

# **Long Term**

**Pete Thorsen**

# Chapter 1

My wife Sally died when she was only fifty-five. I was fifty-six at that time and I had retired early. We had big plans. We had sold our house in town and bought this smaller house way out in the country. We planned on making it our own little homestead. Sally never got to realize that dream before she had the heart attack.

Yes, I moped around for six months or so after she passed. Then I was able to get a part-time job in the small town closest to our, no, my home. There was a small hardware store there and they hired me for a clerk. It was the best thing for me because it gave me something to do and forced me out into the world.

Near spring the store got in all their garden seeds so I bought some and when it was warm enough I planted a small garden. I never used all the seeds I bought because that garden was small. Before I planted I got some manure from a neighbor and incorporated that into the garden soil to make it richer.

After the store had gotten the garden seeds they also got in some chicks. So like my wife and I had originally planned, I got some chicks too. The place maybe would be a small homestead, after all, I started to think. Only now there would be just one person working there instead of the planned two.

The part-time job worked out very well in many ways. It gave me some extra spending money and I only worked the mornings on Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays so I had plenty of time to work on projects at home. Also because I was in town anyway I always stopped at every yard sale I saw. I just bought little things for the would-be homestead if they were cheap.

Time went on like it always does and my chicks grew into chickens. I lost two of them to wild critters. My fault because I should have built the chicken pen stronger. Even though it was my fault I made some critters pay a dear price. I started shooting every coyote I saw around the place. Also at a yard sale, I bought a few traps big enough to hold a coon or a coyote. The traps ended up being only three dollars apiece because when I bought all of them the guy had he gave me a deal. I was always in the market for a deal.

The chickens I had left produced way too many eggs for just me even though I was now a big egg eater. I gave the excess to the neighbors. I had noticed that the prices in the grocery store were sure going up all the time. Things were going up at the hardware store too. And everyone saw the price of gas going up.

I had some savings in the bank and it was making almost no interest at all. I spent some of that money and bought a new generator for the homestead. Then when I had the chance I bought an old clean metal oil drum for fifteen dollars. I spent some time building a small lean-to on the back of one of the sheds and after I built a strong stand I put the oil drum up on the stand.

I had a good valve I had got in a box of junk and put that on the drum. Then using a five-gallon gas can I gradually filled the drum with gasoline. I could use the gas for the generator or just use it in my old pickup. I did add some fuel stabilizer in the gas too so it would last longer.

That fifty gallons of gas was like gold with the high price that they asked for fuel now. No wonder that grocery prices were still going up. With the prices of everything going up higher all the time, I started buying extra of food items I ate on a regular basis when those things happened to be on sale. If it was good sale I bought as much as I could.

My first garden was kind of a success. Stuff grew and I ate what I could and the excess I cut up and gave to the chickens. I saved on chicken feed that way. And with the price of chicken feed so high now I bought a whole bunch of it. I had planned ahead of course and bought some used metal trash cans when I had the chance at a few yard sales. After cleaning those trash cans they worked great for storing that chicken feed so the mice couldn't get to it.

The second spring I planted a much larger garden. Again I had planned ahead and I bought a used pressure canner and all the jars I could at yard sales. I got new lids for a discount at the hardware store where I still worked. I bought a whole case of the lids. I knew they would keep and not get any cheaper.

When I went to get some more manure at the neighbors to use in my garden he wouldn't give me any. Instead, he asked how much I wanted then he brought it to my place along with his tiller and the two of us worked enlarging the garden, spreading the manure, and tilling it into the soil. He said he wanted to thank me for all the eggs I brought him. It's great to have good neighbors.

I often wonder how long the hardware store where I work will stay in business. Many businesses are closing both in our little town and all across the nation. Some of the big chain stores are closing too. So because of the closings and cut-backs, many people are becoming unemployed. Quite a turnaround from the record low unemployment the nation had been enjoying.

And the price on everything just keeps going up all the time! I drew all my money out of my savings account and have it at home now as cash. The stupid bank was only paying me a tenth of a percent interest and I decided not to let them use my money anymore.

I took a bunch of that money and bought a ton of groceries. I think I almost literally bought a ton. The stuff is

going up so fast in price it will be like getting fifteen percent interest or more on my money I think. I have been using the gas out of my drum at home so I can replace it with fresh. I made almost fifty percent interest on that gas because the price has gone up so much since I bought it. That drum was a good investment.

