

Go With The Flow – A Vignette

Mik just stood there and looked at the end of the culvert that ran under the county road at the back end of his ten acres of property. “You look pensive, Son,” Mik’s dad said, walking up to join him.

“Just thinking, Pop. Just thinking.”

“Well, don’t overdo it. Come on back to the house. Your mother wants to talk to you about the Fourth of July picnic.”

“I’ll be there in just a few minutes, Pop. I want to check something first.” Mik waited until his father was headed back to the house two-hundred feet away before he walked/slid down the twelve feet deep drainage ditch. He walked into the cool dimness of the ten foot diameter galvanized culvert. It looked to be in good shape. It hadn’t been there that many years, and didn’t really carry much water, even in the rainy season.

A plan began to take form in his mind as he climbed out of the ditch and walked toward the homestead house.

The place was his now. His parents lived nearby on a modest piece of property. His father was ex-military and still kept his hand in with a welder, being a welder/fabricator at heart for his entire life.

He had two brothers. One younger, married; one older, married with a 6-year old. And he had one sister, also younger than him. She, too, was married, but they didn’t have children yet. They all lived within a few miles of the homestead, and it was the center of activity during most holidays and other family get-togethers.

When he reached the house, Mik wiped his feet on the scrap of carpet at the back door before he went in. It was his place, but when his mother was there, it was her rules. “Pop said you wanted something, Mom,” he said when he went into the kitchen.

“Yes, Mik. Are you sure you don’t mind having the picnic here again this year? Perhaps we should start rotating it around...”

Before she could continue Mik interrupted her, “Aw, Mom! It’s okay. I didn’t mean anything like that earlier. I was just wishing Pat and the others would take a bit more interest in what is going on in the world. Seems like I’m the only one really getting ready for what might happen.”

“So you really don’t mind us swarming the place every holiday?” That was his brother, Pat, in the kitchen to grab a snack.

“No,” Mik replied. “I really don’t. I like having the family around. Most of the time.” Mik grinned when he added the last. Pat laughed with him and Sylvia, their mother, shooed them out of the kitchen.

“Run along, boys. I need some quality time with this birthday cake if it’s going to be ready for the party.”

The two men smiled and headed for the living room. Just turned seven Pat, Junior, was entertaining the rest of the family with his new found skill on the trumpet. Pat and Mik joined in the applause when the youngster finished the piece he was playing.

“Going to be a star at Julliard one of these days,” Pat, Senior, said proudly.

“That’s great, Pat,” Mik told the boy. “Would you mind practicing outside for a few minutes? I need to talk to your dad and the rest of the family.”

“Sure, Uncle Mik.” He said it almost as one word, coming out more as “UncMik” than “Uncle Mik.”

“You’re not going to suggest we become survivalists again, are you?” Martha, Mik’s sister asked.

Mik sighed. “You can come back in, Pat!” he called through the screen door just as Pat began playing again. The others laughed, and Mik smiled. Disappointed a little, but sure he could care for the whole family if worst came to worst, he let it go. He’d been prepping, alone, since he’d bought the ten acre farm from his parents. Always with the idea that the family would come here if needed.

All day, Mik couldn’t keep his mind off the twin culverts under the county roads that bracketed the farm. He finally managed to get into the spirit of Pat’s birthday party when they had supper and then dessert. Much of the food came from the farm and Mik was proud of it.

Two days after the birthday party, Mik stopped Harold Simpson as he graded the two roads after a heavy summer rain.

“Glad you stopped me,” Harold told Mik, before Mik could say anything after Harold opened the grader cab’s door.

Mik’s eyebrows lifted in question.

“Got some bad news, I’m afraid.” Harold opened up his thermos and poured a cup of coffee for himself as the grader idled. “County is cutting back. These minor roads are getting their last grading until next summer. Not even sure the county will have the money for that, the way things are going.”

“I see,” Mik said thoughtfully.

