, and also good source for trade.

We were missing heavy duty items in our clothes, we were ordinary city folks who suddenly were thrown in life with a lot of heavy jobs, so clothes (just like everything else) deteriorated much faster than in normal times.

Did people die or suffer cold-related injuries like frostbite?

Yes, we were forced to look for resources no matter what kind of weather was outside,

Frostbites happened, but also, I strongly believe that something a bit different was much bigger problem.

Usually people in the prepping community (and elsewhere too) when it comes to cold weather danger forget it. It is called sometimes urban hypothermia.

In normal times you may see that condition in elderly people who are living alone in poor condition (They do not move too much, and their circulation is poor.)

It is a condition when people are exposed to prolonged cold environments inadequately heated houses, homes in poor condition (wet, damp for example), and when you connect that with possible bad quality food, a lot of stress, you may find yourself in a bad state pretty fast.

Older people were especially vulnerable to that (particularly if they already had some medical issues). Their immunity systems went down fast and then they got sick.

It was like we all suddenly found ourselves living in 3rd world country conditions.

Frostbite happened fast, and you could reverse the process if you got help fast. Living in a poor (cold more or less) overall condition was something that we could not help a lot.

Do you have any personal stories from that winter that you could share with us?

Fire is very important to keep yourself warm when SHTF. No matter how well you are prepared with some other way of heating and fuel (gas, diesel...) sooner or

later, in prolonged SHTF during the winter you will end up with heating yourself with wood fire.

It makes a lot of sense to have that means ready today somewhere, no matter how modern your home is.

One thing is for sure, when SHTF all things look twice as hard when you are cold, and usually they are.

In some of the hardest situations when temperatures were around -20 and I had to get done some hard tasks, I used to drink alcohol together with small amounts of sugar because an urban myth was that helps in low temperatures. That was wrong, of course, and luckily, I survived, but the point is to understand what kind of food helps you in cold temperatures and what of that you may have stored.,

For example, I would have given a lot in that times to have had a simple hot chicken soup that maybe costs today around 1 euro and it takes 3 minutes to make it ready.

I learned in that times that having a small fire in the middle of the night in cold weather not only can keep you warm but also can give you psychological strength to move on, to give you reason to live, or let's say to make you see the light in what look like desperate situation.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about what must have been a terrible winter? (Did I miss anything important?)

Connected to winter, cold, and fire, people tend to forget that they need to have means to start fire, A LOT of that.

Simply over the time some everyday things like lighters become rare and pretty expensive to trade, and fire was not something that you kept going all the time (resources again), and quality of wood was often horrible so often we had lot of problems to start a fire.

Anything that helps with starting a fire makes sense to have in great quantities, things like a lot of lighters, kindling, candles, fuel cubes.

Notes:

Most modern homes are not prepared for off-grid heating methods. If you have the possibility for off-grid heating, keep it well-maintained and keep fuel on hand.

Shrink your living area that you have less space to heat.

Consider how you will vent the fumes from your heat method to the outside.

Here are some of the recommendations:

- *Duct tape*
- *Winter gear that is sturdier than what you need right now*
- *The ability to knit/crochet sturdy items*
- *A way to heat with wood, regardless of your current situation (as well as a way to vent and a way to protect your walls and floors so they don't catch on fire. Stock up on those things as well)*
- *A way to vent a wood heater (get the right type of stove pipe for your heater, think ahead where you will vent it, and get the proper supplies to seal around the opening and pipe so the heat doesn't escape.)*
- *A way to block off part of the house and just keep one area warm*
- *The ability to use an ax*
- *Lighters*
- *Matches*
- *Fire starters*
- *Fuel Cubes*
- *Kindling*
- *Candles*
- *Cans of spray foam insulation*

Figure out NOW how you would heat for the long-term and get what you need for it, so you don't have to piece together something inefficient and potentially dangerous.

Part 3: Security and Violence

- How (and Why) to be the Gray Man
- How to Defend Your Home and Yourself When the SHTF
- The Brutal Truth About Violence When the SHTF
- Martial Law: Forget your "movie illusions about being a freedom fighter"

How (and Why) to be the Gray Man

In our interviews with Selco, he has frequently mentioned the Gray Man principle. This is something that people in the preparedness community mention a lot, but many don't fully understand it. In this week's interview, Selco explains how - and why - we should embrace being the Gray Man, even before the SHTF.

In your articles, you frequently mention being the Gray Man. What exactly does this mean?

It is a simple concept that comes to be very important when SHTF, and it is often completely opposite of how a lot of preppers are planning to look or act.

In the shortest definition, it is staying uninteresting or simply looking and acting like most of the people around you in a particular moment.

It can be used in a lot of situations when SHTF, during prolonged periods of time, or during short-term events.

How can you use the Gray Man concept for your home, so it is less likely to be targeted?

It depends on the situation, but in case of a serious collapse in urban settings "home invasions" (especially in first period) happens based on opportunity and what can be achieved from that invasion.

In other words, yes, if your home is less protected then it is easier to get inside, but in terms of SHTF the more your home looks like a place with valuable things inside, the higher chances are for being attacked.

Remember it is a time without (at least without proper working) law and police force. That means there are no police coming to help after a few shots. There is only you and the attacker.

Having a home with visible cameras, expensive equipment, attack dogs, alarms and similar (especially in a neighborhood where that is not usual) clearly makes you different and gives attackers the idea that there are valuable things inside.

Having all that equipment in times when there is law and order makes sense because police and help are only a couple of minutes away.

When the SHTF in Bosnia, the first houses that were robbed were known rich guys' houses. It didn't matter that they were defended and had steel bars.

When 70-100 people (who are mostly armed and not disturbed by the police) start attacking a house with only a few people inside, there are no steel bars and no smart strategies.

Not if the attackers have a strong enough motivation to get inside.

Do not give that motivation to them.

I am not talking against alarms and dogs, but I am advocating a more “subtle” way of home defense, and more fluid, more Gray Man type.

Just making your home "gray" alone is a big topic, but here are a few suggestions:

Deterrents

This is the first step of home defense of the Gray Man principle. Using your weapon should be the last!

In one of the previous articles, there was a comment along the lines of “If I make my home look abandoned, then it is going to be targeted, so it is a wrong suggestion.”

The concept is to look like everything else around you. In a prolonged urban SHTF, there are going to be houses around yours that are going to be deserted, ruined, looted.

Sometimes it makes sense that your home looks like that too. Like if 50 people are coming through your neighborhood looking for useful things, it makes sense if your home and yard look on “first glance” looks like someone already looted it (like most of the houses on the street).

Sometimes the best defense is to look like there is no defense. You still can be prepared and ready.

There is no universal advice. In case of prolonged collapse, different tactics will work for different regions, based on the situation.

For example, in my case, it was very useful (and still is) to put few “mines” signs as a deterrent. In your case maybe it is cool to have a few biohazard signs that you

may put in front of your home, or in case of a pandemic, a sign that says "bodies inside."

It works in drastic situations. In my case after some time, people simply avoided going inside places where they suspected bodies were.

Think about what can work in your case.

Think in layers

Your defense should not start at your house door because by that time you have lost some of your advantage. Think in layers.

For example, the first layer is a neighboring house, the second layer is your yard, and the third layer is inside your home.

Use advantages (and disadvantages) in your favor

Example: if you have a yard in front of your home, look now for possible ways that intruders could approach. How many of those ways are there? If there are 4 potential ways, is it possible to watch all of them? Can you minimize that to only one way by funneling the attackers by using obstacles, garbage, etc.? Simply put yourself in the attacker's mind and see what he sees.

Sometimes something simple like planting a bush or tree on a spot in the yard will funnel an attacker to where you want him to be. But at the same time, that bush or tree may obstruct your view, so use your common sense.

Alarms or traps

Popular opinion says that deadly traps need to be used when defending your home during the SHTF.

It is a final solution, because once when you use deadly force (with trap) you are bringing everything a new level. Often, it is simply wrong, and you have gone too far.

Think about traps and alarms in layers too (I'll call them traps, some of them are alarms actually). An entire book could be written about using them when the SHTF, but for this article think just consider these ideas.

An alarm that will let only you know when someone is approaching without letting the attacker know he has triggered something (for example in order to approach your home he need to move from his way something noisy that simply stay there)

An alarm that will let you know someone is approaching and also let the attacker know he has triggered the alarm so he clearly understand someone set it there and that the place is probably guarded.

Traps that are combinations of above-mentioned with the option of hurting the attacker.

There is a situation for each of the above but using the wrong one can be dangerous. For example, do you want to use a deadly explosive trap for two guys from the neighborhood who are just checking whether you have something to trade?

It is cool to know how to construct something from scratch, but sometimes a cheap Chinese “purse alarm” in combination with a fishing line will give you an SHTF alarm that may help you a lot.

Think about using these in layers, too. If someone clearly ignored your warning devices, perhaps closer to home it is the place and time for a “hurting” trap.

All of this gives you precious time to get organized inside your home, to decide what to do and how to act.

One popular opinion is that “I will have a shotgun. Nobody will come through my door”

For the people who have not experienced a violent collapse in urban settings, remember that other people will have weapons too, and other people may come in bigger numbers than you have.

You need to think in layers in order to maximize your chances of success.

How can you use the gray man concept personally?

OPSEC

“Operations Security, or OPSEC, is the process by which we protect unclassified information that can be used against us. OPSEC challenges us

to look at ourselves through the eyes of an adversary (individuals, groups, countries, organizations). Essentially, anyone who can harm people, resources, or mission is an adversary.” ([USDoD](#))

OPSEC is a very good word, but like a lot of other things in the prepper world, some folks have turned it into a parody.

It is not about immersing yourself into the world of conspiracy theories; it is about how it “...challenges us to look at ourselves through the eyes of an adversary...”

Just try to look at yourself through the eyes of your adversary, whoever that might be in your opinion.

- So, for example, if you are driving a car with a sticker that clearly shows your opinion about something, ask yourself, is that information that can be used somehow against you?
- Tomorrow, if a riot starts, will that make you a target?
- Maybe if you are going to prepper conventions then discussing openly at your work place about that and about your latest investment in buckets of dried food, will that make you perfect target when the SHTF?

The examples are many, but it's all down to how you look and act today or when SHTF.

One big sign during SHTF was to have very clean clothes and to smell nice.

It is a drastic example, but you need to understand that in those times if you looked like that it meant you were doing very well, because the essentials were food and water and weapons, and most folks had problems securing that. So obviously you were doing really good, way better than most of the folks.

It is a drastic example, yes, and it may not be like that in your case, but you get the idea.