This year I canned a bunch of stuff from my garden using my pressure canner. It worked out just fine. I have since bought many more used jars but I will stop buying anymore now because I have so many. I use mostly pint jars because it's just me here. I have plans to increase my garden even bigger next year though so I will likely use more jars then.

I asked the gas company where I buy my propane if they would replace the small tank here with a larger one. When they said no I said I will buy a second tank and fill both of them if you do give me a bigger leased tank. At first, they still said no so I said I will just check and see if a different propane dealer will do that for me. They immediately agreed at that point. I now have two five hundred gallon tanks that are full of propane at my place. Again I think it will actually save me money because propane has been going up in price so much too.

I do have a small wood stove in my house but I don't use it. I'm getting too old to be cutting and splitting firewood. And rather than buy firewood I would rather buy propane instead. I do burn a little wood in my shop in that wood stove in there. And my supply of firewood was getting low so I checked around to find a good price on some to have delivered here.

With so many people out of work and everyone needing more money, there were many people selling firewood. I dickered with a couple of them and finally got a deal if I bought two loads. So that is what I did because I knew I could always use the firewood eventually, whether in my shop stove or possibly even in the house.

I got laid off at work over winter but surprisingly they called me back in the spring. That was good because then I got the employee discount again on a bunch more stuff I decided to buy. This year I bought enough garden seeds so I would have plenty for an extra couple years at least. I also bought a few more chicks.

I found more used metal drums at a good price that I bought so I then purchased enough chicken feed to fill all of them. I had enough feed now for a couple of years at least. The chickens just free-ranged during the summer and fed themselves mostly anyway.

The economy was looking worse and worse. In my small town, there were only a very few businesses still open anymore. The owner of the hardware store stopped reordering merchandise at the end of July. He said we would just sell what we could of what was on hand then he would have a going-out-of-business sale in the fall. I was not a bit surprised when he told me that.

The television news channels contained nothing but bad news. Unemployment was steadily going up at a now rapid pace. We were now officially in a recession which many were predicting would deepen into a depression though obviously, that was just a guess on their part. The world stock markets were all in a downward death spiral. Europe was now in a depression.

There were tons of yard sales all summer because people were selling everything they could to try and make ends meet. I bought some stuff but not much because I had so much at my place now I didn't need hardly anything anymore. Prices were really low now at these sales because no one had any extra money.

I bought even more extra grocery and sundry items and I wondered how long until the grocery store here closed down for good too. Right now the grocery store was one of the very few stores still open in our little town. Even one of the gas stations closed up.



## Chapter 2

In the early fall, the hardware store had its going-out-of-business sale. It did not go over very well. I bought a couple of things for less than half price but honestly there was little there that I could use. With no more paychecks and no more work I seldom went to town anymore after the store closed taking my job with it.

I went to town once during the whole winter. I had everything I needed at home because of all the supplies I had purchased. When I did go to town I was not surprised to see two more businesses had closed down. The grocery store was still open and I again bought a whole lot of food. When I had loaded everything in my pickup I went back inside the store and bought even more than I did on the first trip. I just had a bad feeling about the future.

When spring came I planted a big garden again and I let one of my chickens sit on her eggs so they would hopefully hatch. Last summer I had bought a rooster so the eggs would be fertile because I had plans to increase my chicken flock. I had found out I could crack the extra eggs into muffin tins and freeze the eggs. Once frozen I just popped them out of the tins and put them in zip lock bags in the freezer to use later.

I waited until mid-summer to fill the one propane tank that I had used over winter. It felt good to have two full tanks again. I called the local grocery store one day just to see if they were still open for business. When I found out they were indeed still open I made another trip to town. Again I bought a massive amount of groceries. I still had some cash savings at home but obviously, that amount was decreasing. It would be almost another year before I could start getting social security checks. I hoped by that



time that it still would be possible to get Social Security. I had my doubts because all the news on the radio was pretty grim.

I was good at rotating all my food stocks. When I brought this last load of food home I did more than just rotate stocks so the new was in the back and the oldest in the front. I took a more or less inventory of what food I had on hand. I should have been doing that all along. I now saw that I had plenty of most things but a few items I should have more of than I had right now.

I made a list immediately of what additional items I should buy soon. Over the next couple of weeks, I added to that list as things came to mind. Finally, I again drove to town and I even remembered to bring my list with me. I was glad I went because even in those two weeks or so I could see things in town had degraded even farther.

