

WHAT IS A SURVIVALIST? by Kurt Saxon copyright 1980

When a person embarks on a course of action, whether it be a profession, hobby, belief, or whatever, a label is needed. Some people don't like labels but they are necessary for advertising and identification.

The term "Survivalist" is fast becoming a household word. It is mentioned constantly on television, in newspapers, magazines and radio. Although just about everyone has come across it, few really know what it means. The term evolved from the general phrase "back to the lander". That was used mainly by ecologists and conservationists alarmed at the growing pollution affecting the quality of life.

The January 1970 issue of MOTHER EARTH NEWS printed a comment by Gary Snyder on pollution. "The human race for the last century has allowed its production and dissemination of wastes, by-products and various chemical substances to become excessive. Pollution is directly harming the eco-system. It is also ruining the environment in every direct way for humanity itself."

In the same issue, reprinting from CAVALIER, an article titled "How to Make It Your Way", they suggested escaping to communes. "So the air is full of crud and the water tastes funny and the nine-to-five is a drag. You're tired of the subway, dog crap in the streets, bumper-to-bumper traffic and plastic TV dinners. Maybe the communes--with all that fresh air, sunshine, love and homebaked bread--are really into something."

The communes didn't work out very well. There was an overall likemindedness but the lack of discipline and practical skills doomed most such projects from the start. Also, too many who joined communes simply wanted a secure refuge where they could smoke their dope in peace.

THE MOTHER EARTH NEWS had a great impact on the Urban Dropout movement from the time of its first publication in January 1970. They made millions aware of the possibility of finding a more pleasant environment and creating a more secure and fulfilling lifestyle.

In the early '70's Don Stevens, who sells books on self-sufficiency out of Washington state, popularized the term "retreater". The term obviously indicated one who had prepared a retreat in the boondocks to go to when city living became intolerable.

There is nothing wrong with the term "retreater" when used in its proper context. But it is a buzz word to certain types. I just heard what might have been a joke about a general who had an auto accident because he ignored a "Yield" sign. "Yield" was a buzz word to him.

"Retreater" was acceptable to pacifist drop-outs of the MOTHER EARTH NEWS school of thought. But to the more aggressive person it had strong connotations of cowardice.

I certainly didn't like it, since my scenario of the near future calls for aggressive measures to protect mine from all comers. A poem says "I'll build my house by the side of the road and watch the rest of the world go by." That attitude is fine for "retreaters" but what happens when part of the world turns in to loot that house by the side of the road?

The pacifist drop-outs and other non-involved persons simply leave the cities with no fanfare. They don't feel the need for a label because their move is not any form of protest. Also, they don't seem aware that the people they simply don't care to live near may well be a danger to them in the future as marauders.

Unlike the back-to-the-landers, the ecologists, the retreaters

and such, survivalists are not non-involved pacifists. They are not necessarily eager to kill, either. They are simply aware that civilization is cracking up and see the possible need for desperate measures to come through with a whole skin.

The social unrest of the '60's gave a great but delayed impetus to the Survivalist movement. As discontent manifested in urban rioting, clashes between militant rightists and leftists, assassinations, etc., the government threatened gun confiscation.

Millions grew afraid of their government and felt trapped and helpless. As their children were bussed to black neighborhoods, as their streets became increasingly dangerous and the quality of life lowered, they began wanting out.

The weapons oriented magazines urged protest on all levels. They also detailed to their readers the government threats as well as the overall urban dissolution.

Some of them used the term "retreater" when suggesting that their readers drop out. But gun-oriented types were more likely to sit tight than leave under the stigma of "retreater". I am not suggesting that anyone put off leaving because of the term. It is just that they took a militant stand rather than retreat.

In late 1975 when starting THE SURVIVOR, I coined the term "Survivalist" and used it in the first issue published in January of 1976. In THE SURVIVOR I have been urging decent people to abandon urban blight and take their loved ones to a safer environment.

My term has been catching on and now those offended by "retreater" are quite satisfied to call themselves Survivalists and move out. It has turned out to be a word anyone can accept as a label if they want one.

Even so, the media is generally down on urban dropouts so they have been giving Survivalists a bad name. As you know, the media is part and parcel of the Urban Establishment. It follows that anyone unwilling to stay in the cities and support the Establishment and its hordes of dependents is some kind of a kook.

A while back, Boyd Matson, of the TODAY SHOW, called with the idea of interviewing me. When he found I didn't wear a camouflage jacket, a beret and carry a burp gun he backed off.

Some time later I saw the segment he made to describe Survivalists. There was a flock of about a dozen turkeys wearing camouflage jackets and drilling with rifles in the Oregon woods.

I didn't know them but I could tell they were urban clerical types fantasizing playing soldier. They said they had a cache of food and weapons they would go to when the collapse came. In the event that they could get to their cache they would find that roughing it might be a little harder than they thought. Also, with such a Mickey Mouse setup they would run out of supplies in no time. Then they would turn into the same kind of predators they claimed to be armed against.

Do not be surprised when you see Survivalists portrayed as idiots and fear-crazed kooks. The sorriest was the Lou Grant segment titled "The Survivalists." They had a nut in that show who, during a California flood, stole a roll of plastic at gunpoint. He had his kids armed and waving their weapons at anyone who came around. He also used a phrase from one of my editorials, "Those who prepare to survive deserve to survive."

So they had my material and used it to make Survivalists look stupid and dangerous. They don't all do that but don't be disturbed when you see such depictions.

Although everybody uses it today, I figure since I made it up I can also make up its definition. I certainly didn't mean it to be

used to describe predators.

My definition of a Survivalist is a self-reliant person who trusts himself and his abilities more than he trusts the Establishment. Insofar as the Establishment is deteriorating, the Survivalist prepares to leave it.

There are some who call themselves Urban Survivalists but I consider that a contradiction in terms. To hole up in an apartment and expect to survive mobs of starving rioters is silly. Imagine utilities cut off or blown up. Add police and National Guardsmen fighting urban guerrillas, firemen letting whole blocks burn and all exits being cut off.

A real Survivalist would move out of the urban area to a small town while there is still time. I can't see how a Survivalist could live in a city in the first place.

So if you consider yourself a Survivalist and want to tell your unborn grandchildren about it, get out of the city. Move to a small town and become part of the community.

When the worst is over you might have seen some turmoil and even driven away some urban marauders. But you and yours will survive with dignity and with no regrets. That is what a real Survivalist is.