

Surviving the Apocalypse in the Suburbs: The Thrivalist's Guide to Life Without Oil

Wendy Brown

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With conflicts in oil-producing countries, natural disasters worldwide, and economic uncertainty in the US, we're living in delicate times, believes first-time author Wendy Brown. Rather than simply hoping for improvement, she argues, people would do well to prepare for the worst.

Despite the prevalence of weather-related calamities, Brown believes that economic challenges are the more dangerous threat: "With all that is happening with our global economy, a destitute housing market, a ballooning national debt, increasing unemployment and out-of-control personal debt, combined with resource depletion, there are other emergencies against which most of us should be hedging." Those "other emergencies" may result in a total collapse of the American way of life, including food shortages, intermittent power, gasoline scarcity, and interrupted municipal water supplies.

For those living in the suburbs, such a situation might feel particularly bleak, since they wouldn't have the agricultural resources found in rural locations or the community involvement of urban areas. But Brown, a suburb dweller in Southern Maine, believes that the suburbanites are well-situated to withstand doomsday-type scenarios and that upfront planning by suburban families would be advantageous in the long run.

The author's clear, straightforward advice will captivate anyone who has contemplated life without modern amenities and necessities, or just wants to move toward the type of sustainable practices used by traditional homesteaders. She guides the reader through the first steps after a disaster—building a shelter, finding water, devising fuel sources—and supplies a long-term, off-the-grid plan. In covering complex topics like livestock management, health care, and security, Brown articulates a clear opinion on how such challenges can be handled. By bringing in her own family's experiences, especially their missteps, she gives her advice a soft, personal tone that balances well against her sense of impending disaster.

At times, Brown goes a bit too deep into her apocalyptic vision, such as when she expresses concern about her daughter liking wheat-based products, because local wheat won't be widely available "when the time comes." However, her passion could spark many readers to look at their own food choices and build awareness about where their food supplies originate.

For anyone wishing to create a more sustainable, self-sufficient life, Brown's intriguing handbook is a good place to start.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (April 18, 2011)

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