I bought what was on my list along with a few other items I happened to see and I left town faster than the incoming trip. I just felt uncomfortable while in town. Even this small town. There were just too many people around doing nothing. And when I drove past they stared at my pickup like they had never seen one before. They looked hungry. Not necessarily for food but for what they perceived I had just because I still was able to drive. I stayed in town just long enough to buy the groceries and to fill the gas tank and I left. I even watched the rear-view mirror to see if anyone followed me out of town. I was spooked.

But other than the spookiness the trip was uneventful. When I got home I put away my new purchases and then I loaded all my guns. I did not put those guns away but instead scattered them around the house. See, I was really spooked.

As my garden wound down I tallied up the number of jars of produce that I had canned this summer. Maybe it would be enough to last until next season's crop but if so it

would just barely make it I thought. That was fine because I had a very large pantry that was plumb full of store-bought food plus what was stored in the spare room. I would be fine, at least until next summer. But by then I would need either to have a larger garden that would hopefully produce well or I would have to buy a bunch more food in town. Or more likely some of both. I had plenty of seeds on hand. And I knew what I was doing in the garden now. As long as Mother Nature did not throw me a curveball I should be just fine.

In the late fall after getting things ready at home I went deer hunting. Well, I never left the place; I just got up a little earlier than normal and walked out to the edge of the woods. I was there before daylight and when it got light enough I shot a deer. I gutted the deer and walked back to the place. I was able to drive my pickup right to the dead deer and I pulled the pre-placed planks down from the truck box and was able to slide the deer up the make-shift ramps.

I backed into the garage and used a come-a-long to lift the deer up and drove the pickup back outside where I hosed the blood out of the box before it had a chance to dry. Inside the garage, I skinned the deer and took one quarter into the house where I de-boned the meat and then sliced it to what I thought were likely sized chunks for a meal and wrapped two pieces together in freezer paper. I did this with the other three deer quarters too. The meat scraps I ran through the old hand meat grinder I had purchased at a yard sale just for this purpose.

I had deer tenderloin for supper that night. I now had meat that cost me almost nothing. Later that winter I shot another deer so I would have some meat during the spring and summer. I did also shoot a rabbit now and then for something different during the fall and winter.

I was able to sign up for social security during the winter even though it would be a few months before I got

my first payment. I just hope the nation holds together long enough for me to get a little of my own money back that our government has been so kind to hold for me all these years.

Then I called the closest grocery store. I was actually surprised when they answered the phone. I asked for their hours and thanked the guy then hung up the phone. The store was obviously still open for business. I had cash money here at home and I thought it would only make sense to drive in and go on another shopping spree.

But I did remember my unease the last time that I had been in town. By now I had to assume the situation would be worse. I knew that in this state anyone could carry a gun concealed without any permit. It had been big news when that law was passed. I paid little attention to that because I never planned on ever carrying a gun to town. I would now.

I have always been something of a gun collector. I have no real modern stuff but do have several older guns. I chose the smallest pistol in my modest collection and by leaving my shirt untucked it was adequately covered. I took a reasonable amount of cash which I split and put into two different pockets. Thinking of nothing else I got in my pickup and drove into town for the first time in months, wondering exactly what I would find there.

While I saw no other cars on the road on the way into town that was not all that uncommon. My first stop was at the bank. I had only my checking account there now but I had decided to withdraw some of that money too. I would leave enough to cover the automatic payments that came out each month. In two months my social security checks would be automatically deposited and they would way more than cover my monthly bills.

Going into the bank my I saw that my plan would be changed. There were signs up saying that you could only withdraw a maximum of three hundred dollars per week

due to federal mandate. I had not heard that announced on the news. I withdrew my maximum allotted money and left the bank with little talking to the clerk. I saw no point in making a scene.

The bank episode got me ready for the sign I saw on the doors of the grocery store. These signs were short and to the point. "Cash Only."

Well, I had been planning to pay cash anyway so it made little difference to me. I had parked close to the doors because the parking lot was almost empty. I grabbed a cart and started shopping.

## Chapter 3

I saw a huge difference right away. The shelves were not bare but the store's inventory was severely reduced. I walked back to the checkout area where I approached the only checkout person. A somewhat burly guy.

"Is there any limit on purchases?"

"Nope. As long as you have the cash you can buy as much as you want."

"Thanks."

I went back to my cart and started filling it. While there were way fewer food items I did notice the stocks of what was here were fairly deep. It was just a very limited selection. I bought a lot of the items that I would normally eat.

