

## **A Very Short History of Live Free USA**

Live Free USA started as an NRA Shooting Club on the Southside of Chicago in the late 1960s. This was a time when Chicago was beginning to initiate its draconian gun laws so we diversified into an outdoor sports club. While we still engaged in shooting sports when and where we could, we added rock-climbing, cross-country skiing, camping, rafting and caving to our programs. We also started teaching survival skills and conducting survival-training activities. We soon were camping in the middle of winter and testing equipment and techniques under survival conditions. The temporary fuel shortages and recession of the 70s combined with the nuclear threat of the Cold War increased interest in all aspects of survival and we expanded our programs to cover nuclear, biological and chemical war survival as well as general self-reliance skills. At this time there were several national publications devoted to survival related subjects, including American Survival Guide and Practical Survival. This allowed us to advertise and build a national and international membership. We also launched our own newsletter titled Directions in 1977. This was later changed to the current American Survivor. We also had raised enough money to buy land for "The American Survival Center" in Wisconsin. In the late 70s the news media began to run stories about "survivalists", but they had simply attached the title to a variety of religious, political and racial extremist groups that were prevalent at the time. Live Free was faced with the challenge of correcting these misrepresentations while defining the true survival, self-reliance philosophy. We had some excellent spokesmen, positive explanations and excellent, ongoing activities to use in our campaign. We were interviewed on national television, scores of magazines and newspapers and even were on Dutch television and the BBC. We did get neutral or positive coverage because we had the right message and refused to be manipulated by the media. This was a time when we recruited some of the core membership that would hold the organization together and serve as the framework for future growth. We continued slow growth through the 80s, but the public's misunderstanding of our mission kept impeding our progress and outreach efforts. The collapse of the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War in the early 90s coupled with a temporary increase in oil supplies and economic growth created a false sense of euphoria and security. The vast majority of the public was sure that the age of peace, safety and prosperity had come and that the coming millennia would be even better. Our analysis of the world's resources, economics and history told us that this was a very dangerous illusion, but no one wanted to hear that. Most survival groups and publications went out of business by the mid 90s. Our membership and funds plummeted and we had been forced to sell off the American Survival Center property. We were only able to have a few activities each year and the publication of the newsletter was sporadic at best. The Twenty-first Century quickly revealed the growing cracks in national and world stability. As catastrophes of every variety began to multiply throughout the world, the public started to slowly awaken to their insecure present and threatening future. This time the need for preparedness was acknowledged and acceptable. This time advocating family

self-reliance for a long-term or indefinite disintegration of the systems that we have come to depend on was not being rejected. Unfortunately, it took Live Free's remaining staff and limited fund a while to catch up with the demand for information and programs, but we still had a solid framework and core group with 30-plus years of dedication and experience. We had to work very hard to regain recognition and rebuild our membership. We were able to put on our survival education programs in public venues that would have rejected us in the 70s and 80s. We are actually able to work with local fraternal, emergency response and community organizations in many locations. Membership, chapter formation and the number of programs continue to increase at a geometric rate as we bring together and support more and more skilled and dedicated survival and self-reliance instructors, writers and organizers. The challenge now is to carry out our mission while people can still travel to seminars and meetings and afford to buy the survival and self-reliance supplies and tools they will need. While our programs will continue to support preparedness for common home emergencies, localized disasters and outdoor survival situations, our larger missions must be to:

1. **Increase public awareness** of the unavoidable economic decline and associated disasters, emergencies, hardships and conflicts that it will generate in the next decades.
2. **Proved a variety of educational programs and training events** that will help good people adapt to the future challenges and survive the very serious dangers and disasters to come.
3. **Build a national network of chapters** that can provide improved survival resources for their members and be a framework for community survival, as situations grow more severe.

The fulfillment of these missions into the next decade will depend much on the commitment and dedication of the newest members to continue the work started almost 50-years ago.