

Transcript begins at beginning of interview - 10:38

Jack: Hey Selco, welcome to The Survival Podcast, man.

Selco: Uh yeah and thank you for having me. Thanks

J: Um you have a really cool website we'll talk about in a bit but it's based on your experience, we're not going to be specific to where you actually are but in the Balkans area. I think a lot of Americans sort of remember hearing about this but many of them really just don't know what happened in your part of the world. So before we get into what it was like dealing with it, can you just bring people kind of up to speed on what actually happened there?

S: Uh yeah sure. Actually on one way it is a lot complicated but actually it is not. There is a lot similar examples in all the world. So uh, before all started before the war it was wonderful, one country, states inside that country, some kind of federation, actually. And because of the political changes that took place in the late 80's in all over Europe uh that country fall apart and all of those states are uh become independent. And because it was populated with mixed origins and nationalities uh war started between them, between different religions and nationalities. Actually uh, it's very very short explanation but it can be compared to lot of other regions in the world. Uh it all happened sudden actually, all happened sudden.

J: So when this first hit you personally like when you first started to deal with the repercussions, what was that like for you, what was like some of the first things that happened, and some of the first things you had to deal with personally?

S: Well, in way we all, we all think that we gonna recognize that bad things are coming but in real life, I don't know why, but most of us are not prepared for that and happened suddenly so always gonna happen suddenly. That's the key word. Whatever you are trying to prepare for it always happen suddenly. My first, uh, some of my first big sign for me of bad things when I realize that war is on. Maybe first thing that opened my eyes, it was that law enforcement it was gone, and it happened over night. I mean, one day everything was fine, it was normal life, normal country, normal city everything was normal just like any city in Europe and over night the next morning there is no police and it's civil war (inaudible). I mean if you think about the sentence "There is no police" a lot of things come from that. But that was maybe one of the first signs.

J: And uh when this all started to happen, like what were the first things that you had to do without, that disappeared?

S: So. Many things started to disappear maybe month or even two months before anything uh, sounds maybe funny but you couldn't buy a few brands of for example chocolates you couldn't find brand of cigarettes and nobody think too much about why you couldn't buy that. But, first big thing that was out and that was bad for me so running water. I mean running water, that was of course bad thing. Before water, I think, uh first thing what was gone was electricity. But everyone thought, "OK, it's gonna be come back soon" but my water is off, it's bad.

J: And um, when all of the things started breaking down, what I've seen in most situations is that the people that are the least prepared then generally go out and start to prey upon the people who have anything left. Was that something that very quickly occurred, uh, in the Balkan region?

S: Uh actually, uh, I noticed then and I think it gonna be same, whenever, whatever happen again it gonna be same. There was, like, whole army of people who are just like waiting for that event. I mean whole army of people who just uh waited to something big like that happen to go out and do things because as soon they realize that this is something that, uh, this event is something that's not gonna last for five days, uh I guess they realize that can, that they can do lots of bad things. Because it's different when something bad's going to finish in five days or something bad's going to finish in few months. So those kind of folks realize that whole situation going to last for months or even years, it just set them on another level, I mean, they become really mean. They don't have anything to lose. They are becoming animals, animals, that's correct word. So yeah, uh, pretty soon whole bunch of folks were outside yeah actually, I can I can make maybe difference between people who are, like, how you call them, bad and people who are, who just don't have anything in their houses in terms of food, medicine or whatever to feed kids. I don't know, at the end it all come to the same. They going to took stuff from you, you don't care why they going to kill and took stuff for (sic) you.

J: I read some of your writing where you said that the only way that a person could get any level of safety was to band together, that even if you were well-armed or whatever, if you were alone that you were gonna be killed or robbed or something. You had to have some level of community to have any level of security.