I completely filled the large cart. I had also commandeered an empty low cardboard box which allowed me to fully use the bottom tray on the cart too. The cart was quite heavy when I pushed it up to the checkout area. Near the checkout, I saw their spinner rack of garden seeds and bought more. A lot more.

The same big guy checked me out. I asked if I could buy a case or two of toilet paper. He only asked which brand and called to have two brought up to the counter. I had to be very careful putting the items back into the cart after they were bagged so everything would still fit. I thought the prices were surprisingly about the same as my last trip.

I got everything packed in the cart and paid with cash. The clerk asked if I needed help with the cart and I thankfully said that would great. That cart was very heavy and I am not getting any younger.

He made a second call on the PA system and a good-sized kid rushed up from the back. When he realized he was just there to help me out with the cart he seemed, well, relieved. I let him push the heavy cart and I led the way to my pickup carrying the second light case of toilet paper (I had one perched on top of the cart). I had to put some items in the back but most went into the cab. I thanked the kid and gave him a couple of bucks. He seemed surprised by the tip.

I again stopped and filled the truck's gas tank even though I needed little gas. Better to get it while I could I figured. I was the only one getting fuel. And thinking about it as I was at the pump I realized I had the only moving vehicle I had seen on this trip so far. I drove home with no trouble and unloaded my groceries. The trip was totally uneventful to which I was thankful.

The bank withdrawal limit had really surprised me. It apparently was nation-wide yet even though I watched the news every day I do not remember them ever saying anything about bank limits. I would have remembered because it was a big deal. The cash only at the grocery store was also a big deal. The same signs were at the gas station and I had to pay inside upfront before I could get any gas. No more paying at the pump. I wondered what else the news was not telling the citizens. Both the withdrawal limit and the non-working credit cards were a very big deal. Not so much for me but for the nation. And yet the news had never said anything about it. And maybe that omission of real news was the biggest news.

I waited patiently for spring. I planted just a slightly larger garden this year. I still was using up some of the previous year's home-canned goods. The neighbor helped again with the manure and tilling of the garden. After we were done he asked if I could sell him some chicks this year.

“No I can’t sell you any but I will let a couple of hens set their eggs and if it turns out you can have some chicks. It is not like it will cost me anything anyway.”

“That would be so great. Just call me if you need anything, okay?”

“Sure thing and thanks for the garden help.”

I could only guess that the neighbor wanted chicks because they were hurting for food. He did have a family to feed but they also grew a big garden, much larger than mine. Also, they had a couple of milk cows I think. They always used to have a couple anyway. And I knew he sometimes hunted and there were plenty of deer around here. But they did have a couple of half-grown kids and growing kids do eat a lot.

I called the propane dealer and was able to order a propane fill. They did say that I would have to pay the driver cash before he would fill the tank. I agreed to their terms and two days later the propane was delivered. I paid with cash and was happy to get the propane.

I had not worked in my shop over winter so I had not used any of the firewood that I had delivered last year. That was fine and if necessary I could burn that wood in the house wood stove. I hoped it wouldn’t come to that but I could even cook on the woodstove if I had it going anyway during winter.

Mother Nature was kind and my garden produced just fine. The eggs hatched and I was able to give the neighbor six chicks and two hens. I explained that it would be a while before they got any eggs from the chicks so that is why I gave them a couple of hens. I also kept some chicks for myself so I would have young hens for later and I would not miss the two I gave them anyway.

I asked about if they had any chicken feed and he said yes and no. They didn’t plan to have chickens and had no feed but they did have wild bird food. They had planted several pounds of that birdseed and it looked like

they would be able to harvest that to use to feed the chickens this winter. They also made sure they had plenty of the birdseed left to plant next year. I thought that was pretty smart thinking and I told him so.

They said they were also saving seeds from some of their garden produce for chicken feed along with some of those seeds for planting next year if they couldn't buy new seeds. I was happy that they were thinking ahead.

Summer passed and fall came. I did have my propane filled again before fall. I had to pay the driver cash. The mail still worked so from the bank statements I was able to see the monthly checks from social security being deposited. It burned me that the bank would only give me three hundred dollars of my own money. So for two months, I made a trip to town once a week so I could draw out the maximum of my money. I immediately turned some of that money into food or fuel and the rest of the cash I kept at home. By the end of those two months, I had a huge supply of goods at home so I stopped going in and shopping. Towards fall I made one more trip to town.

I again wore a pistol to town. Better to be prepared I figured. My first stop was the bank and I again could only get the three hundred dollars. But I was just happy that they were still open.