“Just the major roads are going to have any regular maintenance.” Harold snorted. “Of course old Henry Malcom gets new culverts and monthly grading on the road to his place.”

“New culverts?” Mik asked politely.

“Yeah. Pulled out two sections of twenty-four inch culvert, still in good shape. He wanted thirty-inch culvert because in really hard rains his front yard floods sometimes.”

“I see,” Mik replied, his thoughts going from the loss of the county services to the used culvert that Harold mentioned. He’d just had another idea.

Casually he asked, “What happened to the old culvert?”

“In the storage yard. Believe it or not, they’re going to sell it on e-bay for extra money! Can you believe that?”

“Uh... What’ll it go for?”

“Don’t know. Been on there for two weeks and no bidders.”

“Okay, Harold. I won’t keep you.”

“What did you want, anyway?” Harold asked, putting the top back on the thermos.

“Just to say hi. Guess I won’t be seeing you much, now.”

“Doubt if you see any county people out here for a year or more.”

With a wave, Mik stepped back and Harold began grading the rest of the road. Mik walked over to the culvert nearby and began to smile.

Every morning and evening Mik checked the news and read the preparedness forums he had found several years ago and got much of his prep information from. The world situation was just not getting any better. China was rattling sabers over Taiwan’s renewed call for independence.

Russia had broken diplomatic ties with China shortly after joint military exercises resulted in several “friendly fire” incidents, killing many Russians, and a few Chinese, as the Russian forces reacted in kind.

The incident was played down by both countries, at first. But soon each had hard words for the other, and then the diplomatic break when Russia called for a censure vote in the UN.

Two weeks after talking to Harold, Mik borrowed a trailer and picked up the four twenty-foot long sections of twenty-four inch corrugated culvert. Working on his own, using the old International tractor the farm boasted, Mik managed to get the culvert into the ditch, two pieces beside each of the ten foot diameter culverts already under the road.

He dragged them inside the culverts, leaving five feet exposed on each end and connected the two pieces together, creating a culvert within a culvert in both places. Working long hours, Mik dug up earth from the small borrow pit on the farm that provided fill dirt for various projects, and packed it around the new culverts until there was a smooth dirt floor in the ten foot culverts, level with the top of the twenty-four inch culverts.

His brothers didn't ask what he wanted the lumber for, when he asked them to get four pickup truck loads of timbers on their contractor license discounts. Having family in the construction business had saved Mik money on other occasions and he wasn't shy about asking for the help again.

Both brothers nearly turned him down when he asked their help to install the timbers. They were to be used to close off the ends of each of the ten foot diameter culverts, leaving only the twenty-four inch to carry any drainage in the large ditch.

"You know this is highly illegal," Pat said when Mik asked him for the help.

"Yep. But trust me. I have a good reason."

Nick, Mik's younger brother, said, "It's a bomb shelter you're building, isn't it?"

Mik had to nod. He said nothing. Pat and Nick looked at one another and then both nodded in turn.

"Okay."

So, with their help, the timbers were cut and fitted into the culverts, leaving an opening in the top for access. They even helped, for a while, filling and stacking sandbags to finish the enclosure process. He had to finish those on his own.

The enclosure of both culverts was finished to Mik's satisfaction two weeks before the Independence Day Holiday and Mik took a couple of days off to rest. He was very glad he'd started the project. Even Nick called on the second day and asked if there was anything more Mik needed help with in the shelters.

"Actually, there is. More sand bagging," Mik told him.

Nick sighed and said, "I'll be there this week-end."

Pat was with him when Nick pulled his truck up near where Mik had the tractor parked, the front bucket full of sand from the borrow pit. The two men pitched in and filled sand bags for a while.

"Where are these going?" Pat asked when Mik said they had enough.

"Should have put them inside before we closed up the culvert," Mik said in apology. "They're going on top of the bottom culvert, four bags wide, four bags high."

