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Bug Out – Volcano – The Prequel

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Bug Out! – The Prequel

“You sure you want to do this?” Sam asked his wife of two months.

“Yes, Sam,” Peggy replied. “When my parents died, they had nothing. No retirement, no home of their own, no resources. Nada. Even if they’d made it to retirement, trying to live on Social Security with the menial jobs they’d always had would have been a nightmare. I don’t want to wind up that way.”

“Going to be a few lean years, especially the first two, if we buy this property, on top of the new house,” Sam responded.

“We’re making good livings, Sam. Are you trying to talk me out of it?”

Sam smiled. “No, honey, I’m not. But I want to be sure. You know how my father is. Always second guessing me. And we agreed to discuss major decisions before we came to any final conclusion.”

Peggy leaned forward and gave Sam a quick kiss. “Yes, dear. And we have. I want this piece of property for when we retire and for the other reasons we discussed. I know you don’t want to push your preparedness beliefs on me, but you have already brought me around to your way of thinking.

“It wasn’t that hard, if you remember. My parents never prepared for anything. That’s why they ended up they way they did. Just so I can keep up one or two of my hobbies, too, and everything is fine.”

That had been eighteen years ago, Sam mused. He thought about that day just about every time a preparedness issue came up. Peggy had been so supportive of his efforts to keep them safe and happy.

She'd resisted, at first, getting a firearm for herself and learning to shoot, but had come to enjoy the shooting sports. She was still uneasy with the idea of needing to defend themselves, but after Ralph was born that maternal instinct kicked in and she decided she could and would defend the children and herself with deadly force if need be.

"What do you think, Pop? Did I do okay?" Ralph asked his father, bringing Sam out of his reverie.

Sam took the Para Ordinance P14 when his son handed it to him, the slide locked open. Sam checked the chamber with his finger automatically, then inspected the pistol closely. It was the first time Ralph had completely stripped the weapon, cleaned it thoroughly, and reassembled it on his own.

It took only a few moments for Sam to disassemble the .45 and put it back together again. "Perfect," he replied to his son's question.

"How about me, Daddy?" Melissa asked. "I put the .380 barrel back in the HK-4"

Sam handed the P14 back to Ralph. And, just like his father, Ralph checked the action to be sure it was unloaded. It was an automatic action Sam had drilled all of them to do whenever they handled their small arsenal.

Taking the HK-4, Sam broke it down and put it back together as he'd done with the P14. "You did good, honey. Everything where it's supposed to be."

Melissa grinned at her brother. He was a year and a few months older than she, but she was doing just as well with the hardware, as she usually referred to it, as Ralph did. And she was almost as good of a shot with her Ruger 10/22 as Ralph was with his.

“Okay kids. Everything is cleaned, magazines reloaded, and ready to be put away. You two go help your mother with dinner. I’ll put everything away.”

“We can help,” Melissa replied.

Sam laughed and ruffled Ralph’s unruly hair. “No thanks. Don’t want the eating machine here to go too long between meals. You two go ahead.”

As the two headed for the basement stairs, Melissa hesitated for a moment, then asked her father, “Daddy, have you decided about the AUG?”

“No, not yet. I’ll talk to your mother and we’ll see.” Sam shook his head as the pair went upstairs to help their mother. Melissa wanted a Steyr AUG like her mother’s. It had already been decided that Ralph could graduate to an HK-91 like Sam’s. They could probably afford both the rifles and Melissa had handled Peggy’s AUG at the range today like it had been made for her.

Sam gathered up the weapons they’d taken to the range that day and headed for his and Peggy’s bedroom. It took two trips but he soon had everything back in the large gun safe in their walk-in closet.

After their supper, after watching the news and discussing it, Sam let his mind wonder a bit as the others watched a movie. For some reason he was in a reflective mood today.

“Sweetheart, you sound just like you did ten years ago when we bought the retirement property. We’ve discussed this and have come to the decision to build the quads.” Peggy looked at the perplexed expression on Sam’s face.

“I do?” he asked.

“You do.” Peggy turned around and looked at the large corner lot they were getting ready to buy. There was another very much like it on the other side of town that was also part of the deal.