The grocery store shopping was about the same as the last times. The shelves there certainly contained less quantity and variety though this time. I again completely filled the cart. I even bought some comfort food though they had little to choose from in that line. They did have coffee and I bought a bunch of that including instant coffee. I never drank instant but times changed and I thought maybe instant might be handy to have around. This time I bought several bottles of vitamins, something I had not bought before but I figured it couldn't hurt any. Food prices seemed to be up just a little from the last run. I added two



more cases of toilet paper again even though I still had plenty at home.

I did stop at the farm store which was open. I bought a whole lot of chicken feed. I also bought egg enhancement feed but I had always crushed all the eggshells and spread them around so the chickens could get added calcium that way. On a whim, I bought a fifty-pound bag of regular birdseed. Maybe I would plant some of that for the chickens like the neighbor did or I could just feed it to them too. It was the last bag of that in the place. I also bought two standard white salt blocks. There are a lot of uses for salt and the hundred pounds in those two blocks would keep forever if out of the rain.

After the feed store, I just drove past the gas station. There appeared to be just the one station open now. My tank was close to full so I did not bother to stop. Gas had gone up more. It was well over twelve dollars a gallon. Seemed kind of high I thought. I knew the price of gas was the reason I was the only vehicle on the road. When I turned onto the gravel road towards my place I almost stopped and brushed out my tracks but decided that would just be paranoid behavior.

It was a good trip into town and I was happy I had gone in when I did before something else happened.

## Chapter 4

When fall arrived in force I shot another deer. I had bought even more freezer paper along with the corresponding tape so I had plenty. I shot a small buck to try and help keep the deer population as high as possible while still harvesting some for meat. Having all my guns loaded and ready at home helped me to keep the coyote population in check. Whenever I saw one I always had a rifle handy and I shot about one a month it seemed like though maybe not so many lately. Doing that had to help the other game populations along with saving some of my chickens.

When all the television stations went off the air I was down to just the radio for entertainment. In December I called the grocery store but I got no answer. I tried the bank with the same result. Next, I tried the non-emergency number for the sheriff and it was busy. I tried all those numbers the next day with the same results. I called the electric company and got a recording so I knew the phone was working fine.

A month later the phone quit working, no dial tone. I was now only getting one radio station. It was always the same guy broadcasting and he only did so for about four hours per day. He reported only things he saw going to and from the radio station because he said the internet had been down for a long time and with the phones not working there was no way for him to get any information.

He reported how dangerous it was in the city. Violence was everywhere. There was no police presence anymore as far as he could tell. One day the radio guy just

said goodbye and good luck and he signed off for good. Now I have no way to get any information.

It looks like now I am totally on my own. In the spring I will plant the same size garden because it has proved big enough for just me. Before the end of winter, I will shoot at least one more deer and two if possible. I think I will make jerky out of the meat. I took some meat from the freezer and after it thawed I cut it into strips, soaked it in a jerky recipe formula I found in a cookbook and jerked it in my oven. It seemed to work well. I will cut way back on the spices for the big batch. At my age I do not tolerate the spicy food that I used to like.

I did get another deer and all the meat other than the small scraps that I ground into burger was made into jerky. The mild recipe I used worked fine and I like the taste much better. Glad I made that very small batch first to try it out. When I liked the jerky I spent some time in the woods until I got another buck. It too was made into jerky except for the small number of scraps that I ground up into burger.

Spring came like always. I drove to the neighbor's place for a load of manure. He apologized for not being able to haul it but said what little fuel he had left he had to save for an emergency. We talked for quite a while, likely because it was the only entertainment either of us had now with everything shut down. He said they were doing okay but would enlarge their garden even more this year. He did say that he had shot several deer over winter. With the venison, the chickens, the cows, and their home-canned food they got by okay.

Back home again I had to incorporate the manure by hand this year into my garden. It was okay because I was in no hurry and just did a little at a time over the next few days. It was still too cold to plant anyway. Away from the garden, I used a garden rake to rough up the soil in one spot. I would try planting some of the birdseed there. Just

for a trial to see what I got out of it. I still had plenty of chicken feed.

Since the loss of phone, TV, and radio I have been more careful in the use of my supplies. I haven't cut down on my food intake but I have shifted to more of the things I can produce or harvest here at the homestead. I have no idea just how long it will be before I can actually buy any more supplies. I also wonder how long the electric power will stay on though so far I have not even seen a flicker. I hope our government is smart enough to realize that millions will die if the power ever goes off for any real length of time. I am very thankful for the huge pile of food and other supplies I have here.

