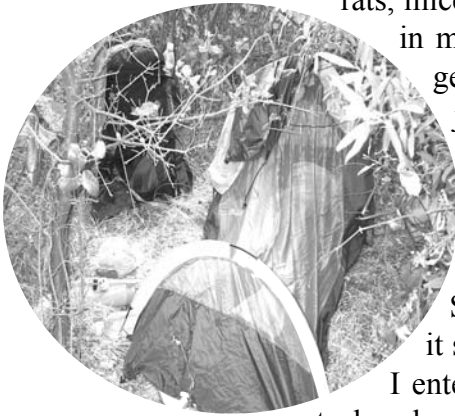




David & Goliath

July 8th began like many other days. You know, say prayers of thanksgiving for not being hassled by anybody or anything overnight. Praise God no mosquitoes, ants, earwigs, rats, mice, coyotes, raccoons, or snakes were in my tent or pack. Then, break camp, get on the road, eat plenty of wild juicy blackberries growing all along the highway, and walk as many miles as possible in the morning because the afternoon would be over 100 degrees in the shade again. Shade is where I seldom walk, least it seems that way in the summer heat.



I entered Redding, California and hoped to be physically recharged. According to the map, the wide-open spaces would be my route for at least the next four days. I was unaware I was about to be recharged in ways I'd not experienced before on this trek.

A major break was necessary at a large grocery store in the city during early afternoon. That way there would be enough daylight left to get out of town and find a safe place to sleep. This timely rest stop would allow me to take advantage of the most brutally hot part of the day, get something to eat, stock up on food, make phone calls, fill water jugs, and air my sweaty shoes and socks out.

Because I'm a detriment to society...excuse me, I should reword this. Because human society thinks I'm a detriment to it, I've learned to take recharging breaks far away from people. You've probably heard the old phrase out of sight, out of mind. For me this is an excellent idea. If people don't see me they hassle me a lot less. Believe me, being hassled gets old after awhile.

I walked into the supermarket, took off my pack, purchased enough food for four or five days, including some ice cream. The ice cream would both help to cool me down and contribute to the large number of calories I need each day to survive. Carrying a heavy pack and walking all day requires much food. Filling the water jugs is something I do in the summer just before I start walking again. Filling them sooner means I'm that much closer to drinking 100 degree city water. It's better than nothing, but tastes horrible.

After packing up and leaving the store, I rechecked the landscape and headed for a shade tree located at a distant part of the parking lot. It was a good place to relax and do the other things I had to do, including phone calls. The phone was visible thus my pack wouldn't be stolen.

For the first and only time ever I put my shoes in a shopping cart and hung my socks over the sides. It made a great solar dryer. The cart was so far away, I thought it wouldn't be retrieved for a long time. I've only done this once because I realized afterward that most customers wouldn't appreciate this use of a shopping cart.

The ground was soft, the tree's trunk was a good backrest, and the ice cream was super. It felt good taking a long break in the shade.

About a half hour later I heard, "Sir, I'm picking up shopping carts and taking them back to the store. Could I please move your socks and shoes somewhere?" I was shocked, as I didn't think anyone would venture this far from convenience and I'd not been addressed as sir since the walk began. Sir is a word I've detested most of my life because, for me, it creates images of ones superiority above another. For the first



Dirt Road to Boonies

time in memory sir sounded good.

Over the previous five months I'd been called garbage, rubbish, scum, loser, low life, a waste, a bum, and a fill in the blank no good homeless whatever. And that is the short list. Lots of cursing fill in the blanks.

Since the beginning of this walk I've wanted someone to recognize I am somebody. I have human value just like everyone does. Maybe this was my day. I told the twenty-year old man, "I'll move the socks and shoes and thanks for asking." His next remark was, "That pack looks heavy." I replied it was, about sixty pounds, and I hadn't filled my water bottles yet.

David introduced himself and gave me five dollars out of his wallet. After gathering the stray carts his last words were "God bless you, I have to get the carts back to the store before I get into trouble."

I felt good for a change. What a refreshing departure from the mostly negative ways I'm usually treated. Was this really happening to me?

It was a quarter to three and like it or not I had to get on the road again. For the second time I entered the store and this time was given permission to fill my water bottles at the drinking fountain. Wow this was my day! Thirty-five or forty-degree water is a real treat. Halfway through the filling process I heard a familiar voice from behind. "Don, I get off work in fifteen minutes. Would you like a place to stay at my home tonight?" "Yes, thank you, I would," I exclaimed.

David lives in government assisted housing. I never asked, but assumed he made minimum wage picking up carts and bagging groceries. I imagined five dollars was a sacrifice for him, maybe similar to the old widow lady described by Jesus in Luke 21:1-4 when He was teaching some of his disciples about real giving.

At David's I took a shower, was given dinner, and use of the apartment complex's washer and dryer. Although I had many miles to go it didn't matter I'd only walked eleven miles all day including to his place. What a treat it was when David's girlfriend, Cassandra came over and sang me uplifting songs for a half-hour. That woman can sing! How can it be two people so young (20 & 19) could have it together like this and treat a stranger with love and concern?

Both of them take their relationship with the Lord seriously. It's not just words in the Bible; it's doing them too. They are both aware of Matthew 25:31-46. You know the sheep and the goats and taking care of the least. I'm glad I was the recipient of this obedience to what is truly worth being obedient to. That is the Word of God.

I'm constantly blessed during this walk. Whether it's a gift of abuse from humanity, which forces me to reach out to my Creator, or being the recipient of a gift of God's love courtesy of David and Cassandra. It's all a blessing. I'd be a liar if I told you I liked both kinds of blessings equally. It's less painful the David and Cassandra way.

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