"What in the world for?" asked Nick. "We can make tables and chairs out of wood..."

"Not for that, though they will serve," Mik said, interrupting his brother. "If the worst comes and we get fallout and rain during or shortly after, that small culvert may carry the fallout right under our feet. Placing the sandbags on top of where it lies buried will stop the radiation."

Nick looked up at the ceiling of the culvert and noticed for the first time that there was, in fact, a sort of ceiling inside the culvert.

Mik saw the look and explained. "Similar situation there. There's only barely three feet of cover at the very top. I suspended plywood a foot down and filled the cavity with sand. Gives us a minimum of four feet of cover right at the peak."

"Is that enough?" Pat asked.

"Should be, unless things get really bad."

Nick looked at Mik for a moment and then said, "Thanks, bro. I hope we don't have to use this place, but I'm sure glad you got the idea. I don't like the way China and Russia are at each other's throats right now. It could spill over onto the US pretty easily."

"That's part of the reason I build these," Mik replied.

"What's the other one for?" Pat asked. "This is plenty big enough for the family, isn't it?"

"Yeah. But the flow is from the other one to this one. I wanted the flow restricted there, so there is less chance of too much flow for the twenty-four inch culvert to handle here in the shelter."

"Smart, Brother," Pat said. "Okay. What's next?"

"We move supplies in here. Food. Water. Some other gear. Our camping equipment."

Nick and Pat nodded. "You can count on us. Should we mention anything to the others?"

"I don't think so," Mik replied. "Pop will blow his stack when he finds out we did."

"Uh... You mean, you did," Nick said with a grin. "I plan to deny knowledge when Pop finds out."

"Me, too," Pat added, also grinning.

"Well, I'll deal with it when it happens," Mik said, frowning slightly at the thought of his Pop getting upset.

It was July Fourth and all the family was assembled. It was a good time, as always. Mik's father always saw to that. Independence Day was important to him. He wore his dress uniform from World War Two, at least a recreation, with all the bells and whistles to which he was entitled. He was supervising Pat, Junior, who was monitoring the electric ice cream maker, adding ice as needed to the container.

Mik's mother was supervising the rest of the meal, with Nick's wife, Pat's wife, Mik's sister Martha, diligently following instructions. Martha's husband Stu was with Mik, Pat, and Nick, staying out of the way, but staying handy for the heavy lifting and carrying.

The table clothes had just been pinned to the picnic tables in preparation of receiving the food platters when Pat, Junior, his attention on the lone cloud in the sky suddenly pointed up and yelled, "Look! Fireworks already! Yeah!"

Everyone looked up in silence. Extreme silence until Pat, Junior suddenly said. "Hey! The ice cream maker stopped."

Mik looked over sharply and then looked at the sky again. The bright flash of light was gone.

"I think this may be it," Mik said softly to his brothers and brother-in-law. Stu looked at Mik curiously. "Try your vehicles. I'll get a radio."

Pat and Nick ran toward their respective pickup trucks as Mik ran into the house. He came out a few moments later, cranking the handle of the windup radio.

"Nothing!" he yelled over to Pat and Nick.

"Won't start," Nick called back.

"Ours either," Pat said as the two brothers approached Mik.

Mik's father was out of his chair, a stern look on his face. "What's going on here?"

"I think we just got nuked with a HEMP device."

"A what?"

"An electromagnetic pulse bomb. Up way high. The power is out in the house. Nothing on the radio, the electronic controlled engines won't start. It all fits." Mik was explaining to his father, and the women as they all joined him.

"Look! More fireworks!" It was Pat, Junior again, pointing to the sky. Streaks of light sped past, headed south. A couple disappeared to their north.

"Missile warheads!" Mik said. "Pat! Nick! Grab the food and take everyone to the culvert."

"I want an explanation, and I want it now!"

"Pop! Pop! We under nuclear attack. Those are missile warhead tracks! I've got a shelter. It's in the culvert over there." Mik pointed to the nearest culvert, two hundred feet away.

