

ESCAPE TO NEW JERSEY; or, getting out of NYC on foot or bicycle, and you may have to settle for Long Island

Living or working in NYC can be rewarding. But as both a police state and an island, it also poses some unique challenges, challenges we believe will be magnified greatly should an emergency arise.

We live in New Jersey, but we work and socialize in New York City.

Since we moved to this area, we have experienced an earthquake, a “snowpocalypse” and two hurricanes; the most recent being super storm sandy, which wiped out key transportation and electrical grid infrastructure throughout the tri-state area; some of which is still being repaired, like Hoboken station. Additionally, New York is the unfortunate target of terrorism, even as recent as this October, man was charged with trying to blow up the Federal Reserve building. On 9/11, we walked with thousands of New Yorkers, all escaping the city, crossing the myriad bridges on bicycle and foot.

It’s easy to forget that Manhattan is an island with restricted access dependent entirely on a system of tunnels, bridges and water taxis for access. Couple this with the fact that there are about 66,000 people per square mile and you find yourself in a potentially difficult and dangerous situation should a disaster occur.

With this realization, we decided that we needed to assess the situation and determine an emergency plan with the objective of getting us off the island and to our home 23 miles away without access to personal vehicles. Like any large, complex problem, we decided to break it down and create a critical path to make a plan. We began w 6 questions:

- 1. How will we find each other?

- 2. How will we communicate with one another?
- 3. What modes of transportation can we plan for?
- 4. What are the best exit point(s) off the islands to get us to NJ?
- 5. How long will it take us to get home; best and worst scenarios and how will we navigate home?
- 6. What should our get home bags (GHB) contain and what are the legal restrictions we need to be mindful of?

Below, I will outline our conclusions, but it will be great to get your collective perspectives on the plan, anything that might help us refine/upgrade, etc.

How will we find each other?

We often occupy different parts of the city at the same time, so we decided we should predetermine several potential meeting spots. So we segmented Manhattan into two zones, North and South; Brooklyn into three zones, Northwest, Southeast, and South toward Beaches; Queens into two zones, East and West, with the rule that if an issue or event happen in one zone, we would meet at whatever spot we determined for the zone that is designated as the “safe zone.” If there is no safe zone, and we are facing a general evacuation of all zones, then within each zone, we have chosen a spot to meet, always places close to the river but away from popular tourist attractions. From this spot, we would assess our exit options off the island.

There is the reality that one of us might not be able to make the meeting point for a myriad of reasons. With that in mind, we established a “waiting window” that if one of us didn’t show up within that window of time, the other would start navigating towards home alone with the hope that the other would make contact later and rendezvous along the route home, assuming we are able to.

How will we communicate with one another?

When the earthquake hit in August of 2011, it was impossible to make call with your cell phone. Texts had a 50/50 chance of getting through. The landlines seemed to work fine but if you were calling a cellphone from a landline, odds are you would get a busy signal. Also, if there was a more dubious situation, a common tactic for police are to shut down cell service as a means of crippling signals that might be used for coordination and/or other outcomes. Walkie-talkies are an option but with all the tall buildings, success for long-range contact will most likely be slim.

Our first objective is to establish contact with each other before obtaining contact with anyone else. If communication is impaired, we realized that we need to start heading to our predetermined meeting place.

If we are both in Manhattan, we determined the area of Manhattan most likely to maintain cell service is the Hudson river bank around 42nd. So if we are both in Manhattan but not together, we will leave from wherever we are at the time of Event X, cutting straight west over to the Hudson river bank as soon as possible, regardless of which meeting zone we pick, so that we would maximize the ability of either grabbing a cell phone signal from the NJ side, or getting a better signal for the walkie-talkie, to contact each other. In Coastal East Brooklyn and Coastal South Brooklyn, we have familiarized our phones with the wifi in many places. All along the East River and the beaches, at every waterfront area, we have potential wifi. So we head to the nearest waterfront to maximize potential cell phone or walkie-talkie signal. In Queens, we determined the best likelihood of signal would be places we know in Sunnyside and Woodside where our phones have the wifi. If a signal is going anywhere in that neighborhood, we will find it. Also, an above-ground LIRR train leaves from Woodside to Long Island and beach points. Accessing any

beach or waterfront points increases likelihood of encountering an escape boat.

If we are distant places, we go to the coast most directly between us to try to make contact, unless that's heading one of us into extra danger.

What modes of transportation can we plan for?

