

How Not to Die when Everything goes to Hell.

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When you run for a prolonged period of time your body uses all of the glycogen in your cells and beta-endorphins in the brain kick in to give you a feeling of euphoria. It's called a runner's high. Scientifically it exists, and according to my sister if you run long enough you'll feel it. It's supposed to be some of the best stuff on earth.

The only thing I feel when I run for an extended amount is the begrudging hope that when zombies attack I'll at least be able to keep up with my family. Mostly I just thank Karl Benz for cars.

The unforeseeable imminence of a Zombie Apocalypse is not the only thing that got me out of my room and into the gym. A recent diagnosis of general anxiety disorder and an unwillingness to add another pill to my morning routine also helped. The apocalypse was probably the biggest reason I kept going, day after day, putting in half an hour, an hour, two. My life revolved around 2 things at the end of my freshman year and into my sophomore year of college. Class and workouts.

I was never one for physical exertion as a kid. Mainly because I had unchecked hypothyroidism which left me exhausted and without any motivation—or rather, hopelessly depressed. The kind of depressed where you don't have the energy to attempt suicide even if you wanted to. That exists. Synthetic Thyroid Hormones also exist, and they give you back every ounce of energy you've never had. Suddenly, physical exertion didn't seem so bad. The idea of sports, still awful. I'm the type of person who draws, writes, sews, knits... team activities were never my forte. I prefer activities with a fair amount of self-reliance and responsibility. The type where I can only blame myself when things go wrong. Working out gave me that selfish self-dependence I needed. It also gave me a way to burn away the stress of having to be co-dependent with my family. A team I never really knew how to fit in with. But should another h1n1 scare happen and thousands of people take under tested vaccinations and become cannibalistic psychotics with a lowered pain tolerance, my family's the only team I have to rely on.

My parents are preppers. It sounds a little ridiculous I'll admit, and the whole zombie overtone is something I have added to the mix. Mom swears up and down she's just worried about what happened to Joplin will happen to us. Dad, who unarguably is more invested in the whole thing, has yet to say what he envisions us prepping for. Zombies. I'm betting it's zombies.

There's dozens of TV shows on right now about preppers and survivalists, *Doomsday Preppers*, *Prepper Hillbillies*, *Aftermath*, *Apocalypse 101*, *Do or Die*, *Live Free or Die*, *Ultimate Survival Alaska*, also *Naked and Afraid* to name a few. The people on these shows do everything from the most sane, keeping bottled water on hand, to the insane, owning over 20 guns, a gas mask for everyone in the house, and daily plotting out multiple escape routes from the city. My family falls somewhere between the two.

The sheer amount of television shows really says something about prepping as a fad. Something to pass the time for the American public, and replace are pure hearted belief that the government would pull through. Patriotic and heroic movies like *Independence Day* where at the end of the day the army and the president save the nation have been replaced with things like *Book of Eli*, *Zombie Land*, and *The Road*. Post-apocalyptic movies where not only did the government not save the day, they don't actually exist anymore. Even Will Smith, shining star of *Independence Day* turned around with the times to act in an apocalypse movie, *I am Legend*. It seems as a whole the idea is "screw the government they can't save us anyway". Maybe I don't blame anyone for this idea. In My life I've seen the US government try and fail when it comes to helping people out after disasters like Hurricane Katrina, or the tornado in Joplin Missouri. But whatever the reason, prepping is here to stay. At least for its 15 minutes of fame.

When I say we're preppers, most people assume I mean we have a concreted bomb shelter with double locking iron doors buried under our backyard and filled with enough canned food for 24,400 years and a Geiger counter. Which makes me think the cold war isn't *really* over if people my age still think the Russians will nuke us. (Or have time to nuke us between killing their own civilians.) We don't have a radiation bunker. What we do have is an overly health dose of paranoia and a rotating pantry.

In my parent's house when anyone buys groceries everyone has to help put them away. This means an average of 3 bodies in the kitchen on any given day, tossing canvas bags aside, dancing around each other, and someone armed with a sharpie. First to mark the old eggs so they'll be used before the new, and second to mark the date on all the canned goods. These go downstairs to a set of floor-to-ceiling iron wire shelves in the basement. The new peanut butter replaces the peanut butter with the oldest date on its red plastic lid. The green beans, the canned tuna, the canned chicken, all of it gets set away in its designated spot and the oldest of its siblings is taken on a trip upstairs to the cabinet. This is a rotating pantry.