S: Uh, yes, if I learned anything from that period, few things. You cannot survive alone, no way. I mean, there is examples for people who are alone, yeah, so there, you cannot survive alone because of multiple reasons, for your own safety and security because no matter how many guns you have, how good secure your house, how much food you have stored, at the end, you need to go out because, because of whatever reason, you need to go out, or other people gonna come to your house and if you are alone, I mean you just don't have a chance, you need to have, you need to have your group. My case, it was family, and in most of other cases in that period, it was family, like group of families band together and that's it. And it was only way to survive, yeah, group. By the way, to survive alone inside the city I'm talking about urban, Urban area of city, alone, no, no way. But before all what I mentioned now, first thing that I learned in any case in future is you have to leave city, you just (inaudible) leave city and forget about anything else.

J: So was there still any level of trade or commerce between people, did people get together and barter for things, was there some, some sort of an economy that remained?

S: Yes, of course, all the time, uh, but, I must say, it wasn't like, uh, like, like trade that you see in any movie or (inaudible) or anything like that. It wasn't based on any kind of organization. I mean, for example, if you had, I don't know, pack of candles, and you need, whatever you need, uh some cans or something, you need to go out to ask for people uh where you can find some guy who had cans, and again biggest problem is who are going trust? So it wasn't, uh, there wasn't any, uh any kind of organization of trade, I mean, forget about picture of some kind of small market with people trading stuff. No. No way. Because as soon as you going to start something like that, people going to rob you. In my case. So nothing, nothing's organized.

J: So, I mean, even if you have food, you've gotta keep it from going bad, you've gotta cook it, and if the power's out and you're in the middle of basically a war zone, what steps did you guys take to be able to prepare your food, of what you could get anyway?

S: I mean it was pretty, pretty much on low level, like rudimentary stuff like for example you just make hole in one wall and put back exhaust pipe from the stove and that is way we cook food, I mean

sometimes, you cook outside in a small yard. It was uh rudimentary stuff most of the time we eat the stuff that is actually grass, I mean, in today's terms it's just grass. (inaudible) we connected with small amounts of bread, so what we eat, from position today, it was very bad. We were, so badly prepared. We were not prepared at that time.

J: The uh, so I guess wood became probably something at a premium then?

S: Yeah, and in city, especial after few months in city it was matter of I guess luck and you are going to find the wood because pretty soon all trees are cut down and after that people started to just make fire with whatever kind of wood they have so wood frame, doors, arc ceilings or whatever is name for that. Whatever you have, whatever is burn. First took other houses, abandoned houses and at the end I burn a lot of wooden stuff from my house. Actually most of stuff from my house I burned, because even if I had some kind of tree inside the city somewhere, it was too dangerous to go, it was easier and it was less dangerous to burn some wooden stuff in the house because pretty soon, early, soon after everything started people must realize that (inaudible) not have anybody at all. So you talk about any kind of (inaudible) tv, stereo, whatever, become junk, just junk. (inaudible)

J: Yeah, what good's a tv if you can't plug it in, right, so, if it's got some wood on it, it becomes firewood.

S: Yeah, sure, pretty soon people realize that. Doesn't matter what kind of stereo, TV and whatever electricals you have in house. It uh, much more important do you know how to make a bag (?), for example, or how to sew pants up or else something like that.

J: So it seemed like there were a lot of people armed and what was it like as far as trying to procure a firearm in your area before things went bad, I mean, because a lot of countries, it's hard to own a gun, is that the case there? And then what was it like trying to arm yourself if you were unarmed after the shit hit the fan there?

S: Well, of course, before everything started, that, I call it, false state(?), it was hard to get weapon, I mean, legally to get weapon, it's hard because all kind of law, regulation and things like that. That was one reason, another reason I think, and as far as I can remember, actually very few people wanted to have gun because security was pretty good at that time so there is not too much reason to have guns before. After everything started, I thinking first maybe 15 or 20 days for confusion, it was pretty much easy to get a gun if you have enough brain or courage maybe to go out and look for the gun because in beginning uh, three weeks or that chaos a lot of the seller just probably (inaudible) anything you like. Abandoned crash, I mean you can usually go in there first, you can easily go inside there and find what else you want if somebody didn't took it already. So yeah, in first weeks, you can have as much, you can easily find a gun, and anyway, you can find a gun if you have something interesting to trade. I mean it was not situation like all kind of weapon were lying in the street, not like that, no, but if you find, if you have food or anything interesting you could trade for gun.

