



No debating this

It was dark with thunderstorm chances at fifty percent after midnight. I'd already walked twenty two miles and was really whupped. All afternoon a dry safe place hadn't appeared no matter how much I looked and prayed for one.

Finally there was a bridge over the four lane highway I'd been walking. Would it be a good one with a flat ledge underneath, or would it be the type that was ledgeless? Climbing up the steep incline to reach my resting place for the night was difficult as usual with fatigue and seventy pounds on my back.

Yes!! A two foot wide ledge appeared. The only thing left to do was take my little flashlight and check it out to see if the bridge expansion joint allowed water to flow onto the ledge from above or was it the dry type.

Bummer!! The ledge was as clean as your dinner table before setting it. Experience has taught me clean means much water action happens during storms.

It was time to head into a little Missouri town off the highway to beg for a place to stay as darkness makes it almost impossible to find a suitable sleeping place.

I don't like begging. Never have and might not ever change. I've only begged for a place to stay about ten times on this walk with mixed results. Being directly rejected by a Christian church or a pastor is quite painful, thus I have to be in a difficult situation to beg.

About a half mile from the bridge were the outskirts of town, and there was a convenience store conveniently there. Upon entering the store, I asked to fill some of my water bottles and also asked if

there were any churches in town.

To my surprise, the store employees were polite, showed me where I could get cold drinking water from the soda fountain, and cheerfully said there were three churches in town.

Teresa and Shannon showed interest as I told them about the walk for Jesus Christ, and showed them a newspaper article about the walk. I asked if any of the church pastors lived in town hoping that one of them would give me a place to stay while the storms rolled through later on. Teresa told me she was a member of one of the churches and thought sure her pastor would help me and thus called him. After a few minutes she informed me her pastor would take care of me. "Praise God!" were my words of joy.

After thanking them it was time to hit the road. I had to walk another half mile through town to reach his home and immediately noticed many presidential campaign signs on his front lawn. Either he was a sign collector or there was no doubt who the residents were voting for cause the signs all had the same names on them.

The Christian denomination isn't important. I've had both positive and negative experiences with all of them including my own Church of the Brethren. The names on the campaign signs aren't important either.

After knocking on the door it was quickly answered, and the pastor came outside. I asked for a place to stay in the church building. He seemed to be busy, and I was grateful for his time with me. A ride was offered with the town's Chief of Police twelve miles to the next town where there is a ministerial association plan in place to



Seen when walking through the heartland

put people like me up in a motel.

I again stated I was walking across America and couldn't accept rides unless it was an absolute emergency and thanked him for his offer, but I had to refuse it. Besides I said, "When we ship people to a motel, there isn't any relationship going on." Again I asked to stay in the church building. Even with the newspaper article and my card with the 800 number and web site information he said no because of insurance reasons.

Even letting him know I'd stayed in another church building of his exact denomination nine days earlier because of impending storms had no effect. I offered to get the pastor's phone number out of my journal so he could find out we spent hours chit chatting and having a good old time.

He informed me he was very busy and couldn't give me any more of his time. Also, none of the other churches could put me up either.

Dejected, it was time to leave. I stopped at the pay phone in town to make a couple of calls and there next to my journal was a brochure from the church nine days earlier. Praise God, and I headed back to show I'd been there.

No one answered the door even though the occupants knew I was there, so I left the brochure in the door. While glancing in the window from the steps to see if anyone saw me (they did) I noticed the probable reason for the pastor being busy. It was September 30, 2004, and their big television had

the first Bush/Kerry debates on.

Again I left, and it seemed to a dumb old man like me if someone is advertising which politician they are for, the debates probably wouldn't change anything. I figured there was no debating that he put the debates over time with me.

It was time to head back to the convenience store and fill a few more water bottles up and head to the bridge as that was my only viable alternative.

Entering the store, I was about to let Teresa and Shannon know what had happened, but they apologized to me before I could say a word. The Chief of Police had already called them, told them what had happened, and asked them if they were being harassed too.

They apologized many times for me being treated in an un-Christian-like way. A minute or two later the Police Chief came in and wanted to talk to me. I said "OK", and he said "Outside". I asked "Why not in here?", and he said "Outside where we'd be alone."

After thirty minutes of harassment by a Christian of another denomination Police Chief it was obvious the time was right for my leaving town. He had every reason in the book for a low life like me to move on. People like me weren't wanted in his town. They'd worked hard to clean it up and I had two options, take the ride to the next town or get walking. He even told me he called the 800 number and left a message for Don

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