"Nukes..." It took a moment to sink in, but Clyde Smith finally understood. "All right! The culvert you say. I'll get the women and children headed that way."

Mik gave a quick nod and ran back into the house. He made several trips to his old customized full size Chevy Blazer, adding tote after tote to it until there was no more room.

When he drove to the culvert, Pat was helping everyone down into the culvert from the opening in the surface of the ground.

“When everyone else is in, start handing these down,” Mik told Pat. Mik began to unload the totes from the Blazer. When it was again empty, he jumped in and drove it back to the house to repeat the process. He made four trips. On the third one, as he was unloading at the culvert, the ground shook.

He looked around, but there was no sign of a mushroom cloud. Deciding they had more time, Mik went after the fourth and final load, including the rest of the food from the picnic. He motioned Pat down into the shelter and began handing down the last items he’d brought, and then the food.

He followed, closed the hatch, and climbed down to the floor of the culvert shelter. He looked around. Even Pat and Nick, who had seen the shelter before, were looking around in awe. Mik had done a lot more work in the weeks since they’d seen it.

The women were all huddled together, Pat, Junior, was exploring in detail, and Clyde was taking it all in. He suddenly sat down on the handy row of sandbags. “I don’t feel so good,” he said.

He looked deathly pale in the harsh light from the windup LED flashlights that hung from the ceiling after Mik indicated for the others to wind them up.

“Lay back, Pop,” said Martha. She helped him stretch out on the sand bags and turned stricken eyes on her mother, Sylvia. “Mom... I don’t have anything...”

“I do,” Mic said, going over to one of the totes that had been brought down. He opened the tote and took out the backpack it contained. It was a medical pack, well equipped, Martha said later. She immediately took a look and with stethoscope and blood pressure cuff in hand began to check her father’s vital signs.

Martha made Clyde take one of his nitroglycerin pills, and then another when the chest pains only abated slightly. But the second pill did the trick and Clyde, and the rest of the family, was breathing easier.

“Let’s get him to a cot,” Mik said, nodding toward a set of cloth curtains. Clyde protested, insisting he could walk, but Mik and Nick simply picked him up and carried him. They set him down on the side of the camper style cot and he leaned back quickly, going a bit pale again.

Sylvia was at his side. Pat’s wife, June, and Nick’s wife Samantha, were arranging the food as Mik organized the totes, and the others continued to explore the shelter.

Stu came over and began to help Mik. “You did all this just recently?”

Mik nodded. “It sort of just came to me and then everything worked out to get it done.”

“Thanks, man. I don’t know what I would have done... Martha and I... Well, just thanks.”

Mik nodded and the two men continued their organizing efforts, with the occasional soft exclamation from Stu as he discovered the many things Mik had brought for the shelter, in addition to the items that were already in it at the time of the attack.

Everyone looked up when the ground shook again, harder this time than the previous shake. A few moments later, when nothing further occurred, June called everyone but Clyde to the picnic meal they’d set up on the three folding tables in the shelter.

“We might as well eat this before it gets too cold,” June said.

“Or hot!” Pat, Junior said, looking fondly at the ice cream maker, which had made it to the shelter intact.

It was a somber meal, eaten simply to avoid wasting it and for the nutrition it provided. Sylvia took Clyde a plate and helped feed him, despite his protestations. Finally, with Clyde eating a bowl of ice cream, watched over by Pat Junior, eating his own ice cream, the other adults gathered around and discussed the situation.

There wasn’t much to discuss. Mostly Mik just explained what was likely to happen and how they could deal with it. There were many questions, as well as many thanks to Mik for having the place.

A watch schedule was set up, to keep an eye on the CDV-717 remote reading radiation meter that Mik had installed near the main entrance of the shelter. He also made a point of showing everyone the emergency exit out the other end of the shelter. One need only push up on the well marked panel in the roof to be able to climb out from that end. Whoever was on watch also had to keep an eye on the ventilation fan. It ran on batteries and if it stopped, Mik was to be awakened immediately.

