

THE BULLETPROOF HOME

CRASH PROOF

HOW TO SURVIVE AN ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

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Surviving the Argentinean Economic Collapse

Early in the 21st Century, the South American country of Argentina faced dire economic conditions. Ultimately, these conditions would culminate into one of the greatest social collapses in modern history. The result started as peaceful demonstrations and ended with looting, violence, and large scale riots.

Many factors contributed to the economic collapse of Argentina; a country still in the process of recovering from these tragic events. The fixed exchange rate between the Peso and the US dollar did not allow for fluctuations based on market conditions. During the 1990s the Argentinean President, Carlos Menem, accumulated massive debts. This debt was further exacerbated by a marked decrease in tax revenue received by the country. Although there were many other factors reaching back to the 1970s, these factors had an enormous impact on the economy and the collapse that soon followed became almost inevitable.

Survival Through the Eyes of an Argentinean

Alongside all the stories of violence and tragedy that came out of the area during this crisis there were also a number of success stories. Many of these success stories went unnoticed by a media that seemed bent on reporting the destruction and devastation that came in the wake of the collapse. However, there are many citizens who survived the crisis with more than just their lives. By carefully planning for the catastrophe before it occurred, these individuals were able to rise above the violence and maintain a somewhat normal lifestyle during the worst times in recorded Argentinean history.

Diego Martin is a man who was able to survive some of the most dire conditions thrown at him during the collapse. Born to a middle class family in Buenos Aires, he was a young and successful project manager for Citibank. The global financial firm had a large corporate office in downtown Buenos Aires. This area was one of the hardest hit during the violent rioting of late 2001.

Throughout the 90s Diego was making a name for himself as an intelligent, adaptive employee at Citibank. Working in the financial industry, he became acutely aware of the economic struggles faced by his country. Although many of his friends thought he was crazy, he began studying everything he could about modern survival techniques. He was confident that the economy would eventually collapse completely and felt that the government was ill equipped to deal with such a crisis. Diego purchased books and read blogs about various survival and prepping techniques. Using his training as a project manager, making and executing a plan for his own survival was the next logical step.

Starting in 1997, Diego began stocking supplies. He said, "I really didn't have any idea what I was doing at the time. I guess I just figured that doing something was better than doing

nothing.” Whether Diego knew what he was doing or not, preparing for a disaster quickly became a passion for him. When not at work, he spent all his time learning new tricks and tactics for survival. He tried to focus his attention on urban-specific survival whenever possible but said “...it didn’t seem like there was much information about what would happen in a populated urban setting. Everything I read seemed to describe more rural survival situations. I remember taking what I thought applied to my situation and hoping I could fill in the blanks when the time came.”

And fill in the blanks he did. What makes Diego so unique is not that he survived the Argentinean economic crisis. Rather, he survived it while facing some extraordinary challenges. Challenges that he hopes others can learn from. Although some of the events of the Argentinean disaster were specific to that crisis, most of these experiences can be translated directly to situations that can and will occur around the world.

Diego’s Unique Experiences

“Many people I knew were able to leave the country when things started to get bad. I decided to stay because I thought I had spent enough time preparing for the worst...there were definitely some times where I wish I had left too.” Despite this sentiment, Diego learned many valuable lessons from his struggles during such a tumultuous time. During the interview, he shared three specific experiences that he hopes can teach others to think “outside the box” when faced with unexpected circumstances.

He recalls that he “had a bug out location outside of the city where I was storing food, some weapons, and fresh water. One of the reasons I decided not to leave the country was because I had this location in place.” When rioting became extremely violent, Diego decided it was time to leave his apartment and get to the bug out location quickly. “Since I lived in an apartment, my supplies were rather limited. There wasn’t much room to store canned goods or large supplies of water in there. I got to my bug out location and I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach. Everything was destroyed. Looters had found the location and taken most of my food. I had three guns there and two of them were gone. I was devastated.”

Even with proper planning, Diego found himself in a seemingly perilous situation. Most of his supplies were gone and he hadn’t carried much with him. Knowing that he couldn’t go back to his downtown apartment, Diego decided to make an inventory of what items he did still have and modify his survival plan from there.

Fortunately he had a supply of cash with him. The stores downtown were closed but he had heard that some of the smaller shops outside of town still had a few things. After realizing that most of his food was gone, Diego knew that he would have to take his chances getting to the store and replenish what he could.

