



The Perfect Place

Because I don't stay in motels, campgrounds, or shelters I've become somewhat of an expert regarding nighttime safe places. Being homeless means my definition of safe may not be the same as yours. Money or the lack of money along with the neighborhood in which we reside can affect how safe we are. Least on some kind of a physical level those things can make a difference.

I've slept in ditches, culverts, abandoned buildings, boats, barnyards, briars, vineyards, orchards, woods, cities, and so far out in the boonies there's no telling how far away the nearest human being is. Different locations include sleeping under trees, shrubs, bushes, rocks, bridges, eighteen wheelers, and heavy equipment. Other times it's been in hay piles, concrete piles, next to manure piles, dumps, junk cars, dead animals or on picnic tables. Thirty feet from the interstate highway, fifteen feet from the railroad tracks, or five feet under the tracks have been my safest choices on several occasions.

Some of my favorite places have been near bodies of water. The peaceful sounds of moving water helps me to sleep much better than next to speeding smelly vehicles, near people yelling at each other

half the night, or dogs barking because they've caught my scent.

Numerous times I've slept near rivers in Washington State. Places that sheltered me with rocks, trees, or shrubs were preferable because I'd remain dry, safe from the dew or frost.

The Columbia River was a good place to sleep many times, but one night I slept under some bushes about fifty feet from the river and five feet above water level. After a while dozens of newly arriving Canadian geese began getting territorial with the resident ducks and the result sounded like the city that never sleeps. The moon was close to being full and the bushes didn't block out much of the moonlight. Needless to say I didn't get a lot of sleep that night.

A quieter, less lit up place was on my mind when I started walking the next morning, as I didn't want to repeat the previous night. And I walked, and walked, and walked. The whole afternoon there weren't any places as "good" as the previous night. In the distance I finally spotted it, a thick stand of trees located a good distance from the river.

As I walked the quarter mile off the highway towards the trees and



[Top] Sleeping with company! [Below] 5 feet under railroad tracks

the Columbia River the setting kept looking better with each step. The densely branched trees were loaded with leaves for moonlight shade. They were about one hundred feet from the river, and eight to ten feet above water level. The lowest branches were six feet off the ground so I wouldn't have to stoop down to enter and they were just right for hanging sweaty clothes overnight. Frost of dew wouldn't get me wet because the canopy was very thick. Wet is no fun, believe me, been there, done that.

I thought about it and realized this place was in my top four of best places I've slept. Sleeping on the riverbanks thirty feet from the Sacramento River way out in the boonies of Northern California was great. Ditto for the Skykomish River in the Cascades as was being in the forest by the ice-cold spring during the heat of summer in the mountains of southern Oregon.

Camp was made and I relaxed next to the river, eating dinner. I heard and saw fish jumping on the silver colored moonlit water that gently flowed past me. The contrast between the brightness by the river and the darkness under the trees was surreal. This was a beautiful and peaceful place.

A little past 7:00 p.m. it was bedtime. From my sleeping bag I saw the moonlight reflecting off the river that was so bright, but where I was it was pitch black. Five minutes later I was sound asleep, tired from lack of sleep the night before, walking all day with 65 pounds on my back, and the mellowness of the moment of this perfect place. Generally I wake up many times during the night due to noises, lights, uncomfotability, bugs, or something. Not this night, I only awoke once.

At around 11:00 p.m. I woke up. The temperature was in the upper 30's to 40 degrees, but it felt colder than that. It didn't take me long to figure out I was half under water and it wasn't a dream. From my waist to my feet I was submerged, and the other half of my body was partially under. It was so dark I couldn't see anything except the Columbia that looked a lot wider than I remembered. I couldn't find my flashlight and knew my paradise was over. To be continued. . .

In Christ's love,
Don

*P.S. Miles walked: 4,104
Money from pavement: \$365.43
Unsolicited money from
motorists: \$339.91*



Places where I've slept: In abandoned buildings