“It’s going to tie up our savings for a few years. Our retirement savings, not the emergency savings.”

“I know, but you know what housing is getting like around here now. The retirement property is worth twice what it was, and single wide trailers are renting for more than we were paying for our first house.

“The bank has already okayed the mortgages. This is a good investment. We’ll have the savings rebuilt in a few years and the land and quadraplexes will be paid for in fifteen years. And we got a terrific interest rate.”

“Well, I just wanted to be sure, before we signed today. It’s just... well... you know. I just like to give you the right of refusal, just in case.”

“I know. And I may take you up on the offer sometime. But this is another of those times when we’re definitely on the same wavelength.”

That had worked out as well as the retirement property. The two quads had been constructed and all eight units rented out almost immediately. They kept a local handy-man on retainer to take care of everything for them. There’d been one or two tenants over the years that had been less than perfect, but with the quality construction they had insisted on, maintenance had been minimal.

The income was paying the mortgages and quite a bit more. The extra went into the retirement funds.

Over the years they'd picked up some investment property. It was dual use. Each of the places had caches with supplies and equipment to shelter and sustain them for some time if they ever had to evacuate and couldn't immediately go to the retirement property. When they retired they'd sell the property to add to their retirement. Of course, they'd probably pick up a small parcel or two near the retirement property for the same reason they had these properties.

Sam's attention was drawn to the movie when Peggy, Melissa, and Ralph all laughed. But it was only a few moments before Sam was lost in thought again.

As the world situation, and the weather, ebbed and flowed, with tensions being heightened then lessening, Sam and Peggy continued their preparations. Sam smiled without thought when he first introduced Peggy to shooting. She'd wound up loving to shoot that first Ruger 10/22. When she was comfortable it, and they had the money from an especially nice tax refund, they'd bought a Steyr AUG. Peggy hadn't liked the HK-91 he'd purchased when he'd first ran across them.

The compact form of the AUG fitted Peggy's needs perfectly. She also liked the HK-4 Sam had run across at a gun show. The HK-4 had been complete with all four barrel and magazine assemblies. It would shoot .22 LR, .25 ACP, .32 ACP, and .380 ACP depending on which barrel was installed. Peggy shot all four calibers at the range, but when she carried it on their outdoor adventures, it was also set up to use the .380.

Sam had been lucky to find the second complete HK-4 package. They got scarce quickly when Heckler & Koch quit producing

them. Melissa liked the medium sized pistol as much as her mother, though she usually shot it using the .32 barrel. The only drawback was they only had a total of 6 magazines for each caliber. Sam would have preferred to have a dozen.

Sam had picked up a pair of Para-Ordinance P14 .45 ACP when they had some spare money, along with plenty of spare parts for all the weapons they had. Over the years they'd added a few more. When the kids hit 12 years old they each got their own Ruger 10/22. Sam and Peggy counted themselves lucky that both their children enjoyed shooting, though neither really wanted to hunt. Peggy wasn't big on it either, though she'd gone on a couple of deer hunts with him in the early days.

Sam had seen that they could hunt, but never pressed the matter. If they needed to, they would. He and Peggy were sure of that. And like the kids, Peggy could and would hunt if necessary.

Peggy and both kids looked at Sam strangely since he was smiling as the movie went into a sad part. Seeing his eyes focused elsewhere they paid no more attention. They were used to his introspective interludes.

As their job opportunities increased, and therefore their incomes, they'd continued to acquire preparedness equipment and supplies. By the time they moved here and built this home, they had canned and packaged food for a year, LTS (long term storage) food for five years, stored water for at least a month, and means to procure more.

Their camping equipment was excellent, partly due to the fact that it had to be, since they did most of their camping in the fall and winter months. Not only did they car camp at times, they backpacked at least once a year, minus the porta-pottie, privacy

shelter, insulated chests, camp stove, and the rest of the niceties they used when they camped out of the truck.

Sam settled a little deeper in his chair. That had been another of the big decisions. They'd had a nice Subaru wagon for several years, but after the volcano started acting up they'd decided to get something more capable to evacuate with if things got bad.