For a month and a half the family stayed in the shelter, not even trying to venture outside to see what was happening. The radiation was just too high. Mik breathed a sigh of relief when he checked areas inside the shelter with his other meter, the CDV-715. Even with water running full force in the twenty-four inch culvert below them, from heavy rains that had to be carrying fallout particles, the radiation level was still easily in the safe range.

Checking a spot right at one end where there was a small gap in the bags the radiation was much higher, but blocked by the sandbags from reaching the inhabitants.

While certainly no stay in a five star resort, Mik had made arrangements for the stay to be as easy as possible. There were three chemical toilets, each in a separate privacy shelter, two privacy shelters for showering using Sun-shower bags filled with water heated on one of the two burner camp stoves in the shelter. A couple of wheeled tanks held the waste from the chemical toilets until it could be buried outside the shelter.

Everyone had their own cot, each family within a curtained area. One of the totes was games and other things to keep everyone entertained. The fresh food from the picnic and the

house, plus the frozen food from Mik's freezer, that had been put in totes and brought down, was used up first.

Only Mik had his usual extra clothes, but he'd bought lightweight coveralls for everyone, and an assortment of underwear, which were in a couple of the totes, so everyone had clean clothes to put on.

The radiation level finally dropped off and Mik suited up in a Tyvek hooded/footed coverall, put on rubber boots and gloves, donned a Millennium respirator, and went outside for a look around. He went armed. Some of the cases he'd brought down contained his collection of firearms and ammunition.

With an AR-15 carbine and CZ40B .40 caliber pistol, Mik left the shelter and took a quick look around. Nothing seemed amiss. He closed the hatch and moved to his truck. It started right up. He stopped the Blazer and walked toward the house, moving quietly, his head on a swivel, looking all around.

The house was a mess, he saw as soon as he got close enough to see inside one of the open doors. He'd made sure to close them when he left the house for the shelter the last time. Someone had been there.

And they were still there. Dead of radiation poisoning. Five of them. Three men and two women. Mik didn't recognize any of them. There was no sign of any means of transportation and Mik assumed they'd walked there when their vehicle stopped due to the HEMP device.

They had not been at all careful when they were looking for food in the house. From the looks of it, all had fallen ill and wound up two to a bed in the two bedrooms and one on the sofa. Even with the respirator, Mik nearly gagged at the sight of the mess. Dried blood, excitement, and vomit were everywhere. The place would need a thorough cleaning and sanitizing before the family took up occupancy again. But that would come later.

Mik checked the garage. His '81 Harley Sportster was still inside, untouched. So was the tractor, out in the small barn. He checked the garden. The people had worked it over, taking everything even close to ripe and had killed most of the plants in the process. It would probably be a total loss.

Besides, he would need to scrape the surface layer and the plants away and bury them due to the fallout. The same with the truck garden one-acre plots. The orchard looked all right, but only time would tell if the radiation would affect the trees long term.

Satisfied that he could do no more at the moment, Mik headed back to the culvert shelter. He'd noticed the clouds. It was heavily overcast. Which wasn't unusual at this time of the year in Indiana. What was unusual for that area at that time of year were the flakes of snow that started falling. "Nuclear winter?" Mik asked himself. He hadn't really noticed the temperature, clothed the way he was. It must be colder than he thought.

In the small decontamination area, Mik sprayed himself down with a five gallon garden sprayer filled with bleach solution, before taking off the protective equipment. The rest of the family, even a slowly improving Clyde, was anxiously awaiting his report.

With Pat, Junior off at the far end of the shelter, softly playing his trumpet, Mik told the others what he'd seen. He described it all, except for the worst details about the dead in the house.