J: Did any time, did ammunition become kind of a barter tool? I mean, there's a lot of people here that think that type of a scenario, that if everybody's got a gun, ammo has value, it's storable, so was it a barter tool, just ammo?

S: Yep, it was very very usual to barter ammunition and in this my case it was on some way easy because I guess politics and whatever before we here have Eastern we have Eastern manufacture of weaponry tools, maybe four or five types of weapon with two or three types of ammunition. So it

wasn't, it was not problem, I mean could readily see some kind of should I call exotic type of gun, it was (inaudible) those types of rifles and gun, that's it. So whenever somebody asks me, "OK, what do you think what type of gun I gonna need(?) in a collapse?" The easiest to answer is, and best answer is, whatever ammunition and weapon is usual in your area, just get that weapon, no matter how bad or good is, it is, just get that weapon because you're gonna need lot of ammunition, (inaudible) whatever available, in your area.

J: What were some of the other things that were common barter implements, what were like the most valuable things you could have when it came to trading for things you needed?

S: Well, I can say that, (inaudible) I guess people traded alcohol, cigarettes, alcohol because you can trade it, always at that time(?) almost like some kind of second value, second money. Uh, cigarettes, alcohol, coffee, and uh, small stuff, uh I mean, of course, (banging in background) (something)'s valuable but uh, much easier to trade, I dunno, fire sticks or lighters. Carry that in your pocket and talk than to carry uh big cans of fuel. Very small things, small usable things like batteries, lighters, candles, so, (inaudible) for lighters, stuff like that. Small things.

J: Now, a lot of people here feel like, if things ever really really break down that the cities are gonna be the worst place to be and their plan is to, you know, to bug out, to get out of the highly populated areas. Was there any place that was significantly safer than the cities because the one thing is you do have less population but it's easier to steal and rob when there's, you know, some strength in numbers thing going on there, and the other thing is, there's generally, even in a catastrophe, there's more resources in a city. So what was it like for people that you know kind of got out of Dodge, so to speak, were there any safe havens at all?

S: My case, at that time, it was much better at the, uh, countryside or rural places, you call it, like that. I can say that those kinds of places like very very small villages I think they were not so, wasn't so interesting for whoever wants to rob them and that's one reason and other reason is people are much more, much better organized, those small places, specially here, because here, 90% of villages this region, are like, uh, relatives, I mean, lot connected things inside village, so it's much, it's very too much easier to organize like 200 or 300 folks that they are all relatives between them than to organize, I dunno, one street inside a town because uh, when that started, everybody was enemy. Inside town, except people inside your small group, inside your house, everybody else, your house neighbor, you didn't know what to think about them, of him. So you don't know what he have inside his house, his son hungry, is he going to rob you or whatever, I dunno, like that track...

J: Got ya. Uh, what about like, I would imagine like, the medical system, hospitals like that just fell apart so you know, what were, what was it like for people that were injured, sick and how did you try to deal with that?

S: Well, uh, you can say that medical system fall down to dark ages in those times. I mean, hospitals worked very very short time after everything happened and very soon, hospital just collapsed, so whole medical system just collapsed. I mean there used to be some kind of like for example, you could hear in that time there is some kind of medical station in other part of town and you could go over there and see that there is nothing over there or you could find some kind of (inaudible) guy he is going to treat you whatever you had need to be treated for, for few cans of food or something like that. Uh medical system fell down to middle ages and to, I can say, old grannies, herbs and stuff like that I mean. Even when people had knowledge about medicine, without any kind of supply, you could do so little. Small cut can kill if you don't have antibiotics. So it was gone. Medical system was gone.