They'd traded in the Subaru on the pickup and taken money out of the savings account to purchase the Suburban. Again Sam's mouth twitched into a smile as he remembered the expression on the parts manager's face when he ordered all the replacement parts for the Suburban the day he picked it up. They had enough spare parts for those items that might be likely to fail to rebuild the Suburban twice. There were two complete sets of system computers in metal cans to protect them from EMP.

They took a little more money out of savings to finish equipping the Suburban, and decided to do the same for the Ford Ranger. He'd found a welder willing to work with him and they'd come up with the receiver hitch mounted racks to carry extra fuel and water for both vehicles. The welder had also helped him install the heavy-duty full-length roof rack on the Suburban.

The front bumpers and hydraulic winches were a package deal. The welder had made the brackets, and a mechanic friend had helped Sam and Ralph install a second power steering pump on each vehicle to run the winches and some hydraulic tools.

While they stored much of the preparedness equipment in the basement disaster shelter, the stuff they would need for an evacuation was kept ready to load into the vehicle in the garage, except for the fuel. The fuel was in the yard shed with the lawn mower and grill.

When he'd started to buy some simple plastic storage boxes to keep their camping and emergency supplies in, Peggy had insisted they go ahead and get shipping containers and good storage racks.

It had been Melissa that suggested they get those "neat" streamlined cargo carriers for the roof rack. Then Ralph suggested they make a pulley system in the garage for the carriers so they could load and unload them easily.

One of the cargo carriers held the lighter camping equipment like the sleeping bags, the two large four-season tents, and privacy shelter, some lightweight folding chairs and a rollup camping table. The other held clothing for the four of them for all seasons. Though not light by any means, having them loaded with those items allowed for the heavier items to be carried inside the Suburban and in the bed of the Ranger.

The roof rack, besides the cargo carriers, also held, in special brackets, two shovels, a pick-mattock, a double bit axe, a Hi-Lift jack, and a pair of bridging planks. Of course there were auxiliary lights on all four sides of the rack.

Sam reviewed the shipping containers in his mind. One held a comprehensive mechanic's tool set. Another field tools for working timber and rock to allow for construction of whatever they might need in the wild. The third case was carpentry tools and the fourth plumbing tools. Next was a longer case to hold long tools such as the cross-cut and rip saws for time work, along with a few other long tools. Another case held other specialty tools. Yet another held fasteners for use with the tool sets. One very large case held nothing but tarps and sheet goods. A companion to that case was one holding cordage, wire, extra awing/tent poles and stakes, and lots of duct tape.

Other cases held LTS food. Water was in squarish 5-gallon water containers. There was a kitchen case holding a field kitchen setup with tools and condiments and a water purifier. It also contained a fire ring, tripod and grate. Another case held the shower bags, supplies for the porta-pottie and other sanitation needs. The porta-pottie had a case that also included some supplies. There was an extensive first-aid/trauma kit.

One case lined with heavy-duty aluminum foil held communications equipment. Battery/AC/DC shortwave receiver, crank shortwave receiver, AM/FM/TV band radio, handheld public service band scanner, SAME weather radio, and antennas for everything. A companion case held compact solar panels, a deep cycle battery, a solar AAA/A/C/D/9 volt battery charger, and plenty of rechargeable batteries of different sizes.

Two smaller cases, due to the weight of the contents, held ammunition. One case held snaring equipment and fishing gear. Six cases held additional clothing. There were more, but Sam was beginning to doze and lost the train of thought. His last thought was that they were in pretty good shape.

Peggy had to shake him a second time to wake Sam. “Time for bed, sweetie. You were out like a light.”

“Yeah. Little tired.” He managed a grin. “Been thinkin’.”

“That’d do it,” Peggy joked back. After a moment she asked, “About what?”

“Oh, just how much I love you and the kids and how good we have it. And trying to figure out what else we might need to do to become better prepared. There always seems to be something bad happening every few days. Fortunately not right here, at the moment, but it keeps me thinking.”

“Well, get a good nights sleep. You’ll think of whatever it is that is bothering you. Melissa said something about an AUG. I think we should get it for her, along with the HK-91 we were planning for Ralph.”