Faces fell. "What do we do, Mik? You say nothing in the garden or truck garden plots are going to be eatable. And nuclear winter. I saw a special about that and..." Stu's voice was beginning to rise as he approached panic.

"It's okay, Stu," Mik said reassuringly. "I have food for the entire family for over a year. That greenhouse kit I bought and never assembled is in the barn. We'll get it up and that will help. The ground can be cleansed and crops put in next year. I think we'll be okay, even if the government hasn't survived. I'm not sure how much help FEMA will be if they do survive. It went from a hands-on prep organization to a money handout situation right after it was formed."

"What about others, Son?" asked Mik's mother.

Mik sighed. "We'll do what we can for those that need it, and cooperate with those that can help. Those that might try to take what we do have..." Mik looked over at the AR-15 case he'd returned the carbine to when he came down. It was with several other similar cases. A mound of ammunition cans was nearby.

"This is the United States of America, Mik," Clyde said forcefully. "We will help who needs it. That's what this country is about."

"I know, Pop. But there are some bad people out there that may no longer have the constraints of the legal system to keep them from doing anything and everything they please."

"Yes... Well... I suppose you are right. I don't suppose you have an M1 Garand in that collection?"

"Sorry, Pop. But I do have a Savage 110 .308 bolt action with a good scope. I was hoping you might keep an over watch on us as we're working on the property. From the cupola on the house. I've set it up for that."

"You made many plans for this, didn't you?" Clyde asked.

Mik nodded and felt a childlike pleasure when his father praised him with the simple words, "You did good, boy."

Another month went by before Mik would allow any of the others out of the shelter, and then, Pat, Junior, was limited to just a couple of hours a day on the area around the house that had been decontaminated with large volumes of water from the diesel engine driven irrigation pump.

Mik, Stu, Pat, and Nick cleaned up and disinfected the house, burying the bodies using the old International tractor. The James manual clothes washer that Mik had purchased and

stored in the barn was brought out and all the bedding washed several times, and sanitized with boiling water before it was used.

Finally, after the radiation level was down below the safety threshold for full time life above the ground, the family started sleeping in the house, but left much of the equipment and supplies where it was, bringing up only what was needed when it was needed.

They'd yet to check on the other home places. It was Clyde that finally asked to be taken to his and Sylvia's place to check on it and pick up clothing and a few other things. After a lengthy argument that had Martha confining Clyde to bed to rest, Mik and Nick got in Mik's Blazer, with a list of items wanted, and headed for their parents house, nine miles away. Both were armed. Mik with an Armalite AR-10 .308, and Nick with one of Mik's two SKS carbines. They weren't going to take any chances.

"Oh, no!" Nick whispered when they drove up to where the house had been. Only charred timbers remained. The whole small group of houses where Clyde and Sylvia lived had burned to the ground. They exchanged looks and got out of the truck. In two hours of searching they managed to recover a few pictures and the fire safe that had been in the master bedroom closet. It was scorched, but looked intact. Reluctantly the two went home.

Clyde took it stoically, doing his best to comfort Sylvia. With the blow of the loss of their parents' house, the other siblings were clamoring to go check on their own places. Over the next few days, each house was checked. Martha and Stu's place was intact and they gathered up everything they wanted, knowing they wouldn't be back to live there for a long time, if ever.

It was the same at Nick and Samantha's. Not only did they clean out the house, but brought back their tandem axle travel trailer. It took some work, but the propane tanks from both houses were recovered and moved to Mik's farm.

At June and Pat's the group ran into their first trouble. Like their parents area, fire had ravaged the neighborhood. But Pat and June's house had escaped damage, one of the very few. And it had a working fireplace. When Mik stopped the Blazer, and he and Pat started to get out, a shot was fired over their heads.

"Go away!" yelled someone from inside the house. "We don't have anything to share or give away!"

"That's my house!" Pat nearly screamed.

"Not anymore," came the reply, accompanied by another shot, this one coming much closer to them.