A trained man can learn a lot about you by watching you for some time, no matter if the SHTF or not.

He can learn from the way you walk, how you leave your car, or how you are standing in a bar. He can learn from if you are carrying a weapon or not, with your choice of footwear or clothes, by your hobbies, etc.

Understand that by your look and activities you are giving up information that can cost you way too much when times get bad.

How can you use this when you are out with your family?

Your family should follow your basic rules about staying gray, again without turning life into a conspiracy theory.

There is no use in trying to blend in if your kid talks in school about how his dad is preparing for the end of the world with enough food storage to last for 40 years.

A good example of being gray and still solving the problem of preparing your family for hard times (and making them preppers) is by practicing skills without the story.

They do not have to believe that society will collapse, but you still can teach them useful skills through activities that they understand and reasons that they understand: camping, fishing, team building, martial arts (sport, health) car repair, cooking meals at home, buying more food (money saving), or hunting (weapon use)...you get the idea.

Is this something you should only use during a crisis or should you practice this all the time?

It is a good thing to use the gray man mentality even today, and not just because of practice. But also, because once when SHTF it may be too late to go gray because some people will already know important information about you, and it is too late to hide it.

What's the easiest way to suddenly become forgettable if you are caught up in a crowd?

You need to set up a clear list of your priorities in case something bad happens and go by that list. It is easy to become forgettable in crowd because crowds have their own psychology. Very often, you need to “flow” with the crowd because you cannot act differently than the folks in the crowd. It can be dangerous, and it can turn you into a target.

I often use the words “if everybody is screaming you need to scream too”, because, otherwise, if you are with a bunch of scared people you will look way

too confident. They will think either you are the leader (if people are members of your group) or you are a target for them (if they are not connected to you).

It is about how you look to other people, not about how you really are.

Are there different levels of "gray"? If so, can you explain them?

Yes, it is more about thinking outside of the box and about the different applications of gray.

Example one:

Something bad happens in your city (pandemic, dirty bomb, civil unrest...) there is a curfew, and nobody is allowed to leave city until order is restored, but you see it is bad and you want to leave city to your BOL.

There are people in streets confused and waiting to see what is going on and what will be. You will mix with them with your backpack with food and ammo inside, lot of people do carry small backpacks, students, athletes, etc. You want to blend in.

But if you put sleeping mat on your backpack, you are sticking out. A simple sleeping mat gives away you.

(This is a real-life example from one of my bugging out courses).

Very often even trained people stick out simply because they confuse necessity and comfort.

Example two:

One of the often-mentioned questions is, "How will I figure out (when SHTF) if I should carry my weapon openly or hidden?"

The simplest answer is to check the situation and understand which of those two options makes you a more probable target.

Sometimes running out with an assault rifle means you'll be seen as a threat and shot down, but in other cases running around unarmed will make you easy prey.

Do you have any personal stories about people who used this strategy?

I knew a man (I still know him) who in the early days of the SHTF understood some things.

He went the station and fill 4 barrels with 80 liters fuel each. He brought them in trailer and hid them in his garage, and nobody saw him.

A week or two later, fuel became rare 50 times more valuable. He used only it as heating fuel very frugally.

And then he gave 10 liters to his relative and asked him to be quiet, then other relative heard from first man and asked him for 10 liters. He gave it to him too because how he could refuse him?

Then 20 days later in the middle of the night, a couple of guys broke into the garage. The man went out and they beat him badly. They took his fuel, searched his house, and took all food (he was smart, so he bought lots of food too). He had a lot of problems ensuring them that he did not have more interesting things hidden somewhere.

He is still alive, an old man now. He thinks the S. is gonna hit the fan again, but all his discussion about prepping and similar stops right there.

And...anything to add?

The gray man philosophy is nothing elaborate, but it should affect all of your fields of prepping, from simple things like where you are buying your stuff for preps (and in what quantity and what reasons) to who you choose to discuss your visions of tomorrow's collapse with.

In short, as far as the people outside your circle are concerned, you are not a prepper, you are like majority of folks and trust in the system. You do not believe that something bad is gonna happen, and when it happens you have to act surprised like them.

Notes:

As the old saying goes, loose lips sink ships. If you know your family members aren't able to keep their mouths shut, they don't need to know what you've stocked. Hungry, desperate people have LONG memories.

While we currently live in a world in which everyone wants attention, practice going through your city unnoticed. Dress to blend in, don't behave in a way that is noticeably "different." NOT drawing attention is your "cloak of invisibility."

How to Defend Your Home and Yourself When the SHTF

Have you ever wondered how to defend your home and yourself if the SHTF? In this interview, Selco provides us with information from the things he went through during the occupation of Bosnia. There are many lessons we can learn from his experience.

What was the most likely crime you would encounter when the SHTF?

Where there is no regular system of law and order you have different kinds of groups who impose that "law and order." In reality, it is lawlessness or law of whichever group is stronger.

To add to that, when there is not any kind of "law" it is then a matter of a no-rules situation.

That means all kind of violence was there.

In reality, it worked on many different levels. For example, you form an armed neighborhood watch. We did, of some 15 people, in our street. Sometimes, in the middle of the of night, we were faced with a group of 50 men demanding something from us. For example, one was a group of people in uniform who stated that they were government forces and they wanted to check our neighborhood for whatever reason.

We could obey or fight or negotiate. All combinations were tested over the time, and sad truth is that when SHTF for serious there is gonna be many different groups who will "represent" government (or law, or order or you name it). But in reality, it all comes down to who will outsmart who.

The most likely crimes were connected with resources because simply in that time and city there was not enough resources.

So, it was about who owned how much (resources), and ways to take those resources from other folks.

It worked on a low level. For example, a few guys could kill you in the street and take your possessions, or on a bigger level - a local gang (if strong enough) could

own your part of town and terrorize you and other folks by taking your stuff with brute force.

How did you make your home less desirable to criminals?

First, it was important where your home is, even in urban settings your house can be kinda "isolated" or stand in a way that it clearly "sticks out." That was bad, and you could not change it.

Then it was important what period of SHTF we are talking about. At the starting period of SHTF, it was bad if your house was close to some objects that were interesting for looting, like malls, gas stations, police stations, or similar.

Generally speaking, it was better if your home (we are talking about in the city) was in the area where it was more packed with houses, simply because it was easier to blend in. Also, as the situation worsened we could use close houses too as they became destroyed or abandoned, which gave us more options, especially in terms of security.

The first level of making a home "less desirable" to criminals was simple blending in. I point it out very often as the most important thing in a home defense plan.

It may seem hard to understand why I point it out so much, but think about it this way:

In order to "pacify" and "own" a city, you need to have a huge military force, organized in a perfect way. Even then it is impossible to be safe in that city. There are many examples of that in modern history.

In my case, and in that SHTF, nobody really "owned" the city. There were many groups trying to accomplish that through different methods. But in reality, and on the ground, it was a situation where nothing was for sure.

As a result, most of the home invasions were a matter of opportunity. If attackers saw the opportunity they took it.

It was not a rule, but it was very often like that.

As a result, a good plan was not to be that opportunity.

In my case that meant we tried to keep our activities on a low level when it came to giving up information about resources in our home.

For example, if we needed to drag some bags of food home we did it so no one saw it. If we cooked something, sometimes even a nice smell could pose a possible danger.

In short, it was time to be quiet and look for danger.

For example, to transfer it to your world- if something serious happens there in your city do you want to be the only guy in the neighborhood running a generator? Or do you want to be only one who has a barbecue every night when SHTF?

In my case, sometimes people did even more drastic things, like placing dead animals somewhere so stench could fend off intruders. It was not about scaring the attacker with the stench. It was about a situation where you have 20-30 houses very close to each other, and you have 50 people going through your street, mostly armed. And they look for useful things, they are scavenging. They might take a chance and fight if they find people defending some house, or they might not, you never know.

So, you make your house, or your entrance and yard look abandoned, deserted destroyed, dirty...by putting some garbage, obstacles from ruins, some dead animals and you hope they will choose some other house because other houses look easier to get in and more desirable.

People do not go gladly into places where they suspect dead things are or go gladly through some obstacles that can hurt them (remember-no doctor). They will choose another target.

That is the first line of defense. The second line is you and the people inside waiting with guns.

Now, this may look stupid to you. You might say, "Oh, this is the US. It does not work like that here." But think about principles, maybe in your case some CDC label ("infectious diseases" or "bodies inside") works.

For example, in my case, a sign warning of "mines" would do a pretty good job, but it might be good only for my region.

It is all about deterring those who are thinking about coming to your home.

How did you secure your doors and windows?

First, it was very important not to "trap yourself" in. There was no sense, if you were under attack, being so well fortified that you could not get out.

Alternate exit and entrances were very useful at that time, not only because of defense. Very often, it was good to leave and enter your home invisibly. You were never sure who monitored you and the stuff you were taking into your home.

Most of our houses are brick or stone houses, so from that point pretty good for smaller calibers. Very soon people started to reinforce doors and windows with whatever was available that offered protection.

One of the coolest was steel sewage covers. Those covers offered good protection. The favorite was dirt bags in combination with boards (planking).

Of course, we used also whatever was available, so a laundry machine, for example, was a good addition for "plugging" a hole.

Can you tell us about your home defense plan? How did you defend your home?

The house was always guarded, all the time.

Depending on the situation (or let us use the term "threat level") it was guarded and defended in layers. The outer layer, for example, started on the street, through the neighboring abandoned house, then to the last layer - our house.

If you had to fight, it was bad if you failed to use outer levels and the fight started in your house.

If you choose to avoid fighting, then the outer levels may not be implemented at all. You could wait and hope to avoid the fight unless they attacked your home.

Another good term that comes to mind is that situation was dynamic. Based on that, we adapted.

Sometimes the situation dictated that the threat would be eliminated quickly out in the street.

No rules.

We were not soldiers, and the people who attacked us were not soldiers in most of the situations. We were closer to some kind of militia probably when it came to the rules of fighting.

Our weapons and condition were a matter of many other factors:

- how much ammo we had
- how many sick group members
- did some of us had a grenade in given moment

Then it was a question of how the attackers looked to us:

- organized or not
- what kind of weapon they had
- any visible fighting skills
- RPGs
- organized gang or bunch of desperate folks

Every situation was different.

How great was the risk of being assaulted when you were away from home?

It was a great risk because you were exposed much more to the danger than being inside your home. It is important to understand that sooner or later you'll be forced to go out, and in urban settings that means you meet other people.

The point of prepping is to postpone that moment (by having a lot of resources in your home) until you figure out what is going on outside.

