



## IN MY ROOM

Some days are cold, some days are hot, some days it's windy, and some days it's not.

As a transient homeless person walking America for almost two years, I've been trying to figure out what kind of weather has been the most difficult for me to deal with.

Both the 2002 and 2003 summers were very hot in the western half of the U.S. Carrying 60 to 90 pounds on my back with temperatures in the upper 90's up to 114 degrees F. in the shade made it almost impossible to walk. Temperatures are twenty degrees higher out in direct sunlight, and much higher than that on my feet walking the black asphalt. It's easy to see why one can fry an egg on the pavement under those conditions.

Some backpackers have a hard time understanding why my pack can weigh in the 80's sometimes. Backpacking isn't about carrying the kitchen sink, it's about traveling light. Most days the past two summers I've drunk two to three gallons of water. At 8.5 pounds to the gallon I'll let you do the math. Water weighs and is hard to get out in the boonies, thus my pack gets heavy.

I made a decision not to drink any "wild" water unless it looked and smelled good and came from a tiny source above human activity. At least ten times I've drunk creek water and not gotten sick, but I cringe at the thought of drinking most of the water encountered so far. There isn't a purifying tablet or filtering device I'd feel comfortable with cleaning up some water. You can do it, but not me, thank you. Besides, those devices add more weight to my pack and I don't trust them either. Many times I've eaten snow in the mountains to keep hydrated.

I remember walking the railroad tracks in California next to the snowmelt-fed Sacramento River during July 2002. Praise God the river was there during high heat as I'd jump in for a couple minutes and get cool. There wasn't any need to dry off because the sun would dry me up real quick. Then it was walk another hour and do it again. Praise God I'd been thrown off Interstate 5 where I might have burnt up without the river.

The summer of 2003 in Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas was a little different. High temperatures in the upper 90's to lower 100's happened every day for two months straight, including higher humidities than in California and Oregon the year prior. There wasn't any clean-looking water to jump into. The drought turned even the rivers into some mucky, filthy, smelly, restroom for livestock. Nevertheless, I did jump in a few times. Once I emerged smellier and yuckier than when I entered. At least some of my smell, filth, and sweat were replaced by something else. If I have to choose my own smell or something else, from now on I'm choosing mine. Man, it was bad.

Big time thunderstorms followed me in late spring and again during late August and early September. This made finding a place to sleep much more difficult because sleeping under trees, in ditches, culverts, and porous-roofed abandoned buildings weren't acceptable. It's already scary not knowing where I'll sleep, but when many of my prime spots are doubly dangerous due to thunderstorms it's past scary! Once I ran through a muddy immature cornfield to get into a tractor cab in order to escape a big thunderstorm during daylight hours.

The Arkansas River was a great breeding ground for mosquitoes the summer of 2003. One night it



The journey began in Tucson, Arizona with a desert rainbow,,,

was so hot, but with a breeze, that I didn't set up my insect-proof tent. It's harder for me to hide from those that call 9-1-1 on me when my tent is pitched. An hour after sunset the winds quit, and the "geetos" came out, thousands of them. They put a wuppin' on my naked body while I set the tent up in the dark, sweating to death. Those little bloodsuckers left me a present of West Nile Virus. This made walking even more difficult as I felt like I was gonna die. I praise God for carrying me as He does when I let Him. Why do we have to wait so long and get into such dire straights before we give up our "I can do it" attitude? You don't have to answer that, it's written for me.

Last summer (2002) was the rice paddies walk in California. I remember one night the low temperature was 80 after a high of 110 that afternoon. I didn't pitch my tent and slept on a picnic table. That night there wasn't any sleep for fear of not having any blood left in the morning. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of the millions of mosquitoes flying around were killed by me. I had welts all over for a week. This was the night I learned to set my tent up if mosquitoes are around. Praise God only half of them are out for blood.

High winds are usually a pain. Precipitation can blow into places way out of the way if it's windy enough, which means I get wet. My pack acts like a sail and most times the wind isn't at my back. As winds are blowing towards my

right shoulder tractor-trailer "wind wakes" become very dangerous to this walker. When the temperatures are high I don't mind a breeze, but it quickly turns into a wind chill when temperatures get below 50 degrees. Dust blows into my eyes and lungs during dry times. Thunderstorms and tornado winds can be very dangerous, too.

Until today (December 9, 2003) the heat has been more of a problem than the cold for me. I used to say I can only take so many clothes off walking the highways of the U.S.A. and can always add another layer when it's cold.

I've often thought cold was worse than heat for those truly homeless. Truly homeless meaning those that aren't walking across America for Jesus Christ, or to see if they can do it, that is survive on the streets, in the woods, or wherever, for awhile. Truly homeless meaning one is about out of options, so one is homeless. It's been said many of us are only a couple paychecks from being on the street or living out of our car. Some people can't understand why the homeless just don't get their act together. That kind of reasoning is right up there with asking why human beings aren't perfect.

Without adequate shelter and/or bedding most winters north of the Mason-Dixon line are tough and life-threatening. Even warm places in the winter like Miami, Florida, or San Diego, California, can have life-threatening cold snaps.

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