

(Almost) Everything I Know

I learned from Gilligan's Island *By: Argus*

With the recent passing of the star of "Gilligan's Island", I watched nostalgically as the networks gave short tributes to Bob Denver. I recalled escaping to the tropical island (actually a back lot in Hollywood) by watching re-runs on the local station, the made-for-TV movies, and the short-lived Saturday morning cartoon. All of this, of course, was happening amidst the real-life devastation and tragedy of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on the gulf coast. It suddenly occurred to me that the light-hearted sit-com may have some deeper meaning, if only to those of us not too blind to see. It was in that mindset that I extracted what I will respectfully refer to as:

Gilligan's Rules of Preparedness

Be inventive and use what is at hand. While some of the inventions the Professor concocted were stretching reality a bit, the principle is there. Gourds and coconuts become drinking glasses and beakers, bamboo used for pipes and construction, you get the picture. Unless you are in the middle of space, your surroundings are a rich source of materials, natural or otherwise, that you have at your disposal. Be observant. That empty bucket can be used to make a still to purify water, or with a lid a 5-gallon bucket can be a washing machine, an animal trap, or a toilet. Broken glass? You have a knife or a signal mirror. Abandoned vehicle? A treasure trove. A headlight with the front glass broken out is a dandy solar fire starter. A thin wire across the battery will likewise start a fire. Hoses can be scavenged from the engine compartment for siphoning out the gas. The vehicle itself can be a refuge from a downpour or blizzard. Mirrors can be removed for signaling. Tires (with the air let out) provide a very smoky signal fire. Leaf springs are great tool and knife making material. Wood ashes? An ingredient in soap and used for tanning animal hides. Human urine? Exceptional fertilizer and also used for tanning hides. Leaves? An insulator when sleeping in the open, tinder for starting fires, and some are edible (dandelion) or can be used to wrap food when cooking (corn husks). Tree bark? Fiber for cordage, and the Anasazi of the Four Corners area used pounded juniper bark for diapers and sandals. Think outside of the box, a Walmart is not necessary when you need to survive.

Don't make stupid mistakes, they can mean the difference between success and failure. Not to bash Gilligan, but the plot often turned on a near rescue that never happens because of Gilligan's ineptitude. For example, a lunar mission is to go overhead, and the castaways lay out logs on the beach in the shape of "SOS", but when they light them on fire, Gilligan gets too close and catches his pants on fire, and then runs around and turns the SOS into SOL. (Prophetic, no?) Or the robot that washed up onto the island, and the castaways program it to take a message to the mainland. Gilligan, of course, unintentionally messes up the plan by placing his lucky rabbit's foot in the robot, short circuiting the voice module and deleting the request for help. Well intentioned, but poorly planned out. The message is to think things through and don't do something that can interfere with your plans and endanger you. For example, it is not uncommon for search parties to find a lost person's backpack full of supplies that has been dumped in an effort to travel more quickly. Your gear is your life, but in the stress of being lost, your thought processes can be clouded. On a more personal level, a lead foot can cost you a ticket, blowing a

couple of months budget for gear, rations, etc. Think before you do anything, you'll be grateful later.

Don't give up hope. The castaways always held in their minds the thought of rescue. In a survival situation, if you have no hope, you lose motivation. Without motivation, you sink into the darkness of despair, lose energy, and give up. Survival is all about making it through. Whether your motivation is seeing your family (or even your dog) again, getting life back on an even keel, seeing your kids grow up, or just not wanting to bite it where the rats will dine on your corpse, you have to have something to hang onto.

Just because you are in survival mode doesn't mean you have to be uncomfortable. The castaways were in a tight spot, but they did not dwell on their plight, taking time to enjoy life. Their routine included tropical drinks, relaxing swims in the beach, and golfing with bamboo clubs. The message here isn't to be the Howells, who contributed little and expected to be pampered. Real life survival means hard work that your life, and the lives of your family, will depend on. The message is that a little comfort can go a long way, and will take your mind off of the uncertainty and bleakness of the present situation. In your kit, include comfort items, like hot chocolate mix, a book, a wallet sized photo or two of your family, toys or games for the family, or an inflatable pillow. You'll rest better, enabling you to increase your productivity and long-term survivability.