You can try to minimize the risk of violence when you are out by carefully planning all your trips and tasks and using as much information available in that planning. But in reality, in urban settings, there are simply too many factors. You never knew what you find out outside your home while you are looking for firewood for example.

Were women victimized? How did they protect themselves?

In any societal breakdowns, women are victimized. Also, in any modern society, there are certain people who are, let's say sick, but they are under the care of the system (or simply scared of system and punishment that the system will bring to them if they assault women.)

When society's laws are out, that punishment is also out, so those kinds of people are on the hunt.

Women's victimization is also brought on another level. Powerful groups (gangs) had their own prisons with women inside. That was used as a kind of reward for gang members.

It was also used in a way of bringing terror to the people. For example, rape was used as a punishment in a lot of cases if people would not obey.

It was part of a special war policy if you can call it like that, to know as a fact that women from your family, for example, could end up in a private rape prison.

Fear and terror was a big part of everything.

Women protected themselves in two ways (actually just like males did):

- by belonging to some group, like family, group of friends or similar-sharing their knowledge and role in that survival group
- by joining some other group, more let us say sinister group and looking for safety there in exchange for other activities.

What were the ways people protected themselves?

The most effective way was by organizing into groups that had something in common. The more things, they had in common, the better the group was. People with things in common are more trustful.

Of course, common sense says that no matter how much a group was trustful, if they did not have enough skills and the will to use violence, chances for them were poor.

Quite opposite to some myths, violence was not a solution for everything. Very often it led to death.

The knowledge of how to use violence was very cool, but much more important was the skill to judge WHEN to use violence and when to choose some other way (run, negotiate, trade...)

What are your suggestions for ways we can prepare now to keep our homes and selves safe when the SHTF?

There are no magic solutions.

I am talking from the point of urban survival, and there are two reasons for that. I experienced urban collapse, so I have experience there, and most of the people live in some kind of urban settings, so chances are big you are gonna experience it too.

There is a popular myth that all of us who live in urban settings will "bug out" to our rural retreat on time (I have that plan too), but in reality, a lot of us who even have the good bug out places out of the urban centers will simply fail to reach it on time. This is reality.

So, a few urban survival suggestions to defend your home:

- **Do not be alone when SHTF.** No matter how romantic it looks to be the lone wolf, it is hard and almost impossible to survive it alone without help. You are gonna be sick, you are gonna be forced to be on guard 24 hours a day, you are gonna have hard time looking for resources...
- **Find likeminded people (preferably before SHTF).** You need time to find people, and you need time to get to know that people.
- **Be ready for violence.** Both physically and mentally, practice with your weapon and be very familiar with your skills and especially with your limitations. Use common sense in choosing your weapons. Check what is useful to have in your situation.(For example, in my situation it made sense to have AK, CZ and similar.)
- **Look at your home from the point of defending/attacking it.** Look today how your home stands, how you can improve it, for example in "detering" possible attackers, neighboring houses, ways of approach, possible booby traps, ways to quickly reinforce your home...

At the end, you need to get up and work pretty hard in order to be prepared for a real collapse. No internet article can teach you that. It can only give you highlights or possible direction.

Notes:

When there aren't any laws, your options are:

- *Obey*
- *Fight*
- *Negotiate*

Not drawing attention of would-be criminals in the first place is your best defense. Most home invasions are crimes of opportunity – don't be that opportunity.

When securing doors and windows, be sure not to trap yourself inside the house.

Have alternative exits, not just for escaping, but for secretly bringing things into the house.

Someone must ALWAYS be guarding the house, so take turns sleeping.

Every situation will be different as to how you should best defend yourself and your home.

You're more likely to be assaulted away from home than at home.

Women are much more likely to become victims of violence.

The safest way to protect yourself is by belonging to a group.

The most important things to remember about SHTF safety:

- *Do not be alone when SHTF.*
- *Find likeminded people (preferably before SHTF).*
- *Be ready for violence.*
- *Look at your home from the point of defending/attacking it.*

The Brutal Truth about Violence When the SHTF

Are you prepared for the extreme violence that is likely to come your way if the SHTF? No matter what your plan is, it's entirely probable that at some point, you'll be the victim of violence or have to perpetrate violence to survive. In his articles, he shares what the scenarios the rest of us theorize about were REALLY like. He mentioned to me recently that most folks aren't prepared for the violence that is part and parcel of a collapse, which brings us to this interview.

How prevalent was violence when the SHTF in Bosnia?

It was wartime and chaos, from all conflicts in those years in the Balkan region. Bosnian conflict was most brutal because of multiple reasons, historical, political and other.

To simplify the explanation why violence was common and very brutal, you need to picture a situation where you are “bombarded” with huge amount of information (propaganda) which instills in you very strong feelings of fear and hate.

Out of fear and hate, violence grows easy and fast, and over the very short period of time you see how people around you (including you) do things that you could not imagine before.

I can say that violence was almost an everyday thing in the whole spectrum of different activities because it was a fight for survival.

Again, whenever (and wherever) you put people in a region without enough resources, you can expect violence.

We were living a normal life, and then suddenly we were thrown in a way of living where if you could not “negotiate” something with someone, you solve the problem by launching a rocket from an RPG through the window of his living room.

Hate stripped down the layers of humanity and suddenly it was “normal” to level an apartment building with people inside with shells from a tank or from private prisons with imprisoned civilians for slave work or sex slaves.

Nothing that I saw or read before could have prepared me for the level of violence and blindness to it, for the lives of kids, elders, civilians, and the innocent.

Again, the thing that is important for readers is that we were a modern society one day, and then in few weeks it turned into carnage.

Do not make the mistake of saying “it cannot happen here” because I made that mistake too.

Do not underestimate power of propaganda, fear, hate, and the lowest human instincts, no matter how modern and good your society is right now and how deeply you believe that “it cannot happen here”.

You've mentioned warlords and gangs in several of your articles. Were they responsible for the majority of the violence or was it hungry families?

Fighting of the armies through the whole period of war brings violence in terms of constant shelling from a distance from different kind of weapons.

For example, a few multiple rocket launchers (VBR) could bring in 30 seconds the destruction in an area of 3-4 apartment buildings and being there in that moment and surviving it gives you a completely new view on life.

Snipers were a constant threat and over time you simply get into a habit in which you constantly scanned area in front of you where your next steps gonna be. Are you gonna be visible and from where? Etc.

The most brutal violence was actually lawlessness and complete lack of order between different factions and militias, so in some periods there were militias or gangs who simply ruled the cities or part of the city where they were absolutely masters of everything in terms of deciding of taking someone's life.

In lawlessness, you as one person could be really small and not interesting or join some bigger group of people to be stronger, some family or militia or gang.

An example of a gang would be group of people of some 300 or 500 people who “officially” were a unit or militia and operate for some faction, but in reality, they operated mostly for themselves.

That included owning part of the black market, having prison (for forced labor or ransom), attacking people and houses for resources, smuggling people from dangerous areas.

Violence from those kinds of group was the most immediate violence, the most visible in terms of SHTF talking.

If those people came on your door you could obey, fight, or negotiate, but mostly you could not ask for help from any kind of authority, because there was no real authority.

In any society, no matter where you are living, there are a great number of people who are waiting for the SHTF to go out and do violent things. Small time criminals or simply violent persons who are not openly violent because system is there to punish them for that. It is like that.

Some gang leaders that I knew were actually completely sick people with a strange type of charisma that makes people follow them, weird situations that can happen only in a real collapse.

They are people who just waited for their time to rise.

Those kinds of people together with criminal organization that are already there in any city in the world will be the backbone of SHTF gangs.

Who were the most likely victims?

A very simple answer would be that the most likely victims were people who had interesting things without enough defense.

But it was not always that simple.

For example, one of the first houses that got raided in my neighborhood, right at the beginning of collapse while there was still some kind of order, was a rich family's home.

They had a nice house with bars on the windows, a pretty good setup for defense, and they had enough people inside, so they could give pretty good resistance against the mob.

But they got raided simply because they were known that they are rich, so they were attacked with enough force to be overwhelmed.

It was not only about how much manpower you had and how well-organized defense of your home was, it was also about how juicy a target you were.

If you are faced with 150 angry people attacking your home because they are sure you have good stuff inside your chances are low, no matter how good and tough you are.

People who were alone were a pretty easy target and old people without support of family or friends.

It was not always about killing someone or violence. For example, if you were alone and without resources but you had something else valuable like some kind of skill or knowledge you could easily be “recruited” for some faction or group, not by your will of course.

What were some ways to prevent yourself from becoming a victim of violence? How do you recommend that people prepare themselves for the possibility of violence?

It can be done in steps, or in layers.

Do not be interesting (or attract attention) when the SHTF.

This means a lot of things, for this article I can give a few examples with shortened explanations because it is a huge topic:

Do not look like a prepper (before or after SHTF).

There is no sense in announcing that you are prepping for EMP, civil collapse, apocalypse, or whatever. With that you are risking the probability that when the SHTF, people will remember that you have interesting things in your home

Your home should look ordinary.

For example, if you are living in the city on a street where all houses look similar, there is not much sense in making your home look like a fortress. You'll just attract attention.

Your defense should be based on more subtle means.

Some examples are having means to reinforce doors and windows quickly when you need it, or to reinforce them from inside. Make changes in your yard to

funnel possible attackers where you want them to be (trees, fence, bush...). You can make your home look abandoned or already looted.

Think about what survival is.

Survival is about staying alive, it is not about being comfortable at the expense of losing your life.

I have seen many times people lose their lives simply because they were too attached to their belongings (house, car, land, goods...) so they simply did not want to leave something and run in a particular moment.

Everything can be earned and bought again except life.

Forget about statements like “I will defend it with my life” or “over my dead body” or similar because the real SHTF is usually not heroic or noble. It is hard and brutal.

When you are gone you are gone and there might be nobody to take care of your family just because you have been stubborn or trusted in movies when it came to violence.

To rephrase it: Be ready to leave your home in a split second if that means you and your family will survive, no matter how many good things you have stored there.

Be mentally ready for violence

In a way, it is impossible to be ready for violence, especially widespread violence when the SHTF, but you can minimize shock when that happens with some things.

If you are not familiar with what violence is, you can try to get yourself “close” to it today (in normal times).

It can be done, for example, by doing some voluntary work for example in a local hospital, ER or similar... or simply by working with homeless people.

It sounds maybe strange but activities like this can get you a bit of a feeling of what it is all about, not to mention that you can learn some practical and useful skills for SHTF.

Have means and skills (physically) to defend - or to do violence

No matter how old or young you are, your gender or religion I assure you that you are capable of doing violence. It is only a matter of the situation and how far you are going to be pushed.