J: After, after living through all this, if you saw the signs of something like this happening again, or I imagine you just, you stay prepared now. If someone had 3 months, 6 months to try to get prepared for a really bad situation, what are the main things you would tell them to do to be prepared?

S: Well first, based on my experience, you need to go out of the town and to have some kind of, yeah to have bug-out location in some kind of village or rural place and you cannot survive alone. You need to have that place, in that place you need to have your group, your family or whatever, you need to have group of people, 10, 15 people at least, something like that. And no matter how much food, how much medical supplies, how much water or whatever you have, sooner or later, you are going to waste all of that, you are going to eat all of that, and then you are going to need to go out and look for all that. So if you have 10 or 15 people in your group, just share knowledge between members. I mean, it is good to know lot of small stuff but everybody or few inside your group need to be some kind of expert for something. So in my case, my group, I have man who is a expert for doing stuff on ground, on field, I mean, with plants and stuff like that, food. We have expert in medicine, expert for weapons, expert for everything that needs to be around in that time. I mean it is good every man knows how to shoot, how to treat wounds, I mean, lot of simple stuff but you need to have experts inside that group.

J: What, uh, obviously there was a lot of death and I think that one thing that a lot of people in the civilized world take for granted is that when you die somebody prepares the body or cremates the body and then there's a burial. Um, that would probably be a pretty low priority for normal funeral services when the city's in a state of war within its own borders. So, you know, death has many problems because it can spread disease and just the overall sanitation and all so how do, did society deal with the dead in that scenario?

S: I mean, uh, to die, to be shot, uh I mean to be gone in that time, uh, it becomes something like, everyday thing, and the smell, stench of death, in that time, it was everyday thing, too. I mean, when you are talking about diseases, I can say, I can be 99% sure that everybody in that region, in that time, suffered some kind of disease related to, to poor hygiene, everything, this because I remember everybody my group has in some kind of period have, uh diarrhea, like 15 days or 20 days something like that. Diarrhea or vomiting. In that time, you couldn't do anything, you couldn't say, "OK, this is disease that is spreading with rats." We got a diarrhea and that's it. There are a lot of way too much important stuff to think about than about that diarrhea. But yes, also, to that question that poor hygiene kills a lot of people, even the best people, I mean if somebody have a death inside his house, I mean some of his group, somebody from his group died or get killed or whatever, (inaudible) bury that man at closest place to his house, safest place, very close to house or some kind of park or garden or whatever. And lot of guys just, I don't know how to put this, lot of guys just died and stay on streets or inside houses for weeks or months, so you can imagine the stench. So it was pretty, pretty bad.

J: When you were dealing with people looking for help, for barter, what have you, I mean obviously you have your own group, but like you've said many times now, it ends up where you need to deal with other people. How were you able to identify who was, you know, a friend, and who was an enemy, how, like was it a network like this guy knows this guy so you know his group's OK? Were there alliances like that? How did you manage that because it seems to me that it would be really easy for somebody to say, "Yeah we want to barter with you or whatever" and then you know, kind of do the sneak attack thing, so how did you guys sort that out?

S: Of course. Uh, allow me to say it wasn't any kind of organization like that in that situating(?) thing, also it was most of the time based on (inaudible) word on the street. Yeah, if you need something, it

was your chances to get that based on a lot of word on the street so just look for any kind of usable information, and after you get that information, then you need to go and check that information, so go along and check that information and never take too much stuff so candles, take few candles if you are carrying or some kind of food, very small amounts of food first talk with that person, see what kind of man he is, if you can trust him. After you finish some kind of negotiations with him, then you gonna check, then you gonna negotiate some kind of place in town in street where you are going to exchange that stuff. And I never, I never trade anything inside my house or in front of my house, I never was too (inaudible) with people who I going to trade, so they can't see inside my house, see that stuff I has, so always out of your house, always out of your street so. Reason is that, maybe some of them gonna think that you have lots of that food stuff inside your house.