“I’ll get on the internet tomorrow and see if I can find one for sale. The local gun shop doesn’t have an AUG. I checked the other day, but Tommy said he’d be glad to receive one in for us if we found one. And he still had that HK-91 he’s been trying to get rid of.”

“Don’t worry yourself too much, Sam,” Peggy said. “We’re sitting pretty good. We’ve got the equipped and stocked shelter here, a means to evacuate with equipment and supplies, and several places to go to if necessary. If there are some more details we’ll deal with them as we think of them.

“And by the way... I love you for caring about us enough to go to the pains you have to get and keep us prepared.”

“Wasn’t me alone. You’ve been there every step of the way. And I love you, too.” He gave her a hug and a long kiss to seal the words.

“I just wish that volcano would settle down,” he whispered as they headed for the bedroom, hand in hand.

End *****

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Bug Out! – A Vignette

Sam was happy with his life. He was sure his wife, Peggy, and his two children, Ralph, 17, and Melissa, 16, were too. His job was going well and so was Peggy's. Ralph and Melissa had annuities set up for their college educations. The two quadraplexes in the town near their retirement property were paying for themselves and generating a nice supplemental income.

The retirement property was paid for and the well and septic system were installed. A large earth sheltered building that was pump house, garage, and shop was already built. It had a full bathroom and a work sink as part of the equipment. The foundation for the house was poured. The materials to build the house, a small earth sheltered concrete dome, were stored in the garage and shop. He and Peggy would live in the garage and shop until they finished construction of the house. That would be after Melissa graduated from high school and went off to college.

The house here in the city was in good condition and was appreciating in value. When they moved into the retirement house when it was completed, the sale of the current house would finish off the retirement package they'd set up over time. "Just three more years," he muttered to himself, eyes going to the volcano in the distance as he drove in to the office where he worked. "Just keep your lid on three more years and we'll be out of here." The volcano didn't respond. The cloud of steam just hung there like it had been doing for the last two years as he drove his four-wheel-drive Ford Ranger into the parking lot of the office building where he worked.

It was almost noon when the sirens sounded. Someone turned on the radio in the office. The volcano was making noises, and the city was being put on alert for a possible evacuation. Sam had found out everything he could about the volcano when they first

moved to the area. It had been dormant then. The little activity the last few years had been considered only a minor danger. But he knew that if the volcano erupted, it was the type that could dump a pyroclastic flow onto the city in only minutes if it erupted big time. It wasn't something you took a chance with.

He knocked on his boss's door. "Mike," he said, when he was motioned into the office. "from the report on the radio they haven't ordered the evacuation yet, but I don't plan on waiting. I hope you understand. I'm taking off now."

Mike frowned. "Well, I can't stop you, of course, but we're going to have a serious talk about this when you get back. You've been a good employee for a long time, but I can't let something like this just pass. See me when you come back after this scare is over."

"Yes, sir." Sam didn't wait. He grabbed the small backpack he kept in the bottom right hand drawer of his desk. He wanted the items the small pack contained with him. There was one similar to it in the Ranger, but he wasn't going to take any chances at all.

Sam kept the broadcast radio in the Ranger turned on. The station was giving announcements about the volcano. The authorities were encouraging people to get prepared to evacuate, but the order to actually leave had not yet been given. Apparently there was already a mob scene at several of the schools. People wanted their children with them.

Sam suddenly had to whip the truck to the right. Someone had cut into his lane to pass, speeding on the way to somewhere. Sam didn't worry about his kids. At least not very much. They'd run drills for this before. As soon as the school dismissed them, they would meet up and head for the house in Ralph's old Honda Civic. Taking a lot more care than some of those on the road right now, Sam was sure. They were responsible kids.

When he tried to get Peggy on her cell phone he got the rapid busy. Probably a third of the cell phones in the city were talking to another third. Sam checked the dashboard clock. If Peggy, or the kids, couldn't make it home by two, which was just a little over two hours after the initial warning, they would all head for the first designated rendezvous point other than the house.

When he pulled into the drive at his house, his neighbor Harry was out watering the lawn. Harry called over to Sam, grinning. "You're home early. This is just an alert, Sam. Like that drill they had last year. Just want to wake people up, just in case."