It is not just "some people are capable of violence." Everybody is capable. Not everybody enjoys doing it or is willing to do it so easily.

In today (normal times) you can learn some violence skills and you should do it, again no matter if you are a woman or old or young.

You should own a weapon and know how to use it.

You should practice with it or have at least some basic knowledge about hand-to-hand combat.

The worst-case scenario is to have a weapon that you try for the first time when SHTF.

Be familiar with your means for defense, let your family members know what they need to do in case of attack of your home, have plan, and go through it.

Only through practice will you minimize chances for mistakes.

Use common sense

I know lot of survivalists almost dream about how they are going to use weapons against bad guys when SHTF, and that they will be something like super heroes from movies, saving innocents and killing villains.

Truth is that in a real collapse, a lot of things are kind of blurred and you are not sure who the bad guys are. Good guys turn out to be lunatic gang members who want to bring food to their kids.

There are no super heroes when SHTF, and if some of them show up they end up dead quickly.

There is only you and your skills and mindset and what you prepared.

Use violence as a last resort because of the simple fact that by using violence you are risking of getting killed or hurt. Remember when SHTF there is maybe no doctor or hospital to take care of your wound.

It is a time when even a small cut can eventually kill you through infection and lack of proper care.

I'm a single mom with a household full of girls. In an SHTF situation, what would our best strategies be to remain safe?

Just like I have mentioned before, strategy is always same for any part of survival, and shooting from the rifle is pretty similar no matter are you man or woman.

Being single mom with household full of girls on first look make you as an ideal target in some situations, but we are talking here in prepper terms so there is no reason not to be perfectly well-prepared as a single mom with girls.

But yes, I admit it is not perfect situation, even if you are prepared well, some things are sure, you need to connect with other people even more.

House with a couple of girls will always look like easy prey for some people.

It is like that.

Were people in the city safer than people in the country? Can you tell us more about rural living during this time?

In my case, definitely no.

In the essence it always come to the resources and people.

City meant more people less resources, country (rural) meant less people more resources, and because that level of violence simply was lower. That was most important reason.

There are few more reasons why it was much better in the country.

People in the country (rural settings) were much more “connected to ground” they were more tough if you like, they grew their own food, had cattle, lived more simple life prior SHTF and when everything collapsed they had less problems getting used to it.

Yes, they also did not have electricity and phones, running water or connection to other places but they adapted easier to the new life because they had more useful skills then people in the city.

Life was harder for them too than prior to the collapse, but they had means to get resources: land, woods, river...

Another thing is that people in small rural communities “in the country” were more connected to each other.

People knew their neighborhood and some things were easier to organize, like community security watch, help in case of diseases and similar.

What types of weapons did people have for self-defense?

It was different political system prior the collapse where it was not so usual to own a weapon legally.

And to own one illegally could mean a lot of troubles.

Right prior to SHTF, it became possible to buy different weapons on the black market but still, a majority of people did not own weapons.

When it all collapsed, it was possible to get a weapon through trade.

Because of the military doctrine here prior to the collapse, we used “East Bloc” weapons. A favorite was AK-47 in all different kind of editions, or older weapons like M-48 rifle, SKS rifle, 22 and similar.

People used what they had, so in one period you would be lucky if you had any kind of pistol and knife.

Later through the different channels weapon become more available so people had them more. A lot of that was actually junk that some warlords somehow “imported”.

Weapons 50-60 years old without proper ammunition, or not in operating condition. A lot of people simply did not have a clue how to use any kind of weapon, so a lot of accidental deaths happened.

I remember people storming abandoned army barracks that was mostly looted. But then they found in one building a lot of RPGs while other part of the same building was burning.

Two guys were trying to figure out a single-use RPG.

While they were messing with it clearly not knowing how that thing worked, they accidentally armed it and launched a rocket that flew through the crowd, not hurting anyone and exploding in wall 100 meters from where they stood.

They were smiling, clearly happy because they thought they figured out how that thing worked.

What weapons do you suggest having for SHTF?

It is a never-ending discussion and a favorite prepper topic, and I must say that whole discussion is overrated.

I have used them in a real situation and tried and tested lot of different kind of weapons and what works for me may simply not work for you.

For example, here for me good choice is AK-47 rifle, maybe for you wherever you are it is very bad choice.

Good advice is that you need to have a weapon that most people have around you because of multiple reasons: spare parts, repairing, ammunition availability, possibility that you can pick that rifle from other people and you know how to use it.

What caliber and similar is a matter of discussion again. I am talking from the point of owning a rifle.

Another thing is that you need to know how that weapon works. Luckily, most of my readers live in an area where gun laws are great comparing to region where I am.

You have much more choices when it comes to owning a weapon and practicing with it. Use that.

And do not forget that using weapon in a real-life situation is not like shooting at beer bottles with your friends after a barbecue.

In real life you might be in a situation to use a weapon while you are tired, dirty, and hungry and while someone is screaming next to you.

It is going to be maybe when you are not ready to do that, maybe in pitch dark, maybe after you have been awake for 48 hours. At least think about that.

When should you use violence?

Contrary to some popular beliefs in the prepper community, the point is to use violence only as a last solution.

The reason is as I mentioned already, the risk that you can be hurt or killed too, but also once you do violence you change your own rules, or push it more forward, and it is easy to get lost in violence.

There are consequences to that, and you are not going to be the same person ever again.

Violence is a tool, not a toy. You need to know how to use it as best as possible, but also to avoid using it when it is not necessary.

It is a good idea to set up a clear set of rules (mentally too) when you are gonna use violence and to try to stick to it.

For example, you will use a weapon if someone tries to break your home and attack you, and you need to be ready to do that without hesitation.

What else should we know about post-collapse violence?

Think with your head and research.

One thing that is absolutely important when it comes to understanding how violent it is going to be and what can you expect in your own case of SHTF, is to understand how much media can influence people in making their decisions about violence.

In my case, the media built up situation where people feared so much from other people that they actually hated them. They hated them so much that they actually strip them down from humanity.

In a real-life example, it works in a way that people killed other people, including kids and women, because they hated them so much because media told them.

It may look ridiculous and not possible to you, and you might again think “that cannot happen here” but please trust your own resources, look for independent information, not mainstream media, in order to get the right information about what is really happening in the beginning of collapse.

Do not be pulled into “popular opinions” just because the “man from TV” (whoever he might be) told you so.

It is easier today. Because of the internet, you have much more choices for correct information than in my time. But still be careful, or you might find yourself rioting together with 500 people just because you trusted some media.

Notes:

Violence is very common in collapse scenarios because you are bombarded with propaganda designed to instill hatred and fear.

In Bosnia, they were a modern society one day. Then, the next day it was utter carnage.

Powerful gangs will form.

The most likely victims are people with something “interesting” and no way to defend it.

Ways to prevent being a victim:

- *Do not be interesting (or attract attention) when the SHTF.*
- *Do not look like a prepper (before or after SHTF).*
- *Your home should look ordinary.*
- *Your defense should be based on more subtle means.*
- *Think about what “survival” really means.*
- *Be mentally prepared for violence so you aren’t frozen in shock.*
- *Have a weapon and know how to use it*
- *Use common sense.*

People in the country were better off than in the city if they lived in groups, but not if they were isolated.

Violence should ONLY be used as a last resort.

Martial Law: Forget your "movie illusions about being a freedom fighter"

Let's talk about martial law. This is when the normal law of the land is suspended, and the authority comes from the military or federal government.

One recent example of undeclared martial law in the US was when the police were looking for the suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing and went door to door, forcing innocent people to come outside with their hands on their heads at gunpoint, while their homes were searched without warrants.

It turns out that many of us have some serious misconceptions of what it's really like to live through a martial law situation. I asked Selco, who has personally been through it, to clear up the myths and tell us what it's actually like. You can always count on him for the unvarnished truth, and that's what we need to be prepared to survive extreme situations.

Would you say that your city in Bosnia was under martial law for any part of your ordeal? How long did it last?

During Yugoslav wars, in different regions (states) based on particular timing and events you can say that martial law was in place, or "state of direct war threat" as some call it here.

There were different "stages" or even levels of it, but one common fact is that during that all normal civil rights and laws were completely and absolutely a matter of the will of the "war government." (Or "military council" or "war headquarters".)

The names were different for different regions, even cities, but the results were the same.

In the case of my city in that particular time, it was "war government" that had little influence on ordinary citizen simply because there were too many factions.

But prior to that time and after that year I experienced and went through something that looks more like real "martial law" as your readership imagines it.

Many people in the prepper community think they'll be able to take on the militarized police or army rather than bending to the new rules. How do you think that will go? Can you give any examples of people attempting to defy the military?

Yes, I am aware that lot of preppers imagine martial law to be like some black and white situation (with clear causes, solutions, and views). In reality, it is quite different.

It is a situation where all stakes are much higher, and solutions-actions that the government (ruling party, military leaders or whoever in your case) wants to achieve will be attempted with all means. That can include some new rules where what you think about it usually does not mean anything.

A lot of preppers think about “martial law” but in reality, they think about it still in normal terms, with rights, law, constitution, and rules...

You cannot defy military , at least not openly, because they will deal with you fast and efficiently. In times like that it is so easy to get labeled that you are dangerous, an enemy of the state, a terrorist or anything similar, and most probably you will not have any help.

Forget about the movie illusions of openly being a freedom fighter.

No matter how well-organized you are, those who impose martial law have better organization than you.

Remember that martial law usually means an information blackout. “They” will own information and present it to the public the way that they want to present it.

There are a lot of myths about martial law in prepper lore. Can you discuss a few of them?

In my opinion here are few really widespread myths in prepper movement about martial law:

"The UN will somehow “occupy” my land, impose martial law."

When it comes to martial law I would choose to be worried about my own government first when times get really hard. That's because most probably your

freedom will be taken by those people through the martial law so they can achieve they own goals, or in order to stay in power when all goes to s**t.

It is not about who lives where, and what kind of system you have, and how much you love your country. It is about powerful people staying in power when times get really hard, even if that means taking all your rights and eliminating all possible threats from the common folks.

Patriotism does not have anything to do with that.

While you are looking for some outside “exotic” threat, the danger may be next to you all the time.

"I will recognize the threat (coming martial law, repression etc.), and fight against it."

Most probably you won't because it will be arranged into something easily “digestible.”

For example, it will be a fight against terrorism, foreign threat, patriotism euphoria, or something similar, and then one day you'll realize you are living in the middle of “no more rights” situation. Maybe even you'll even be labeled as an enemy of the state simply because you have a weapon, or an off-grid retreat or similar.

