

# On The Streets: By Choice.



A domesticated individual walking down the streets of Babylon, as we travelers call it, assumes that every homeless person out there is the same. And in a sense this is true- there is definitely an overarching sense of community. One traveler even told me ***“We lift everyone we mingle with up to be nines. Not tens because that gives a sense that someone can be better than the rest, but were sure to get everyone sitting at a comfy nine together”.***

Everyone on the streets supports and helps out everyone else on the streets regardless of how they wound up there. However there are so many different types of individuals living in so many different ways who wound up on the streets for a large variety of reasons. For simplicity's sake we'll categorize this into two generic categories.

The first is the obvious, against the individual's want and will. These may be people who are mentally ill, lost their jobs, or suffer from addictions like drugs, alcohol, or gambling. Some of these people have been forced into this situation by false or valid convictions, or loss of funds due to identity fraud... the list of reasons goes on and on. Some of these individuals are actively fighting to get housed up and are just continually kicked back down by the system. Maybe they can't get an ID to land a job, they

have no credit to be approved to rent a place to live, or they can't save up enough cash due to paying homeless tickets. Yes, they get ticketed for being homeless. (In Denver, people are physically assaulted by cops for rallying for the homeless to have the right to sit down on public sidewalks so they have somewhere to rest. I have even heard of a story about a couple in Kansas who received \$1,500 tickets per person for sleeping under a bridge on a rainy night. When they explained to the judge that they had no way to come up with these kind of funds unless he could help them source a job, he responded by giving them a 30 day deadline or face jail time. The wife was seven months pregnant.) Some of these individuals have just let the idea of housing and jobs go and have found a way to get by happily on the streets.

The second category is one many people don't consider. These people, including myself, are homeless because they want to be. They want to travel. They don't agree with how society functions. They aren't happy staying in one place, or working a regular 9-5 job. Some of these people simply are not super high functioning people, at least not according to what society considers to be highly functioning. Many are artists who work best on their own schedule. Others are just free spirits who prefer not to be held down. And although homelessness by choice usually leads better circumstances and easier exit opportunities than the former category, the hardships are still very real sometimes. However the love of the lifestyle outweighs the hardships. I have noticed that many domesticated people of society make quick assumptions about us ferals that are extremely false. They seem to fear anyone that lives or looks differently than themselves. However, the street kids I have met are the kindest and most generous people I typically encounter in a city. (And I think it is useful to add here that street kids are not just kids...

people of all ages take this lifestyle and stay young at heart.) They know what it is like to have nothing and seem to have the ability to place themselves in other people's shoes easier than say someone who has lived with everything they ever needed their entire lives. A good civilian with two dollars will give someone in need one. A street kid will give them two, and then go spange to give them two more. I even hesitate to place myself in the category with these souls as I always try to do what I can for others, yet their kindness just seems to be on another level... it is purely genuine and without second thought.

Street kids truly do have their own branch of community layered over regular societal life. Some cities this stands out way more intensely than others, but it is always there if you look hard enough. They have their own hangouts, their own lingo, and their own set of general thumb rules on how to show respect for everyone else in the community. This isn't to say they are better or worse than domesticated society, simply incomparable.

Just as there are many reasons people come to live on the streets, there are many different ways to go about it as well. Some individuals stay put- they find out how to get by in one city and get real good at it. Others stay on the move, either by car, foot, hitching, train-hopping, or other means of public transportation. As far as sleeping goes the kids traveling by car or train are pretty obvious. But what about the others? Some pitch tents and live in the woods or the mountains. I have met people who live up in the mountains year round with only a small tent for shelter, even in the winter months. Some don't even go that far and simply find places around town- parks, bridges, and city sidewalks. When I asked one traveler if they ever get uncomfortable or scared sleeping on the street with strangers

walking by they responded ***“No way, I always wake up with money and food at my feet! It's the best.”*** They claimed they have even turned down the opportunity to get housed for a night to stay on the street instead... ***it's truly their home.***

**-Zandra**

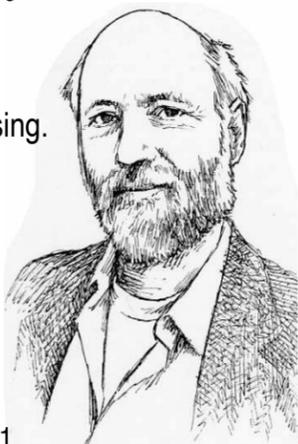
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