“Oh, that’s actually smart,” Is the most common response I get when I explain the sanest of my families prepping activities. It’s always said with the same kind of shock and speculation. As if no one expects anything a family prepping for an unknown apocalypse does to be smart.

The second most common response generally has to do with distaste for canned foods. Which, I won’t argue that pre-cut green beans in syrupy water are better than the fresh from shrink-wrapped Styrofoam packaged kind. But I’ve also ate a lot of canned food in my life. Spam is a delicacy not to be scorned at, and I believe I have it in me to kill a man for some canned corn beef should the eventual world collapse happen.

Canned food aside, in the warm months my family eats produce fresh off our own land. This is another part of our prepping.

We live in the average American suburbs of St. Louis County. So when I say our own land, I mean the mediocre stretch of homogenous grass that constitutes a front and back yard. Of course ours is marred by three large square garden boxes growing squash, zucchini, cucumbers, okra and radishes. The patio, while dotted with millions of pots containing beautiful flowering plants, is also home to two tin tubs one with carrots the other with lettuce, three tomato plant towers, a myriad of spices and herbs, an arrangement of wood logs, branches, and twigs for fires, and patio furniture. It sounds like a lot, but trust me, my parents are very adept at stacking.

While it may not seem like we have the land to grow our own produce, we certainly do with what we have. Which in itself is something of a motto in my family. Mom has an apt green thumb, which is displayed not only by a flourishing summer time garden, but also by the sheer dozens of house plants that have relocated to our house. Many named after the previous female owner from who mom has adopted the plants from at their estate sale.

We aren’t the only ones looking for ways to adapt large scale gardening projects to little space. The art of hydroponics is one that in recent years has broken out of agriculture and greenhouses and into the realm of the everyman. It’s the use of stacked gardens, water, fish, and chickens to create one self-renewing source. The gardens at the top are fertilized with chicken shit and the excess water from their watering drops into a tank below with dozens of fish. The fish get their food from the nutrients that falls with the water, and below their tank is another small garden that is fertilized and watered by the fish’s shit laced water. You can arrange the whole thing so that it sits firmly over a chicken coop. Voila, space saving hydroponics.

Of course, my family hasn't stepped foot into this realm of savvy smarts yet. I feel it may not be long however. My grandfather has already offered to by us chickens, or bees. Something I am completely on board for. Chickens are adorable, and bees are endangered. Also, I quite enjoy eggs and honey. My family has not taken to the idea of raising our own non-plant based food yet, however. My mother has made several mentions of needing to check with the city to see if we can even own chickens or bees but never has. We have a neighbor with a peacock, and I have a friend just a city over who has his own bees so he can make mead, I'm fairly certain we'd be given the a-ok. It's not like we're raising cattle.

That's not to say that my family has a problem with killing animals for food, or even wielding guns. We grew up with play guns, with the knowledge that you never point a real one at a person unless you mean to kill them, and the presence of mine to know what a safety is and to never trust it. That being said, I never held a real gun until the age of 19.

When Dad suggested we go to the shooting range my sister opted out. A gun, she figured, was more a danger in her hands as it could be turned against her. Which, is fairly true. Then again I've never seen a movie where the undead or aliens know how to work an 18 gauge shotgun, and generally you keep people at a distance in apocalypse settings, so I feel fairly safe. We've also all seen my mom shoot bull's-eyes with bb guns, so we know who will really be wielding the weapon should we ever need it to protect ourselves or hunt for food. Something of which no one in my family has ever done, but my mom on more than one occasion has mentioned believing herself to be capable of skinning a rabbit. She can't even drown a chipmunk to save her lettuce crop.

Murderous attentions aside, prepping for the apocalypse is more than the threat of other people, animals, and starvation. Without modern heating and cooling you can freeze to death. The way my parents heat our house in the winter I'm still convinced modern heating doesn't exist and I might freeze to death. I grew up on real wood fires in the fireplace that weren't there for the aesthetic and Christmas cheer. Our olive green brick fireplace has been used to heat the living room for five cold individuals and cat, to make hot cocoa, popcorn, and cook hot dogs. As a general rule about life, I try to pretend all of this is normal.

Besides our fireplace, we have a fire pit outside for cooking food on summer nights and winter ones alike. All but two of my family members know how to build a proper fire. My sister who is the most civilized of us, and my mother who has a knack for lighting fires in unconventional places. Like the oven.

My brother, father, and I all learned our skills from Boy Scout camp. I, spending most of my preteen years, as an honorary scout in my younger brother's troop. My father, one of three troop leaders. Though we all cannot turn a stack of wood into a cook fire, we all chip in with gathering the wood.