“I remember getting to the store and literally watching the clerks changing prices as I walked around. By the time I got to the cashier, the prices on many of the items I had grabbed had already changed. It was unreal.” After getting what supplies he could, Diego went back to his bug out location and assessed his situation.

“Before the crisis began, I was very confident in my survival abilities. After that first night in the bug out location, I felt overwhelmed. One day into my survival plan and I was already rewriting the entire thing. Then I remembered all the information I read about having a proper survival mindset. I knew that I couldn’t let doubt control me and I was determined to succeed.” Having a proper survival mindset is arguably more important than any other survival skill. It is human nature to become overwhelmed in stressful situations. Diego was able to remember what he learned about maintaining a positive attitude that allowed him to keep negative thoughts at bay. Rational thought is difficult, if not impossible, when the mind is overrun with negativity.

A couple of weeks later, Diego was once again forced to leave the safety of his bug out location. He needed food again and knew that he would have to travel into the more populated areas of Buenos Aires to be successful. “I was nervous because I had to travel through some of the hardest hit areas of the city in search of food. I was carrying a small machete and a Glock 9 handgun for protection because I had no idea what I might run into during my travels.”

Diego was lucky to have brought weapons with him. As he entered the city he was confronted by a group of four street thugs. Without a strong law enforcement presence, groups of criminals were wandering the streets looking for people to rob and goods to steal. Diego found himself surrounded by the criminals. “Three of them were carrying baseball bats; the other guy had a shovel. I was nervous and I could barely breathe but I knew that if they saw how scared I was they would jump me like wolves. I thought about reaching for my gun but knew that I wouldn’t be able to shoot all four of them before being taken down. Pulling my machete out of its sheath, I decided to start swinging it wildly in circles. One guy got slashed in the leg.

Another guy nearly lost his hand when he tried to block the blade. After that, they ran off. I am not proud of what I did but I realize that it was necessary for my survival. Those guys would have beaten me to death if I hadn’t fought back.”

Diego did not share this story to brag about how tough he is. Rather, he simply wanted to point out that people will do some crazy things when times get tough. Fortunately he was prepared to deal with these people when he ran into them. There were many others that were not so lucky. “I remember seeing injured people everywhere. Some were bleeding on the sidewalk. There was a huge crowd of people fighting to get into a local medical clinic. Even though I am not a violent person, I was thankful that I had been able to defend myself when necessary. After that experience, I became a huge proponent of adding self-defense techniques to any good survival plan.”

Another experience Diego recalled was when one of his fuel canisters began leaking and contaminated his water supply. "I had a small generator at my bug out location that I had found during one of my food runs. It ran off gasoline and I used it sparingly because I was afraid the noise would tip others off to where I was hiding. I had a few five-gallon containers of gas stored outside and I remember smelling a strong gas smell one day. Turns out that one of the plastic fuel containers had sprung a leak. To make matters worse, the fuel had run right to the plastic water jugs I had stored outside. The fuel instantly melted the plastic jugs and I lost about 75% of my water supply in no time."

Although Diego was fortunate enough to have a freshwater stream nearby his bug out location, he no longer had very many containers to store the water once it had been boiled. It had taken him a lot of effort to acquire the water containers and he was apprehensive about going back into the city to find more. "I knew that the situation in the city was even more dire than before. People were hungry, injured, and scared. I definitely did not want to be attacked again but I knew I needed some way to store water. I was afraid that the water supply would become tainted and wanted to keep as much fresh water stored as possible just in case."

Even faced with a significant loss of water, Diego was able to regroup and figure out a new way to store water. Nearby his bug out location there was an old junkyard. He was able to remove the gas tanks from a few of the cars and bring them back to his location where he thoroughly cleaned them out and used them as water storage tanks. Although they were not portable like the smaller jugs he had before, these large tanks allowed Diego to store a large amount of drinkable water.

Diego stresses that he does not share these stories to brag about his feats as a survivalist. "The point of these stories is that you never know what life is going to throw at you. I remember my father telling me that as a child. It really only sunk in after spending time in a life or death survival situation. Even a minor curveball can mean big trouble during a crisis. Instead of panicking, my hope is that people will learn to think differently. If you can remain positive there are very few things you cannot accomplish. With my limited experience I never thought I would be here today but here I am...a better person because of my experiences."

