

9 Disaster Preparedness Lessons I Learned While Living in Hawaii



When you think about Hawaii, do you think about preparedness and survival?

Tropical drinks and sandy beaches, sure, but Volcano stoves and survival blankets – probably not. But Hawaii is a place you must be prepared in. Hurricanes, while they don't happen often, are often devastating when they do. And much of Hawaii is far-flung, so you have to be ready to be on your own for quite some time before help arrives.

Plus, Hawaii is on the Pacific Rim, so earthquakes and tsunamis are ever-present dangers to be prepared for.

Oh yes, and there's the wanton dock strike that could happen at any time the dock workers decide. Hawaii gets most of its goods – including food – via the docks, and a dock strike can be devastating to the unprepared.

You get the picture: the wise Hawaiian is prepared. Super prepared at that.

And nobody is more prepared than an "auntie" (AKA, respected woman from the 'hood).

It was from these aunties that I first learned what it meant to be prepared. Wise women, they were often teased by their families for hoarding acres of toilet paper and Spam found on sale at the drugstore. But these ladies knew what was up, and at the first sign of any tsunami, heavy rain, etc., all the family would show up at their house for a good meal and to wipe their bums.

I was fortunate enough to live in an *ancient* neighborhood in Hawaii where I was surrounded by these aunties. And they taught me many things about preparedness – in fact, this where I started my preparedness journey. Hopefully you'll find bits of helpfulness in their wisdom as I did.

* There's no such thing as too much toilet paper. And there's no shame in having so much toilet paper that you have to store it in your kitchen or behind the sofa. Some aunties will remove the cores of the TP so they'll lay flat and they can store more.

* When food falls from the sky (off of trees), pick it up and either eat it or preserve it. It is a blessing. When the tiny and barely-edible guavas are in fruit in Hawaii, every auntie's kitchen has a pot of guava jelly going. It's often given as gifts or sent to the mainland. Nothing is wasted. And much of it is pressure canned since it takes less energy than water bath canning (electricity and gas are expensive in Hawaii).

* Good neighbors are a blessing. In older Hawaiian neighborhoods, it can sometimes be hard to leave the house for a walk and come back empty-handed: everyone you meet will want to give you a few bananas or mangoes since they have so much and they don't want to waste. These are the folks you want to be around in a disaster situation.

* Spam can be made to be delicious. I was a vegetarian most of my life, but the aunties taught me how to love Spam by watching them love it. As I've noted in previous posts on Spam, it's not really much different than luncheon meat in terms of its composition. Try Hawaiian Spam, eggs, and rice. It's pretty *ono* (delicious) when cooked in local Hawaiian recipes.

* Insurance pays. But only if you document what you had, so take pictures of anything you might lose in an event.

* If you don't have a gas stove, get a butane stove and keep it on hand. Being able to cook a meal will go a long way in keeping everyone sane and even happy.

* Relief agencies will come – eventually. But you must be prepared to wait a week or so and then they will be there in droves. Best to be able to handle most of your needs yourself and not wait in line even when they do come.

* Keep at least a month's supply of any prescription drugs you depend upon – like heart or diabetes medicines. The priorities for medical care will shift, and there may not be a way to get your much-needed prescription drugs.

* Finally, if there's people you care about and they are not prepared, consider preparing for them too. The aunties were always prepared for anyone – from close family to

strangers – and when I think about my years in Hawaii, it's this generous spirit I'll always remember. It's something I aspire to.

Have you lived in a place that taught you to prepare better? Who were the people who inspired you to become better prepared?

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