

LIFE IN A SHELTER

1963

----- *Thamar E. Dufwa* -----

Both the United States and the U.S.S.R. built and tested nuclear weapons throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, and many Americans grew increasingly anxious about the possibility of nuclear war and its consequences. Some individuals and communities prepared for nuclear attack by building underground fallout or bomb shelters. This excerpt is a chapter from the guidebook *How to Survive in an Atomic Attack*, published in 1963.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Issues

What insights does this 1963 guidebook offer historians interested in understanding the level of public understanding about fallout from a nuclear explosion? Use specific examples in your answer.

It should not be expected that life in the shelter will be as pleasant as life in the home. Many home comforts will be missed, but this is a reality to which one has to adjust. Certain tasks should be assumed by the different members of the family. A diary should be kept of everyday events and of the messages received from Conalrad with the date, the hour, and the exact words of the message. If the electrical system is not impaired, some reading or fancywork may be done. If a father has an inventive mind, he may be able to work on that invention he has been dreaming about, or a mother may work out the pattern she had thought about, and the children may play games. Some people may prefer the community shelter for companionship, others may prefer the more quiet, family-type shelter. Projects may be planned in detail in the shelter and worked out when life can be lived aboveground again.

Children should be permitted to play in the shelter before it has to be occupied, in order to get used to having their toys and games there. When the time comes to occupy the shelter, the children will be delighted to have their parents with them in what used to be their playhouse. Games like chess or checkers may be played by young and old.

When the comforts of the home begin to be sorely missed, start to enumerate the blessings the shelter provides. Much will be found to be thankful for. There is the husband and wife, there are the children, one is alive, and one has food and safety for the time being. Books are at hand to help pass the hours, and the Bible is a wonderful source of peace and quiet for the human heart.

Perhaps one may discover delightful traits in husband (or wife) or in the

children that one had been too busy to notice before life in the shelter began. Perhaps there is a basketful of mending that should have been done a long time ago, but one never had found time to do it. Perhaps one has a secret ambition to do something unusual, but the cares of the home have left no opportunity for it; perhaps one has the urge to write a story or a play. Now you can let your imagination play to its fullest capacity. Enlist others in your project. Put on your skit or play; the shelter is your stage. You may never have a better opportunity.

When life begins anew after the period in the shelter has passed, there will be too many things to do to permit one to live in a dream world. You will again have to face the realities of life. Dream while you can; the realities will come soon enough, and the work ahead will be tremendous.

Everything outside the shelter will be covered with fallout dust. Beta and gamma rays are a menace to life and health, but they can be washed away. Buildings must be washed outside and inside, *all* buildings, homes, garages, and others. The water hose can be used on the outside of the house and on the lawns, if there is enough force to send the water rushing down the sewers. The lawns must be washed, and in some places perhaps the topsoil will have to be removed. Everything inside the house must be washed or vacuumed. A Geiger counter is essential to determine whether the house is clean and fit to live in. It may take several days to clean a home so that one can live in it again. In the evening, after a bath and with clean clothes on, the shelter will seem like a haven to anyone who has worked at a cleaning job all day. One will feel safe there.

There may be cases where the father did not get home, or the children were compelled to stay in the school shelter. How can one locate the members of one's family? Communication and transportation have been disrupted. Where can one get food and water? Friends and relatives may be missing; some may have become bewildered and not know what to do. Many people will be slightly hurt, seriously injured, or sick. One cannot stand still and just look. Everyone must help. The number of things that will have to be done is staggering. But "as the day is, so shall thy strength be." The dream world of the shelter is gone and the world of reality begins again.

Source: *How to Survive in an Atomic Attack* by Thamar E. Dufwa, Ph.D (New York: Exposition Press, 1963), pp. 20–22.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that this guidebook titled "How to Survive in an Atomic Attack" reflects how the public was misinformed about nuclear fallout. They may cite as an example the assertion that beta and gamma rays can be rinsed, cleaned, and vacuumed away with a few days' work. They may also cite the book's depiction of the shelter as a tranquil haven, a place to catch up on work and hobbies. Students may also note that the passage implies that the time spent in the shelter will be only a few days before people can return to "normal." Students may also answer that the guidebook's depiction of a nuclear attack's effects contradicts evidence from the aftermath of the Hiroshima **and Nagasaki bombings in 1945**.