Basic Survival Requirements

As a former project manager, Diego is no stranger to proper planning and documentation. He has developed some basic checklists that provide the required items necessary for survival regardless of the situation. Diego stresses that this list is not meant to be all-inclusive. Rather, it should be a guide to be expanded upon as you see fit.

Food

One of the supplies that will be the hardest to acquire after an event like the economic collapse in Argentina is food. Having a supply of nonperishable food is a priceless asset when stores are no longer receiving regular shipments and shelves are essentially empty. Diego was living in a downtown apartment when the collapse occurred so he was unable to store large amounts of food. "By 2000, I had every extra inch of my apartment filled with every type of food imaginable. I researched nutrition information and tried to select foods that were versatile, easily stored, and provided the maximum amount of energy possible."

The types of food you choose to store will depend on availability and personal preference. Diego favored protein bars and pasta because they provided a large amount of calories per serving. "Argentina has a very strong Italian influence and pasta is a staple food here. It was only natural to include pasta, which is high in carbs, in my survival stores."

Diego recommends the following basic list of food items that everyone should consider including in their survival preparations. Again Diego stresses that "...the list should only serve as a basic guide. Everyone will have success surviving in a different way but I have found certain foods to have been the most beneficial for me during the worst times."

- Dry pasta
- Canned vegetables (glass jars if possible)
- Tomato sauce
- Vegetable oil
- Rice
- Sugar
- Salt
- Protein bars
- Powdered drink mix
- Beef jerky

He also suggests some additional non-food items that make life easier when living in a survival situation.

- Soap
- Bleach
- Toilet paper
- Alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Toothpaste
- Laundry detergent
- Disposable plates and utensils
- Trash bags

"I quickly realized that I had planned adequately for food and water but not for the other necessities that went along with them. I completely forgot about trash bags and had a

hard time figuring out what to do with my garbage in the bug out location. Eventually I found some trash bags at a local store and began burying the filled bags. I did not want to attract any attention from people or animals because of smelly waste and felt that burying the garbage was the best way to accomplish this.”

Water

The human body can only survive for about three days without water. Diego was fortunate enough to have a running water supply near his bug out location. As long as that water supply did not become contaminated he would have an indefinite supply of water. Diego recalled that he didn't want to take any chances so he tried to store as much water as possible.

“My apartment did not have enough room to store water. I assumed that the public water supplies would dry up relatively quickly and I was right. Within a few days, water no longer came out of my faucet. That was when I decided that it was time to pack up and move to my bug out location.” Experts recommend having at least a one month supply of water on hand whenever possible. If you live in an apartment or small home this will most likely not be possible. Carrying this much water to a different location is also not practical. At a very minimum you should be carrying two gallons of water per person if you intend on traveling during a crisis.

Diego also recommends obtaining both water testing and purification kits. “Even after I selected a bug out location that had a water supply nearby, I wanted to make sure that I could test the water frequently. Often water will look perfectly clear but be contaminated with any number of organic substances or even hazardous chemicals. Having a portable testing kit really made a difference because I was able to test the water regularly.”

This list serves as basic water checklist. Once again, the exact contents of your kit will vary based on the environment and exact nature of the crisis.

- Two liter bottles of water - At least 2 gallons for every person although more would be ideal
- Water testing kit
- Water purification kit
- Large water storage tank at bug out location
- Large metal container to boil water if necessary
- Coffee filters to strain out non-hazardous debris

Weapons

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Diego's survival plan was having a good supply of weapons. As you recall, after he was attacked in the city he took self-defense to a whole new level. “Self-defense is a continual process. There are always new things to learn. And it's not just about weapons either. Proper self-defense is also about training and physical

fitness. Someone equipped with the best weapons in the world will not be able to defend themselves effectively if they are not in good physical shape.” After his run-in with the street gang, Diego spent much of his free time practicing the use of different weapons and working out to keep himself in top physical condition.

“Survival is not easy. It is difficult and it will test the boundaries of who you are as a person”, Diego stated. Surviving successfully is a combination of knowledge and training. Diego learned through trial and error what the best weapons for survival are and he shares that information so that you will be well equipped to deal with any number of potential threats.

Diego has two favorite weapons that he relies on almost exclusively. The first is his short machete. Remember that this weapon saved his life when he was attacked by thugs in the streets of Buenos Aires. “My other favorite weapon is my 9mm handgun. It is lightweight, portable, and has enough stopping power to stop a charging man. Between my machete and my Glock, I can travel most places and feel secure.”