There are two bins and a wood pile on our cramped patio. One bin for kindling, one for larger sticks, and the wood pile for actual honest to god wood. Be it tree limbs, trunks, or pieces of scrap from Max's carpentry work, or retired pallets from Dad's business. We don't have a set day for collecting firewood, instead it's a "when you see it grab it" style adventure. This has led to the developed habit of pulling over whenever I see exceptional branches on the side of the road and putting them in my car to take home. I get antsy if I don't grab one, and just pass it by. Which might say more about my vaguely under control anxiety than my families survival skills. Either way, I have firewood.

When I got my car I knew exactly what was in store for me. I had watched the pattern emerge already, after my Dad woke up with the idea to prepare his family for the impossible and my sister and brother had already had cars for him to stock. So I wasn't surprised when I woke up to find a canvas tool kit, black plastic tool kit, and various additional tools waiting on the kitchen table for me the morning after. Or the reappearance of my red backpack from elementary school and my Dad calmly sipping his coffee and playing solitaire on his iPhone. It was time to construct my bug out bag.

The purpose of which, is that should you find yourself in an unsavory situation you can jump into your car with no preparations and drive off to safety. Your bug out bag tucked away in your trunk, and supplying you with the essentials for a day or maybe two if you ration things out. This is called bugging out. There is, undoubtedly, a question that develops in your mind when your Father starts enforcing that all of his family have bug out bags in their car. That question is, *what the fuck could he be doing that we'd have to skip town with no notice?*

Someday I will actually ask him this. The fifth of July, with a brand new used car, was not the day. Instead I had breakfast, let dad win solitaire, and then we put together my bag.

The following materials are essentials for any proper bug out bag: water, some form of food, a blanket, a small first aid kit, and a knife. My own bug out bag contained a purple fleece blanket rolled up and tucked at the bottom of my old back pack, a couple bottles of water, one can of pineapple and one can of chicken breast in water, a roll of toilet paper because shitting doesn't wait for immediate danger to be gone, a first aid kit with a focus on burn ointment, and a knife. This, in addition to the multiple tool kits, went promptly into the back of my trunk. I was prepared. For what I'm still not sure.

Now, of course the traditional bug out bag can be tailored to the individual. Over the course of a year mine has acquired various tea bags, because what I really want after a long day of zombie fighting is a nice chamomile and lavender, the leftover hermetically sealed antibiotic ointment from my first tattoo, crap loads of taco bell sauce because I have a mild addiction, and every sugar packet that has ever wandered into my pocket either on accident or purpose. Sugar, as well as the filmy skin of eggshells, and spider webs, can be applied to an open bleeding wound to seal it off. Much in the same way as a Band-Aid, but without the itchy rash of latex allergies. Nothing really puts you in a bad mood like becoming post-apocalyptic bear chow all because you had to scratch an itch on your allergic reaction rash because you used a latex Band-Aid after scraping your knee.

Allergies aren't the only thing you can tailor your undead apocalypse preparations towards. I have hypothyroidism, meaning my thyroid doesn't produce enough hormones and I need to take synthetic hormone every day or my whole body goes screwy and I become a massively depressed blob with a digestive tract that just doesn't function. I also have anxiety. My mother has both of these as well, along with a healthy dose of about a million other pills. My father has high cholesterol. Combined, we all probably don't seem like the ideal apocalypse survivors. However, we're preppers. We're prepared. Along with all the canned goods, and hermetically sealed packages on our emergency food shelves in the basement, my family also has a stock pile of every extra unused medication anyone has ever been prescribed from the doctor. Extra pills of levothyroxine from all the times Mom or I have had to experiment with finding just the right dose. Pain meds from the time Max broke his arm, or Mom had a root canal. Codeine cough syrups, and the like. Things that could easily be abused, and should easily be tossed. Instead, they go into back up medical supplies. In case looters and un-friendlies can be fended off with prescription grade laxatives or Xanax.

In my mind, natural remedies are always better than a handful of pills. Then again, I'm the one running laps and lifting a third of my weight just to get my anxiety attacks under control, and my Mom is choking down a pill medley for breakfast and doing great. So maybe I don't have the right idea. Regardless I kept working out and waiting for the day I would achieve a runner's high. To see if it's all my sister chalked it up to be, but mostly to see if it was anything like the other kinds of high. Running was never my style, and fighting wasn't really my sisters.