Do not expect to see one day a big neon sign that says “martial law is coming”, because it will be smartly packaged into something reasonable and understandable. And most probably it will not be called martial law.

It will be packaged in a way that most people will actually welcome it, because they will not recognize what is actually, and those who openly recognize it and call it by its real name will be the first in danger.

The majority of people will look for it and ask for it, because they will think it will resolve a hard situation.

If you are going to be able to fight it, most probably you'll have to fight it in a silent way, like a real underground resistance movement.

"I just need to obey the rules and look after my own business and all will be fine."

Actually yes, this is true. But it is hard to obey rules when those rules actually take all of your freedoms.

One of the first actions in martial law situations is to eliminate possible threats - or let's say "subversive elements".

It can be done in a soft way by shutting down free press. for example. Or making you obedient (docile) by taking away your resources, and making you dependent on resources that they will give you. Or it can be done the hard way by making "problematic" people "disappear" after raids for example.

You can be that problematic man if you are openly opposed to them taking your rights, if you have other political opinions, are in the prepper movement, or similar.

Maybe you are already on some list of "emergency detention people" in case of an event.

Run away or obey publicly while you are silently working whatever you can against it.

You simply need to be grey.

What is life really like under martial law?

There are two faces of it:

- **The outside face:** martial law is there because of whatever reason. There are new rules, and if you obey all will be fine.
- **The real face:** martial law means whatever they want at a particular moment. For example, the military may confiscate all your food and meds and you'll be hungry and sick the day after. Or you may be detained for as long is necessary, or even killed.

The real problem is that in the case of serious martial law for a prolonged time (nothing like bad weather event or similar) people will hear only information that "they" want you to hear (remember free press and speech is gone). So, it will be

quite easy to after some time to make the majority of people to believe in whatever they want them to.

It is really scary how easy it is to make people believe in something ridiculous if that is repeated enough times and if the situation is out of ordinary.

There was a period in time during martial law here in my region when the order was that people were to leave all doors (on houses and apartments) unlocked and only partially closed (ajar) because the authority issued an order that all folks are subject to house searches at any moment. The authority did not want to lose time breaking through the door. Any closed and locked door would be considered a threat and would be attacked.

Now you can say "I will defend my home", but I will say that if you are already caught in that situation (you did not bug out somewhere or you do not have a big organization) you will simply die, and everybody else in that house will too, because you'll be labeled an enemy of the state or a terrorist.

Homes like that did not even get searched or checked. They were blown up from the outside.

You were labeled simply as a threat.

Just obey in situations like that.

How much do the laws change?

There are no "laws." There are proclamations which direct your aspects of living. You obey, or you are a target.

In some of the regions here where martial law was in rule but still no real war or violence, the press that still worked had completely identical headlines, full of praise for the rulers, generals or those in power.

It was ridiculous to see the same stuff in every newspaper, but people read it. Actually, most people, after some time, believed it.

That is scary.

I remember the case of one journalist who opposed ruling people in some article in his newspaper.

A few days after, he disappeared. Later he was found dead. He had been tortured. Years later the truth emerged that the ruling party leader paid a few criminals to do that.

But what was really scary is fact that in the moment of his death most of the common folks commented with words like, "he got what he deserved," and "he was traitor."

The point is that after some time of living in martial law conditions, a lot of people start to believe all that is "for their own good." They are ready to get rid of everybody who thinks differently, even if that means one day they will be next who will "disappear."

The sad truth is that a majority of people are sheep.

How does martial law hamper your efforts to survive?

It is completely opposite to what survival movement is about.

A big part of survival is having the means to be independent, self-sufficient, and ready all the time.

Martial law is about having people under control, with less than needed resources(so they can be controlled by it), with constant fear and threats of the unknown. It is about taking your rights and freedoms.

It is about control.

You are not in control anymore. You are not in control of your life.

Were there ways that people got around the rules of martial law or were able to fight back?

Yes, but you are going to be "outlawed" and hunted like a mad dog. You'll be labeled as a "great danger" and you will not have any rights at all in terms of expecting to be spared.

It is (again) how strong you or your group is, if you are common man with family, you need to obey or look like you obey.

If you have some organization, maybe a prepper group, and you belong to something bigger and stronger, then your options are different.

But the big thing here that you'll be labeled by the majority of folks as a “enemy” or “terrorist” or “lunatic” or whatever because it is what majority of folks are going to believe. In times like that, the majority of folks will obey because of blind trust, fear, or simple stupidity.

Are members of the military held to different standards of behavior during a martial law situation?

Yes, there were different actions from them based on the individuals who were in charge during the particular situation.

There were cases of soldiers rejecting orders from some officers because they felt it was against everything they were taught.

Usually those soldiers disappeared too.

Military was big machinery, and parts of that machinery operated on orders like any military. In martial law times, orders are rarely questioned because punishments for that were hard.

Can you tell us anything else about this?

Do not adopt opinions about some romantic version of martial law, because that does not exist.

You as an individual may have huge preps and means and plans, but in a martial law situation, you are way too small to count on any real results if you try taking your rights and freedoms back.

Notes:

Nothing is black and white during martial law.

There is no constitution or bill of rights to protect you from being abused or killed.

The military will be in control of all the information you can get – it will be propaganda.

Myths about martial law:

- *"The UN will somehow "occupy" my land, impose martial law."*
- *"I will recognize the threat (coming martial law, repression etc.), and fight against it."*
- *"I just need to obey the rules and look after my own business and all will be fine."*

It is really scary how easy it is to make people believe in something ridiculous if that is repeated enough times and if the situation is out of ordinary.

If you are labeled as a threat or troublemaker, you will be killed along with everyone else in your family.

Part 4: Health and Medical

- How to Prep for When the Medical System is GONE
- What You MUST Know About SHTF Medicine

How to Prep for When the Medical System is GONE

Something difficult to plan for - or even wrap your brain around - is a world in which medical care is not available. Even though it's outrageously expensive here in the United States, we can still access care. We may be in debt forever, but it exists.

So, what do you do in a world in which it no longer exists? A world in which there aren't emergency rooms or doctor's walk-in clinics? A world in which there aren't any well-stocked pharmacies?

Here's the brutal reality of SHTF medicine.

Since there were no hospitals, how did you treat people who were ill?

The organized system of professional medical help ceased to exist.

Hospitals, health centers, EMS, and everything similar was gone. The most advanced medical help that you could find in the hardest period was more or less primitive medical care that some military units had, such as medics and low-level trauma care. But this was not available to common folks.

People with medical knowledge became very important because of this fact, but even the most skilled people were often completely useless because all of the other help that the system offers you is simply non-existent.

One of my old colleagues told me story that could point out some things.

His friend called him to help him with his father, who had fallen from the roof. The man climbed on the roof to repair broken tiles, and he was there in the middle of the night (which was the safest way). He fell down, and his sons found him unconscious. They brought him in the house and called my ex-colleague, a nurse, for help.

When he arrived, he checked the old man, then called his sons in other room. He explained to them that their father was going to die very soon because most probably he had internal bleeding.

The sons were mad at him and they started to threaten him, asking him that he help the old man in any possible way.

My colleague told them that only way possible was to ask for help from the local paramilitary unit who had some medical stash, but even that was very questionable because man need specialized medical care, and at that moment that kind of care was not available in the whole city.

The sons took a trip that night to the headquarters of that unit, and guys there told them to visit the "hospital" which was situated in the basement of a destroyed apartment building.

They later told my colleague that the "hospital" actually was 3 basement rooms with oil lamps and a stench so bad that they both immediately vomited.

The "doctor" who listened to their story about the old man's injuries asked the two of them " Do you have weapons?" They answered "Yeah, sure".

They were surprised, and started to yell at him, then "doctor" pulled a gun and said, "Get the f.... out of here or I'll shoot both of you. Your old man is already dead."

They went home. Their old man was not yet dead, but he died in the morning.

Some things can be taken care with basic knowledge and a little bit of inventiveness, for example, taking care of a broken rib or similar, but other conditions and traumas were simply too much to take care for most of the folks.

The point of this story is not to scare you.

Maybe in your case, the whole situation is going to be much better. Maybe there is going to be some organization, some kind of bigger system when SHTF. I do not know.

Usually, a person who was ill was placed in a separate room and people did as best as they could to help him.

If we managed to get real medication we did that, if not we tried natural remedies.

Honey was one ingredient that was in most of the home remedies, or at least people stated that, pine needles were sometimes there, chamomile mixture, garlic...

Where did you acquire medications? Were you able to buy things like antibiotics on the black market?

Just like all other resources, they were there (in very small amounts, of course) to take, steal, or barter.

Antibiotics were very valuable on the black market, and usually, you could dictate the price with if you owned any.

Antibiotics were used even with expired dates, and people did not care because sometimes it was the only medicine that you could find.

Natural remedies also jumped in, and yes people who had any knowledge about herbal remedies became important. Also, there were a lot of scams. For example, you heard that some man had a good herb mixture for asthma, and if that was your only choice, of course, you would try it.

A lot of people used that and scammed people with "homemade herb mixtures".

Sometimes you could find a man who offered you 15 pills, not packaged, not in a box, just 15 pills, which he stated were antibiotics, and you really need them, so what could you do?

Did people with chronic illnesses like diabetes die?

It was a full-scale collapse. People were dying from a lot of things (even if we do not mention violent death). There were no doctors, no hospitals, no X rays no lab results.

One day you are good, next day you feel sick and you are vomiting, your skin is yellow, you have a fever...

And then a few days later, you are dead.

Maybe you died from food poisoning, maybe renal failure, maybe your blood sugar went down or up. Who knew?

Lot of ordinary folks did not know why someone died.

A lot of people with chronic illnesses died. The majority of them did not have a stash of medication needed for their condition, and when you add to that fact

that overall life quality went down very sharply and very deeply, people who were chronically ill and needed medical attention had serious problems.

In some cases, and for some illnesses, certain people managed to pull through with acquiring medication from the black market or using some substitutes like herbs. But for example, if you were an older man who lived with his older wife, and you had insulin-dependent diabetes, and you do not have friends or family to help, and you had no stash, your chances were really low.

Was there an increase in mental illness?

Yes, but if we are talking about real mental illnesses, people who had serious mental problems that were under control by medication simply lost it without their meds and went completely "mad".

You could see people hallucinating out in the street more often than in peacetime or breaking down in their rooms. I knew cases when families locked in their loved one who had mental illness in a room, controlling him in that way because there was no other way.