"Let's go, Pat," urged Mik.

"That's my house!" Pat argued. But another round came their way and Pat got into the truck, gripping the SKS like he intended to use it.

"Man, there is nothing in there to get killed over," Mik said, trying to calm his brother down as they drove back to the farm.

“You don’t understand, Mik. That’s mine and Samantha’s and Pat’s whole life in there!”

“Talk it over with Samantha. If you still insist on going back, I’ll go back with you. But it will be just us two.”

Pat nodded. He was calm when they got to the farm, but when Samantha started crying, and Pat, Junior asked about his toys, he got angry all over again. “Don’t worry, Son,” he told Pat, Junior, as he held Samantha. “We’ll get your toys back.”

Mik stayed out of the discussions when the rest of the family, finally including Samantha, tried to talk Pat out of going back to the house. Mik had said he would go, so he would go.

They waited a week, with Pat chafing at the bit, but finally the two went in again. Parking well away from the house, Mik disabled the Blazer so none of the few survivors that they saw occasionally could steal it, the two, armed the same as they’d been on the first trip, made their way cautiously toward the house, using the burned out homes for concealment.

Pat was in the lead and suddenly stopped when they crept low behind the house next to Pat’s. Suddenly Pat turned around and headed back the way they’d come. “Let’s go. Not worth it,” Pat said almost too low for Mik to hear. Mik stepped forward and looked to see what had changed Pat’s mind. Three children were in the back yard of the house, playing with Pat, Junior’s toys in the three inch accumulation of snow.

Hurrying after his brother, Mik put his hand on Pat’s shoulder. “You made the right decision.”

“What am I going to tell Samantha and little Pat?”

“We’ll think of something... Which... Let’s go downtown and see what the damage is.”

Pat just shrugged.

There was no sign of anyone in the small downtown area. Many of the business had broken windows and doors. Everything seemed to have been looted thoroughly. But Mik stopped the Blazer and got out, Pat slowly following. “Keep an eye on the truck,” Mik said and headed for one of the shops.

He came out a couple of minutes later, the AR-10 slung over his shoulder, his arms filled with toys still in their packages.

Pat brightened considerably and hurried toward the store himself. Mik put what he’d brought out into the back of the Blazer and stood watch as Pat went on a no money shopping frenzy. Though the stores had been looted, many useful items remained. When Pat wound down, and the back of the Blazer was full, the two headed back to the farm, Mik determined to make a few more trips to the three small towns the farm was near and do some more salvage work.

That was how Mik explained it to Clyde, who took a very dim view at first of the largesse Pat had brought back to Pat, Junior, and Samantha. “The things will just go to waste. We’re not taking anything from anyone with any kind of claim.”

“Well, make sure you don’t,” Clyde admonished Mik. Clyde lay back down on the sofa in the living room. He was not faring well. Martha was doing all she could to control his heart problems with what Mik had provided, but privately told Mik that Clyde was going to need a doctor’s help, and soon.

After a few more trips to each of the towns near the farm, Mik shut down the salvage operation. Not only had they gleaned all they could of what was left, but the weather was getting very serious. Mik wanted to get the greenhouse assembled before it got any worse.

It took the men a week to get the greenhouse up and the heater that went with it installed and plumbed to one of the propane tanks. Sylvia took over again, and directed the other women on what to plant and when. Mik let her have at it. She needed something to keep her mind off Clyde’s illness.

“We need to get more propane,” Mik said one day after yet another night’s fall of snow. He was at the kitchen table with the others when he spoke. Mik suddenly noticed how pale his father was. “And we have to get Pop some medical attention.”

Clyde waved an arm dismissively, but a stab of pain brought it down quickly. “Well... If you think you can find one.”

Whenever they had time, someone was using the wind up radio and listening for radio broadcasts. There had been a few, but none locally. But three days after Mik’s conversation with his father about medical attention, a strong signal boomed on the local city’s news radio station frequency.

