

## Wilderness Training By Maria Marchese

They were a relatively new couple. Jacob, calm and level-headed, logical and mature even though he was four years younger than her. Marcy, an excitable, overthinking idealist who was adjusting to dating someone relatively normal. The pandemic took over the world and had limited their courting activities so they had become fans of reality television. Not the kind where desperate singles searched for love while simultaneously seeking their 15 minutes of fame or were forced to live with strangers. Instead, they watched contestants try to survive in the wilderness without human contact for an unspecified number of days.

She did not consider herself high maintenance, but she had proved that she preferred some amenities like running water, doors that locked and noise cancelling headphones so she could drown out his snoring.

They had become couch experts judging the contestant's skills. "He really should be using willow bark to make that fish funnel", she scolded. She applauded the contestants who could survive 8 days in the wilderness. She didn't think she could survive 8 minutes. She half-joked that once the boat that dropped her off was out of sight, she would be the first one to use the satellite phone to tell the producers that she's changed her mind and someone needed to come and get her.

He understood this about her. But, "You could do that, I bet" she commented. "Be out there in the outdoors all by yourself."

He agreed with her in his perpetual Zen state. "Yeah" he shrugged. "I'd need to learn some more techniques, but I think I could do it."

"Do you think I could do it?" she asked in a let me see how this man handles the task of telling his girlfriend that she would absolutely suck at something without making her feel badly about it.

"I don't think you would enjoy it, no." The answer satisfied her. He kept passing the tests he didn't even know he was taking.

What if there was some sort of apocalypse, zombie or otherwise? Would she be prepared? With her luck, she would be one of the last surviving members of the human race. She'd have to prepare herself.

According to one website there were 10 outdoor survival tips that she needed to master. The first suggestion was that she 'Master her Attitude'. Apparently the wild is not a place to panic. Marcy wasn't even trying to survive yet and she was already anxious. She was tempted to start working her way up the list from the bottom. But she figured she would miss some crucial steps, so she tried to follow the advice. "You are more likely to survive a difficult situation if you focus on maintaining a positive, proactive attitude". She laughed aloud. She was as self-deprecating as the day was long and she had been self-caring herself into namaste nowhere. She would go back to that one. Panicking was the way she got through life. She prepared for the worst and hoped for the best.

She was working on being alone with her thoughts. She overextended herself to keep her hands and mind busy and she scheduled her life in 30 minute intervals. It was *her* survival tactic. So she compartmentalized her needs. The four pillars of survival are water, fire, food and shelter.

She would need some kind of shelter. Assuming that she would not be able to inhabit some kind of dilapidated, abandoned house à la *Walking Dead*, she would have to start from scratch. She would have to rely on trees, their branches and some sort of foliage to chink any openings. Marcy peppered the lingo into her musings which she shared aloud while Jacob scrolled for fishing lures or some other outdoor gear.

He looked up from his phone, impressed that she had remember that she had to insulate her shelter. She didn't have to look at him to know that he was humouring her.

"I would have to cut down trees so I would need some sort of an axe, right?"

Jacob put his phone down to show her that he was taking her seriously.

"Yes, you would need a felling axe. They aren't too heavy. They weight about 5lbs. You should be able to wield it pretty easily."

She thought about the only time she had ever handled an axe in an axe throwing arena. She had been pretty good at it. Her confidence was growing.

She thought about the design. Jacob returned to scrolling.

"Maybe a log cabin structure?"

Jacob realized she was committed to this train of thought. He knew this was her way and because he had the patience of a statue and he had working knowledge of the outdoors, he could educate her and calm her at the same time.

"A log cabin would be ambitious for your first project. Maybe something that would keep you safe from the elements to start. Then you could construct something more elaborate if you had to stay longer".

"Hm." Was her response. She was thinking and planning simultaneously. Her layout included a few bedrooms and a living area clearly unnecessary for survival but she was thinking ahead to when she met other survivors. They could commiserate in her salon.

She moved on to water. She knew that she couldn't drink water straight out of a lake, but she knew that she may be lucky enough to find a spring and if that wasn't a possibility, she could boil water.

Marcy drank water from the tap. She didn't always drink bottled water. She also knew that all water did not have the same taste. Some did not quench her thirst, some didn't have a taste and one particular brand tasted like it had been sitting out in the sun, in a water gun.

She wasn't too worried about water. She kept that discovery to herself. She knew Jacob's answer would be a nod or a shrug.

She lived in Canada so she would have to deal with the changing seasons. Eventually, it would get cold. She would have to build a fire and she's have to learn that pretty quickly to address the water purification issue.

"If I didn't have a flint, I could still build a fire, right?"

Jacob typed something into his phone and he began reading the various methods of starting a fire.

"Yes" he said. "You can angle the beam of the sun into your tinder. You could also rub two sticks together and if you produce the correct amount of friction, you will be able to start a fire".

"Well I have shelter, water and fire covered. Now I just have to worry about food."

Jacob, having returned to his own research, assessed her reasoning.

"Food is a pretty big one. You might need to think harder about that one."

She loved to cook and sometimes she baked and most of the things were made were totally edible, mostly delicious and served in abundance. He took care of the grilling and the barbecuing because he enjoyed it. She had lived as a single mother for almost 20 years. If she had to figure out how to do something, she would.

She had never foraged. She wouldn't know the difference between a tasty, healthy mushroom and the poisonous variety, the thought of eating a bug no matter how much protein it contained made her nauseous and how would she hunt and kill an animal for food?

Jacob decided to inject some reality into the rabbit hole Marcy seemed to be spiraling into.

"You would have to learn to build a snare at the very least or learn to fish. I don't think you're prepared to eat never mind gut whatever you may catch or kill. We can try fishing and see if you like it. It is not really farm to table. It's more like kill it, take care of it before it rots or another animal eats it, cook it over the fire and eat it without seasoning. We could also try camping in the backyard."

Marcy looked at the her matter of fact partner. She had still not been able to pee in the lake or on the side of the road, even in an emergency. If they camped in the backyard would she have to answer nature's call in her flower bed? That was one of the unaddressed pillars. There were clearly more important things than bathroom etiquette but she couldn't help thinking about what her outhouse would look like. She didn't discuss this with Jacob even though she was fairly certain he would listen.

She decided that if the human race would one day rely on her to repopulate the world, the world might in a little trouble.