J: Um, from what I've read of your postings and all, it seems like it was, if you had to go somewhere, you use darkness, go out at night, right? So one of the things I've always thought is very useful to have, uh, to deal with a breakdown is night vision equipment. I imagine there isn't a lot of it there, it's a lot more, uh, available now. But would you say that would be a huge advantage for someone to have night vision equipment?

S: Uh, yeah, I mean, uh the uh, whenever I talk about this and write about this I always mention that you need to keep (inaudible) a low profile, when you are preparing for this, (inaudible) I must admit if I had that night vision, it would be such good thing at that time. It would help me so much so answer is, "Yes, of course."

J: Um, I guess another belief that people seem to have is that if you have society fall apart there will absolutely be no authority whatsoever, like there'll be no police or what have you. I imagine that was true for a time, how did that get re-established? What was, you know what I mean? So like, people will rob because there's no one to come take them away, arrest them or put them in jail. Did that just happen in some areas or did it pretty much happen everywhere?

S: Actually, it not so simple. It's a little bit complicated but at the end it comes to the same. When I say that, and when people say that all kind of society going down, no any kind of law or stuff like that, actually we don't have, in really small region, like city, for example you gonna have like 30 or 40 or even hundred groups and each group is going to claim that they are the law. So each of the, uh, you can count that members of each of that group gonna come to your house with statement, I don't know, "We are, we need to take food from you because of the cause or whatever" or we gonna recruit you because of that. Actually that absence of society means there gonna be hundreds of groups that they are claiming that they are society actually or law.

J: So (laughs) so that brings up a whole new level of, of danger that, so you would have people that would use false credentials but I would imagine some of the actual people with true authority were fairly dangerous as well?

S: Uh true authority, my case, true authority were really down, I mean, you can, you say that authority is down but it was fierce(?) so yes all kind of people claim that they had authority but you could clearly see that they are simple gang, gang who claim that they are new government, new law or revolutionary guard, you can call them whatever, they call themselves lot of different things but in reality it's a gang. But people expect that gang is looking like gangs from the movies but in most situations, no, they are not looking like that. Actually they are looking like they are trying to, like build(?) up.

J: Yeah, yeah, so when things started to be somewhat put back together, structure started to come back

in, what were some of the first things that had to be done in an attempt to restore order, and I imagine it didn't happen like, one day it's chaos and the next day it's back to some semblance of order, it was like a transition? So can you talk about what that was like?

S: Yes, actually, that kind of transition. I mean, first period was, you can compare it to Wild West because, my case, international troops were came and forced all kinds of different sides to sign truce but in real life, on the terrain, all kinds of hundreds and hundreds of different groups, they didn't want to break with their kind of life because they like that kind of life, so troops needed to be brute force and for months after that there used to be all kinds of groups hiding in some kind of region somewhere, that they are (inaudible) some kind of alcoves, something like that Wild West, maybe lots of for, maybe year, you could (not) go freely in some regions because you driving car and some kind of some region of country you can expect on route that jump, that 15 guys jump out with rifles and rob you. It was for year almost.

J: What's it like today? I mean what I've seen, it's probably, the people, their belief systems and things have changed, but it looks like society's relatively stable in the region today. Is there still some, you know, things left over from the conflict, as far as the way people interact with each other, or is it business as usual?

S: It is complicated, but (inaudible) state before the war, I can say that before the war, this region look like almost another region in Europe, and after the war, this region again (?) look like some regions in the world where you have like 50% unemployed, 45, something like that. For example, you still have some kind of hate and rage lying under, beneath the surface so you can feel that, you can sense that, and when you add all of this bad economic situation on that, yeah, it look like it going to explode again. I mean on the surface looks good, much like any other modern state, I guess, on surface. But beneath, look like it going to explode again. But it's nothing, nothing, I can compare economic situation, I don't know, Greece maybe, and on that bad economic situation add (inaudible) hate and rage and bunch of the city killed, revenge(?) thing...