Those that heard it quickly shouted for the others and they all gathered around the radio as Mik fine tuned the station so they could understand what was being said. There were shouts and hugs and laughter when the news reader announced the presence of the Indiana National Guard in the city. They were slowly making their way to the smaller cities now, after having done what they could in the larger cities.

Mik, one of those fearful of what FEMA might do in a situation like the one they were in breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed he’d feared for naught. The government really was here to help.

Martha quickly wrote down the various contact points to get medical attention, fuel, food, water if needed, and many other categories of services. It would be weeks before the Guard moved out into the small towns, but everyone with transportation was asked to bring in the worst cases of need to the city. Fuel would be made available for the return trip.

“Do we trust them?” Mik asked, still not one-hundred-percent sure of what was happening.

“Of course we trust them!” Clyde said. He coughed painfully and settled back down.

“Okay. Martha, you and Mother and I will take Pop in tomorrow.”

The rest of the family looked at Clyde, expecting a negative reaction. He just nodded and said, “Okay.”

Mik thought about it, and decided he would take his weapons with them, without telling Clyde. He added two of the AR-15 carbines to the AR-10 rifle in the back of the Blazer so Sylvia and Martha would have them if needed. He wore the CZ40B under his jacket. Nick and Pat went with them as far as the nearest propane dealership. They’d found the loaded delivery trucks on an earlier salvage run and managed to get the old trucks running without too much trouble. The two ten-wheel delivery trucks would keep them in propane for a long time.

Pat and Nick headed back to the farm in the trucks and Mik headed for the city. They had Clyde bundled up, due to the cold, and Mik drove very carefully, using four wheel drive the entire way into the city. At the first checkpoint at the edge of the city, they and the Blazer were checked for radiation contamination and then allowed to proceed with the caution that violence would not be tolerated, though any arms they had with them they could keep.

That finally convinced Mik that his fears were needless. He relaxed and drove to the hospital where the National Guard medics and doctors were located. The agricultural team was in a nearby building and Mik went there, leaving his mother and sister to take care of Clyde. There was going to be a wait.

Three hours later Mik was back in the hospital, a smile on his face. He’d signed up as one of the small time farmers that would be given assistance with seed and fertilizer as soon as the weather cleared in, hopefully, no more than two years. His assurance that he would participate in the program got him food vouchers to take to the supply station on his way out of the city. They’d have food enough to get them through two years, with the extra supplies every month added to what Mik already had stored.

The smile faded for a moment when he saw his mother and sister. They looked stricken.

“Is Pop okay?” he hurriedly asked.

“That old goat was flirting with a nurse,” Sylvia said. Sylvia tended to be a bit jealous and the emotional strain on her had come out in a fierce attack of it.

A subdued Clyde was sitting nearby, a bag of what turned out to be medicine in his hands. “I think we’d better go home before I get into any more trouble,” he told Mik.

“Yes,” Sylvia said, immediately, giving a hard look at one of the female nurses that walked by.

Mik managed not to laugh as he led the way out of the hospital to the Blazer. He explained everything he’d found out and asked about Clyde’s visit with the doctor.

“Not going to be much help to you, Son,” Clyde said sadly. “But I got some medicine, and they say it should be available on a regular basis to keep me going for a few more years.”

“That’s great, Pop!” Mik said. He pulled into the supply station and showed the guard his vouchers.

“All this for three people?” the guard asked suspiciously. Bureaucracy still being bureaucracy after a nuclear war, it took another two hours to get the appropriate response from the agricultural powers that be to convince the people at the supply station to load the back of the Blazer and half the rear seat with boxes of long term storage foods.

But they got the food and made it home, despite the snow storm getting worse.

The abnormal winter tapered off after a year and a half and Mik and his family began farming the ten acres again. There were changes at the farm as the years passed, but the family stayed together and prospered, expanding the family as well as the farm, as times improved.

End *****

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