It rains on the rich and poor alike, disasters don't play favorites. The Howells again, sorry Thurston, but even with a suitcase full of money, and a pedigree among the best, when the fertilizer hits the ventilator it will spray on anyone in its path. Preparedness is everyone's job, not just those who don't have a butler and a maid. The truth is, we don't choose when hell breaks loose, and your American Express Platinum Card may not be worth the plastic it is stamped on when it does. As the recent events in New Orleans demonstrate, many transactions in the days following a disaster hurricane are cash only, often simply because there is no electricity or phone lines to accommodate credit transactions. Your cell phone may not work, and your Escalade may be up to its over-priced mobile DVD system in flood waters. You can't rely on your wealth or status to bail you out. Among the people rescued from the flood waters in the big easy were several celebrities and celebrity's families. People in the shelters included doctors and lawyers as well as bus boys. The message is this: *everyone* should have their kit together and have the skills and knowledge needed to survive. When the big one hits that may be the only thing between you and the wolf at the door.

If you don't have it with you when disaster strikes, it won't help you. The castaways carried a lot of stuff with them on their infamous "three hour cruise", but ended up having a lot of stuff to use on their "uncharted desert isle." Granted, it is a bit hard to believe that anyone, even Ginger, would go on a pleasure cruise with feather boas and an assortment of slinky evening gowns, but that's not the point. The point is that whatever you have with you becomes your survival kit when the manure gets deep. Having items in a bag in the bottom of your desk like a coil of rope, a flashlight, a multi-tool, a bottle of water, a cell phone and a dust mask could save your hide in the event of a terrorist attack or an earthquake. Having a cell phone, a pocket knife and a sturdy pair of shoes on you is a darn site better than flip-flops and tic-tacs in case you get caught in the thick of things on the way to the grocery store or to pick up the kids. A tool box,

duct tape, extra coolant, spare belts and some bailing wire will cure a number of road emergencies, IF they are in your trunk when you need them. As cops are in the habit of saying, your ballistic vest doesn't help you any when it's in your closet protecting your shoes. You don't choose the time when the stuff goes down, but you DO choose what you have on you when it does.

Knowledge is powerful. Without the professor, it is doubtful the castaways would have lasted more than a few days after their ship wreck. Again, it is doubtful that any professor would have the breadth of knowledge about physics, biology, psychology, geology, botany and chemistry that the professor had, but that isn't point. What is the point is that physical assets don't mean anything unless you have the knowledge to make use of them. You can have a bunch of expensive toys, but if you don't know how to use them to full advantage you can still be in trouble. For example, knowing how to build a fire without matches, how to navigate without a compass, how to find or purify water, how to build animal traps, how to provide advanced first aid, and how to tell edible from poisonous plants could be the difference between going home in the rescue chopper in a jump seat or a body bag. I got a bit torqued off watching the news in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A reporter in the field said that authorities in the flood-ravaged Mississippi delta told people they could barbecue to cook food. The brainless blonde commentator in the studio raised her voice, waved her arms and said something to the effect of "How are people supposed to barbecue? There's no electricity, what do you expect them to do, *rub two sticks together?*" Her obvious point was to emphasize that since the government wasn't Johnny-on-the-spot spoon-feeding the helpless population, they were helpless. *My point is that, yes, you silly bimbo, people can start a fire with two sticks if they have gained the knowledge through education and practice!* Most survival skills are not difficult, but it takes some time to learn, and you have to have the KNOWLEDGE of how to do it BEFORE it is needed. Don't be caught trying to give CPR while reading the instructions out of the phone book. Knowledge is part of what separates survivors from victims.

So there it is, Gilligan's *second* legacy. If it works as an example of survival that more folks can relate to, so much the better. Rest in peace, Little Buddy.

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