Some survivalists recommend rifles or shotguns as a primary weapon choice. Diego disagrees. He feels that smaller, more portable weapons are advantageous in most situations. “Sure...I have two shotguns and I don’t know, maybe five rifles but I still rely on my handgun more. The problem with rifles and shotguns is that they are not easily concealable. When someone sees you walking around with a large gun they are more likely to view you as a threat. This makes you more prone to attack.” Diego said his survival can be attributed in part to his ability to remain inconspicuous. Drawing attention to yourself in a survival situation is a bad idea. Other people who are probably not properly prepared for the crisis may try to attack you for your supplies.

Although Diego doesn’t recommend rifles or shotguns as a first choice, he admits that they are better suited to hunting. “One thing that all the survival stuff I have read kept talking about was sustainability. Hunting always comes up as one of the best ways to maintain a sustainable food supply. This is the main reason why I have shotguns and rifles. My bug out location had some dense forest and open fields nearby. I would often go hunting in these areas. Fresh meat is certainly a welcome treat after days of nothing but canned goods.”

Having guns is one thing. Having ammunition for those guns is another issue. Before the collapse, it was nearly impossible to get decent ammunition because supplies were low and prices were high due to demand. Diego made a habit of purchasing at least one box of ammunition every week. He said, “I figured ammunition would follow the normal laws of supply and demand. As the situation in Argentina grew worse, I began to see just how right I was. It was almost impossible to find quality ammunition and even when I did it was so expensive that it really cut into my budget for other supplies. Plan ahead and start stocking up on ammunition now. A one-month supply should be your absolute minimum goal but you should really have as much ammo as you can get.”

Differences in an Urban Setting

One of the big differences between much of the literature Diego had studied prior to the crisis and his situation was that many of the examples provided referred to rural or suburban areas. In these areas, the population density is much lower and the risks of immediate danger tend to be fewer and farther between.

Diego aims to educate people on the many differences inherent to urban survival. He had to learn the hard way through trial and error. “I don’t want people to have the same learning curve that I did. If people understand the many challenges they will face during an urban crisis, their propensity for panic and ultimately violence will be significantly decreased. Instead of competing against one another, my hope is that people will be able to work together to restore order to society.”

One of the biggest differences in an urban setting is the high crime rates. One only needs to look at the many natural disaster that affect large cities to see the results of widespread panic in an urban area. Diego mentioned the Hurricane Katrina disaster and how the crime rates doubled overnight as people struggled to survive.

“I remember how hard it was to even leave the city when I decided it was time. People were everywhere. Cars were not moving. I literally watched an angry mob pull a family from their car. I’m not sure what happened to them. It was pure chaos.” Buenos Aires is similar in population density per square mile to any large city in the United States. The same behavior can be expected if a similar crisis affected one of these areas.

Diego recommends walking if you must pass through areas filled with people. He recounts how the cars were not moving and “it looked like a giant parking lot.” If you live on the outskirts of a city, a vehicle may provide you with a quick means of escape assuming you can avoid densely populated areas. Otherwise, walking is probably your best bet.

“Another thing I learned is that it is best to try blending in with the crowd. I’m not saying you should take part in violence but if you look and act like a rioter you are less likely to become a target.” The people who tend to get attacked by rioters are those who look fearful and are trying to escape. Diego was able to escape the city limits safely by moving with the crowd and slowly making his way towards the outside where it was easier to escape unnoticed. Once again, remaining as inconspicuous as possible is one of the best defense mechanisms that you have in your personal survival arsenal.

Surviving an urban disaster is something that nobody wants to do. Diego often has nightmares about some of the experiences he had while trying to survive in uncertain conditions. Although it was a horrible experience, Diego is glad that he had the experience and is now able to share what he learned with others. “A little bit of knowledge can make all the difference in a situation like this. If more Argentines were aware of the things I now know I

really think the situation would have been much better for everyone.” Diego hopes that his story serves as a beacon of hope for those who may face catastrophic circumstances in the future.

Currently, Diego is writing a book about his entire experience so that his message may reach as many people as possible. The stories and lessons he has shared for this guide are real lessons that allowed him to survive in circumstances where many others were not as fortunate. Start preparing now because you really never know when you may be thrust into a situation like Diego was where your life may depend on how much you have prepared in advance and how much knowledge you possess about survival techniques.