Sam wouldn't argue the point. When the ground shook just a little and the volcano belched a little more steam than usual, Harry looked a bit unsure of himself. "Of course, getting ready wouldn't be a bad idea," he said, heading for his garage.

"Right," Sam muttered. "That's just what I'm doing." Sam opened both garage doors, then unsnapped and removed the bedcover of the Ranger pickup truck. The bed was empty.

Working quickly, Sam began loading shipping containers from the shelving system in the garage into the truck. The heavy-duty containers held equipment and supplies to support Sam and his family for at least a month. There was a years supply at the retirement property, cached, just in case of a break in.

He had the radio in the garage going. Still just the occasional update about the situation. And calls for the citizens of the city not to panic. Sam checked his watch again. High school students were being sent home. Students in lower grades were if the parents could be contacted. The rest would be cared for at the schools until the normal dismissal time or their parents came for them earlier.

He glanced down the street. Ralph and Melissa should be getting here soon.

The truck bed loaded to capacity, he closed the tailgate. It didn't take long to arrange a tarp over the load and fasten it in space with a tie down net. Going to a rack on the wall, Sam carried a custom built rack back to the Ranger and inserted the support tube into the receiver hitch under the step bumper and locked it into place.

Sam took out his set of keys for the four-wheel-drive Suburban that was in the other side of the garage and started it up. It took a couple of tries to get it centered under the two long, streamlined cargo containers suspended from the ceiling of the garage.

Once it was centered though, it took only a couple of minutes each to lower the containers onto the roof rack of the Suburban and latch them into place. They were already loaded with equipment and supplies, just as the shipping cases he'd loaded into the truck had been.

He pinned a removable cargo rack similar to the one for the Ranger onto the mount on the rear of the Suburban, then went to the small metal storage shed at the rear of the lot. He moved ten 5-gallon fuel cans and four 5-gallon water cans to the vehicles. Five cans of fuel and two of water went onto the racks he'd just installed on the vehicles.

Now for the inside stuff. The gun safe in the big walk-in closet of his and Peggy's bedroom was quickly emptied of its few firearms, and a group of cases. The cases contained important papers, keepsakes, and valuables. Part went into the Suburban, the rest into a steel box that was installed behind the seats of the Ranger.

He'd been glancing at the street often the last few minutes. He breathed a sigh of relief when Ralph pulled up in the Civic and he and Melissa got out.

"We've got another thirty minutes to wait for Mom. Load your bug out bags, then take your time and pack up secondary items," Sam told them.

"This isn't just going to be a drill this time, is it?" Ralph asked.

"I don't know, son. I don't know. But we are not taking any chances." Sam glanced up and down the street. There didn't seem to be anyone else attempting to get ready to evacuate. Not even Harry.

Ralph and Melissa both had their bug out kits in the Suburban and were gathering up a few more things. He started to caution them about what to take and not take, but decided to leave them alone. Their choices might not be perfect, but they were taking pains to think about items before they loaded them up. He looked around himself and decided on a couple of not really required items and took them out to the Suburban.

"It's almost time. We probably should have already suited up. Get your Tyvek suits on and keep your respirators with you." With a bit of pride he noted that both of them had laid out the clothing and equipment, ready to don it in a hurry. It took them less than two minutes to be suited and booted, their respirator bags strapped to their thighs.

"Daddy?" Melissa said, giving Sam a quizzical look.

Sam suddenly looked down at himself and said, "Oh, Jeez!" He quickly went to the bedroom and donned his own white Tyvek suit and steel toed rubber boots. He handed Peggy's hazmat equipment

bag to Melissa to take to the Suburban. Peggy had a Tyvek suit in her daypack, but only a simple dust respirator and pair of safety goggles, not the full-face respirator in the hazmat bag. Peggy only had a pair of athletic shoes in her daypack to replace the pumps she wore to work.

“It’s been two hours and ten minutes since the alarm sounded,” Ralph said, looking at his watch.

“Yeah. We can’t wait here for Mom. We’ll pick her up at the rendezvous,” Sam said.

Peggy was carpooling with Elizabeth today, and Sam had suspected that Peggy wouldn’t be able to talk Elizabeth into leaving work early. It would be easier for her to catch a cab or some kind of ride, walk if necessary, to the fast food joint just on the edge of the city on their main route out.