A lot of those cases were connected to the people who were heavy drug users (addicts). When the SHTF some of them simply went "wild" or, even worse, some groups used those people for very dirty jobs in exchange for a drug supply. Bigger organized groups had more power and more connections, which meant they could find drugs even in those circumstances. This meant drug addicts were ready to do whatever they had to for them, and very violent things were usually what was needed for a gang to keep power. It is not too different from "peacetime" criminal organizations, but when the SHTF stakes are higher. Violence is much worse and much more frequent.

If we are talking about people who simply went crazy because the world as they knew it collapsed around them, then no, not really. Not too many people lost their minds because of the eruption of violence and collapse.

Of course, there was increase in suicides and cases of people simply giving up because they thought it was not worth it to continue to live on that way, but not in numbers that people would imagine.

I think the instinct to fight for survival is stronger than we think.

People mostly pushed through, day by day. There was an increase in alcohol consumption or marijuana, sedatives were good thing to have or some herbal substitutes... but people pushed on.

What diseases became common when the SHTF? How did you treat them?

When the SHTF, all aspects of life changed, and that included aspects of life that you did not even think about, simply because the system had always taken care of those aspects of life.

For example, how much physical work you are doing today-if you are average citizen who work as an clerk somewhere, or truck driver, or housewife or whatever, you are used to some physical activity and certain food quality and quantity.

You are used to having an operating bathroom, and to being pretty warm in your home, etc.

When the SHTF, all that changed.

Food became different. The quality and quantity of it went down. Physical activities went up very sharply. Add to that fact that one day, it was stressful not to find your favorite yogurt in few stores. Then suddenly, the next day when the SHTF, the levels of stress were about seeing people shot for fun or asking yourself whether your kid was going to survive eating plants only.

All of that contributed to people getting sick simply because people were almost always exhausted.

If we are mentioning the most common illnesses, then those were gastrointestinal illnesses connected with bad food, bad water, and low hygiene (both personally and in the home).

Second to that, a lot of problems were connected with secondary complications of a minor injury.

For example, you might get some nasty cut while you were working in some abandoned storage, trying to scavenge some useful material.

That cut looked nasty, but basically it could be taken care with iodine, peroxide, sterile dressings and antibiotic treatment. But you did not have any of those so

you bandaged it with a dirty bandana. Then, a day later you got a nasty infection which was a huge problem.

A small cut could kill you.

Homemade remedies were used a lot, again with varying levels of success. Home mixtures were used for cuts and infections, and of course, people searched for antibiotics.

If someone broke his arm, for example, you could try to find someone who had a clue about setting the bones, but you can still today find people with funny looking fingers, or bit twisted arm, or not so functioning leg, simply because they splinted it alone at home during that time without any real medical help.

How can we prepare for medical issues?

We can be prepared to some extent, but it is more important to understand that very often (in case of serious collapse) you cannot do too much.

Much more important is to understand "from what end" you need to start your medical preparedness.

Most of the discussions about medical preparedness in prepping community today have few common characteristics. They are talking mainly about:

Taking care of patients in short period of time in until advanced help arrives

Specialized training is given by very specialized instructors (for example combat medics will train you how to take care of a wounded person until evacuation helicopter arrives)

Students who are driven to learn things that look "cool and flashy", for example, you'll be given the task of stopping bleeding on mankind (or animal meat) while instructors pointing a flashlight in your eyes or using firecrackers to simulate gunshots.

Those are only examples, or one analogy could be that medical preparedness experts teaching you how to suture wounds even if that wound can be taken care of with simple steri-strip (adhesive tape that gonna connect wound edges).

Nobody mentions the complications that can occur from the wound, prolonged care of an infected wound. This is the material and knowledge that you are gonna need.

One of the reasons is that it looks cool to suture a wound or to train how to use tourniquet until help arrives in form of an ambulance or a helicopter. The other reason is that most of the trainings assume that help is 10 minutes or one hour away.

It may not be like that when real SHTF happens and it is completely different. Then, most probably nobody is going to arrive, and you'll have to take care of everything.

You need to start with basics and go gradually to more complicated things.

Do not misunderstand me. I know how to suture, and I am a combat medic and nurse, too, so I am not talking against that knowledge.

But before learning how to suture as a part of your medical preparedness you need to learn what to do with your waste when SHTF, how to build latrine, how much water you need, and ways to have it in order to keep a minimum of hygiene.

Before you buy 20 suturing kits you need to learn wound care in prolonged terms, including antibiotic treatment for that wound.

You need to know ways to keep yourself clean and protected in order to minimize the risk of getting injured or getting ill.

Another example would be that lot of people are fixated with buying antibiotics without real knowledge of how antibiotics work and the differences between groups of antibiotics.

Get gloves, face masks, working gloves, hand sanitizers, and alcohol pads. Then go with antibiotics and tourniquets.

It is about preparation and common sense. So, if you have, for example, a person with high blood pressure problems in your family, you need to learn all you can about that condition including proper diet, natural remedies, what to do in a

possible crisis, and you need to have serious stash of medications for that condition.

Think outside of the box.

Just like with all other fields of prepping, here too, you need to think a bit outside of the box.

A lot of medical skills can be learned. Some of them are online, free to research and learn.

For example, sometimes it is simply not enough to give oral antibiotics, sometimes you'll have to give it through an IV or intramuscular, or sometimes best choice is to rehydrate person through IV solutions.

Yes, it is probably illegal to do that if you are not a medical professional, but when the SHTF, that is gonna be not so important. On the other side, your skills are gonna be very important.

Learn skills no matter what system says about who can practice those skills. You are preparing for a time when system is gone so it makes sense.

Notes:

When the medical system collapses, you are left with nothing but what you already have.

People with medical skills became very important.

No matter how skilled you are, without supplies and medicine, you are not very effective.

People with chronic illnesses will die if the collapse lasts very long.

Prep with medicine, knowledge, and herbs.

Beware of scams with people selling "medicine."

There will be an uptick in mental illness. First people going off their meds, and second, people who get depressed as time goes on.

Gastrointestinal illnesses, waterborne illnesses, and illness from eating bad food were most common. Second most common was infections and complications from minor injuries.

Learn the basics, not the flashy stuff.

What You MUST Know About SHTF Medicine

SHTF medicine was one of the most valuable skills that I used when my country collapsed. I plan to use that medical knowledge again if times get bad, for me and my family, or simply for other people, as a help or skill for trade.

When the SHTF, people used what was available for treating their medical condition. Results differed.

All different kind of medical problems suddenly happened when the SHTF.

SHTF medicine for chronic conditions

Preppers usually think about injuries and wounds when they imagine real collapse but tend to forget the spectrum of existing chronic medical conditions) that a lot of people cope with.

Those conditions will not disappear when the SHTF, so if your father or spouse has a high blood pressure condition that probably means you will be more likely to deal with high blood pressure complications when SHTF than to treat gunshot wounds.

It does not mean you do not have to know wound treatment, it means you HAVE to know how to deal with high blood pressure.

So, it makes sense to watch for already existing medical conditions within your family and to be ready to help with that when the SHTF.

Depending on the level of your knowledge and other circumstances, this can mean learning about natural remedies for episodes of high blood pressure (garlic, for example) or choosing to have huge stashes of meds for high blood pressure, oral or in the form of injections, or learning how to control it with dietary changes, etc.

Best is a combination of all of the above-mentioned skills and techniques.

A frequent mistake is to "lean" on just one technique, skill, or philosophy.

And that is exactly thing that is often seen in survival movement. Natural-herbal medicine.

Natural medicine doesn't always work.

I knew several people who had knowledge about herbal medicine during hard times in the war. It was a valuable skill, simply because real medicines (drugs) were hard to find.

So, they treated people with their own "medicines". Most of them actually "sold" those medicines. Some of them actually gave it as a present. (Of course, they always expected something in return. Rarely people do anything for free, which was pretty understandable at that time.)

Some of that it worked, but more of it did not work. It was a situation where you took it or left it, and to take it usually meant some hope.

Not to mention, a big number of scams occurred with that medicines.

You need to understand that the range of medical condition that was happening at that time was pretty wide. Because the medical system was completely out, you could see anything.

The important thing here is to understand that natural remedies might work in some conditions, while in others they are completely useless because of many reasons. (Too slow, too weak, lack of proper diet, a lot of stress...)

I remember treating more than once wounds with a mixture of herbs and other natural remedies like honey, pine needles, and similar.

And you know what was the result?

If the wound got severely infected, the person lost part of their body or even their life.

It was simple like that.

I have seen cases of pneumonia treated with natural remedies from men who had generational knowledge about natural remedies. And yes, sometimes they did have success but often they did not have success.

It was a desperate time. I saw people being treated after being not conscious for days, burning from fever with homemade hot balms, and prayers from 8 men next to their bed, but still they died.

Do not get me wrong, people may die from pneumonia in the most modern societies with advanced medical care, but here we are talking about common sense and layers.

There is a reason why we are using antibiotics to fight serious infections and not natural remedies.

Yes, part of that reason is the greed of big pharmaceuticals companies, I do agree with that. But antibiotics are needed to fight the most serious infections.

So, if you put all of your money on natural remedies, you need to consider again your prepping philosophy.

Natural remedies have their place as an important skill for SHTF, but as an addition to conventional medical knowledge, stash, and skills. Or, in a worst-case scenario, for use when it is the only way to treat illnesses or injuries.

What makes sense vs. what is fancy

When SHTF you will have to solve problems (including medical issues) in the quickest, most efficient way.

There are few reasons for that:

- **You'll have other problems.** Most probably that medical issue is not gonna be your only problem. Most probably you will have many other problems concerning resources, safety, and security. You'll be under stress, physically and mentally.
- **There is no time for mistakes.** People feel confident in some things today. It is like that because you have the most advanced medical system usually just a phone call away from you. In other words, NOW if you have some kind of small incision, yes, of course, you're gonna try to solve it with natural remedies, herbs, natural ingredient ointments, or whatever. It is like that because if you messed up and see that your cure is not working, you can sit in your car and go to the emergency room for professional help. Guess what: When the SHTF, if you mess up, you are f***ed.

Remember - when SHTF, a small problem can lead to a very big problem really fast.

Medical preparedness is all about levels.

The first SHTF medicine knowledge that you need is systematic understanding of medical conditions in terms of severity and probability.

Just like all other prepper topics, there is no sense to start preparing from the end of the spectrum or to cover what is unlikely while completely forgetting the basics.

For a very fundamental start it is good to look into hygiene, infection, existing chronic medical conditions (yours or in your family-group), and wound treatment (emergency and prolonged).

Just these few topics will take months of time, especially since you will try to implement natural remedy knowledge together with medical knowledge.