J: I guess when a region has been through something like yours has that the potential for a second break down and for it to get really bad, really fast, is actually higher because the soft people are gone, right? It's the hardened people that made it through that already, have already dealt with a situation like this, and if it degrades again, you have experienced people, right, instead of, like, in Greece, there's not a whole lot of guns owned by the society, they haven't had any major conflict on their soil in, you know, since I guess parts of World War II maybe. But in your society if things start to go wrong, then they're going to probably go wrong faster?

S: Uh, yes, definitely because of multiple reasons, a nation already, an army of people that they just wait for some sort of collapse so they can go out and do their things, robbing and everything, and of course, in this region after the war, there is a lot of weapon everywhere and I guess there is a great percent of people who want that actually (inaudible) But on other side you have young generation who don't know who don't remember that at all, that period, that war and some people who want to live like young people again just like who lived young people my time. (Inaudible) going in circles I guess.

J: So you have a website, it's SHTFschool.com and can you tell folks a little bit about that, what they'll be able to find there?

S: Yeah, actually, it is site about, short and simple, I wrote and speak about what happened to me, our lives, going through all that what we stay society, how people get through all of that, my family, my

neighbors, my friends. What they can expect, not if, when that happens to them, or everybody because I agree we all need to be prepared, (inaudible) I mean, materials whatever, we need to prepare our mindset for that because there is a short period when collapse happen. I remember that, my time, and it's up to person how is going to react. If time of reaction is too long, you can get killed. He's something like, (inaudible) surprise, that bad he can attack very fast in situation. I remember people who adapt very good situation, they went very good through all that period. Another folks, who (inaudible) to adapt, both of them just died, so people need to read, how that occurred in real life. (inaudible)

J: And you have a, like a course people can sign up for and take, right?

S: Yep, yep, I have, all of the stuff that happened to me, I mean everything.

J: In fact, I'm seeing you have like lists, things to stock up on, how to lay things out, how to set up defense of your home, very very intense stuff and obviously stuff we know works because you're still here.

S: Yes, yes, I guess it was first part of was second stage how it happened to me and how I went all that and there's a part about how my, how I prepared next time because I wanted that some, somethings just not war, I mean. You can agree with me, or people can agree with me or say I'm "he's not right." I'm just writing how things were for me in real life and what works, worked, and what didn't work because not useful for me that time

J: I've got one final question for you, it's really just kind of an off-the-cuff question, like a personal opinion. Like, I've had Fernando Aguirre through the economic collapse in Argentina and basically he spent the last seven years of his life figuring out how to get out of Argentina. He wanted to come to America but in the end he ended up choosing Ireland, and uh, have you thought about leaving or have you just basically decided, "I've lived through this Hell and I'm gonna stay here" and, you know, what are your thoughts on that?

S: Well, uh, I go, uh I went through all of the stage, uh, I change my opinions, multiple times. Right now, I think that next time, it's not going to be some small region and I (inaudible) myself here, I'm talking this area about war, I'm talking about collapse, reason is not necessarily important. Important thing is whole thing going to collapse and I think next time it not going to be of some small region or my country or Europe or whatever. I think that all is going to something happen, all is going to collapse so that pretty much is not important. Where you are, I mean in terms of geography, in terms of state, much more important how, how you are prepared for that.

J: Awesome, well, unfortunately I agree with you. I say unfortunate because I do think that the next major thing that we're gonna deal with is gonna be more of a global economic situation. In some ways if you're in a place where you're already organized and already know what to do, you might actually be able to make a better stand and with that, I thank you for being with us today. And I definitely recommend that people check out your website. I will put links in it, it today's show notes. The course that Selco has, I believe is \$29, I'm pretty sure that's the number, because I just bought it and I'd highly recommend to the audience that you check it out and I just don't think there's a substitute for learning from a person who's been through there. I know that English is not your first language so it was a little tough getting through this interview but I have to appreciate it and I thank you so much for being with us and sharing with us what you dealt with in the real world instead of some type of Hollywood fantasy so thank you for being with us today.

S: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. Thanks.

(Closing remarks)