“Okay, Ralph,” Sam said. “You’ve got the Suburban. You ride shotgun with him Melissa, until we pick up Mom. Melissa, you pull the Civic into the garage when Ralph pulls out.”

It was the work of only a few moments for the switch to be made and for them to hit the road, Sam in the lead in the Ranger. Sam didn’t realize he was so tense until he noticed his knuckles were white on the steering wheel of the truck. He made himself relax, reassuring himself that Peggy would be at the rendezvous. That worry wasn’t the only thing contributing to the tenseness. There was some really bad driving going on.

The traffic on the routes out of the city didn’t look that much heavier than the traffic into the city and on the city streets. The driving going all directions seemed equally poor.

Sam said a little prayer to himself when he saw the white Tyvek clad figure sitting on a sign support at the fast food restaurant. Peggy was swinging her legs back and forth, bouncing the rubber heels of her athletic shoes against the concrete. The dust mask was hanging down around her neck, the goggles projecting from a pocket.

“Been getting a few looks,” Peggy said with a smile as the family reunited. “due to my apparel, I think.”

The others laughed as they shared hugs. “You remember the new photo album?” she asked Sam after the quick reunion was over.

“Yep,” Sam said. “I added it to the others in the case from the safe. “Let’s get on the road before traffic gets any crazier than it is.”

“When I was inside people couldn’t make up their minds about whether to stay or go. I’m glad we’re going. Have you felt the temblors?” Suddenly the ground was shaking again. Enough to feel, but not that bad.

“Yes,” Sam said. “Let’s go.”

The traffic thinned out not long after they left the city limits and the little convoy pulled into a service station to refuel. They had plenty of spare fuel, but the plan called for refueling the first chance they could, every time the tanks dropped below half full. Only when they couldn’t get additional fuel would they use the extra fuel they carried.

When they got near a small town several miles from the city, Ralph called Sam on the Family Radio Band hand held radios each of them carried on their belt. “We doing plan Charlie? Mom wants to know.”

Melissa lifted her radio and looked at Sam. “I think not. Nothing seems to be happening. Let’s stop at that place up ahead and get rooms. Monitor things and find out what’s happening. The radio isn’t saying much about the situation right now.”

Melissa keyed the radio and relayed Sam’s remarks. Ralph held his radio so Peggy could hear it easily. When Peggy nodded, Ralph keyed up and said, “That’s a go.”

Melissa grinned. “Ralph loves these radios.”

Sam had to smile. They could only talk about a mile on the radios, maybe two under perfect conditions, but they got the job done and not too many people were likely to hear them with that short of a range. Still, Sam and Peggy had trained themselves and the children to use some code words for certain communications.

If they’d gone to Plan Charlie they would stop in the town they were passing now. They owned a quarter acre lot in an area that wasn’t going to be developed for some time. There was a good gravel road going past the lot at the moment. It would eventually be a street. The ground was kind of rolling so it had been easy to have a 40 foot connex shipping container delivered to the site, then mound it over with earth. If you didn’t know something was there, you’d just think that particular mound was part of the terrain.

The family had three places like that, spaced several miles from the city in three different directions. There were caches of equipment and supplies buried near the shelters. If need be, they could stop there and be quite comfortable. And safe. They were really only stops on the way to the final destination, which was the retirement property they’d bought so long ago, partly for this very reason.

The town lots would be sold, like the house in the city, and new properties acquired on routes out from the retirement property when they moved there.

It was still early afternoon when they found a good place to stop. Turned out they weren't the only ones that had left the city before the evacuation had been called for. They'd heard the report just before they stopped. A full evacuation had been ordered for the city and areas surrounding the volcano. When Peggy was registering them in, she heard another couple talking about how glad they were they'd left early.

They got two rooms, one for Sam and Peggy and one with two queens for the kids. The vehicles were moved over by the rooms.

They ate an early supper at the restaurant next door to the motel, then went to Sam and Peggy's room to watch the news. The evacuation was not going well. Even though it was still early, they all decided to go to bed. They would get up at six the next morning, breakfast, and get back on the road.