Again, do not get me wrong. Knowledge about natural remedies was very important and valuable, and I believe we all need to know the basics. But do not throw away what modern medicine can offer you just because you have some opinions that natural is the only way.

What I point out very often is the fact that if something is illegal today (like administration of injections, healing with antibiotics, or whatever) from the point of medical legality it doesn't mean you are not allowed to research the hell out of it and to learn everything possible. When the SHTF, nobody is gonna care about licenses. Knowledge and skills are gonna be more important.

A lot of knowledge is out there and FREE. You can learn a lot through that.

In the end, for us, natural medicine was very important and valuable because a majority of folks did not have a better choice.

Notes:

Prep specifically for the existing chronic illnesses in your family. Use layers – stock up on meds, learn other ways to manage it, learn home remedies, and see what you can acquire locally to help.

Do not depend on just one method.

Natural remedies do not always work.

Part 5: The Mindset

- 5 Deadly Mistakes That Preppers Are Making
- Noise, Light, and Your Mind Playing Tricks
- How Even the Best Plans Can Go Horribly Wrong

5 Deadly Mistakes That Preppers Are Making

It is hard to bring the mindset of survival to the people who have not experienced a hard situation of at least some kind of survival event.

Over the many years of being connected with people who are into survival, I realize there are the same topics for discussion and people actually become fixated on those topics.

Inside those topics over the years "rules" are set and it is hard to change them. Opinions are formed and if you jump in with a different opinion, you are going to be ridiculed.

The survival community has turned into a parody of itself. Something that should be free from the mainstream has turned into a very mainstream thing.

- Misunderstandings.
- Intentional false information.
- The survival industry.

We are living in a society where we want it and we want it now, and what is most important we want it the easy way without effort and sweat.

This is true for the survival community, too.

That is the way survival myths (and mistakes) are born. Here are the 5 biggest mistakes that preppers make. Mistakes that can get them killed.

1) Making too specific a plan (and sticking to it)

Because of tons of information, we are being "funneled" into forming opinions about survival and especially about the reasons of possible bad events in future, possible SHTF situations, collapses or whatever you call it.

So, we have preppers who are getting ready for an EMP, or an economic collapse, or an immigrant crisis, or a war, or simply a bad weather event.

In essence, there is nothing wrong with it, except some people stick so hard to one imagined" possible scenario that they do complete planning based on that scenario only.

As a result, if that scenario happens they could be good, but if any other scenario happens they are in deep trouble.

There are numerous reasons, possible scenarios, and outcomes. We do not have a clue what exactly might happen.

In an urban survival scenario, I like to think that there are a few common things in any event:

The disruption of society that leads to the system not working properly (or collapsing completely) which leads to a situation where people "sharing " resources in a different way. And that way includes violence.

In other words, if you are preparing for a serious storm event, and you forget the possibility that after a really serious weather event (loss of electricity, floods, contamination) and prolonged time, violence simply has to be a factor, you are missing the point.

It does not have to be civil war.

2) Overlooking the basics.

As the opposite of the above-mentioned, if you are preparing for a really tough time, like for a full outbreak of violence (Mad Max style) there is a danger that in the tons of information and equipment that includes weapons, martial arts, and similar. you simply forget the basics.

Here is an example:

In this region, where it is still fragile and always close to rioting, turmoil and where word war is never too far, whenever there is some disruption (news about possible riots or riots on streets) the first thing that most people are checking and getting prepared is not their stash of weapons (and every house has that, a lot).

It is water.

On even the smallest disruption here, people get up and fill the bathtub and water containers.

Why?

Because it is one of the basic and usually the most needed thing. And one of the first things that are gonna go away if something happens. You cannot live too long without it, we know that from experience. You can never have enough water.

It is one example, but the point is that you cannot go into the "high end" if you did not cover the basics.

Not covering the basics will get you dead long before you reach the need to use high-end equipment and plans.

During the course, I met out in the field a person that asked me a question that was very important to him in his prepping philosophy: Do you have any idea how to hide yourself from a helicopter with thermal imaging and similar high technology that is chasing you?"

At the same time, that person could not start a fire in a field in the middle of the woods during perfect weather with a lighter. His level of fitness was so good that after one night in an abandoned building (sleeping on the floor, with a sleeping mat) and one day of walking he was unable to continue at all.

He failed in map reading, water collecting, fire making...he did not see that as an important.

He did not see that as a big problem in his prepping philosophy.

All he was interested in was how to run from the helicopter that will chase him (with modern seeking devices).

First, nothing is wrong with the fact that his performances and knowledge were low, as long as he realizes the importance of that. (He did not).

Two things are wrong:

He is choosing "running away from a helicopter" as his biggest worry and likely scenario when SHTF. He is an average young man, college student. But he is not at all worried about fire, shelter, water, fitness...

Nothing worries him in basic things.

But being chased by a helicopter simply sounds cool to him. He wants to be prepared for that.

He chooses (like a lot of preppers) to prepare "from the end," not from the beginning. He chose to prepare for what looks cool to him, not what is likely. He forgets the basics.

And second thing is that he does not realize very probable fact that if he is going to be so important (good or bad) , so not "gray" that a helicopter with sophisticated equipment must chase him, he is missing something in the prepping philosophy. He is probably dead anyway.

Often the best thing in order not to be found is not to give reason to be looked for, not to be interesting. Blend in.

A helicopter chase is not so probable. A bad rash because of poor hygiene or pests in your food are more probable issues.

But they are not cool topics to prepare for, right?

3) Underestimating the violence

I am not some violence expert.

I do know some judo, and I know how to operate with several different weapons in a real situation. From handgun to mine thrower.

There are no real violence experts as you imagine it because it is personal.

There are people who can teach you techniques, skills, and how to use it efficient way.

They may be experts in teaching, which is different.

How you are gonna use it in real life SHTF is a completely different thing. You do not have clue how it is gonna be until you find yourself in that situation.

And based on my experience it is different from imagined.

One thing is for sure, SHTF violence is a combination of a lot of things. Pressure, both physical and mental. And you will test your "violence skills" under different circumstances.

There are good reasons why war veterans are not so happy to tell stories that are let us say "most interesting" when it comes to violence.

It is intense and confusing. And real.

The best advice here that you need to train your "violence skills" while you are under pressure. You must push yourself to the limits and learn to operate as best as possible in those conditions.

Tired, sleepy, angry, hungry, terrified...

4) Refusing to think in terms of "new world, new rules"

I remember a man, my friend from peacetime, who shot another guy, a prisoner. He shot him in the face from a close distance. An unarmed man.

And I asked him, "Why did you do that?"

He said, "Why not?"

And that was it. I was looking at him, I thought I knew him but obviously, I did not.

I thought he was "normal" (whatever that mean), a normal guy. He worked before all that in a travel agency. An average guy, a bit shy with girls.

But I did not know him actually.

People talk about the end of the world, complete chaos and disorder. And then they say something like. "Oh, it is not gonna be like that. It cannot be like that because it is wrong, not fair..." or similar.

You cannot prepare for very bad times and while preparing for it still think in terms of normal times.

In normal times, people are neighbors, teachers, truck drivers. They say hello to you because they know you. The system is working and holding things together, including most of the people.

When the system goes out (seriously goes out) people are a possible threat until you rule out differently.

It is like that because sooner or later, people realize there are not enough resources for all of us.

And then real "fun" starts.

You do not know what kind of people are around you before times gets real hard.

5) Thinking, "It cannot happen here."

Trust me. It can.

You can see a glimpse of that in football rioting, or during Black Friday sales, or in gang wars sometimes.

It can happen anywhere, no matter how many people are there (per square mile) or how well-armed you are, or how modern your society is or how democratic your country is or how many rights you have.

I am sorry, but the more modern your society is, the worse it will be. The fall is going to be bigger and longer if something serious happens, and people are going to have a harder time adapting to the new reality.

Notes:

5 huge mistakes

- *Making a specific plan and sticking to it even if it isn't working or things have changed.*
- *Focusing on fancy preps and unlikely scenarios and overlooking the basic supplies and likely events*
- *Underestimating the brutality and violence that will come*
- *Refusing to think in terms of "new world, new rules" – you can't live by the "old rules" when nobody else does*
- *Thinking it can't happen to us.*

Noise, Light, and Your Mind Playing Tricks

In this article, Selco shares some of the lessons students learned when they attended his last course in Croatia.

Urban Survival: Keeping a Low Profile

Hollywood industry, fiction survival books and our imagination over the many years kinda taught us to expect big things and to think in big terms when SHTF. As a result, a lot of preppers forgot to use common sense in preparing and thinking. Actually, they forgot to be aware and to notice little things around them.

They were expecting big things, so they forgot small things and techniques that are actually important. That can eventually get you in trouble or get you killed.



To understand better how things can be hard when SHTF you need to put into perspective how noise and light work in different situations, or in other words how light and noise can be your enemy or friend depending on what situation you find yourself during SHTF.

Noise

Often you have seen in the movies or read in a book how someone sneaks up on someone or through some building.

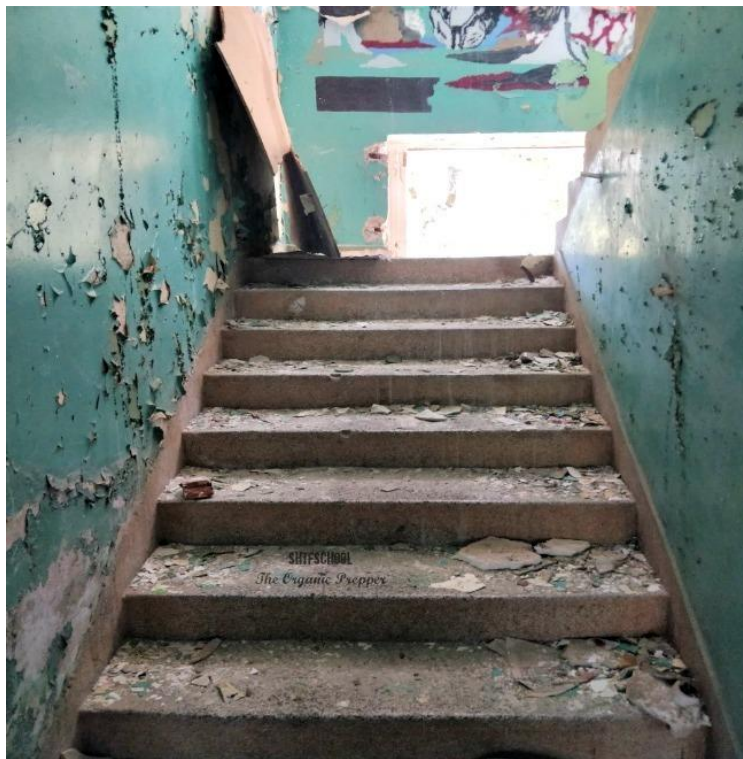
In reality, students are shown that there are no ninja warriors. Remember we are talking about average folks here. If they are forced to survive in some dangerous situations they simply need to know:

- some basic technique of walking (sneaking)
- a lot of time and patience
- proper clothes (not noisy definitely)
- proper preparations before taking action (checking for things in pockets that make noise, etc.)
- a lot of practice

But the highlight is on time; you need time to do it the safe and secure way (even if you are highly trained). So, in reality (if it is dangerous) it may take you an hour to cover 20 meters sometimes.