When I thought the time was right I planted my large garden. It was large but it was the only real work I had to do so I still had plenty of free time. I did spend some of that time making two solar driers or dehydrators. I built one and then after setting it in the sun a few times with just some weeds inside for testing I modified the design some and after further testing, I built another using the newer design.

This year I did use those dehydrators some for some of the garden produce. I also found out I had to blanch most of the produce before drying it. I did still can most things though. About the time the garden was done the fruit on my many fruit trees was starting to get ripe. This is what I really used the solar dehydrators for though I did use one electric dehydrator that I had also just because I had so much fruit to do at the same time. The dried fruit was great and I often added it to my morning oatmeal.

My test plot of planted birdseed was a success. The resulting crop was mostly millet I believe which the chickens did seem to enjoy. I made plans to plant a fair amount of the birdseed next spring. I would do so to stretch my stored chicken feed as far as I could.

This year I decided to try harvesting some of the local acorn crop. There is a patch of oak trees about a half-mile from my house. I had hunted squirrels there last year and this year besides the squirrels (which did taste just fine) I brought home a large amount of the acorns.

Acorns taste very bitter and really cannot be eaten. Unless that is you first soak them in a few changes of water. This soaking and rinsing removes the excess tannins found in the acorns. Once the tannins are removed the acorns have an almost sweet, nutty taste. The acorns can then be eaten raw or roasted and then eaten. I tried both ways and found I liked them better roasted so when I had other items baking in the oven I always added a tray of acorns in the oven too so I got double value from the now very precious propane. I ground the roasted acorns and added them to many baked items. I also just ate them as a nutty snack. I found some of the ground up acorns tasted pretty good even added to my bread when I baked some. After the first time I tried them in bread I often added the acorns. At least until I ran out of them. I vowed to harvest a much larger supply of acorns in the fall.

The winter was long because of the total lack of any communications. I did walk over and visit the closest neighbor a few times, something I think we both enjoyed. I did read and re-read many books that I had at the place. I used the wood stove in the house for at least some of the heat. I also cooked on top of the woodstove as long as it was hot anyway to save more of my now very precious propane.

Finally, just when I was sure that the winter would never end, it started to get warmer outside. While it was still plenty cold and the deer still had their antlers, I did shoot another buck deer. This one was almost all turned into jerky just in case the power did go off the jerked meat would not spoil. This added meat with what I already had on hand would carry me over the summer months until next

fall, or at least I hoped so anyway. The jerky I stored in sealed canning jars, mainly because I had so many of those jars. For the dried jerky, I did use some of my saved used canning lids which worked fine.

My truck still ran so I drove that over to the neighbor's place for my yearly supply of manure when it got a little warmer. It was good to drive the pickup a little anyway and I wondered just how much longer the fuel would be viable even though I had added fuel stabilizer to the tank. The neighbor was happy to supply the manure and again I mixed it into my garden by hand which proved to be no problem for me though I did space out the job over a several days. I felt older this year.

## Chapter 5

I was not really concerned at this point of starving people coming to my house. By this time most people either had a handle on their own survival or they were dead by now. Also, this had been a slow build-up and most people had exhausted all their money early on and with fuel so high they likely had little or no fuel left in their vehicles when things really got bad. With no fuel, they would only have their two feet for transportation so they would not be traveling very far.

I live well out in the country where few people traveled even in the good times and I was not surprised when no one showed up here when times got bad. I was happy about that fact. I hated to think that some people likely had to guard their gardens from other people instead of just critters like I had to do.

It took forever but finally, I decided it was warm enough to plant. A few things I had planted in pots inside to start them early. This included several tomato plants. While waiting for my new garden to come up I went through all my remaining supplies to kind of take an inventory. While doing that I found the stash of vitamins that I had bought but I never taken any. I took the first one today and now I will make it a point to take one daily. Maybe I will get some of my old energy back again!

The garden is growing fine and since I started taking the vitamins every day I do seem to feel much better. I am certainly glad I had purchased them. I am also eating better simply because I have no junk food of any kind because I cannot go shopping. No pre-packaged foods left so I make everything now from scratch. The closest I get to junk food is the rare times that I make a batch of cookies.

I planted some more of the birdseed this spring so now all I have to do is sit back and watch it grow. Of course, what grew the best were weeds so I had to pull those out almost daily.