There are three segments to the journey home we needed to plan transportation for:

- 1. Getting to the meeting spot
- 2. Traveling from the meeting spot to exit point of whichever borough or island we are on
- 3. Traveling from exit point back to New Jersey

What modes of transportation we might have access to, in order of likelihood of finding:

- 1. Feet
- 2. Folding Bikes
- 3. Good Samaritan with car/Hitch Hike/pay off driver
- 4. Limited Public Transportation
- 5. Pay a taxi driver
- 6. Pay a boater to ferry us

Each one of these options will depend on the severity of the emergency. If the emergency is minor, the odds of leveraging taxis, boats and public transportation are high. If the emergency is major, we may be stuck with feet, folding bikes, or possibly a Good Samaritan.

We came to the following conclusions:

- 1. Feet: We will be doing a LOT of walking and we need to take this into consideration with our GHB
- 2. Folding Bikes: folding bike with small cargo rack: \$175

Three major concerns with folding bikes:

- 1. Would the bikes make us a target in a major emergency?
- 2. What if one of us didn't have access to our bike and had to proceed on foot?
- 3. Could two of us fit on a tiny bike?

We are hesitant about the subway option, based on the post-Sandy transit experience. People losing their tempers, yelling, etc. So we find ourselves avoiding the subways as we reason through this. One thing we also realized, we both prefer to stay above ground in an emergency.

What are the best exit point(s) off Manhattan to get to NJ?

Manhattan is 13.4 miles long and 2.3 miles wide. There are 14 bridges and 5 tunnels accessible by car and in some cases foot (the tunnels don't allow for pedestrians under normal circumstances). There are another 11 train tunnels and one train bridge. For access directly to NJ, here are our options:

- 1. George Washington Bridge (GWB)
- 2. NY Water Taxi to Hoboken
- 3. Staten Island Ferry (SIF)
- 4. Holland Tunnel
- 5. Lincoln Tunnel

The best option is the GWB followed by the Water Taxi or SIF. The tunnels possess a unique danger; carbon monoxide poisoning. Even though the underwater tunnels are vented, the fumes build up very quickly. One would need a pretty good respirator to make it across without getting seriously ill.

GWB is the best option because that area's population is smaller and the chances of finding a car, Good Samaritan, and/or working public transportation will go up. The Water Taxi or any ferry is likely to be overrun with people looking to get out.

What are the best exit point(s) off Brooklyn to get to NJ?

We divided Brooklyn into 3 zones based on where we are likely to be: coastal south, coastal west, and inland northwest. We realized in terms of avenues of escape, it makes the most sense to treat northwest Brooklyn as a part of LIC/Sunnyside/Woodside. For access to NJ from the rest of Brooklyn, here are our options:

- 1. JFK Airport
- 2. Verrazano Bridge to Staten Island to Outerbridge Crossing
- 3. Waterfront communities w boaters, Howard Beach
- 4. River Ferry Docks, NY Water Taxi at Brooklyn Bridge, Staten Island Ferry, and commuter boat stops
- 5. Path to NJ

If the airport works, we'll take it. But we suspect airports will be shut down in a crisis. The best option is walking across the Verrazano if we are south enough. If we are near Sunset Park or beaches, hoping for a Good Samaritan boater somewhere along the waterfront. Water Taxis and commuter boats may work, but may be overrun. If necessary, we

can hotwire a boat.

Again, the Path train would be a last resort for us, as we do not prefer to go underground in an emergency.

What are the best exit point(s) off Queens to get to NJ?

We realized in terms of avenues of escape, it makes the most sense to treat inland northwest Brooklyn as a part of LIC/Sunnyside/Woodside, because it is only about a 20 minute bike ride away.

- 1. Lagaardia Airport
- 2. LIC Ferry dock; Anable Basin dock
- 3. LIRR to Long Island, then to boats, waterfront communities
- 4. Walk to Long Island, then to boats, waterfront communities

If the airport works, we'll take it. But we suspect airports will be shut down in a crisis. The LIRR runs above ground from Woodside all the way to Montauk. It's not New Jersey, but it's far away, and we would hope for Good Samaritan boaters or pilots from there. If the LIRR is not an option, the next best option is walking either to Long Island to look for boats, or to the East River for boaters at the 2 docks.

How long will it take us to get home; best and worst scenarios and how will we navigate home?