Definitely, it is not like in the movies.

You can use sounds in surroundings (or background) to cover your movement (for example in this photo, it may be the sound of waves or wind through the trees) but again, you need a lot of time, and skill.



Now put that in perspective of real urban survival, and a situation where you need to check some building (for example to take shelter) that looks abandoned, with things on the ground that simply make too much sound. Sometimes it is impossible; sometimes it does not make sense to even try.

Moving in a group and staying quiet is a skill that is possible to learn, through the familiarization of group members, the use of hand signals, and proper preparing (again proper equipment, footwear, clothes). That technique makes sense to be put to the test in a hard situation like dark and bad weather (rain, wind) where you can try to use that weather and night in your favor. It's also important to see how everything can easily go against you (conversation-signals in pitch dark, loss of orientation, losing group members.)

Light

If you tell average students group to start a fire so they can prepare a quick meal or make coffee, most of them will make a huge fire big enough to cook a boar on. If you tell them to turn on the flashlight to find something in their backpack, a lot of them will turn on a torch that will burn the eyes of all people around them, affecting their night vision badly.



Strong torches and big fires make sense sometimes, but in urban survival prepping staying undetected is a big priority, and you need to adopt that kind of philosophy first.

Planning your movement during the day, and taking that particular route during the night, even in an urban environment in SHTF settings, can be two completely different things, even if you saw (or went through) that area during the day.

It is very easy to get disoriented in pitch dark, and known buildings are not known anymore.

Distance may look completely different, and the combination of everything may be very dangerous if you are not aware of that.



In the photo above there is a camping fire (not hidden) in an abandoned building in an area where there is no other light. It is clearly visible from 200-300 meters.

Your Mind

What do you see in this photo?



The photo above is taken after midnight in an area where students did not expect people to be. (The students were driving with us in a car during one of the exercises).

Students after the encounter described the man as a "very tall" (2 meters or 6'5") person in a full white bodysuit, probably a man with no good intention (drug dealer? body disposal?).

The encounter lasted a few seconds.

After that, they made camp in a close vicinity to where the "man in the white bodysuit" disappeared into the bush.

And of course, their minds continued to play dark scenarios in their heads for rest of the night.

They did not have nice night because of that.

In reality, it was one of our "ghost" instructors. He wore full camo and a clown mask - both were very visible (much better than in photo) but in the given circumstances (very late and a strange person walking slowly in area where there is not supposed to be anybody) the students mind offered a solution of what man is there and his intention.

Your mind WILL play tricks on you in survival situations. If you are in an uncommon situation or you are not very experienced when you are not sure what you see or hear your mind will offer you an answer. Often, that answer may be wrong, which may lead you to make some bad decisions.

It is the reality of SHTF.

Learn to use your skills under pressure

A big part of the course is using your skills and techniques under PRESSURE when you are not sure what is what, and that is a topic for other articles.

You can avoid that by training:

- Rechecking how things work in the real world
- What is visible from what distance
- What can you hear from where
- How many details can you spot and memorize
- How good your orientation skills are

All that can be practiced in normal times, some in nature while hiking, some while drinking coffee in town by observing the people around you.

Again, it is not about ninja warriors. It is about being aware of the world around you in different settings.

Notes:

Learning how NOT to be noisy

- *some basic technique of walking (sneaking)*
- *a lot of time and patience*
- *proper clothes (not noisy definitely)*
- *Proper preparations before taking action (checking for things in pockets that make noise, etc.)*
- *a lot of practice*

It may take you a lot longer to get somewhere when you are sneaking there.

Light

- *Make the smallest fire you can for your needs – you are making coffee, not roasting a boar.*
- *Even things that are familiar are unfamiliar in the dark – spend time outside at night to learn how to get around better.*
- *In the dark, your mind will play tricks on you – you can't always trust what think you see.*

Practice using your skills under pressure.

- *Recheck how things work in the real world*
- *What is visible from what distance?*
- *What can you hear from where?*
- *How many details can you spot and memorize?*
- *How good are your orientation skills?*

How Even the Best Plans Can Go Horribly Wrong

Urban survival vs. rural survival is a near-constant debate in preparedness circles. Those who live on acreage sometimes scoff at those who live in cities for reasons of business, education, or families. Those who live in the cities feel obligated to defend their choices.

The truth of the matter is that there IS no perfect plan, and even if you had one, SHTF might have other ideas.

But, as Selco explains, even the best survival plans can go horribly wrong when the SHTF.

I write almost always about urban survival because of a few simple reasons:

I survived SHTF in an urban environment, so I write about it from my own experience.

The majority of us actually live in urban settings, so there is a reason why we need to pay more attention to preparing for urban survival.

Most of us who live in urban settings have a plan (me too) to bug out to some kind of rural setting in order to have a better chance of survival. But the sad truth is that a lot of us will fail to bug out on time because of numerous reasons.

As a result, a number of us who have a good BOL in a rural setting will still end up surviving in an urban area.

Generally, I think it is much better to be out of the urban area when SHTF. But we don't always get what we want no matter how good our plan.

Urban vs. Rural Survival

The whole dilemma of urban vs, rural has become pretty useless because people imagine that what they need in order to survive is to just run away from a populated area into woods and they will be perfectly fine.

While I do agree that bugging out from the populated areas is a good thought and a good start, it should not be the end of your planning. You may find out that after you run from the chaos in the city, you face a whole new range of problems (a lot of them very challenging) in wilderness settings.

It is not a simple decision and simple plan. Choosing between urban and rural (or the wilderness) should be based on careful planning and preparing. All that usually takes years.

Without planning, it makes more sense when the SHTF to bug-in and take your chances in the city.

What was it like in rural settings when the SHTF?

As I've written many times, I spent my SHTF time in urban settings, but many of my friends and relatives were in rural settings and small villages instead of the urban centers.

How was it?

Very bad, but what is really important it was also much better than in the cities for many reasons.

Mentality-tradition

People in rural settings here still lived partly from their land. Yes, they did have modern houses, electricity, hot water, etc. A lot of them lived in villages but worked in cities. But the important thing was that they had a connection with their land and their surroundings.

A lot of them had chickens, crops, and vegetables. A majority of them were hunters.

So, when SHTF yes, they did lose connection with the outside world, electricity, water maybe, and regular transport of goods, but they still had resources around them in huge quantity, and most of them did have knowledge of how to use that resources.

They had woods around them with animals that they could hunt, rivers and creeks for water sources, and their land.

I think when SHTF they were using maybe 30% of their land for food growing, and of course, they switched very fast to using all of it for growing.

They had the opportunity to grow everything, including tobacco, and of course, homemade alcohol.

Life became much harder than in normal times, but compared to urban areas, it was paradise.

One thing that was important and good there was that they had a much better generational knowledge and preparedness for a hard life.

No matter how modern they were, they lived a harder life in normal times than city folks and getting used to SHTF situation was much easier to them than for city folks.

Also, their knowledge about natural remedies, home medicines, or simply about delivering babies at their homes was much better and still fresh.

Bugging out to the wilderness or rural area

There is a popular myth that if something serious happens and you are living in the city you simply will go and bug out into the wilderness.

It is a very nice thought, and it is tempting to imagine that while cities are exploding in violence you will be happy somewhere in woods.

A whole prepping philosophy and industry are based and built on that picture.

I did have a very short period (several days) of surviving during SHTF in a wilderness setting and it was hell for me. If I learned anything from that episode it is the fact that either you have to be a real master of wilderness survival (it is possible, but I really met very few people like that) or again, you need to have really serious preparations prior to the event together with a network of good people.

A lot of "mainstream" wilderness preparedness is based on shorter terms events, or "until help arrives".

Being in a situation where you need to survive in the wilderness for a prolonged period of time lowers your chances a lot.

You may have a premade BOL location somewhere in the wilderness, a cabin for example with a really good stash of everything. That, of course, raises your chances for survival in the wilderness. But sooner or later you will (in a prolonged event) you will eventually come down to the-wilderness-your skills equation.

Not too many people are actually ready for that.

Being in small rural places, together with other people around you sounds much better, and I kinda lean to that solution. Actually, my BOL location is just like that. It is a small village where I have resources and the help of like-minded people.

You need both. Resources and trusted people away from urban area.

"Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face."

It is great to have plans, but it is even greater to stick to reality, common sense, and experience. When the SHTF you do not have a clue where you may end up. You might be forced to adapt and bend your plans a lot.

The biggest mistake people make is that they are confident they have the perfect BOL but due to circumstances they are forced to bug in, and they did not plan at all for bugging in. Or opposite.

SHTF is a completely new event, and as much you plan for it, there are variables that you can simply can't factor in.

Those variables may completely change your plans of where you want to be when it happens.

Notes:

Whether you plan to bug in or bug out, you've always got to be ready with a plan B because disasters are fluid.

Unless you already have wilderness survival skills, don't plan on bugging out into the wilderness. You'll die.

Unless you already grow food, don't plan on stocking seeds instead of food. You'll die.

Don't plan ONLY on getting to your bug out location in the country – you could get trapped in the city

Don't plan ONLY on bugging in at your rural home – a natural disaster or some other event could force you to leave.

These articles previously appeared on the blog, TheOrganicPrepper.com

About the author:

Selco survived the Balkan war of the 90s in a city under siege, without electricity, running water, or food distribution.

In his online works, he gives an inside view of the reality of survival under the harshest conditions. He reviews what works and what doesn't, tells you the hard lessons he learned, and shares how he prepares today.

He never stopped learning about survival and preparedness since the war. Regardless what happens, chances are you will never experience extreme situations like Selco did. But you have the chance to learn from him and how he faced death for months.

Real survival is not romantic or idealistic. It is brutal, hard and unfair. Let Selco take you into that world.

Read more of Selco's articles here: <https://shtfschool.com/blog/>

And take advantage of a deep and profound insight into his knowledge and advice by signing up for the outstanding and unrivaled online course. More details here: <https://shtfschool.com/survival-boot-camp/>