My days were mostly leisure. Pull a few weeds and maybe walk over and visit the neighbor. Some days it was just sitting back and watch the clouds float by. The electric power is still on thankfully. It would be very unhandy if that shut down. Not a crisis but very unhandy. Who was paying for the electric power I wondered. I assume the banks are all closed down. I longed to know what was going on in our country. I missed the radio and television. And I missed my wife, Sally.

The summer passed as they always do. The garden was fine and I canned or dried a lot of stuff from the garden. Then the fruit started getting ripe and that I mostly dried in the dehydrators. There was more fruit this year with the trees getting bigger every year. When the fruit was done I checked on the acorns. They were not yet ready but it appeared to be a good year for them. We had received adequate rain all year so the good acorn crop did not surprise me.

As the weather started to cool I checked on the acorns often. While there I occasionally shot a squirrel for my supper. The squirrels were good eating and they were my competitors for the acorns. When I determined that the acorns were ready I harvested way more than I had in the past.

I had made simple frames with some scrap one by two lumber. I just tacked the pieces together on the ends to make what looked like wide ladders that I placed on the garage roof to get the most sun. That is where I put the acorns to dry and finish ripening. When dry the outer half-husks dropped off with very little effort. Then the acorns went into the pails of water to soak and leech out the tannins. The pail water was replaced as needed to be kept



fresh. When I tested them by eating one and determined they were tasty and ready they were again spread out on the roof rack to completely dry. Now they could be stored and the hulls removed so the meat could be eaten. But with them dry that shelling process could be done later as I used them. The key to storing them was to have them as dry as possible so they would not get moldy. I guess that is the key to properly storing almost everything – it must be dry and stay dry.

When I got up this morning the power was out. While chilly outside there was no kind of bad weather conditions so it was very doubtful that the loss of electric power was weather-related. The loss of power caused me no real problems this morning other than making me worry some that this outage might be permanent. At about nine the power came back on, much to my relief. Then it went off just after lunch but was back on at supper time.

I had not kept track of the exact times of these outages and the power went out again just as I was getting ready for bed. In the morning again without the power, I just waited and at around nine in the morning the power returned the same as yesterday. It must be a rolling blackout! Sure enough this time I checked and it was off for four hours before coming back on again. I was watching the clock and the power returned on schedule at five. This night I made sure I had my teeth brushed and was all done using water by nine when the power winked off. While not handy I could certainly get used to the four-hour on and off schedule of the electric power. Way better than a complete outage.

The rolling blackouts continued for a few months. There were a few bloopers where the power was off for longer than the four hours. The longest outage was just over a full day. That one really had me worried but after that it stabilized again into the four-hour shifts. Towards the end of February the power stayed on continuously and

is still on all the time. A few days later I realized that maybe the return of the power meant that things were getting better. I started checking the radio to see if I could hear anything. At first there was nothing but I was not deterred and kept trying the radio just about every day. Then I heard something.

It was not much but it was something and I admit it shocked me when I heard the voice from the radio. The announcement just was a pep talk about things getting better and I believed it just because hearing a voice on the radio was a huge improvement. I listened to the radio daily after that first message. It just repeated for a week or more then it changed but really contained no additional real information.

Sometime after that, the announcements started changing almost daily and started having some real information about things around the nation. When it changed again to having some local information occasionally I started checking the house phone to see if it had a dial tone. Then about ten days later the phone was live. I called the local grocery store number but got no answer. I kept trying that number every day then one day I received an answer. They said they would be opening in three days with limited stock and it would cash sales only. I was still okay here for food to keep me alive but I would really like some more stuff to make a change in my diet. But I could wait.

I waited a month and then drove into town (after another call to make sure the grocery store was indeed open). I could plainly see the difference in the roads from the lack of travel. Weeds had grown in the road on the gravel parts and even through cracks in the asphalt. The drive in was fine and my truck still ran fine with the now old but stabilized fuel. I did have my pistol on me because I was taking no chances.

When I got to the grocery store I did see a couple other people and by the time I parked I had seen two other moving vehicles. Then I just walked into a store for the first time in a long while. The outside of the store looked pretty rough with plywood covering some windows and I walked through a very ill-fitting front door to get inside. I guessed that the door was a temporary replacement.