There are several likely scenarios:

- 1. We have to walk to, and then across, the GWB, where we will have access to cabs and/or public transportation in Fort Lee, NJ. This will take between 3.5-5 hours to make it across assuming delays. Assuming traffic back home once we catch a ride, another

- 1-2 hours making it a conservative total of 7 hours
- 2. We have to walk to and then across the GWB and then all the way home. Assuming only minor issues or delays, this could take anywhere from 10-20 hours.
 - 3. Boats might land in NJ anywhere from Fort Lee to Bayonne, or South Amboy to Asbury Park. Boat rides can be up to 3 hours, and we'll have to get home from any of those places, either by walking or finding a bus, train, taxi or Good Samaritan. 7-20 hours.
 - 4. From Queens, if the East River options work, a 2 hour walk from the meeting point, followed by a 2-3 hour boat ride, followed by either a taxi or a walk home. 7-20 hours.
 - 5. From Queens, if the East River options fail, then walking east is the best option. If airports are functioning, that may be one destination. If airports are shut down, we walk toward Kew Gardens and stop at River Fund NY to see if ways out are launching from there (3 hours). Otherwise, keep walking and search the countless bay boating communities south of Merrick Road (10-20 hours). Hope for a Good Samaritan; hotwire a boat if that's the only option. 2-3 hours boat ride, then getting home from NJ coast. 20-36 hours.

The net/net here is that we believe that we could possibly not be heard from for 2 whole days or as little 7 hours. Obviously, the time of day we evacuate will also have impacts into timing and also how we prepare our GHB. We decided to account for the time using walking as our primary transportation option, to set a more realistic/conservative estimation for friends and family. It could save time if we have use of our folding bikes. But if three days go by and we aren't home, it is probably time for family and friends to start making some assumptions and making decisions.

What should our get home bags (GHB) contain and what are the legal restrictions we need to be mindful of?

The topic of GHB's have been discussed ad nauseam and we read every word of it to build our bags. We built our bags around a 2-3 day walk, assuming 1-2 overnights with limited access to food and water. Good shoes, extra socks, medical, food, water purification, etc are all accounted for. We chose the Big Berkey Water Filter System, the Doom and Bloom Mini Trauma Bag, and will carry 2 Big Bully Brand MRE's each. GHB's should be both waterproof and slashproof. Our bags are Pacsafe Venturesafe 15L. We used them on a trip through South Asia to test their skills. A Plus!

Here are other items we have in our GHB's:

- 1. Big Flashlight: Heavy and useful for light, can zip tie onto the bike for a head light
- 2. Hiking Axe: Be aware axes occupy a gray area in the law that I will explain below.
- 3. Tactical Gloves: To protect hands for climbing, riding, weather, encounters w shrapnel, questionable substances, etc.
- 4. Steel Toe Boots, well worn with hiking miles on them: Good support for long walks, weather, or self-defense: kick to the head, knee or groin.
- 5. Inflatable life vests: in the event a boat we are on sinks or one of us is pushed off due to overcrowding.
- 6. Reliable paper maps of New York streets and waterways.
- 7. Walkie-talkies: to communicate with each other if networks are down
- 8. Battery pack w appropriate cords for flashlights, phones, and walkie-talkies.
- 9. Swiss Army knife: but you need to be careful what you carry. More on that below.

Living in NYC can be rewarding. But as both a police state and an island, it also poses some unique challenges, challenges we believe will be magnified greatly should an emergency arise. We decided to assume

our bags will be searched, either by transit police, NYC police, or military, depending on the location. Penn Station and Grand Central, for example, have all three. So we have to be careful what we carry.

If you want to keep it legal, forget guns. In NY, you can't carry them anywhere; concealed or not. In NJ, if you have a fire arm in your car and you can't prove you are heading to a gunsmith or shooting range, you will be arrested. Even BB guns, extendable batons and pepper sprays are illegal or require permits. There is also no reciprocity; a permit for pepper spray in NY won't hold in NJ. One also can't license the same can of pepper spray in NJ and NY and transport it between states.

Here is an excerpt of NYC law:

A person is guilty of criminal possession of a weapon in the fourth degree when:

- (1) He possesses any firearm, electronic dart gun, electronic stun gun, gravity knife, switchblade knife, pilum ballistic knife, metal knuckle knife, cane sword, billy, blackjack, bludgeon, metal knuckles, chuka stick, sand bag, sandclub, wrist-brace type slingshot or slingshot, shirken or "Kung Fu star"; or
- (2) He possesses any dagger, dangerous knife, dirk, razor, stiletto, imitation pistol, or any other dangerous or deadly instrument or weapon with intent to use the same unlawfully against another.

Whether a "knife" is a "dangerous" knife may be determined on the basis of three alternative considerations: one, its own characteristics which show that it is primarily intended for use as a weapon; second, a modification, which converts what would otherwise be a utensil into a weapon; and third, the circumstances of the possession which may reveal that the possessor considers it a weapon and not a utilitarian tool. Because there are axes specifically made for hiking, we bought those, and are keeping the tags attached as proof of our nonviolent intentions.

We only want to survive. Survival is the only goal.