It was a well built motel. They neither felt nor heard the eruption when it took place that night shortly after midnight. They saw it on the news the next morning.

The city and surrounding area had a population of almost a million people. Many had left by the time the eruption took place. Most had not. Of the estimated 750,000 people left in the affected area, almost 400,000 were killed by the effects of the eruption. Most died when the massive pyroclastic flow spread out over much of the city. It took less than five minutes. There was some lava flow, but it was relatively minor. But many were killed directly by lava bombs, more by the fires they started. Ash and fumes got the rest.

White faces looked at one another as they sat in their pajamas in front of the television that morning. The news camera helicopters were already flying over the area. They didn't see their house, but they did see several houses in the same area. They looked scorched, but were still standing. Their area had been at the furthest reaches of where the pyroclastic flow had traveled before it dissipated.

Sam thought for a long time before he spoke. "We need to make a decision," he said. "I had fully intended to go up to the property, no matter what, until things calmed down. We'd be fine there."

"But the danger is over now. People are going to need help aren't they?" Peggy asked.

Sam nodded. Sam and Peggy both looked at their children. "Red Cross will need all the volunteers they can get," Ralph said.

Melissa agreed. "As long as the house is okay, and the danger is over, I don't mind going back to help."

"There is no guarantee that all the danger is over, but you heard the scientists. They don't think there'll be another large scale eruption for a long time," Sam replied.

"The way it stacks up," he continued, "is that we can go back and stay at the bug out stop until things settle down. Or we can go on up to the property. We can stay there until things settle down, or we can go ahead and start building the house and stay permanently. Enroll you two in the school in town there. Or we can give it a day, then go back home and do what we can to help."

The decision was affected by another news announcement. The city had been sealed off, except for rescue teams. No one was being allowed in at the moment.

“I think,” Peggy said, “in light of that, we should go on up to the property and set up for an extended stay. As soon as they start letting people back in, we go back and help where we can.”

“Kids?” Sam asked.

Melissa and Ralph looked at one another for a moment, then both looked at their parents and nodded.

“That’s the plan then. We’ll go back when the authorities say we can go back. They’re bound to have alternate arrangements for school. Whether Peggy and I have jobs when we go back is something of a moot point. If not, we’ll just find something else. The rebuilding is bound to take a lot of people.”

With the decision made, they got dressed, had breakfast, and were on their way to the retirement property. It was almost two weeks before the government began allowing people back into the city. Sam’s old firm no longer existed. He got a job with FEMA, working as an office manager in their assistance office. Peggy worked as a file clerk and data entry person in a similar office on the other side of the ruined city.

Their house had a quite a bit of damage, but they were able to make it livable, using their camping and emergency preparedness equipment. An alternate school was set up and Ralph and Melissa attended the abbreviated classes. They helped where they could, working with a youth brigade set up by the Red Cross when they weren’t in school.

The massive aid effort lasted for a year. Electrical power was restored the first month, but it was months before the water and sewer systems were restored in many areas. There were daily water deliveries and waste pickups conducted by the National Guard in

the areas without those services, so they continued to stay in the house until it, like every other one in the area, was condemned.

It was going to be too expensive to restore full services to all areas. The housing wasn't needed, anyway. It would be decades before the population ever grew to what it had been before the eruption, if it ever did. The volcano continued to vent vapors. Sam and Peggy took the compensation for their house and decided to retire early. They rented an apartment until Melissa graduated from high school the following year, then they headed for their property once again. During that summer before Melissa went off to college, she stayed with them on the property to help with the construction of the house. Ralph came in from college and did the same.

By the time their two children headed to college that fall, Sam and Peggy were ensconced in their new home. The garden plot was ready to absorb the winter snow moisture, and Sam had bought a Bobcat 5600T Toolcat with many of the available attachments to work the garden and do a little side work around the area to stay busy. There was a lot of new construction going on in the area.

Sam and Peggy started something of a trend with their near disaster proof place. Many more people moved into the area with the same idea. Sam bought a franchise to build dome homes like the one he'd built and supplemented their retirement income with one or two sales a year.

All in all, a good plan, proper equipment and supplies, the willingness to use them, and a little luck, had brought them through dangerous times.

End *****

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