Inside did not look near as bad as the outside but the store still had little stock of goods for sale. Most of the shelving was bare and only the shelves in the very front of the store contained any merchandise. Many items that I wanted were not available but I did buy some things and I was not sorry I had made the trip in to shop. From the grocery store, I drove to the opposite end of town before turning around to drive home. When I saw a gas station open I did stop and fill the truck's fuel tank. Then it was straight home from there.

## Chapter 6

It was a worthwhile trip to town. The prices I paid were less than they were on my last trip in, so long ago. The price of the gas was substantially less. I had stopped at my bank and though it was closed there was a new looking sign on the doors that said "Opening soon." Pretty hard for anyone to do business without the banks being open.

In the grocery store, I had asked about whether they expected to get any garden seeds. The clerk said all deliveries were very erratic and their distributor just shipped what items they had available. But garden seeds had been promised and were expected soon. I knew I could still get by using the seeds I had saved from my garden last season and ones still in packages but I would rather have fresh new seeds anyway. I decided I would call off and on and just ask about the seeds then drive back in if the store did receive any. It would still be a month or more before any planting could be done.

A couple of weeks later I drove to the neighbors for my yearly supply of manure. After it was loaded in my truck we talked for quite a while. We talked mostly about what was happening in town and what we expected for our future. We both thought that things would get better and we were past the worst.

I spread the manure and hand-turned the soil to incorporate the manure into my garden over the next two weeks or so. There was no hurry. About a week later when I called the local grocery store they said they had received a large number of garden seeds so I made another trip to town.

I could see many improvements had been made just since my last visit. In the store, they had at least twenty five percent more merchandise. Besides the seeds I bought several other things too. Done there I drove to the bank which I saw was now open. I went inside and asked about my Social Security deposits.

They said currently our government was not sending out Social Security payments but Congress was supposedly working on that and they expected to start payments soon. The payments were expected to be reduced but at least the reduced should start again soon. I did still have a balance in the bank which I left there. I drove home happy with hope for the future.

It was maybe three weeks later before I planted the first hardy seeds in my garden. About two weeks after that I planted the rest of my garden. I planted actual seed potatoes this season that I had been able to buy when I bought the other garden seeds.

My garden is growing fine and Mother Nature is being nice enough to provide the needed rain without any damaging hail. My chickens all appear healthy and happy and are supplying me with plenty of eggs. I did let a hen sit one batch and now I also have some little chicks running around the place. The radio is full of promising news of our nation's comeback. Though I do take the news with a grain of salt, things do appear to be improving all the time.

I am now again getting a Social Security check deposited into my account every month. The amount I get is roughly half of what I used to get. But prices on items have dropped too so I think I should be okay. So far I have spent none of my "new" money. The insurance company I had for the truck and house insurance is now out of business. Currently, I have no insurance of any kind. I'm not sure if anyone has any insurance.

Our Congress is making almost countless changes. I'm not sure if all those changes are for the better but

honestly many certainly are better I think. State and local governments are also making changes. Obviously, all these entities have to make changes now. The whole world is a different place. All world economies hit bottom and are now slowly rising again. Very slowly. As of yet there is very little world trade. Here in our country there is a big push to return all manufacturing back stateside. That will be slow process but it does seem to be starting. It would be a good thing I think.

The many months of almost total chaos in our country killed a lot of Americans. Lack of goods and services including food, medicine, and police protection led to many deaths. Winter was the worst for everyone living in the northern areas of our country. It was so bad that almost all cities and even smaller communities had to resort to mass burials. Hopefully that dark time is all now behind us and such things will never again happen in this great nation.

Things have not really changed too much on my little homestead. I was able to buy many more canning jar lids so I never ran out and now I am stocked up pretty good again. My garden produced well this year and my fruit trees are now full of ripe fruit that is keeping me very busy harvesting, processing, and storing. Though I don't really need to harvest any acorns this year because I can now again buy food in town, I have grown to enjoy the acorns so this year again I will be fighting the squirrels for the acorn harvest.

The radio announced that school will be in session again this year though it will be only three days per week with just slightly longer days. There will no sports or any extracurricular activities. Class sizes might be much larger for some grades due to limited teachers and other resources. But at least there will be school for all the children.

I had my propane tanks refilled so I am set pretty good for the coming winter. With things looking better I will just be using the propane for heating this season. My pantry is bursting with food supplies and I have plenty of chicken feed for my now slightly reduced flock of chickens. Some of my chickens are now safely residing in my freezer just waiting to be roasted. I did manage to shoot a deer and that processed meat is also in my freezer. Yep, I am as ready as I can be here on my little homestead.

**The End**